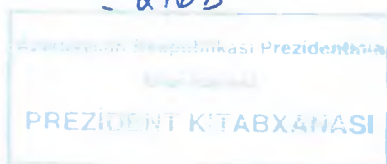




HEYDAR

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HEYDAR

**The rise and fall and rise again of
Heydar Aliyev and Azerbaijan**

by Graeme H. Wilson

**Media
Prima**

Contents

<i>Author's Preface</i>	9
1. Baku Calling	11
2. Refugees	19
3. Nakhchivan	33
4. Heydar	43
5. The Formative Years	55
6. Top of the Class	67
7. The Abecedary	77
8. "He Will Come"	87
9. 'Peace for Our Time'	97
10. A Career Lost	107
11. Tinker, Tailor, Soldier. Spy	117
12. Repelling the Reich	131
13. Cold War, Warm Heart	141
14. A Toxic Romance	151
15. Fresh Start	167
16. The Rise and Rise	173
17. Institutional Memory	183
18. Smiles and Handshakes	193
19. The War Room	203
20. Waging War	215
21. The Esoteric Guy in the Room	231
22. Raubwirtschaft	241
23. Thursdays	251
24. Metastasising of the Malaise	263
25. The 'Andropov Model'	277
26. Zarifa	287
27. A Party of One	297

28. Crisis Management	307
29. Was it ‘Mokrye Dela’?	321
30. The Fall	331
31. Dr Samuel Mudd	341
32. Silenced No More	351
33. Reception Committee	365
34. End of the Party	379
35. 1991	393
36. Genocide	401
37. The Four Horsemen	413
38. Gettysburg	425
39. Darkness or Light	437
40. The ‘Aliyev Effect’	449
41. <i>Pacta sunt servanda</i>	463
42. A Call from a Friend	473
43. A Life Defining Year	491
44. A Chance at Peace	503
45. Affairs of the Heart	517
46. Contrasting Statesmanship	533
47. Negotiating with an Empty Shirt	541
48. Country Before Self	553
49. The Longfellow Axiom	565
<i>Abbreviations</i>	570
<i>Glossary</i>	572
<i>Illustration Credits</i>	576
<i>Bibliography</i>	582
<i>Index</i>	586
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	599





Author's Preface

Who was Heydar Aliyev? Was he a guilt-edged democrat, whose 11th hour return to Baku prevented civil war and stabilised Azerbaijan? Or was he a hard nosed political operative whose era at the pinnacle of the Soviet system was enviably followed by a return to power in an independent state? What is evident is that, amid a life of sometimes improbable twists and turns, there could hardly have been a more defining moment in the life of a man than the events of June 9, 1993. On that day, at 70 years of age, Heydar Aliyev stepped off a plane at Baku International Airport and into the flames of a nation almost at collapse. Azerbaijan was a nation rocked by civil war, economic ruin, fast diminishing food stocks and the occupation of a fifth of national territory by a predatory neighbour, an invasion which created close to one million pitiful refugees.

Sir Winston Churchill, Great Britain's great wartime leader, knew the dark days and tough decisions that are reserved for those holding power. He himself met these head on, and later commented that: "The price of greatness is responsibility." Heydar Aliyev, a septuagenarian and, shortly before, the victim of a heart attack of questionable origin, stepped up to take responsibility when all seemed lost for Azerbaijan.

Heydar Aliyev's life had defined the early promise of the Soviet Union. The son of a poor railwayman but quickly considered one of the most potent minds of his generation. He served in Soviet intelligence during World War Two and later rose through the ranks of the KGB. He headed Soviet Azerbaijan, winning a reputation as a moderniser, before being summoned to Moscow. His career should have peaked in the late-1980s, a reformer amid a newly-minted reformist administration. Yet he quickly turned his back on popularist *perestroika* predicting — correctly — that this would expose the 350 million people of the Soviet Union to unheralded socio-economic collapse.

The rest of the world had forgotten Heydar Aliyev when, in June 1993, he returned from retirement to face the problems that afflicted Azerbaijan. I am writing this preface from one of the many new, well-appointed five-star hotels that can be found around Azerbaijan that were not here a decade ago. My hotel overlooks an increasingly prosperous and developed nation, illustrating that this unique man was not only up to the responsibility of saving his country, but would go on to set Azerbaijan on a course towards the 21st century.

Graeme H. Wilson



At the time a septuagenarian enjoying his semi-retirement, Heydar Aliyev was faced with a stark choice of a return to Baku or see Azerbaijan collapse into social and economic chaos.

Baku Calling

Happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected.

— George Washington

Heydar Aliyev looked out of the window, his gaze drifting into the distance. At 70 years old, his once youthful looks were understandably faded. Although he had some colour in his face, the result of walking in the spring sunshine each day, his face was etched with deep lines, reflecting his age and, perhaps, the tribulations and turmoil of the last few years of his life.

Heydar stared at the horizon, to the distant hills of his native Nakhchivan. Throughout his life, whether living in Baku or Moscow, he had kept photographs and paintings of the same mountains in his home, sometimes found on display in his office. They had provided comfort, a link with the place he considered home. During arguably his darkest days, lying in a cold, sterile hospital bed in Moscow, his body reeling from a mystifying illness, one of his few comforts had been a small pencil sketch of the Nakhchivan Mountains standing on the windowsill. With his physical self largely incapacitated for a time, Heydar had spent much of those drawn out weeks looking longingly at the image and dreaming of returning to his home.

It would take several years from that *annus horribilis* for Heydar to get his wish. By 1990, the exhausted Soviet system was slowly collapsing when troops massacred peaceful protestors on the streets of Baku. This would be

the tragic catalyst for the end of Heydar's forced exile in Moscow. Only then would he make it home.

Despite death threats, and the murder of at least one close friend, the battle-scarred former grandee of the Soviet Politburo, having turned his back on an increasingly discredited system and quit the Communist Party, returned to Nakhchivan seeking to live out his days in the bosom of his family and friends, amid a community in which he felt at peace.

The days of a salubrious lifestyle, and an office overlooking Red Square, were long gone. Heydar arrived home wearing his one suit, his one overcoat, and with a single suitcase of clothes. Along the way he had lost everything and his generous salary as a member of the Soviet elite had long since dwindled during those long years under virtual house arrest.

Moving into a two-bedroom apartment, belonging to his niece in the heart of Nakhchivan town, amid the rolling power cuts and food shortages of the early 1990s, Heydar had believed his working-life done. He had fallen far in political terms, but living among his own people and the beauty of the region, including its stunning mountain ranges, he considered ample compensation for whatever indignities he had faced in order to get there. He believed himself due, and welcomed, a quiet retirement.

Yet the circumstances of the collapse of the Soviet Union, of Moscow's intrigues, hung heavy over those nations which had eventually freed themselves from Soviet helotry. Azerbaijan suffered greatly. Now trading as Russia, the old ways remained ingrained into the political system in Moscow. Amid the economic and social discombobulation of this period, Russia's meddling in the affairs of newly independent nations across the Caucasus caused much strife. Azerbaijan had been pushed to the brink of national collapse, resulting from an attack on Nagorno-Karabakh. A shocking one million Azerbaijanis had been displaced, today more than a tenth of the population.

For three years, Heydar remained on the sidelines of the national agenda. He had somewhat reluctantly taken on the job of steering the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, overcoming an armed coup attempt and open warfare with Armenia, to bring some semblance of stability to the region. Yet he was adamant that, at a time of life when most people his age were enjoying



*The countryside of Nakhchivan held a powerful hold on Heydar.
It was in his homeland that he intended to live out his final years.*

their senectitude, the extent of his ambition was to nurture a successor for the post he held.

Elsewhere in Azerbaijan, by 1993 events were coming to a head. The second city of Ganja was home to an armed insurrection that threatened to swallow Baku and the nation as a whole. The capital city existed in a power vacuum, the word of the then President carrying little further than his Presidential Palace. Turmoil reigned.

With forces from Ganja making progress towards Baku, the economy in free fall, and law and order breaking down, desperate officials had begun to telephone Nakhchivan. Come, they implored Heydar, your country needs you. Over a period of weeks Heydar procrastinated. He was 70. He was still recovering from that mysterious malaise that hit him so suddenly in Moscow. He believed that his days on a national stage were long over. But the calls kept coming. And the situation in Baku grew steadily worse. In April 1993, President Elchibey was lobbying Heydar's friends to persuade him, and began sending emissaries to Nakhchivan. Still, Heydar declined.

Three times an aircraft was dispatched to Nakhchivan on the President's orders. Each carried a delegation ordered to bring Heydar Aliyev back to Baku.



Amid the chaos that enveloped Azerbaijan, the President of the newly independent nation became increasingly isolated in the offices of the Presidential Administration in downtown Baku.

Each time he listened to their arguments, proffered advice, but declined to be aboard the return flight to Baku. Those around him are sure, even with the benefit of hindsight, that the veteran leader personally had no intention of leaving home again.

By May, for Baku, the wolf was at the door. Insurgent troops were almost at the gates of the city. Society was breaking down. Civilians were fleeing ahead of an expected battle for the city. The beleaguered President stalked the halls of an increasingly isolated Presidential Administration — even his loyalists were melting away. It was then that President Elchibey reached out to Heydar again. For a fourth time he sent an aircraft, unannounced, to Nakhchivan. On board was an aide, carrying a hand written letter from the President.

It was evening and Heydar received this emissary at his home. He had three suits now, several overcoats and a little money from his job. Times were not as hard as before.

Sitting in his favourite armchair, Heydar read the laconic letter silently, deliberately. It described an unfolding and impending calamity caused by government. Of blood on the streets of Baku. Of women and children in the crossfire. Of a nation set for collapse. Of being easy prey to an aggressive, expansionist neighbour who had already conspired to occupy a full one-fifth of Azerbaijan territory and was guilty of several horrific massacres.

*The tranquillity of Nakhchivan was
a direct contrast to the troubles
and strife in Baku.*



The 70 year old absorbed these words and paused. Out of his window, even today, one can see the wide, tree-lined streets of the city, buzzing with cars, its dusty footpaths and its small shops. The rarefied air is so clear and fresh that most people prefer to walk. The area nearby was constantly alive with the chatter of women going about their business and children playing their games. In spring, he liked to open the window and let in the sounds of the street.

Beyond the city limits and stretching into the distance is the eponymous Ilandag Mountain. In the spring, when this fateful letter reached Nakhchivan, these are at their zenith in terms of beauty. They are windswept and somewhat grey in winter. In the summer, the heat saps them of their youth. But in spring, they are at their most pretty, a carpet of green that stretches to the horizon and beyond. For Nakhchivan's most famous son, this mountain represented his home.

Heydar looked out at this scene from his window as he considered the conundrum. His generation had mostly retired. Some had passed away from old age. He stayed in touch with many old friends and it was not uncommon to hear of them becoming frail or suffering declining health. Yet he was now being urged to step into the middle ground of a civil war and return to the political centre of what virtually amounted to a failed state.

He frowned as he considered this. His craggy face was like a map. It was lined from a life well spent. His was a journey from the poverty of a

Nakhchivan youth, to Baku, and a rise up the ranks of the KGB, ruling Soviet Azerbaijan, and then the call to serve in Moscow. The bitter late Moscow years had left their mark but, back in Nakhchivan, Heydar had believed there was nothing more to add.

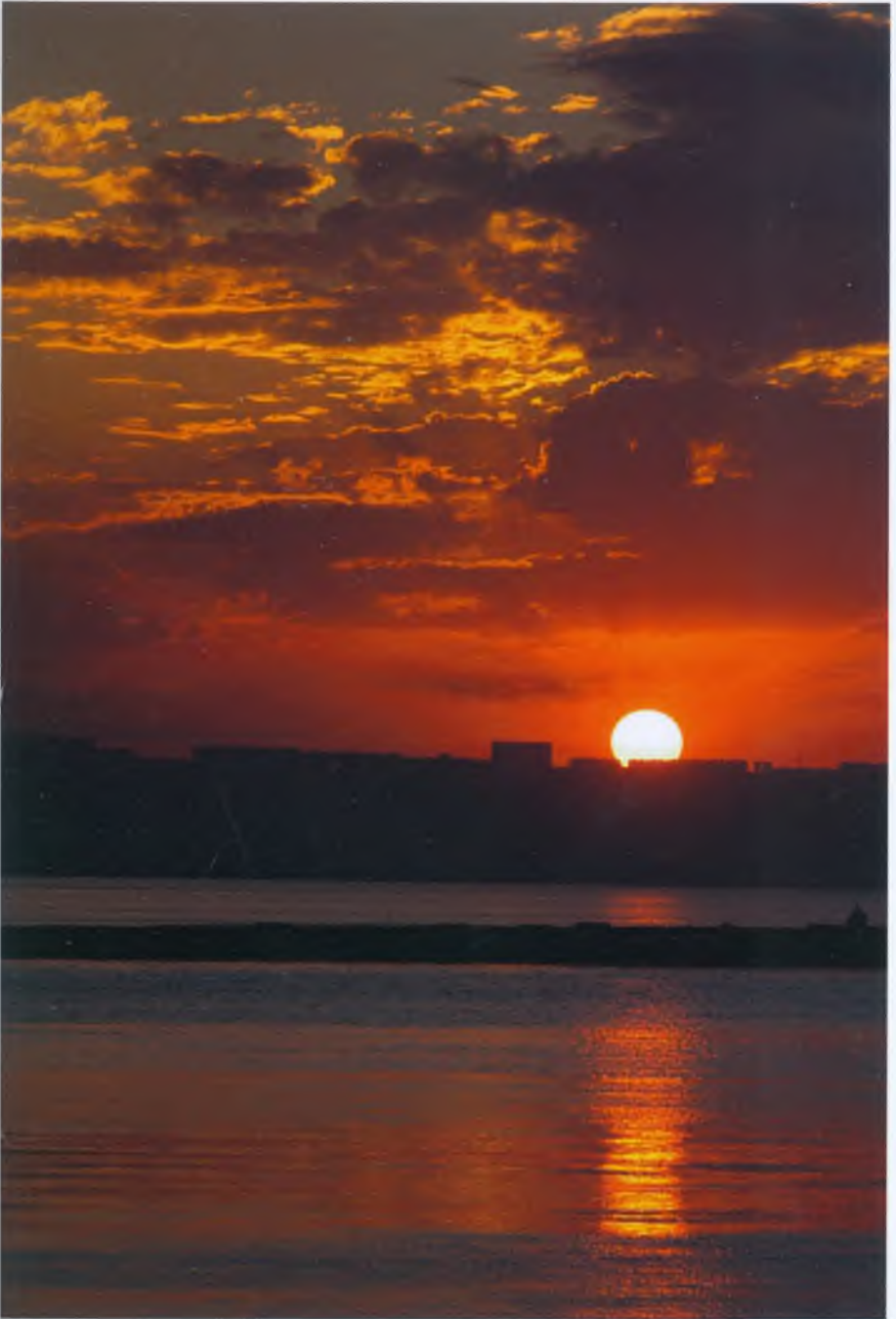
“In the final analysis, he could not ignore the plight of the nation and its people,” says Ilham Aliyev, today President of Azerbaijan. “He loved Azerbaijan.”

Deliberating with himself, silently, he painfully resolved the competing forces of nation over self. He decided that if no one else was capable of intervening in the civil war, he would have to. If he achieved that much, then untangling the remainder of Azerbaijan’s numerous pressing problems would be up to those democratically elected to lead the country from Baku.

Word quickly spread in Nakhchivan. That evening, with his only suitcase packed and already aboard a waiting aircraft, Heydar was called to his office where an unsettled crowd of some 20,000 people had gathered to voice their disquiet. In Nakhchivan he had brought peace. The economy was stable. Law and order prevailed. There were calls for him not to leave.

In June 1993, on the steps outside his office, Heydar made a promise that he would ultimately break. He acknowledged the crowd with a smile and stated that he would briefly attempt to end the war that was tearing the nation apart. Don’t worry he told them, he would return quickly, a few weeks at most.

It took six months for him to return. By then he would be President of Azerbaijan.



After a brief taste of freedom, most observers believed they were seeing the sunset of another fleeting attempt at independence and that Azerbaijan was about to collapse.



Set amid the imposing Zangezur Mountains, the village of Jomardli was in a fertile valley and had been home to a homogeneous Muslim-Christian community for hundreds of years.

Refugees

Peace at home, peace in the world.
— *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*

There is a tragic irony that a man who would come to steer the fortunes of a nation burdened by the fate of one million refugees, would himself, be drawn from a family displaced from their home, by the same aggressors, more than half a century earlier.

The Zangezur Mountains straddle the region. With peaks rising up to over 2,000 metres, vast forest tracts and breathtaking plains, the rugged, windswept beauty of the region had attracted settlers for thousands of years. In some places fertile for crops, in others ideal for cattle and grazing animals, despite sometimes extreme weather conditions, the land provided well for its people.

Zangezurians were considered hardy and proudly independent people. The region's remote mountains and its maze of gorges, rivers and valleys made for a particularly tough, self-reliant society. It was also one that took exception to outside interference. Genghis Khan and his Mongol hordes had failed to absorb Zangezur. Similarly Tamerlane, and his 14th century armies, feared throughout Asia, Africa and Europe, had been unable to count the Zangezur Mountains as part of his empire, although not for the want of trying.

For centuries, the Zangezurians considered themselves a single community, an eclectic ethnic mix of people mostly of Azerbaijani, Azerbaijani-Turks

and Armenians. Some were Christians. Some were Muslims. But above these considerations they were essentially a single community, united by the bond of life of a common homeland.

Those were homogeneous times, especially so in more remote areas where people barely considered that something like religion would be viewed as a barrier. They lived, worked and socialised together. Religious divisions would be nurtured and exploited by a few ambitious politicians, with tragic success. But these differences were of no interest to ordinary people who had existed alongside each other for generations.

In an era before newspapers, telephones and Internet, outside events seemed a long way off, and news of even the world's most seismic turning points filtered through slowly. The Great War, which would claim the lives of more than nine million combatants and dominate Europe, was a world away. The Russian Revolution of 1917, which destroyed the Tsarist autocracy and would ultimately lead to the creation of the Soviet Union, was, similarly, played out on battlefields and in cities far removed.

Yet the Great War, the world's first mechanised conflict, would shape the planet's view of oil and with it transform the geopolitical importance of Azerbaijan for generations to come. The rise of an expansionist Bolshevik government in Russia would, similarly, impact deeply and fundamentally on the Caucasus region.

Indeed, the rise of the Bolsheviks would affect the people of the village of Jomardli, and the people of the Zangezur Mountains in general, far quicker and indeed more profoundly than they could ever have imagined.

Alirza and Izzet Aliyev lived peacefully enough in Jomardli, believed to be part of a population of no more than a few hundred at the time. The village was largely Muslim, but some Christian Armenians also lived there. The town had a mosque and a small church. No one considered themselves 'different' from the followers of the other religion, other than that they worshipped in different buildings.

The Aliyevs were part of this common community and, according to those who know the history of the family, had called the small village home for generations. Some members of the family made their living in the livestock



At the beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijan represented over half of the global production in an increasingly mechanised and oil-hungry world.

business, perhaps those more affluent, who could afford cattle or sheep. Like many men in the region Alirza, living a more hand-to-mouth existence, made his living as a seasonal oil-worker on Azerbaijan's Caspian coast.

Medieval travellers to the Caucasus remarked on its abundant supply of oil. By the 19th century, Azerbaijan was by far the front runner in the world's oil and gas industry. In 1846 – more than a decade before the Americans made their famous discovery of oil in Pennsylvania – Azerbaijan drilled its first oil well in Bibi-Heybat. By the beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijan was producing more than half of the world's supply of oil.

For months each year Alirza Aliyev trekked to Baku, where there was good money to be made for men willing to undertake back-breaking and dangerous work in Azerbaijan's oilfields. Azerbaijan was at the centre of the globe's emerging oil industry and, in the days before mechanisation, this required manpower.

“My grandfather was a tall, well-built man. But it was a tough existence. Working in the Baku oilfields was back-breaking,” says Ilham Aliyev. “Accidents and fatalities were viewed simply as an inevitable occurrence in the industry, the accepted norm.”



The vast oilfields in and around the Absheron Peninsula of Azerbaijan represented the region's socio-economic hub.

Deaths in the oilfields of Baku were common. The hundreds of wooden rigs on the Absheron Peninsula, and their rudimentary drilling technology were crude but effective. Yet they were also prone to disasters. One book notes that each death:

...represented a generation of one-parent families scraping to get by in an era where there was no social system. The oil companies, who were making fortunes, did nothing other than send due salary. Under the Soviet system there was no discernible difference.

Communities rallied round to help the families of those claimed by the oilfields, but even in the tight knit communities of those days there was not much that could be done. Instead, the kin of those who died suffered.

Alirza also worked for many years on the extraordinary civil engineering project that was Bibi-Heybat Bay. Underwater drilling was still decades away, yet the bay sat on a huge oilfield. In order to bring this on line, between 1909 and 1932, the bay was systematically filled in with earth under the leadership of engineer Pavel Pototsky, in order to make drilling possible. Hundreds of men laboured at any one time on the effort across nearly a quarter of a century, including the grandfather of the current President of Azerbaijan.

Baku produced seven million tonnes of oil per year, close to 15 per cent of

World War One was the world's first truly mechanised war, which would serve to underscore the importance of the oil industry.



global production, at the end of World War One. The rush to open up her oilfields, in an era when the technology was way behind, only placed further pressure on Baku's exposed oilers. In describing the origins of the industry in Baku, in addition to the obvious dangers of dealing with flammable oil and unstable gases, one research paper observes:

The workmen who dug oil wells were in great danger. The deeper the well, the more gas there was. This is why it was extremely dangerous to stay at the bottom for any length of time. Numerous diggers were poisoned, lost their eyesight or even died.

Elsewhere the same paper states:

In order to clean oil wells, a worker used a rope to go to the bottom and manually remove the sticky substances that accumulated there and reduced the productivity of the well. Naturally, as oil evaporated, especially in summer, the worker was subject to great danger and his work was sometimes unbearable.

With an almost prosaic acceptance of the dangers, Alirza believed the lack of safety to be a trade off for relative economic stability. He could not afford livestock, nor the lower wages paid to general labourers in Jomardli, so Baku was a necessary part of life. For Izzet this was a decision that she never came to accept. Across the region, many families lost their menfolk in the oilfields.

“She did not have any choice, neither did my grandfather, because the family was very poor,” says İlham Aliyev. “When my grandfather died he was still young. She was not in a terrible situation, because of his hard work, but she did encounter difficulty because of the social situation...”

For six to eight months each year, Alirza would leave his wife and family behind in order to seek work on the Absheron Peninsula, returning home in winter when the weather froze and the industry did likewise. It was a precarious existence, but one that served his small family well in financial terms.

Years later, when Alirza was in his last years, a person close to the family noted: “The work from those years made him a strong, fit man. Even into his latter years, he was powerfully built and was active.”

His spouse, İzzet Aliyeva, ran a tight, small home with a regular, predictable income provided by her husband’s somewhat risky career. A regular job and regular money was not something enjoyed by all in the agrarian Zangezur Mountains. But despite the stability she was said to consider the benefits not worth the risk, and to have implored her husband to find another line of work. Eventually he would.

Few would have anticipated that the dangers of living in an increasingly polarised Baku, were set to escalate to genocide during the March Days of 1918.

Far away from the Aliyev’s house lay Baku. Events from the city rarely impacted directly on life amongst those in the mountains. Yet an ethnic divide that was emerging in the metropolis would burst into the open through the so-called March Days, and then reverberate across the region in an orgy of ethnic cleansing.

In Baku, some 12,000 men, women and children — mostly Muslims killed by Armenians under the banner of Bolshevism — were slaughtered in a frenzy of race riots. These mass killings would trigger a growing ethnic chasm between Muslims and Armenian Dashnaks.

Events began with the steamship *Evelina* sailing into Baku port on March 27, 1918, with 50 former members of the Russian Army’s Savage Division



A turn of the century oiler in Baku. While the financial rewards were excellent, the dangers were omnipresent and accidental death was an all too common occurrence.

aboard. They came to Baku to attend the funeral of a colleague killed in a skirmish with Russian Armenian forces in Lenkoran.

Although Baku was already tense, it appears that the disbanded soldiers returned to their ship and were preparing to sail out of Baku on March 30 when, according to the Soviets, information was received that the crew of the ship was armed and preparing to join a revolt against them. Other sources claim that the men of the Savage Division returned in response to a plea for help by the Azerbaijanis, who were fearful of the growing strength of the Armenians.

From 6pm on March 30, scuffles on board the vessel and an exchange of shots had flared into an insurrection. By the evening of March 31, rifle and machine gun exchanges had morphed into an all-out battle on the streets.

What had originally been a political power struggle between Azerbaijanis and the Soviets, became a race war with many Armenians, seeing the weaker Muslim side on the run, deciding to take vengeance. Armed militias of Dashnaks randomly looted, burnt and killed many in the Muslim sections of the city. Bolshevik artillery shelled quarters of Baku.

By the fifth day much of the ancient city was on fire, blazes blackening the spring days with thousands of Muslims joining a mass exodus. According to 1919 book *Le livre rouge*, tensions rose throughout late March:

By 6pm on March 30, 1918, Baku was filled with fighting. Trenches were being dug, barricades erected, and preparations made for warfare. The horrors that followed would be replicated through violence across the region.

In an October 1918 article published in the *Armenian Herald*, one prominent Armenian leader, Karekin Pasternadjian, asserted that over 10,000 Azerbaijanis and nearly 2,500 Armenians were killed. In 1998 Heydar Aliyev issued a Presidential Decree which described these events thus:

Taking advantage of the situation following the end of World War One and the February and October 1917 revolutions in Russia, the Armenians began to pursue the implementation of their plans under the banner of Bolshevism. Under the watchword of combating counter-revolutionary elements, in March 1918 the Baku commune



*(above) Bodies of victims of the
March Days massacres. (right)
Many buildings in Baku were
burned amid the troubles.*



began to implement a criminal plan aimed at eliminating Azerbaijanis from the whole of Baku province.

If this programme was centred on Baku, it quickly spilled over into ethnic cleansing elsewhere. In the tiny village of Jomardli, the Aliyevs went about their business a whole world away from the genocide that was unfolding hundreds of kilometres away. But events in Baku were about to have catastrophic effects on the small community.

Even a region as remote as the Zangezur Mountains would not be immune.



Today renamed Tanahat, the ethnic cleansing that occurred in Jomardli displaced the Aliyev family and was a humanitarian disaster replicated throughout the region.

Especially with the crisis in Baku being viewed by some as a strategic stepping stone on a wider project to create a ‘Greater Armenia’.

Events played out throughout the Caucasus. For the Aliyevs and their neighbours, the dirty politics far off in the capitals would have a catastrophic impact. One book notes of events in the town:

...soldiers entered the village from the lower side. At the foot of the slope a few houses were set ablaze. (They) demanded all the people to leave for the mountain, taking as many of their possessions as possible.

There were cries of horror, women were weeping, children's wailing filled the village. Even rocks seemed unable to remain calm in the face of the tragedy that was spreading on the land of Zangezur. Horsemen, loaded mules, bulls and cows bellowing with fright — everything got confused. The only people left in the village were some old men distraught with grief who could not conceive a life without their homes.

Alirza and Izzet scooped up their two children and joined the miserable exodus as it streamed out of the village. It was early spring, and the weather was raw on the exposed mountains, further adding to the sense of loss. The

nearest major town, Nakhchivan, was far away. It would take many days to trek there, the family and their neighbours forced to rely on the kindness of strangers on their route for food and shelter.

A friend of Heydar Aliyev, who later knew the family, states: “They left everything behind in the village. All their possessions, their home, everything, and were forced to start again somewhere else. I came to know the family years later, yet the memories and emotion of what occurred that day were so raw, that when Jomardli came up in conversation, they quickly changed the subject. It was too painful.”

Izzet is said to have talked of returning to her home in the future, perhaps not grasping the wider implication of events which had conspired to make her small family refugees. But she, her husband and children would never see their small, once peaceful home again.

The unravelling of the Caucasus had claimed more victims. But for the region around them, the seemingly insignificant tragedy of April 1918, in Jomardli, had set in motion a decisive turn of events in regional history. The couple's third son was destined to be born in the family's adopted home. Nakhchivan.

He would become a leader for the Azerbaijani people.



These remains in Jomardli, in present day Tanahat in Armenia, are identified by villagers as being the ruins of the Aliyev family home.





The story of Noah and the Ark is told in the Bible and the Holy Koran. The tomb of the prophet is a tourist attraction and a place of pilgrimage in Nakhchivan today.

Nakhchivan

He is happiest, be he king or peasant, who finds
peace in his home.

— *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

The Koran and the Bible state that Noah was told by God to build a huge ship for his family, and to collect two of every kind of animal so they could survive an impending flood. According to legend, the city of Nakhchivan was founded by this prophet and today a mausoleum marks the grave of Noah. Mount Agridag (also known as Mount Ararat), a snow-capped, dormant volcanic cone in Turkey, is said to be the landing place of Noah's Ark.

Across Nakhchivan as a whole, at least one third of the territory is 1,000 metres or more above sea level, with the highest peaks measuring at some 3,000 metres. People have lived across the region for thousands of years. Excavations have revealed a network of caravan trails that existed at least 2,000 years ago, and there are ruins of ancient cities and caravanserais, with coins being found, pointing to Nakhchivan's important role along the ancient Silk Road.

It was a land where citizens tended their livestock and kept their families quietly. They wove carpets from the snow-white silky wool that came from their unique sheep, and bred buffalo and other cattle. The fruit from their orchards included peaches, apricots and pomegranates. It was an era when villagers dropped into their neighbour's cottages, irrespective of creed or

religion, to share the local dish of *plov* (mutton, hazelnuts, almonds and dried fruit), or freshly baked bread and cakes.

It was (and is) a land brimming with mineral deposits. Since the mid 18th century geologists had been attracted to Nakhchivan in search of its salt, copper, gold, molybdenum and sulphur. Even today there are many deposits of gold and copper still to be mined.

Important dates in the history of Nakhchivan include the invasion by the Arabs in 640 AD. The Seljuk Turks took over the region in 1055 and, in the 12th century, Nakhchivan became the capital of the state of Atabegs of Azerbaijan. By the 16th century this land became part of the Azerbaijani Safavid Empire. During the 17th century there was a 'peasant' revolt' led by Koroglu. In 1747, Nakhchivan khanate emerged after the death of Nadir Shah Afshar, becoming a Russian possession after the Russo-Persian War in 1828.

Almost a century later in June 1918, the region came under Ottoman conquest. The British took it from the Ottomans after the Armistice of Mudros. A year later the British decided to withdraw.

In April 1918, Alirza and Izzet Aliyev and their two sons had arrived in Nakhchivan amid a flood of bedraggled, confused and almost destitute refugees. Thousands of people had been forced from their homes at gunpoint across the region, their crime to be Muslims of Turkic-Azerbaijani extraction.

But the Aliyevs were among the lucky ones. In the wake of the infamous March Days, the ramifications were a quiet, almost unseen, genocidal rage that swept across the Caucasus. Hundreds of people had lost their lives. Those who had been driven from their lands, able to leave with only the possessions they could carry and the clothes on their backs, were indeed lucky. They could run. They would have an opportunity to try and rebuild their lives.

Like many forced off the Zangezur Mountains, Alirza, his wife, sons and extended family made for what they hoped would be the sanctuary of Nakhchivan. In a time of ethnic uncertainty and strife, Nakhchivan was viewed as a safe haven. Therefore, he hoped, there would be stability, where they could pause and find some temporary relief.

Nakhchivan had itself been gripped with March Days shockwaves. In the

*The repercussions from the
March Days massacres were felt
throughout the Caucasus
as previously unseen tensions
erupted between communities.*



wake of the crisis, a steady stream of refugees had been arriving from across the region. A small group from Jomardli was lost among these. They headed towards Nakhchivan town, where the administration was struggling to cope with financial and humanitarian pressures caused by the crisis that enveloped the region.

Nothing is known of the immediate period after the family arrived in Nakhchivan. But soon Alirza had returned to Baku. In such a dire situation, the urgent financial needs of family trumped the dangers of travelling across a precarious, tense region and working in an equally tense Baku. In the wake of the March Days, much of Baku's seasonal workforce did not arrive that year, resulting in above normal payments for those who made themselves available. Amid the horrors of 1918, it was a small silver lining that Alirza's seasonal job provided improved income that year.

Back in Nakhchivan town, the thousands of refugees struggled to come to terms with the disaster that had befallen them and had begun to rebuild. The local administration was providing parcels of land to whomever wished to settle. Hundreds took up the offer. But, beyond that, there was little that the region's largely impoverished government could do.

By the autumn Alirza returned home from the oilfields, earlier than normal. His wife and two sons had sheltered with family during the easy-days of summer. But winter would be different. The climate varies from plus 43



Izzet Aliyeva was known for her 'green fingers' and especially famed for her pear trees.

degrees in summer to almost minus 30 in winter. The Aliyevs needed a home to shelter them before the bitter days and nights began to bite hard.

Over the next few weeks, with help from family, friends and neighbours, Alirza worked together to build a home — and begin to reconstitute the family's centre of gravity. If an Englishman's castle is his home, then for a refugee it is even more so.

By the onset of winter, with the mercury dropping markedly, Alirza completed his task. His wife and sons, at last, had a proper home, although their lives had changed immeasurably from their peaceful days in the Zangezur Mountains. It was a humble one bedroomed home. The furnishings were normal for the time, and it was sparse and not much to look at. But that was how people lived during that period.

The new Aliyev homestead, surrounded on all four sides by a low wall, had a small garden, eventually a few trees and shrubs. Izzet grew vegetables and fruits, such as pears, apricots, figs and pomegranates, which gave the small family some additional variety in its diet. On the family's flat stove she was noted for her cooking skills, particularly her plov.

The book *Heydar Aliyev* writes of Izzet's knowledge of flowers, trees and herbs, notably the highly regarded jam recipes. The same book quotes Shafiga Aliyeva, Heydar's sister, as recalling a home-spun medicine being made:

...Izzet with scissors and a sieve goes to the rose bushes that border the yard. It is not easy to reach them because of the thorns. But their petals are delicate. Izzet cuts them off. Then she spreads the petals on a baking tray, where sugary syrup is poured on. Then she adds cinnamon and white ginger, mixed up with sugar powder. The result was considered a indispensable potion for curing colds and stomach aches, which no family could avoid.

Another account of Izzet, records her drying flower petals in the shade and then folding them among newly cleaned and ironed clothing, to keep them fresh and smelling nice. The family kept clean clothes in wooden trunks, in which she placed fruits from quince trees, known for their very strong perfume. She was in the habit of sprinkling her veils with rosewater. Shafiga Aliyeva recalled that these pungent fruits “would saturate our clothes”.

The family home in the central district of the town is gone today, some nine decades later. The family had set down roots relatively quickly. Yet all was still not well around them. Armenia was seeking control over Nakhchivan. More violence erupted leaving thousands dead and many villages burnt to the ground. In mid-March 1920, Armenian forces launched a major offensive.

“For ordinary people, it was a horrific period. Instability was a constant, due to the uncertainty of not knowing where or when fighting would erupt,” says Vasif Talibov, today Chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

The solution to the people’s disquiet would come from Moscow, but this would bring an end to a brief period of independence and begin an unbroken period of foreign rule that would drag on for decades.

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) represented a first successful attempt to establish a democratic and secular republic in the Muslim world. The ADR was founded by the Azerbaijani National Council in Tiflis on May 28, 1918, after the collapse of the Russian Empire and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. It established borders with Russia, Georgia, Armenia and the Persian Empire, and set out to forge a modern, progressive society.

Like many similar countries, independence was born in blood, with up to

12,000 Muslims killed in what came to be known as the March Days in 1918 and even more slaughtered later in a Soviet Army invasion.

It was the first democratic and secular republic in the Muslim world, pre-dating the Republic of Turkey by five years. Its national charter declared Azerbaijan as a sovereign nation, determined to establish friendly relations with all, including neighbouring nations, guaranteeing all its citizens full civil and political rights.

Despite existing for only two years, ADR's Parliament made world history by extending suffrage to women, the first Muslim nation to grant women equal rights — even before countries like the US and United Kingdom. Sixteen states immediately recognised the new country including Italy, Denmark, Britain, America and Sweden.

However, the new republic came to an early end when Soviet Russia decided it could not live without Baku's oil, and its armies invaded while the Azerbaijanis were occupied with conflicts on the Nagorno-Karabakh front. But even so there was stubborn resistance, resulting in some 20,000 Azerbaijani deaths.

Decades later, on the 80th anniversary of the founding of this first democratic republic, Heydar Aliyev told the nation that the adoption of the Declaration of Independence had shown 'great courage and far-sightedness'. He praised the founding fathers. He commented: "The Azerbaijani Democratic Republic existed briefly so it could not adopt its constitution. In 1995, we adopted the first constitution of an independent Azerbaijan by way of a national referendum. We can be proud of it. We are the faithful successors of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic."

By March 1920, it was obvious that Soviet Russia would take Baku. Vladimir Lenin stated that the invasion was necessary, as Soviet Russia could not survive without Azerbaijani oil. This was cleverly dressed as Russian Bolsheviks assisting the proletariat to overthrow 'counter-revolutionary nationalists'.

It was a typical Bolshevik invasion, a template for later attacks. The local Bolshevik movement, having started 'worker riots', requested support from Moscow, which would then send its troops to assist.



(above) A meeting of the Cabinet of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the first secular and democratic state in the Muslim world. (right) Fatali Khoyski served as Prime Minister.



In January 1920 Mikhail Tukhachevsky had arrived at Petrovsk Port in Dagestan and on April 21 issued invasion orders to the Volga-Caspian military flotilla and the Red Army to invade Azerbaijan. Tukhachevsky ordered:

Azerbaijan's main forces are busy on the western side of the country. According to our intelligence, only minor Azerbaijani forces are defending the station of Yaluma-Baku. Cross the border on April 27th and in a quick offensive take control of the Baku province. The cavalry units must be sent to take control of the Transcaucasian railroad around Kurdamir.



(above) The Russian Red Army in Baku in May 1920. (left) Vladimir Lenin served as the leader of the Russian SFSR from 1917, and also as Premier of the Soviet Union from 1922.

When the 11th Army approaches the Absheron Peninsula, the commander of the flotilla, Raskolnikov, is to ensure landing of a small unit around the Alat station — this unit is to take orders from the commander of the 11th Army. Make a quick raid to take control of Baku using all the tanker fleet and prevent any damage to the oilfields.

Not only did the Red Army invasion overthrow the government, but they also nationalised the Branobel Oil Company, the largest in the world, owned by Ludvig and Alfred Nobel. Alfred, the younger of the Swedish brothers, later went on to establish the Nobel Peace Prize. A strange paradox indirectly associated with a brutal invasion and suppression.

The Fifth Cabinet of Ministers of the ADR resigned on April 1, 1920. On April 25, 1920, the Russian Red Army crossed into Azerbaijan, entering Baku on April 27. They demanded the immediate dissolution of the Azerbaijani Parliament and set up their own Bolshevik government headed by Nariman Narimanov.

It was Nakhchivan, the Aliyevs adopted home, that enjoyed the last few weeks of independence. Some 12 weeks after they marched into Baku, in July 1920 the 11th Soviet Red Army invaded and occupied the region. On July 28, 1920, came the declaration of a Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic with 'close ties' to the Azerbaijan SSR. In time, along with Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan would be lumped by Moscow into the rump Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, which lasted from 1922 to 1936.

For Alirza and Izzet, the arrival of a new government changed little, other than to dampen down the strife that had claimed their ancestral homeland two years earlier. In that sense, the new reality was generally welcomed by ordinary people in Nakhchivan. For the small family peace reigned around them. At last.

In May 1923, that peace would be broken. But on this occasion it was not war, or tragedy, that would change the dynamics of the family.

The Aliyev family was set for a new addition, and his arrival would shape not only the dynamics of the family, but eventually also Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union as a whole.



In the news in 1923 were (clockwise from top left) Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler and Vladimir Lenin.

Heydar

How pleasant it is for a father to sit at his child's board.
It is like an aged man reclining under the shadow of an
oak which he has planted.

— *Voltaire*

On March 9, 1923, Vladimir Lenin suffered his third stroke, which rendered him bedridden and unable to speak. He would soon be forced to resign his position as Chairman of the Soviet government. Within 10 months he was dead. Winston Churchill commented that: “he alone could have found the way back to the causeway... The Russian people were left floundering in the bog. Their worst misfortune was his birth... their next worst his death.”

In June the same year, the storming of Ayan in Siberia was the last act of the Russian Civil War. Elsewhere in the world Pancho Villa was assassinated, the Great Kantō earthquake devastated Tokyo and Yokohama and, in an early taste of what was to come, in November that year in Munich, Adolf Hitler lead the Nazis in an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Bavarian government. Not far from Nakhchivan, Turkish head of state Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Republican People's Party, while Ankara replaced Constantinople as the capital of Turkey. By October Turkey became a republic following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Atatürk, considered today the father of the nation, was elected President.

While Atatürk was creating history, some 400 kilometres from Ankara, the Aliyevs were welcoming their third child, another son. Also born this year,

and later to rub shoulders with the child, were future United States Secretary of State and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize Henry Kissinger, American politician and Presidential candidate Bob Dole, Singapore's influential leader, Lee Kuan Yew and Shimon Peres, who would serve as both President and Prime Minister of Israel.

Heydar Aliyev was born on May 10, 1923, in the small family home, attended by various aunts and women from the local community. The USSR's child mortality rates were reported as the best in the world in the 1950s, 7.7 per cent, better than comparable industrialised nations from that era, which ranged from eight to 12 per cent. In the 1920s, however, across the world this figure was significantly higher. Rural physicians were rare and births were, traditionally, assisted by female relatives and neighbours.

It was a peaceful, innocent time to grow up in Nakhchivan. Crime was remarkably rare. People left their doors not just unlocked, but open. There was a deep community spirit.

It Takes a Village is a proverb which reached mainstream use in 1996 when then US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton released a book with the same name. Clinton focused on the impact of the wider community around a family has, for better or worse, on a child's well-being and upbringing. The proverb originated from the Nigerian Igbo culture and the phrase *Ora na azu nwa* which means it takes the community to raise a child. The Igbos also name their children *Nwa ora*. This means child of the community.

Heydar and his siblings were lucky. Times were not easy. But in a very real sense, the community at large worked as an extension of family. The family formed a basic protective and learning unit for children, but within the wider community they also imbibed inherent values and skills that enabled them to go through life responsibly.

"In Nakhchivan in those days, the wider community played a key role in the physical, social, spiritual and mental development of children," says Vasif Talibov. "It was common that uncles, aunts, other relatives and even neighbours would discipline or correct a child when he misbehaved and the parents would not complain."

In the Aliyev household the care of extended family and neighbours was

*In 1837, Tsar Nicholas I was
the first to introduce rail to
the Russian Empire.*



important. For long months each year, Alirza would travel to Baku to work. Izzet, although in herself strong-willed and considered something of a disciplinarian, would have support from an extended network as she raised her boys.

The arrival of Heydar also coincided with a change in the family's circumstances. Community was one thing, but the boy's older brothers were growing. Alirza recognised that it was better to play a more consistent role in their lives, and that he should be around more. He decided to end his seasonal sojourns to Baku and seek work closer to home.

The first railway in the future Soviet Union was laid in 1837 for Tsar Nicholas I as a curiosity, but by 1852 Moscow and Saint Petersburg were joined by Russia's first railway. The first railway in Azerbaijan was opened in 1880, close to Baku. This ran between Sabunçu to Suraxanı, today, thanks to urban sprawl, both situated within the limits of the city.

The first long-distance railway opened in 1883, stretching between Baku and Tbilisi in Georgia. By 1900 other lines connected Baku via Baladjar, Derbent and Petrovsk in Dagestan. The Dagestan route connected Baku to the Russian Empire. In 1908, Nakhchivan was linked to Armenia by rail with the advent of a line to Nakhchivan and Julfa, a town on the Araz River on the border with Persia. This took two years to build and provided an economic fillip, allowing people and goods access to previously distant cities and markets in Armenia and Persia.

After the founding of the Soviet Union, the People's Commissariat of Railways embarked on a notable project during the late 1920s as one of the centrepieces of the first Soviet Five-Year Plan. This would ultimately expand the railway network to over 100,000 kilometres by 1940.

Nakhchivan's towns and its economy could have only grown to a limited extent without rail transport, but as a result of this development the economy received a notable boost. In 1923, the year Heydar was born, the People's Commissariat of Railways announced a plan for a new line, which would stretch between Nakhchivan town and Mingevan. The same project would also see a major upgrade of the 15 year old line between Nakhchivan town and Julfa, including a bridge that crossed the Araz River. The latter would further enhance trade ties with consumers in Persia.

This project would be a boon to the local economy, creating hundreds of jobs. The opportunity to be close to his growing family year round was tempting.

Alirza won a job via the People's Commissariat to work on the railway. At the time, this represented arguably the biggest civil construction project ever seen in the region. Hundreds of men were set to work labouring to prepare the land for the many station buildings, bridges, culverts and tracks that would be created. As this process was underway, and when construction began in earnest, many other jobs were being created for engineers, conductors, administrators, morse code operators and many other direct and indirect employment opportunities were being created. The book *Ilham: Portrait of a President* states:

Alirza initially found a full time job on the construction side. Conditions were hard and the work was back-breaking and very dangerous. This included clearing the land of trees, hand drilling rock with short and long metal drills and then blasting the rock with the unstable black gunpowder, to the hauling of this dirt and blasted fill. Tasks also included laying of bed grade rock for the road, cutting wood for the rail sleepers and setting the steel rails in place and driving the spikes and securing the steel rails that carried locomotives. At every stage there were inherent dangers.

Alirza's years working on the oilfields in Baku had made him a strong, fit



This 1929 image of construction work on the Trans-Siberian Railway shows the back-breaking manual labour that was required.

man. Talibov observes: “He was a man of few words, an old school type of character who worked hard and didn’t skive. This made him valuable to his employers wherever he went.”

Perhaps due to these traits, he was able to shift from the construction side of the project and get a coveted permanent spot on the actual railway. This meant a regular, long-term wage. While seasonal employment in the oilfields would pay more, Alirza’s position on the railway was year round and came with considerably fewer inherent dangers. The added bonus was that he could now live at home with Izzet and his children.

Alirza began his new career as a station worker, but quickly joined the operational side of the railway as a coaler. It was a tough and demanding job, one which paid well, but had a heavy toll on the bodies of its exponents. One account from the *Wolverhampton Railway Gazette* states:

Coaling was a shattering job, the coal wagons being emptied by hand as piece work. The coalers could earn more money than the time-keeper or the top link drivers, but (one interviewee) remembers the effect the work had on them, he would see them staggering along the lane at Bushbury, holding the railings for support. (One respondent) recalls



*The USSR quickly developed its rail system and industrialised with Five-Year Plans.
As a result, rail freight grew about 20 times by 1941.*

*that his hands were so calloused that a sixpence would fit into the cracks,
edge on!*

Despite the inevitable callouses and strains on his body, Alirza seems to have enjoyed his new career. He later moved on to become a fireman on board the locomotives themselves. It was another back-breaking job. Large steam locomotives had reached the limit that a fireman could fire by hand, requiring to be fed some 2,250 kilos of coal per hour, shovelling chunks of coal from the tender through a flexible joint to the engine and into a very hot firebox. To maximise performance, the fireman needed to ensure that the coal was spread evenly across the surface of the grates in the firebox. The largest coal-burning locomotives before the invention of the power stoker required two firemen working at full tilt.

A fireman was also usually responsible for cleaning the ash and dust from the firebox, prior to lighting the fire, adding water to the engine's boiler, and making sure there was enough coal aboard before starting a journey. Steam rail enthusiast Geoff Pusey adds: "Being a fireman was a tough, brutal job at times, but it was also one that required intelligence. Along the route, according to the topography, the engine needed an appropriate amount of power, so the fire needed the appropriate raising or banking, in order to meet that need. It



Alirza joined the service side of the new railway, first coaling and then as a fireman on a steam engine, which was described as a tough, brutal job.

was not just a case of constant shovelling and maintaining maximum power.”

Alirza rose through the ranks and did well. His salary was now year round, instead of the seasonal work when he was employed on the oilfields, and this compensated for his earnings dipping somewhat. But for the family as a whole, the compensation was that he was able to play a full part in family life.

By the time of his father’s elevation to fireman, Heydar was in short pants and had grown into a gregarious small boy. Like his two older brothers, and the five siblings who later followed him into the burgeoning family, Heydar was also expected to play a role in the home. In Nakhchivani society children undertook various responsibilities in the home. In the Aliyev household they did these chores easily without being reminded. Girls would fetch water. Cooking was done communally during which time girls shared and learnt a lot from each other. They also absorbed other values such as sharing, common responsibilities and caring for one another. The boys would be expected to help around the home and help tend the family’s vegetable and fruit garden, an economically vital extension to what was available in the market.

In Nakhchivan there were no passengers. Children learned a value system which is perhaps different today.

In their spare time, Heydar, his brothers and his friends ranged out of the urban sprawl and into the countryside that surrounded the town. The area was full of wildlife to be examined and there were many natural features to be explored.

“He was an inquisitive boy, always on the move, with a great deal of energy,” says one closely associated with the family. “He enjoyed exploring the area, understanding his surroundings, and sometimes getting into the sort of trouble that small boys do!”

He adds that Heydar was often in trouble for returning home with his clothes dirty, a result of games and exploration in the countryside.

At five years old, in 1928, Heydar joined his older brother Hassan at one of Nakhchivan town’s first kindergartens. Moscow was also keen to spread a gently ideological preschool system across its huge territory, a system that author Kitty Weaver was to dub as being aimed at producing generations of Lenin’s Grandchildren.

In Imperial Russia, according to the 1897 Population Census, literate people made up 28.4 per cent of the population. Literacy levels of women were a mere 13 per cent. By 1916, literacy of the total population was estimated at 56 per cent. Figures for Azerbaijan do not exist from this era, but were believed to be much the same. In December 1919, Lenin signed his *Sovnarkom Decree* which called for ‘the liquidation of illiteracy’.

After the Bolshevik revolution the People’s Commissariat for Education spent its time introducing political propaganda into the schools and forbidding religious teaching. Commenting on the tasks of preschools, Article 17 of the *Law of RSFSR on Public Education* noted that they should foster; ‘...love for their socialist homeland and native region’. While noting in Article 19 on their administration that:

Children’s preschool institutions are organised by the executive committees of the district, city, rural and settlement Soviets of People’s Deputies, as well as, with the Soviets’ authorisation, by state enterprises, institutions and organisations, and by collective farms, and by other cooperative and public organisations.

In addition to the ‘fun’ part of nursery school, Heydar and his peers took



In accordance with a Sovnarkom Decree of December 1919, signed by Vladimir Lenin, the new policy of likbez (liquidation of illiteracy), was introduced. A new system of universal compulsory education was established, in time for Heydar Aliyev to take advantage of the new opportunity.



their first steps into formal education in reading, arithmetic, Russian, Azerbaijani, history and a gentle entry into Soviet indoctrination through classes with such imaginative names as ‘the life and labour of the family in village and town’. For a man who would later go on to run the system, and maintain a fitness regime while doing it, there was also a Sovietised exercise programme. The book *Soviet Road to Olympus* states:

Within pre-school institutions, the physical education is considered by means of special physical education lessons, morning gymnastic exercises, games, walks, excursions and a special toughening procedure... Morning gymnastic exercises in nurseries are conducted



The Soviet system would seep into all areas of life across the republics, shaping physical infrastructure and life in Baku (above) and socio-development. (left) A propaganda photograph showing how Moscow encouraged children to view themselves as students.

daily before breakfast... The duration of morning exercises are from seven to twelve minutes and it could include from three to eight different drills.

While these ‘special toughening procedures’ sound somewhat imposing, Heydar blossomed within the system. The structure of a school environment suited him. He studied at Nakhchivan’s central elementary school from late summer of 1928 and left in late spring of 1929, two school years, in preparation for Primary School. Research shows that nursery has major benefits to a child in cognitive development and impacts markedly on literacy

and higher grades well into the future. In Nakhchivan, indeed across much of the Soviet Union, one of the benefits of falling under the yoke of Moscow, was greater attention to literacy and education. For Heydar, the opportunity for a pre-school education would lead entry into a quickly improving education system as he entered his formative years.

Heydar would come to symbolise the classless, educated society that Lenin had foreseen. The son of a Nakhchivani railwayman, from decidedly rustic stock, the Communist system was feeding the development of a boy from a poor family, who would go on to serve as Deputy Prime Minister of the Soviet Union and more...



Like his predecessor, Joseph Stalin understood that education was key to the success of the Communist project and in forging a coherent Soviet state.

The Formative Years

The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation will
be the philosophy of government in the next.

— *Abraham Lincoln*

In 1920, Vladimir Lenin had called upon young people to “first of all, study, study and study!” The Soviet system planned the transformation and unification of its disparate society through a herculean effort to develop its education system. Viacheslav Yelyutin, the Soviet Minister of Higher Education stated: “The role of Soviet education is to assist in the building of a Communist society shaping the materialist world outlook of the students, equipping them with a good grounding in the different fields of knowledge and preparing them for socially useful work.”

Every child in the USSR started school at seven years old, ahead of a decade long programme that covered three years of primary and seven years of secondary education. In September 1929, Heydar entered the primary system after a couple of preparatory years in nursery school. His school would display prominent images of Joseph Stalin, who had succeeded Lenin. He too understood the importance of education to the Communist project and stated: “Education is a weapon whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed.” He challenged the youth of the nation to be the conduit to the future.

It was a challenge Heydar was ready for. He liked school. He liked learning. He enjoyed the social side with those at the school alongside him.





The humble Aliyev family, with Alirza and Izzet flanked by their growing brood, including a future President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev (second left).



In school Heydar Aliyev was introduced to some of the great Azerbaijani writers for the first time, such as Nizami Ganjavi (left) and Khurshidbanu Natavan (right).

All schools throughout the Soviet Union had broadly the same curriculum and were run according to unified principles of education. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) formulated its own moral code. Russian scholastic thinker Konstantin Ushinsky wrote; ‘Philosophical thought must direct and serve as the foundation of education. In its essence, education is a ‘philosophical science’ and therefore requires unity of thought.’

Unity of thought was, very much, in the thinking of the CPSU. Ivor Morrish’s book *The Sociology of Education* states; ‘...everything in Soviet education is planned in great detail, whether it be matters of finance, questions of curriculum and teaching methods, or building programmes. Organisation and policy are... closely controlled by the Communist Party.’

The ideological feature of Heydar’s preparation for adulthood had begun in his pre-school, but would be ramped up during his primary days. Yet the national features of the population in different republics were also taken into consideration. In Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, as well as other republics, this meant native language, literature, geography and history were taught, in addition to the compulsory ‘national’ subjects that were taught in all schools.

It was in primary school that Heydar had his first introduction to Azerbaijan’s leading literature and poetry icons like Nizami Ganjavi, Fizuli,

Khagani and Khurshidbanu Natavan. These and others were introduced to the young student and his peers, along with Russian and Soviet era writers and poets.

Contemporary Azerbaijani writers who did not conform to the party line were persecuted, but many historical names continued to be held up as the best in Azerbaijani history and those whose works were no threat to the party's ideological line found their way into classrooms.

"I got to know Heydar Aliyev later, of course, but understood that he had grown fond of reading the great writers and poets," says Anar Rzayev, today Chairman of the Writers' Union of Azerbaijan. "It was an area of culture which he absorbed. He was always surrounded by books and, whenever I had the opportunity to meet him, was invariably in the middle of a book."

The syllabus that now faced Heydar also highlighted basic humanities, science and mathematics. These subjects were the basis for a scientific outlook and, the Soviets believed, helped to develop a child's cognitive power and capability. Physical education was also at the fore. Prominent Soviet educator Anton Semenovych Makarenko stated: "There is so much to do for the Soviet school child that he has little time for boredom or mischief. All non-academic activities take place in his own time, not in lesson time..."

Heydar's education, with its physical programme, set him and most of his friends and classmates on a course for robust health and an active lifestyle that they continued into adult life.

"My father liked running and physical activities," says Ilham Aliyev. "At school he took to team games, but he most enjoyed the long runs across the surrounding countryside."

"Later my father always kept himself fit and was in the habit of swimming almost every day, within the parameters of his duties as President," says Ilham. "I believe that his physical strength and his exercise regime carried him through the latter years of his life when his lifestyle as national leader was stressful and there was a great deal of pressure on his shoulders."

Into his 70s, Heydar continued to swim almost daily. This is perhaps a lesson for educators around the world. In the US, the American Academy of

Paediatrics and the Secretaries of Education and Health and Human Services, have noted a drop in physical education in schools as a possible contributing factor to the rise in obesity throughout the population and called for an effort to promote physical exercise in schools.

Out of school, the CPSU also reached into the lives of Heydar and his friends. The Scouting movement had been purged by Stalin and replaced with a similar, yet strongly ideological structure. Heydar had the opportunity to become a Little Octobrist, the equivalent of the Cub Scouts. At nine years old, children graduated to become Young Pioneers (full name Young Pioneer Organisation of the Soviet Union). Pioneers wore red ties, went to summer camps, had a group motto and there was a long set of rules to follow.

Like most children, Heydar joined this youth system and continued up its pyramid, absorbing some of the ideology which was offered, tolerating, like his peers, the boredom of the demonstrations, marches and rhetoric, in order to get to the good stuff.

Joining the Young Pioneers, Heydar would have been required to recite a Solemn Promise in front of other Pioneers. This went, somewhat pretentiously:

I, Aliyev, Heydar, joining the ranks of the Vladimir Ilyich Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organisation, in the presence of my comrades, do solemnly promise to passionately love and cherish my Motherland, to live, study and fight as the great Lenin bade us, as the Communist Party teaches us to and as required by the laws of the Pioneers of the Soviet Union.

Having joined the group, beyond the CPSU doctrine of Young Pioneers life, Heydar discovered much of the Robert Baden-Powell's style of scouting that was enjoyed by young people worldwide: camps, outdoor pursuits, games, earning badges, learning teamwork and, above all, the forging of friendships.

And then something happened in Nakhchivan that would widen the boundaries of the world further for Heydar and his peers. Until the 1890s, theatre had always been confined to actors on a stage. The Lumiere brothers, Auguste and Louis, changed all that. Their first public screening of films at which admission was charged was held on December 28, 1895. This heralded the beginning of the Silver Screen era. But while the West became familiar



A scene and movie poster from Battleship Potemkin, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, still considered one of the early classics.

with Hollywood, Russia also had its pioneers in that era. Sergei Eisenstein was perhaps the most notable Soviet Russian film director, noted in particular for his silent films *Strike* (1924), *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1927).

The Soviets understood that this new medium would be a most ideal propaganda tool. Lenin declared it vital for reaching the masses. After him, Joseph Stalin concurred. A state-backed industry quickly emerged, propagating ‘socialist realism’ via films, documentaries and newsreels.

Baku had been an early starter on the motion picture revolution that would sweep the world. Frenchman Alexandre Michon lived in Baku and from 1879 to 1905 made a series of short films, which remain today at the Union of Cinematographers of Azerbaijan. During the early part of the 20th century there were a handful of movies shot in Azerbaijan, perhaps most notably 1919’s *Celebration of the Anniversary of Azerbaijani Independence* made during the all too brief period under the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

In 1920, Nariman Narimanov, Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan, signed a decree nationalising Azerbaijan’s cinema. Initially, only a few theatre halls in Baku were able to show films. Yet the striking popularity of the media, from the perspective of the general public due to their



The classic Soviet film, Chapaev, was one of Heydar's favourites — he returned to the cinema several times to see it.

entertainment and novelty value, and from a Soviet perspective in spreading 'socialist realism', meant that efforts were made to spread the screening across Azerbaijan. Regular showings were a feature of life in Ganja and Sumqayıt by the early 1920s, and by the second half of the decade theatres and public halls in Mingachevir, Khankendi, Shirvan, Shaki, Nakhchivan and other Azerbaijani towns were showing films.

In Nakhchivan, like elsewhere in Azerbaijan, the public warmed to this exciting new form of entertainment. In 1924 the Azerbaijan Photo Film Institution (APFI) shot its first production, based on legend of Azerbaijan's iconic Maiden Tower. This was enduring and popular, but by the time Heydar got his introduction to the Silver Screen there was a wide variety of fare.

The Young Pioneers ran a movie club, which offered its members wide-eyed entry into a world outside of Nakhchivan that most had little concept of, and certainly few would have had the opportunity to see for themselves. During this period most Azerbaijani films during this era focused on tackling ignorance and illiteracy, the revolution and the rights of women in society. The most popular films of this era were 1925's *Bismillah*, and the 1929 hit *A House on a Volcano* by director Amo Ivanovich Bek-Nazarov, who also oversaw the seminal *Sevil*, which portrayed an Azerbaijani woman struggling to win her

freedom. And while Azerbaijani films were of keen interest to Heydar and his peers, it was footage from Moscow's film production units that created more of a stir simply because they showed an outside world that was beyond anything they had the opportunity to see before.

"A trip to the cinema was magical during those times. There was no television then, of course, so these films were the only way one could experience the wider world," says Vasif Talibov, who serves today as Chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

Heydar is reported as returning to view many films several times, one of those being the 1934 classic *Chapaev*, a dramatic biographic on Vasily Ivanovich Chapaev, a legendary Red Army commander who became a hero of the Russian Civil War. Other notable releases during Heydar's first years as a cinemagoer included revolutionary history as told in *Golden Mountains*, *The Outskirts* and the *Maxim* trilogy. Lenin biographical were in vogue, but there were also classic comedies like *Circus*, *Volga-Volga* and *The Shining Path*.

"When he headed Soviet Azerbaijan, and again after independence, Heydar Aliyev was notable not only as a supporter of the arts, but as someone who actively encouraged and patronised writers, poets and filmmakers," says Anar Rzayev. "His interest in the arts was sown in childhood, and was nurtured into adulthood."

'Socialist realism' may have been at the heart of these films but they are still regarded as classics by scholars. Yet for Heydar and his friends the stories and the places that these movies took them were of far more relevance. Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Minsk were a long way from Nakhchivan, geographically, and in so many other ways. But were magically brought to life on screen for wide-eyed Young Pioneers.

In July 1932, Heydar completed his time in primary school. The children of Nakhchivan spent long, idyllic summers avoiding the heat. In August and September, in Nakhchivan, the mercury regularly tops 50 degrees, making life outdoors less appealing. Heydar and his siblings made the most of their time, heading off into the countryside or playing close to home and whiling away the peak hours of the day the best they could.

The summer of 1932, a period when Heydar would make the transition from



(above) While Stalin's propaganda machine presented him as a cultured and refined man, a patron of the arts and protector of the education system (left) he was directly responsible and oversaw the Holodomor, which caused the deaths of millions.

primary to secondary student was one of turmoil around the boy, throughout the Soviet Union. The state had adopted its first Five-Year Plan, setting goals and priorities for the whole economy. The 'collectivisation' of agriculture had begun, a process that would see hundreds of thousands of peasants killed, millions of peasant households eliminated and their property confiscated. The Soviet famine of 1932 to 1933 swept through the major grain-producing regions of the Soviet Union. *Holodomor*, or 'hungry mass-death', is the term used to describe the famine within the borders of Ukraine.

The effect of 'collectivisation' was less pronounced in Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, yet the effects were there. Food grew more scarce and the

economy suffered. The accursed *Holodomor* may not have directly reached the neighbourhood where the Aliyevs lived, but times were definitely hard.

Author Robert Conquest, in his book *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivisation and the Terror-Famine*, estimated at least seven million peasants died from hunger in the European part of the Soviet Union, plus an additional one million deaths from hunger as a result of collectivisation in Kazakhstan.

Starving people were prevented from fleeing this holocaust, by the state, which prevented a mass wave of migration to less affected regions, such as Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. This is why Stalin's misguided policy only barely affected Heydar's childhood. In 1932, Heydar's main concern, aside from the normal follies of a child in summer, was entry into a new school and the possibilities that lay ahead.



Joining secondary school in 1933, Heydar Aliyev was thrilled with a syllabus that included the sciences, astronomy and an array of challenging subjects.

Top of the Class

It is not possible for civilisation to flow backwards while there is
youth in the world. Youth may be headstrong,
but it will advance its allotted length.

— *Helen Keller*

In September 1933, it was time for the 10 year old to begin Secondary School. He was allocated a place in Nakhchivan's School Number 8, where his older siblings were also studying. The curriculum was wider, hours longer, and expectations on him now far higher. Subjects covered were significantly broader than in primary school, the likes of literature (Azerbaijani and Soviet), social science, geography, biology, physics and chemistry. Also on the syllabus was astronomy.

Heydar would later observe that it was here that he learned the sort of profound impact that teachers have on their pupils. He named four of his own — Murad Tutayug, Mir Jafar Mirishli, Latif Huseynzade and Ibrahim Hamzayev — as playing a role in shaping him during those early years.

School Number 8 was a grey, cinder block, somewhat dreary building that, in itself, did not inspire much from those who attended. From the top of the pyramid in Moscow, much was made of Sovietised-curriculum and physical preparation. The environment in which they spent their formative years, and the inspiration this provided, was not high on the agenda. Nevertheless, Heydar found his time stimulating, at least judging by results.

School reports from that era show a straight 'A' student. It was not a breeze

for him. He was bright, for sure, but he excelled because he threw himself into school and lessons. He enjoyed learning and he had an enquiring mind.

Heydar came from a family that had been refugees hardly a decade earlier. They were decidedly proletariat, in Marxist theory, the class of a capitalist society that does not have ownership of the means of production and whose subsistence comes solely by selling their labour power for a wage or salary. His father, by now a stalwart on Nakhchivan's railway system, was a lifelong member of the proletariat. But for his children he hoped more than the tough manual work existence that had been his. Heydar's father pushed his children.

"He was a gentle man, but was quite strict in some regards. One of those was education. He was adamant that they make the best of themselves at school," says one with close ties to the family. "He demanded that his children push themselves. If they weren't academically inclined that was alright, but he wanted them to try, try..."

Heydar's long list of 'A's came not by breezing through school on a whim, but through fulfilling the demands placed upon him.

"Heydar idolised him," says Latif Huseynzade, quoted in the book *Heydar Aliyev — Life of Outstanding People*. "They were close, although Alirza was very much the opposite of his son in many ways. Where Heydar was gregarious and surrounded by friends and acquaintances, Alirza was a something of an austere character."

Alirza never had the educational opportunities that were presented to his children. Yet he fully understood the opportunity. Ahead of Heydar, his siblings, and his generation, lay opportunities that were impossible to contemplate for their parents.

"In Heydar Aliyev, I think Alirza saw the future, a capability that would see him escape the working class roots of the family. This was something he wanted to encourage, as he did not want his children to have the same back-breaking life he had lived," says Vasif Talibov.

In a generation before television and casual entertainment, it was a time when families were close knit. This was true of Heydar and his father. The more he emerged as a bright, articulate child, the bond between them

*Heydar Aliyev (left)
appearing in a school
stage production.*



strengthened. While Heydar was still given to riding his bicycle and playing with friends, he also spent time walking and talking with his father in their neighbourhood and in the countryside surrounding Nakhchivan town.

William Shakespeare wrote that: ‘It is a wise father that knows his own child.’ And it was during this period that a closer, more personal relationship developed. Heydar began to show a burgeoning aptitude in his school, while Alirza began to get a sense that this child was set for something bigger.

The key — of course — was the formation of the Soviet Union and the unprecedented education system that was being built. The Soviet Union had abandoned a massive experiment in Progressive Education which had caused chaos during the 1920s. The Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Commissariat of Education savagely condemned what it called the ‘thoughtless adoption of projects and the application on a large scale of hitherto untried methods’. Stability was the new educational watchword. Progressivism was scrapped. And the USSR rolled out a massive school building and child place programme, which reached into all parts of the empire, including Azerbaijan and Heydar’s home town, Nakhchivan.

From a little less than one million secondary school pupils during the 1914-1915 scholastic year, enrolment in the whole of the Soviet Union rose to over 17 million for the 1936-1937. The *desitiletka* (a standard 10-year school), consisting of a four-year primary and a six-year secondary school had become established as the norm.

In the *desitiletka* that Heydar and his siblings attended, there were unheralded new offerings introduced for students: a five year programme for physics and four years of chemistry were two that he encountered, subjects that a few years earlier would have been alien to a child in remote Nakhchivan. During this period, Moscow introduced an array of innovations that, over less than a decade, meant that young students from Ukraine in the west to the Kuril Islands in the east were receiving an unprecedented scope and depth of education.

Now the children of Nakhchivan were passing through a mandated 197 school day-year (20 more per year than ideological enemy America) that encompassed 20 ‘disciplines’: native language, literature, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, natural history, history, the constitution of the Soviet Union, geography, physics, astronomy, chemistry, one foreign language, drawing, penmanship, drafting, singing, physical education and military drill. All this offered extraordinary opportunities to those willing, or able, to grasp them.

Heydar’s aforementioned school reports, showing a string of ‘A’ grades, indicated someone able. Yet more importantly, with his father’s encouragement and nurturing, Heydar at 10 and 11 years old was a boy who had got the message that he had at his disposal the social support, and the intellectual means, to escape his humble beginnings.

In one perhaps allegorical tale, Huseynzade is also quoted as stating: “Heydar was one of our best students from the first days of studies. Even our self assured graduates treated him with respect calling him ‘General’ openly behind his back as if they foresaw his future position.”

Whether children of that age would have such a thought process is perhaps debatable, but what is clear is that even at 10 years old, in his first year as a secondary school student, he quickly established a reputation. He was an ambitious boy. Encouraged by his parents and his teachers, he began to understand the possibilities that lay before him.

“He had a good sense of humour out of school, but when a class began, he was never a person who laughed or joked,” says a schoolmate from the period. “He didn’t like students who were disruptive. He took his studies seriously and believed that others should also.”



The Nuremberg Rallies were a show of support and force that began to illustrate the extent of Hitler's intentions.

If Heydar was a serious boy at times, it was not without due cause. In another part of the world, by late 1933, the period Heydar started his secondary schooling, Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist German Worker's Party had begun their rise to power in Germany. Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and, in 1934, Führer.

Hitler's Nazi regime was committed to repudiating the Treaty of Versailles, purging Jews and other minorities from German society and expanding Germany's territory. Hitler was also outspoken in opposing the spread of Communism, eventually bringing Germany and the Soviet Union into opposition. Soviet era media reported extensively on the rise of Nazism and railed against the emergence of Hitler in newspapers and on newsreels shown in public cinemas. The media trumpeted the danger that Hitler represented.

Despite not being even a teenager, the thoughtful boy read his father's thin Azerbaijani newspapers and was caught up in the adult discussions around him as they discussed events in Germany. The Soviet media machine was keen to play up the dangers to ordinary citizens and their way of life. With its reach into even the most remote parts of the Soviet Union, the rise of a menacing Nazi Germany was the first global event ever to play out in almost real time in Nakhchivan and similar outposts of the Soviet Union.

If, for example, in more contemporary times the events of September 11, 2001, were the first ever global event widely reported around the world, the impact of this would have been profound. Decades earlier, especially through the prism of the Soviet PR machine, newly connected regions of the USSR had every opportunity to witness first hand the shocking, inexorable rise of Fascism and the Nazi war machine.

While the world around him was changing, for Heydar personally these years represented a relatively smooth path to adulthood. He topped his classes in his first secondary year, 1933-1934, and moved swiftly through the 1934-1935 and 1935-1936. Written reports and first hand accounts show that in each of these three periods he excelled.

The question his parents and teachers were increasingly asking was, what good it was doing him breezing through school? As much as his father pushed him to study harder, there came a point where normal lessons ceased to be stimulating as the challenge ebbed.

Moscow's Commissariat of Education had created a system strictly 'conducted according to a definite plan and with a definite group of pupils'. The system was absolutely successful in introducing, for the first time, a union wide, comprehensive education system. It was a tremendous success. Nevertheless the price of achieving this was a rigid system.

Heydar in Nakhchivan sat through much the same 'lesson' as a child in Odessa, Tallin, Murmansk, Vladivostok or anywhere in the Union. The Commissariat of Education created the 'lesson' as a fundamental unit of all educational procedure, stocked with stable and standard textbooks, formed through a definitely planned course of study, formal examinations and a syllabus which, for all its efforts at indoctrination, was on a par with any around the world.

Yet the lesson, and the education system, now also represented something of an impediment to Heydar, whose startling progress was in itself a product of the new system. The Commissariat of Education could not, and had not, built in any measure of flexibility. In cases where pupils such as Heydar excelled, there was little scope for a fast track approach. There were no 'super courses', no schools-within-schools for elite studies and no special secondary schools for advanced children. These would arrive in later decades. Instead,



*(above) A typical Soviet classroom.
(right) Andrei Bubnov served as
People's Commissar for Education
and built an impressive
yet inflexible system
across the Soviet Union.*



the probability was that Heydar would coast along in school, without great challenge, for the foreseeable future. He returned to school for the 1936-1937 school year in September as a keen 13 year old. With his friends, he had enjoyed a lazy summer, avoiding high temperatures where he could, and spending times in the countryside, swimming in the Nakhchivan River and local lakes. At home he had completed his chores, tended the family garden and read his books.

Yet his parents, and more importantly his teachers, were convinced that while the shiny new Soviet schools system had unearthed a brilliant young

student who could go on to better things, the same system was now suffocating him.

“Intellectually gifted and academically talented, he was able to learn material rapidly and understand concepts,” says Thomas Leonard, a British academic specialist who studied Heydar’s reports and work, and the syllabus available to him. “Operating at an intellectual level beyond same-age peers, frankly educational acceleration was a realistic and desirable alternative to normal grade-level work.”

Yet as it stood, standard grade-level work was all that was open to him. At the beginning of the 1936-1937 school year, what lay for Heydar was three more years of operating in an environment, which now limited the scope of his progress. Heydar was himself stoic. He was 13. Surrounded by friends. Times were good. But his father, and those who were charged with his education, were keen to look for a way out of the situation.

While the Commissariat of Education were unbending in their systems, there was one thing that the new comprehensive, national education system needed badly. Heydar’s way out of the stagnant situation would be, perhaps, to be swap sides in the classroom.



Heydar Aliyev was emerging as a noted student, but one whose intellectual gifts were potentially being wasted as he found his schooling less and less of a challenge.



These Soviet propaganda posters illustrate how Moscow was attempting to shape the image of the teaching profession and give those who taught children almost hero-like status.

The Abecedary

What nobler employment, or more valuable
to the state, than that of the man who
instructs the rising generation.
— *Marcus Tullius Cicero*

According to author Hamlet Isaxanli, founder of Khazar University, the Soviet period brought rapid advances in literacy across Azerbaijan, which rose to 90 per cent within 10 to 15 years. In Azerbaijan, and across Russia and the Soviet Union's other 14 republics, there was a great leap in education. From Moscow, the Commissariat of Education oversaw a union-wide surge in literacy and numeracy, which aimed to prepare a generation of ideologically-polished, enlightened young Soviets. There is no doubting the enormity of the task, spreading a comprehensive education system to all corners of the new union. And the sheer scope of the enterprise brought with it inherent problems. Among those was the quality of the educational product. A massive increase in pupils, classrooms, schools and, indeed, subjects, required teachers. This was something that the Commissariat was being forced to meet head on. Across the Soviet Union, a network of Pedagogic Schools was created, designed to dispense full post-graduate courses for secondary school teachers in subject matter, general and special methodology.

The Soviet Union needed teachers. Heydar needed to move on from a secondary education that had served him well, but no longer served to offer a challenge. In September 1936, Heydar returned for his fourth year a secondary school. He had breezed through his previous scholastic year and nothing indicated that this would change in the new. Yet the boy's father had a plan.



A contemporary photograph of Dovlat Mammadov, considered to be one of Heydar Aliyev's closest friends during his formative years.

Instead of three more years of Heydar registering 'A' grades without breaking a sweat, he reasoned that his son needed a challenge.

Nakhchivan Pedagogical School, situated in the heart of the town, would quickly emerge as the heartbeat of Nakhchivan's educational renaissance. Generations of teachers would be moulded within its walls and go on to play a role in shaping Nakhchivani society. The faculty admitted youngsters from across Nakhchivan, aged 16 and above. It offered a two-year post-graduate course, which led into an Aspirantura (equivalent of a Bachelor of Arts).

The 13 year old was significantly younger than the norm for Nakhchivan Pedagogical School. Yet he had entered the 1936-1937 scholastic years in much the same form as the previous. In terms of results and grades, he headed his age group by a significant distance and was surging onwards in academic terms.

"Heydar's father was a man of few words, but he was a thoughtful character. When he decided upon a course of action he quietly and deliberately went about it," says Dovlat Mammadov, one of Heydar's closest friends.

Like other people who came into contact with Heydar at that time, Alirza saw the brooding intellect of his son. It was something that he sought to nurture, buying books and newspapers to read. He had pushed Heydar to study hard, and this had itself paid off. Heydar, too, recognised that his school works had ceased to present a challenge.

Fortunately in the debate about his future, Alirza had allies in the boy's teachers. They, too, recognised the folly of forcing a student to go through the motions without much to gain other than to pass the time before he could go on to other things. During the early months of the 1936-1937 school year, Heydar's father took the situation into his own hands, making an appointment to see Latif Huseynzade, Director of Studies at Nakhchivan Pedagogical School. With the support of Heydar's teachers, Alirza sought a position for his son, a place to study for an Aspirantura the following year.

At that time, when the new Soviet Union was still relatively new, there was a great deal of rigidity to the system. Certainly, at this point, there was no precedence to admitting 13 year olds into teacher training programmes. Nevertheless, Alirza argued, his son's time was being wasted. He submitted a handful of school reports to back up this statement.

Interviewed in 2005 Huseynzade recalled meeting with the Aliyevs and Alirza stating: "My son longs to be a teacher." Huseynzade went on to question Heydar, probing his intellectual skills. Convinced, he took the boy through to see Nakhchivan Pedagogical School Director Kazym Talybly. He recalled telling Talybly: "This boy knows Azerbaijani literature and history well, speaks and reads well and I think he will make an excellent teacher."

Talybly was similarly impressed after a brief talk with Heydar, but wished to ensure his mathematics was strong. He summoned the school's Head of Mathematics, Tofiq Bektashi, who gave the boy an assessment to see if he had what it took.

A few weeks later, Alirza and Heydar were summoned back to Nakhchivan Pedagogical School. The school had taken the unusual step of 'bending' their entry criteria. This was a time when the Soviet Union was scrambling to create a new generation of teachers, not helped by circumstances of a Stalin led-purge of enemies, real and imagined. The appearance of a talented young candidate, during a period when Nakhchivan desperately needed new blood, was timely. He could, Talybly decreed, join the school in September 1937, if he completed his fourth year in Secondary School with 'A' grades and if he would use the intervening period to read and grasp a series of pedagogical books, in order to be up to speed with his older classmates when the new term began. It was a challenge that Heydar was prepared for — and one that he would rise to meet.

At that time he was certainly the youngest student to gain entry into Nakhchivan Pedagogical School. Indeed one can surmise that across the Soviet Union as a whole there were not more than a couple of boys of 13 who were being admitted to teacher training. With a notable first on the horizon, Heydar returned to his secondary school with a greater sense of purpose. Plus there was the small matter of a mountain of reading material — over a dozen thick textbooks lent by Talybly.

Over ensuing weeks, the young boy took on his schoolwork and crammed in the theory of pedagogy. There was now a lot to learn and Heydar would perhaps, for the first time, come face to face with the darker side of the Soviet system. The so-called Great Purge would reach out from Moscow across the nation. It would quickly arrive in Baku, and then spread to Nakhchivan, as Stalin sought out enemies. The term ‘purge’ had referred to expelling individuals from the Communist Party. But from 1936 the term morphed and took on a far darker meaning — including almost certain arrest, imprisonment and, in many cases, execution. The Great Purge was led by Stalin, in order to eliminate political challenge, notably from Leon Trotsky.

The murder of Leningrad party chief Sergei Kirov in 1934 would serve as a pretext for a sweeping movement in which, according to some historians, up to one million people perished. This would include a purge of the Red Army, nearly all of the Bolsheviks who were prominent during the Russian Revolution or Lenin’s Soviet government. The culture of fear that this created, throughout the Soviet Union, cannot be underestimated. Even the relatively sleepy Nakhchivan would not escape Stalin’s campaign.

On July 2, 1937, Stalin wrote to Sultan Majid Afandiyev, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijani SSR, and all regional party chiefs, also copying in heads of People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs — Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (NKVD), a forerunner of the KGB. He gave them five days to provide estimates of the number of *kulaks* (prosperous landowners generally demonised as an exploiter of ordinary people during the October Revolution) and criminals who would be arrested, executed or sent to camps.

Up to one per cent of the Soviet Union’s population would eventually be swept up within the Great Purge. This would have a profound effect on the nation as many were drawn from the higher echelons of society, such as



Millions of Soviet citizens were summarily arrested, imprisoned and mostly killed in the gulags that served Stalin's paranoia.

political leaders and party stalwarts, teachers and intelligentsia among them. The destabilising effect in Nakhchivan, as elsewhere, was felt in the loss of many in positions of responsibility.

The folly of this era, from a historical perspective, is easy to assess. Across the Soviet Union some 2,000 writers, intellectuals and artists were imprisoned, and of these nearly two-thirds would die in prison or in the concentration camps. Around them, the population of Nakhchivan watched as key officials, party men and others were picked off the streets and disappeared. Those who were executed for their crimes were often better off than those not.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, winner of the 1970 Nobel Prize in Literature, introduced the term *gulag*, an acronym for the Main Administration of Corrective Labour Camps, to the Western world with the 1973 publication of his *The Gulag Archipelago*. But to the Soviet population, the existence of the *gulag* system was no great secret. By March 1940, there were 53 separate camps and 423 labour colonies across the USSR.

The education apparatus into which Heydar was now heading was itself reeling. Many of those caught up in the Great Purge were from this sector. The national education system as a whole, however great its successes, was clearly under the ideological microscope.



Heydar Aliyev's secondary school grades were sufficient to persuade the Nakhchivan Pedagogical School to bend its admission rules.

A 1931-1932 national education plan was swept away, dubbed a 'leftist' distortion of orthodox Marxism, and on July 4, 1936, a resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party condemned a 'pseudo-scientific' approach of pedagogists. This condemnation established a strict principle of common secondary education for all, the same idea that Alirza and his son had neatly circumvented in order to ensure that the latter could reach his full potential.

With such upheaval playing out around him, during the latter part of 1936 and into 1937, Heydar Aliyev kept at his studies in order to retain his high grades, enough for entry into Nakhchivan Pedagogical School, while cramming books and papers to ready himself for the latter.

"He was an omnivorous reader," says Ilham Aliyev. "Late into his life, as President of an independent Azerbaijan, he was always well on top of his brief, on any subject, simply because he absorbed so much material, be it books, briefing papers, background notes, anything. He loved to read."

This trait was much in evidence throughout his youth, and Nakhchivan Pedagogical School had kindly lent the young student some textbooks. He pored over these, absorbing the subject and attempting to grasp the latest Soviet pedagogical theories of the day. After several years of relative ease in his schooling, the opportunity to push himself was an intellectual challenge that he enjoyed. As the spring of 1937 gave way to early summer, Heydar and his classmates took their exams. Amid a weight of expectation, yet without real

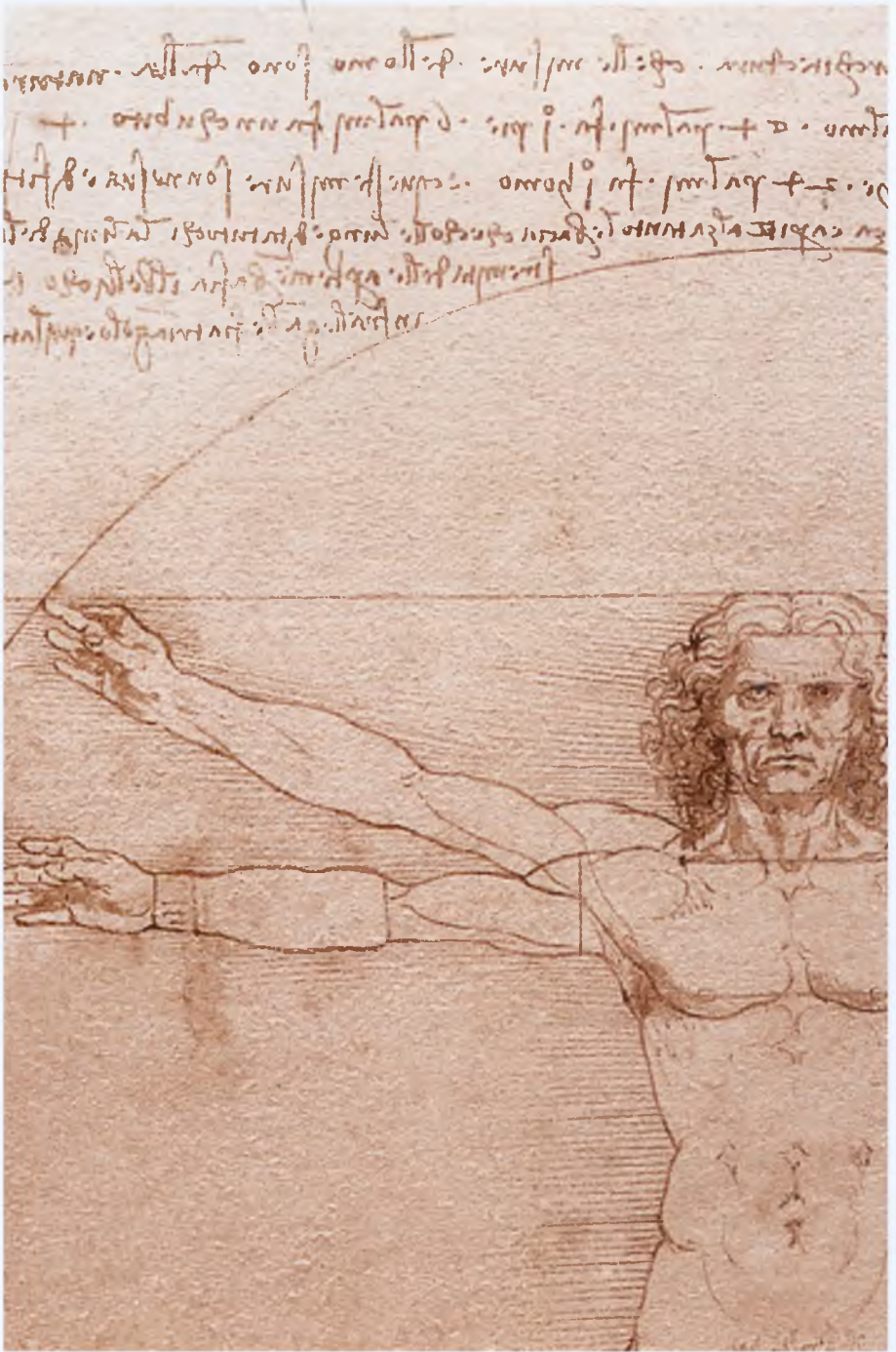
cause for worry, his final report would show a string of 'A's. Heydar had sailed through his final year there with the same ease of the previous three. In early July 1937, the school year ended. Ahead of Heydar and his friends lay the usual round of innocent, childish pleasures. But this particular month would play out to, arguably, the most destructive of the irrational actions that made up the Great Purge. On August 5, 1937, a nationwide wave of arrests went ahead across the Soviet Union, unleashing more fear, as tens of thousands of individuals were the subject of what seemed, at times, random arrest.

From the hierarchy of Nakhchivan more officials were taken, from state institutions men and women disappeared. Alirza, a decidedly apolitical figure who got on with his work on the Nakhchivani railway system without making waves, was relatively safe from the machinations that swirled around him. Yet fear of Stalin's campaign, and the sometimes bizzare nature of its victims, created a pall of fear.

During this period Alirza kept his head down, worked hard, and returned home quietly at night to tend his garden and see his children. Having himself suffered the horrors of ethnic cleansing in 1918, he now drew quiet pleasure from family, his wife's love and the company of friends, while studiously avoiding public discussions on politics or religion in public.

To the backdrop of the events of August 5, and the days that followed it, Alirza remained aloof from events outside of the small Aliyev family home off Pushkin Street and concentrated on the issue at hand. Heydar, for so long able to breeze through school, was now home-schooling himself in Soviet pedagogic strategies. The earliest version of general learning theoretical concepts we know today as things like Behaviourism, Cognitivism and Situated Learning.

"Whether it is the Soviet Union, or other parts of the world, pedagogical thought is aimed at how one can bring people to learn. This is particularly true regarding larger families of thought like constructivism," says Thomas Leonard, a prominent British pedagogist who studied the Soviet education system, who was consulted on the subject. "In those early years of the Soviet Union there was much tinkering and an ideological aspect, which is alien to the science today. Yet, the Nakhchivan Pedagogical School that Heydar would join, was an element of a grand network, the widest expansion of education across a nation that had ever been seen in human history."



Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, circa 1490, is considered one of the world's earliest and most profound scientific and pedagogical works.

Leonard adds that, for his relative youth, Heydar was a highly unusual trainee teacher.

“Certainly his grades suggest some *wunderkind* — a highly evolved long-term working memory. This memory is capable of holding relevant information for extended periods,” says Leonard. “Experts believe that prodigious intellect tends to arise as a result of the innate intelligence of the child. Others believe that environment plays the dominant role. In this particular case evidence suggests that, supported by a family that encouraged him, in Aliyev’s case it was true innate intellect.”

That apparent intellect was now woven into the Soviet Union’s latest theories of pedagogical thought. Through the summer of 1937, Heydar prepared himself for a challenge.



IlanDag, just outside Nakhchivan City, is perhaps the most iconic topographic feature of the region.

“He Will Come”

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

— *Martin Luther King, Jr*

As the summer of 1937 went on, Heydar prepared himself for the challenge ahead. But he still had time to make a friend, a man who today provides one of the few first hand accounts of Heydar's childhood. At 15 years old, Dovlat Mammadov was a bright young Nakhchivani student. He had won himself a place in Nakhchivan Pedagogical School.

In August, Mammadov accompanied his father to visit a friend in the village of Geidere, not far from Nakhchivan town. Already there was Alirza Aliyev and his 14 year old son.

“He greeted me, smiled, held out his hand and introduced himself as Heydar,” says Mammadov. “I can remember it today, it was a firm, friendly handshake, and that sealed a friendship that lasted until he died.”

That afternoon the pair, both of whom were set to start at the new school in a couple of weeks, talked and talked. “We had a lot in common initially, as we were both going to pedagogical school, and on that mutual point we found we both liked literature and the arts, we both loved the cinema, sports and nature,” says Mammadov. “I remember most of all his sense of humour. We were always laughing and joking. He had an ironic sense of humour.”



The syllabus within the Soviet pedagogical school system included physics, sports, biology and literature.

Over the next few weeks they met a couple of times. And by the time school was due to begin, they were already firm friends.

Nakhchivan Pedagogical School was arguably the best-equipped educational entity in the region in 1937. Nearly new, the school aimed to produce a new generation of teachers, which Stalin believed would go on to create generations of highly educated Soviets capable of driving the relatively new state forward. Stalin viewed a nationwide network of pedagogical schools as the foundations on which to create a Soviet Union that would vie with the United States, Britain and others on the world stage, for generations to come.

In fulfilling this mandate, the Commissariat of Education in Moscow imbibed its pedagogical schools with top class infrastructure and general amenities and a generous annual budget. Nakhchivan Pedagogical School possessed the latest in classroom technology, science laboratories, a well-stocked library of (ideologically correct) books, an elite sports complex and even a movie hall.

Two of the new students that year, Mammadov and Aliyev, were thrilled when they were posted into the same class — and with the opportunities that presented themselves at the school. The classy gymnasium was one.

"Heydar Aliyev was thrilled to be there. He was a sporting type, and the facilities were very, very good," says Mammadov. "I keenly remember that he used to get through two reading books most weeks, above any he may have to read for his studies and homework. The library was flowing with so many books. He attacked this facility with gusto."

For Heydar it was not the smooth sailing of his secondary school years, now thrown in among older children and taking on a host of new and strange subjects. On a syllabus that included the arithmetic, geometry, chemistry and history, he was now faced with the likes of 'physical culture teaching methodology' and 'natural science teaching methodology'. There was also instruction on calligraphy, the constitution of the USSR, school hygiene and military training, among others.

Says Mammadov: "It was really quite tough during those first few weeks, but this was nevertheless something Heydar relished. He was the youngest in our year but, I believe, was quickly established at the top of the class."

As well as the more mental aspects of his studies, Heydar did well in more practical spheres. He won a medal for his shooting, and was a keen participant in the gymnasium. It seems strange to think of the man we know today, a statesman-like Heydar Aliyev, dressed in whites, attacking the parallel bars. Nevertheless he was an adept gymnast and enjoyed challenging himself physically.

The two students were now close, seeing a great deal of each other, both in and out of school. Mammadov recalls Heydar's thoughts, away from his studies, being consumed, at times, by what he viewed as an impending storm.

In Germany, fanatical members of the National Socialist Party had rejected Versailles, repudiated an international economy which they claimed to be a tool of Jewish financial power and called for the rearmament of Germany to conquer the globe. Adolf Hitler had adopted the popular idea of *Lebensraum* (living space) as a justification for territorial expansion and seizure of economic resources. This became the basis of German foreign policy and would influence the beginning of the war.

Germany laid bare its challenge to the Soviet Union in November 1936, when it and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, initiating an international struggle against Communism. In 1937, Benito Mussolini of Italy joined the pact.

In Nakhchivan, Heydar and his friends learned of the threat to the Soviet Union, and its system of government, through newsreels. Nazism was now directly aligned against Communism. The German-led Axis, and particularly Hitler and his expansionism, were a huge challenge to Stalin, who responded with a breast-beating nationalism that served also to solidify his own position amid the horrors of the Great Purge.

Heydar had remained within the structure of the Young Pioneer Organisation of the Soviet Union. This was the ideologically altered Scout-like organisation of the Union. But there were a great many similarities. The Scout motto 'Bud' Gotov' ('Be Prepared') had been altered into a Pioneer motto 'Vsegda Gotov' ('Always Prepared'). Mention of God was removed, replaced by the omnipresent pledges of loyalty to Lenin and the Communist Party. Aged 15, Heydar joined the Komsomol stage of Young Pioneers, the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.



(above) During the long war years the Komsomol was a conduit for Moscow to teach the population about civil defence. Here a group show their readiness with gas-masks. (right) A Komsomol pin badge.



“Joining the Komsomol was something boys looked forward to, not necessarily because they liked ideological aspects, but because at 15 years old it was a reaffirmation of their progress toward adulthood... If you were in the Komsomol you weren’t a kid anymore,” says Polad Bulbuloglu, today Azerbaijan’s Ambassador to Russia.

In May 1938, during his first year at Nakhchivan Pedagogical School, Heydar graduated to the Komsomol at a key moment. The rise of Nazi Germany gave additional impetus to Komsomol activities as Moscow sought to marshal its people to be ready for the perceived, potential threat.



A typical Komsomol membership card from the period. The Soviet Union's home grown version of the Scouting movement was an integral part of the Communist structure.

Moscow dictated that Communist youth should live life in accordance with Party doctrine. Smoking, drinking, religion and any other activity the Bolsheviks saw as threatening, were discouraged. According to author Peter Gooderham in his book *The Komsomol and Worker Youth*, the organisation remained out of step with ordinary youngsters. While it urged political connectivity, most members were disengaged from politics and simply uninterested in politics.

Yet these were not ordinary times. The Komsomol that Heydar joined was almost on a war footing as the Soviet Union prepared itself for the challenges that, inevitably, seemed ahead. The USSR had begun a massive programme of industrialisation and rearmament. By 1939, Russia would have the third largest industrial economy and, on paper, the world's biggest military power.

The Komsomol, with millions of young almost fighting age members, would be key to a successful prosecution of a war. The organisation's commitment to overall fitness, health and military-style training increased. For members of the Komsomol, and the population of the Soviet Union in general, news reports of the increasing danger that Hitler and the Nazis represented were often played up with zeal.

“Looking back, Heydar was a nationalist,” says Mammadov. “He loved Azerbaijan. He loved his home and the people around him. He was a serious boy, so he had a deep concern of the dangers that we faced at the time.”

Heydar had won a medal for his shooting at school, and was considered a good shot within Komsomol, but personally did not have the faux-macho affinity for guns that one could see in most boys his age. His friends never saw in him a role with the armed forces. Although some of his peers were said to call him 'general', this seems to have been more to do with his strategic thinking than any military bravado.

Increasingly, however, the slide towards war was underway. In May 1938, the same month that Heydar turned 15 and joined the Komsomol, Hitler ordered his generals to plan an autumn war against Czechoslovakia on the pretext of freeing the German-speaking peoples of the Sudetenland.

When German pressure reached a peak in the summer of 1938, the European powers were in disarray. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met Hitler and brokered an agreement that would see the region of Sudetenland given to Nazi Germany. War was averted, but only for a time. News of the so-called Munich Pact between Hitler and Chamberlain, arrived during high summer. Nakhchivan Pedagogical School had closed for the break, at the end of a satisfying first year for Heydar. He hovered at, or close to, top of the class in all his subjects. In typical form, although he had plans for the usual round of summer exploits with his friends, he had chosen to look forward. He had raided his school's library for reading material and planned to comb through these in order to prepare.

Nakhchivan town now also boasted its first public library — another benefit of Moscow's largesse — and the boy was one of this facility's most regular visitors. Around the summer he had planned self studies, some time with the Komsomol, hanging out at the family home, and in and around Nakhchivan's unspoilt countryside with his friends. Yet a dark cloud lay ahead that troubled him. He found plenty of reason to be in a serious frame of mind. Says Mammadov: "I clearly remember a comment that he made to me when news of the agreement between Germany and Britain was reported. People hoped that this would be the end of it, that Hitler would be satisfied. I remember Heydar looking at me, shaking his head as if to disagree. He told me he believed that this was not the end of the problem, that this would escalate again."

Seven decades on, Mammadov has a crystal clear memory of this particular conversation. Many summers have passed in Nakhchivan. Now a proud



A young Heydar scoffed at suggestions that Adolf Hitler would be placated and considered that it was only a matter of time before Nazi Germany made its move.

Azerbaijani, not a Soviet, a former teacher who dedicated his life to succeeding generations. A lot has happened in his life. As a loyal friend to Heydar, he has spoken little of their private times together as friends during their formative years, believing these to be just that, private. Yet despite the long years that have passed, he recalls with absolute clarity, a conversation they had, sitting under a fruit tree in the small garden in the Aliyev family home.

"People were saying that the danger was over," he says. "That the Germans were, I guess, placated and that they would no longer be a threat."

Remembering that Heydar was just 15 years old, his conviction over what would happen next offers insight into the analytical skills that he would become famous for possessing. Heydar told Mammadov: "Hitler won't stop. Not ever. No matter what. There is no room in Europe for Fascism and Communism. The Germans will come. He will come."

Heydar's comments were no idle boyish talk. Mammadov recalls his friend's serious face as he made his prediction.

"That is what he believed," says Mammadov. "He was convinced that war was inevitable. Why I remember this so clearly? He looked at me with those intense eyes of his, that expression when he was deadly serious, and told me outright that war was coming."



‘Peace for Our Time’

War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary,
it is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace
by killing each other's children.

— Jimmy Carter

He had a sense of purpose. I won't say destiny. But he believed that he would complete the course, and we thought probably top of the class. So while many people had whiled away the summer aimlessly he kept a lot of time for studying and reading," says classmate Dovlat Mammadov. "He forced himself to miss a lot of enjoyment that summer.

"I remember him inviting me to his home to study. His mother made fantastic lemonade. The family had a couple of lemon trees in their garden. We would work together for some hours and then take, for me, memorable breaks, sitting in the shade of a tree in their garden, sipping on tasty home-made lemonade."

As for most students, wherever they are in the world, summer passed all too quickly. In September 1938, Nakhchivan Pedagogical School opened its doors for the new year. Heydar was well prepared, having crammed for much of the summer. One year remained of a challenging two-year degree course. "His work had paid off handsomely. We arrived back in classes, and it was noticeable that he was head and shoulders ahead of everyone," says Mammadov.

There was a demanding year ahead, one that would see them sit final exams



*Nakhchivan Pedagogical School
and its well stocked library
provided a stage on which Heydar
would begin to define himself as
one of the intellectual minds
of his generation.*

in the spring, tests that would for many define their future place in the ultra-hierarchical Communist schools system, and therefore their place in society. There was a lot at stake.

The late 1930s was an era when central electricity supplies were non-existent in Nakhchivan. There was perhaps a few dozen telephones in the territory. Television was unheard of. Many homes got their light from a small, private generator, if they were lucky. For the most part households had an oil lamp or two. As a marquee institution in an era when the Soviet Union was

building its elite education system, Nakhchivan Pedagogical School was blessed with an abundance of power from a relatively large generator. The brightest young brains in the territory had been provided with the brightest lights.

At 3pm each day classes ended. A stream of students would make their way home across the city while others fanned out to surrounding towns and villages. In the warmer months of summer, Heydar was among them. In the long evenings, he assisted with chores in the family home along with his brothers and sisters. His father asked all the children to help out around the house. Heydar's favourite task was tending the small garden. He enjoyed physical work. Later, work done, he habitually sat quietly outside reading his heavy books and completing a little homework. A homemade wooden bench, under one of the family's fruit trees, was his favourite spot.

As autumn gave way to winter, however, daylight hours grew shorter, and the pattern of Heydar's days changed. He was excused chores at home on weekdays. There were many books to be read and the school library remained open late. In lighter moments he picked up tomes by the likes of Mirza-Shafi Vazeh the 14th century 'sage from Ganja', and the poetry of Khurshidbanu Natavan, considered one of the best lyrical poets of Azerbaijan. He had gained a liking for some of the works of Najmaddin Nakhchivani, an outstanding philosopher and scholar in the Muslim East whose scientific and philosophical writings were highly regarded in the Middle Ages. Among the student body there were also bootleg copies floating around of the works of the controversial Mikayil Mushfig. He was a noted poet, but his resistance to the Soviet totality put him at odds with 'the system'. He would be executed in 1939. With this, the age of the dissident writer arrived in Nakhchivan.

"When he came to power, much later, Heydar Aliyev was arguably the most tolerant head of any of the Soviet republics," says Anar Rzayev. "In Soviet times he used to joke that by allowing so many dissidents in Azerbaijan, he was himself a dissident."

During the long, dark winters in Nakhchivan, the works of these authors and others would pass through Heydar's hands. Many winter evenings he would sit in the library and read his pedagogical books, and anything else that had caught his fancy. The well-lit library became a refuge from the winter, as well as a place of learning. Heydar may have viewed the athenaeum as a focus

for learning. The white washed walls and high windows of the library were a sanctuary for the 15 year old during an era when such a facility was an exception rather than the norm. He understood that he was in a privileged position and remained determined to make use of the opportunity.

Yet while he was enjoying a successful time in classes, Heydar may have wished his youthful talent for reading political affairs was not quite so astute. Within months of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's claim of "peace for our time", Adolf Hitler's megalomania was stalking Europe once again. The inexorable slide towards war had begun in earnest.

Germany annexed a large part of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Hitler then demanded, and got, Memel and Danzig from Lithuania and Poland respectively, with both nations being forced to gravitate politically towards Germany. When Poland refused to subordinate itself completely to Berlin, Hitler's generals were ordered to start planning for invasion. In the winter of 1938-1939, Britain and France — attempting to draw a line in the sand decreed that if the Germans attacked any country that defended itself, they would join in its defence. Chamberlain hoped that this would save Romania, Poland and Greece from Hitler's obvious interest.

While events in Europe seemed a long way away from Nakhchivan, to young boys of almost fighting age there was inevitable discussion on what the immediate future held. For a 15 year old student teacher, and the young men of the region as a whole, there was some soul searching to be done.

"World War One was fresh in everyone's memories. So were the conflicts that shaped the Soviet Union. Especially The Great Patriotic War. Not like today when you see war glamourised in a way, in movies, there was a stark realism among us," says Mammadov. "So when talk turned to what was going on, as it became more and more clear that something bad may happen, we were talking in very realistic terms about what lay ahead."

The Aliyev family, once refugees driven from their home due to ethnic purging, had suffered its share of loss. Therefore, if it seemed that Heydar and his brothers were to be part of a generation that would be called upon, there was much consternation.

"We spoke of this, of course," says a family friend. "Heydar Aliyev, like

SAURDAY, The Ballin

IT IS PEACE FOR OUR TIME

*Tumultuous Crowds Throng Downing-street
Chamberlain Speaks from No. 10 Window*

WITH HIS WIFE ON
PALACE BALCONY

*Pact with Hitler is
Only a Beginning*

DUCE ASKS PREMIER TO
COME



British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's claim of "peace for our time" would be all too brief, a pause in the slide towards war.

everyone we knew, did not want to be part of a war. No one wanted to fight and die. But there was a sort of acceptance that if war broke out, then we would do whatever was asked of us."

At 15 years old, Heydar was stoic, telling friends that if he was drafted to fight he would do just that. Ever analytical, to those who were less concerned about the threat that Hitler posed, he pointed out that what they were seeing on newsreels went far beyond the notion of *Lebensraum*, German for 'habitat' or literally 'living space'. Europe. The Soviet Union. Azerbaijan. Even Nakhchivan. All would eventually be in Hitler's sights.

Not everyone drew such a hypothesis. But some quite influential figures did. While the newspapers and cinema newsreels in Nakhchivan told Heydar and his friends of the crisis that was fast enveloping Europe, something was also afoot in Moscow. Stalin had repeatedly reached out to Hitler, hoping to keep the Soviet Union off Hitler's agenda. Initially, at least, Berlin ignored this. Yet the Soviet Union also presented a powerful strategic and military danger to the Nazi war machine. German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop met with the Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov in Moscow to conclude two pacts — an economic agreement and the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Stalin hoped to steer clear of a global conflict. For Hitler

the accord left him free to pursue his agenda, the partition of Eastern Europe, before turning his attention towards Moscow when the time was right. For a time, both would get what they wanted, the Soviet Union would not initially be dragged into World War Two.

Heydar's second year at Nakhchivan Pedagogical School passed relatively easily. As 1938 became 1939, he easily became the outstanding student. He was already starting to think beyond the degree course he was busy studying.

"I thought he would go on to higher studies," says Mammadov. "He was brilliant, he had an excellent mind and could draw people in with his intellect. He would have made an inspiring teacher... but he was not cut from the same cloth as the rest of us. In Nakhchivan at least, if not Azerbaijan as a whole, he was the intellectual giant of his generation. We all knew this."

Heydar was not sure of the future. He liked the idea of academia. Yet he also wondered if there was something beyond. Some of his lecturers agreed. In a Communist system that was increasingly alert to high flyers, one or two people had taken note of the youngster moving beyond his years through pedagogical school.

In the event, circumstances would shape what happened next.

Throughout the first half of 1939 the possibility of war swirled throughout Europe. Britain sought to make Nazi Germany understand that there would be no more appeasement, and that she would declare war on Germany if Poland was attacked.

Heydar Aliyev. 16 years old. Newly armed with a degree in pedagogy was at home on September 17, 1939, when news spread that Germany had struck. Hitler had ordered Heinrich Himmler to stage a fake act of provocation by Poland. In retaliation, that morning, German forces surged across the border and swept through the country. Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, quickly declared war. World War Two had begun.

Germany and the Soviet Union swiftly invaded their apportioned sections of Poland. Then Stalin ordered his forces into Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and parts of Romania, along with an attempted invasion of Finland. Soon, Stalin and Hitler began trading proposals for a Soviet entry into the Axis Pact. In



Soviet infantry troops rally their defiance, but the war would be costly in terms of lives. One in six Azerbaijani soldiers would lose their lives in the conflict.

Nakhchivan and across Azerbaijan, a war effort now got underway. It would be a humanitarian disaster. One publication notes that:

Between 1940 and 1946, the population decreased from 3.27 million to 2.73 million, a loss of at least 534,000 people. In other words, one out of every six Azerbaijanis became a victim of this war.

Of the estimated 700,000 Azerbaijanis who were recruited into the Soviet Army, 400,000 never returned home. Their graves are spread all over Europe from the Volga River to Berlin. Others died of starvation, particularly in rural districts, or they became victims of Stalin's cruel exiles. And yet, these figures are mere estimates.

There are no precise statistics tracing the paths of the millions of people who were mobilised, evacuated and dispatched to different areas within the Soviet Union. If we take into consideration the hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens who made Azerbaijan their second homeland between 1941 and 1945, the casualty list could even be larger.

Casualty numbers vary with different sources. But the unmistakable fact is that Stalin's scheming brought suffering on an altogether unprecedented scale.



*(above) A view of Baku from what was the Kirov Monument, the city skyline interrupted by a parachute tower and two barrage balloons
(left) Azerbaijan leader Mir Jafar Baghirov had taken an interest in the career of the young Nakhchivani.*

His intentions were quite clear. He publicly stated: “In the Soviet army it takes more courage to retreat than advance.” Based on such a statement, it seems to have been a campaign that the Soviets fought with more ideology than tactics, and by a man who famously also said that: “One death is a tragedy. One million is a statistic.”

Across the Soviet Union as a whole, World War Two casualties are commonly estimated to exceed 20 million. The current assessment of dead in what was, at the time, dubbed by Moscow as The Great Patriotic War, by today’s Russian government stands at 26.6 million. In late 1939, Moscow began to muster its armed forces through volunteerism and conscription.

Across the vast Soviet Union, a military machine burst into life. It drew on all the republics. From the Caspian coast, through Nagorno-Karabakh along the spine of the nation and to the Nakhchivani border with Turkey, a generation of Azerbaijani men heeded a call to arms.

Heydar's destiny would be somewhat different.

As far away as Baku, Mir Jafar Baghirov, leader of Azerbaijan from 1932 till 1953, had taken a passing interest. Baghirov was a giant of Azerbaijani politics, for both good reasons and bad. He had begun his career as a village school teacher, but risen to become First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party. During his tenure he would be noted for resisting Armenia's attempts to grab Nagorno-Karabakh. One notable part of his personality was his treatment of his youngest son as a normal citizen. Baghirov did not shield Vladimir from service. He joined the air force and was killed in June 1943 when deliberately flying into a German plane.

But while even-handed in that sense, Baghirov was also tasked, as head of Azerbaijan, with making sure that the cream of the republic's youth were nurtured for the future. They would not be going to war.

It is not clear under whose focus the newly graduated student at the Nakhchivan Pedagogical School fell. But what is clear is that young Heydar's name was on a list in Baku.

There was a list. He was on it. Leaders, for the sake of their lands, had a duty to protect and nurture those who were considered the future intelligentsia and leaders of Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union as a whole. Having been identified as one of those, it was doubtful that Heydar would have been allowed to join the front line war effort. Instead his destiny would lay elsewhere.



Heydar won a place in the prestigious Azerbaijan Industrial Institute and intended to pursue a career as an architect.

A Career Lost

Noble life demands a noble architecture for noble uses of noble men.
Lack of culture means what it has always meant: ignoble civilisation and
therefore imminent downfall.

— *Frank Lloyd Wright*

Azerbaijan Industrial Institute was arguably the leading seat of learning in Baku between the wars. Along with Baku State University, which was established in 1919. These two institutions were where the human future of Azerbaijan was crafted. Places were vastly oversubscribed and competition was, as a result, fierce.

The Institute had its origins in the previous century and a requirement for a technical school that would feed into Baku's oil industry. Established in 1887, it would morph into Baku Polytechnicum and grow in reputation, scope of syllabus and quality. However at the same time, the benefit to Azerbaijan would weaken as the faculty became increasingly dominated by foreign pupils and educators. According to some sources, by 1916 out of the 494 students studying at the Institution, only 20 were Azerbaijani, a meagre four per cent. In order to address this shocking imbalance, Azerbaijan SSR closed Baku Polytechnicum and rebranded it Baku Polytechnical Institute. This refocused the mission of the Institute back to producing well qualified engineers to serve in a broad range of industries across Azerbaijan, from agriculture to oil.

By 1939, on Heydar's arrival, it was now called the Azerbaijan Industrial Institute. He had opted for a degree in architecture. Baku was one of the world's most beautiful cities thanks to the influx of oil money, before the onset

of a mostly bland, monolithic Soviet era, and at the time offered a fine example of how architecture could serve people.

Sir Christopher Wren said: ‘Architecture aims at Eternity’. The scope and potential transformational-power of the architect seemed to intrigue Heydar, the ability to place a permanent stamp and sculpt space.

In September 1939, Heydar moved to Baku, for the first time. A decade and a half earlier, while preparing to leave Baku, Russian poet Sergei Yesenin wrote a verse titled ‘Farewell to Baku’, in which he lamented:

*Farewell to Baku! I'll see you no more
A sorrow and fright are now in the soul
And a heart under the hand is more painful and closer
And I feel the simple word 'friend' more distinctly.*

After several generations as the world’s biggest oil exporter, the city and its surrounds had evolved into a place that won many hearts, where living was easy compared to many capitals. Baku was known as a cultural and social beacon of the Caucasus, a business hub and, attractively, a city of burgeoning education and intellectual thought.

“Students of the Azerbaijan Industrial Institute were the cream of the crop,” says Musa Gasimli, an Azerbaijani historian. “At that time, the institute and Baku State University represented for Azerbaijan what Oxford and Cambridge Universities do for Britain.”

“He found this invigorating,” says Dovlat Mammadov, his old friend from home. The pair corresponded by letter for several years after Heydar left for Baku. “Heydar had not been bored in Nakhchivan, but in Baku he was challenged intellectually and surrounded by friends, fellow students, lecturers and others who were more his match.”

Heydar had been a big fish in a small pond in Nakhchivan. In Baku, he would study among the intellectual best of his generation from Azerbaijan and the Caucasus. In his letters during those early months, Heydar spoke of missing his hometown and the more genteel pace of life. But gradually references eased, as Heydar became more immersed in life in the capital. Aside from the much evident Old City, Baku had and still boasted the first national

*Azerbaijan Industrial Institute was
one of the premier higher
education facilities
in the country.*



theatre of Muslim East, the first opera house, a host of Azerbaijani newspapers and well-stocked public libraries. For a time, and despite evident signs, the war did seem far away. Students would gather after classes, in coffee shops, dormitories and parks to talk, debate and argue over everything from philosophy, war, Communism and the Soviet Union, to the latest performance of local football teams. While Heydar had only a passing interest in football and sports, he grew immersed in his studies and in the student life that surrounded him.

For myriad of reasons, Baku, which would play such an imposing role in his life story, enchanted him.

“He never lost his deep-rooted love of Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan. He carried this throughout his life, until his death. He was deeply patriotic,” adds Natiq Aliyev, today Azerbaijan’s Minister of Industry and Energy. “Yet he also took to life in Baku well, I think simply because of the cultural and intellectual stimulation that it offered.”

There were downsides to the move from Nakhchivan, of course. He missed his family. His friends. The imposing countryside that surrounded his hometown. And already in those days Baku had begun to see the scars caused by its natural bounty.

Famed Russian author Maxim Gorky wrote after his first visit that; ‘The oilfields remained in my memory as a perfect picture of the grave hell. This

picture suppressed all the fantastic ideas of depressed mind, I was aware of.' Industrialist V. Rogozin made mention of the short-sighted greed of the industry, stating that oil was being pursued 'without counting and calculating'.

In 1940, the first full year that Heydar resided in Baku, some 22.2 million tonnes of oil were extracted in Azerbaijan, almost two thirds of all oil produced throughout the Soviet Union. There may have been an ugly underbelly as a result of oil production, but its importance to Stalin as he tried to develop his union, and to a nation with an active military machine, meant that this was a secondary consideration.

For all that, the old city and the few new grand Soviet era buildings that were emerging in Baku centre, coupled with its vibrancy, made Baku a city of some attractiveness. Heydar settled in well to the increased tempo of life and to his work at Azerbaijan Industrial Institute.

In 1940, the Institute's Department of Architecture boasted a syllabus that would typically have been practical, designed to produce Azerbaijani talent capable of building their nation, albeit combining elements of East and West, along with studies into domestic influences such as the ancient architectural treasures like Maiden Tower and the Palace of the Shirvanshahs.

But like in all strands of society, Moscow was now strongly exerting influence. Soviet policy was geared towards rationalisation. All cities were to be built to a general development plan, divided into districts. Projects would be designed for entire districts, transforming a city's architectural image with a Soviet hue. The Stalin led, but never completed, Palace of the Soviets project in Moscow, delineated a neoclassical tone to his 'Empire style' (also called Stalinist Gothic, or Socialist Classicism), and his Soviet Academy of Architecture, was still half a decade away. Yet Moscow's influence was already creeping. Across the Soviet Union architecture, and its teaching of the skill were becoming influenced by a Soviet mission to rationalise and introduce styles that were, often, alien to natural culture and heritage.

So it was with definitive Soviet overtones — that some around him resented — that Heydar began his journey to become a draftsman in September 1939.

Why did architecture grab his attention? "As I understood, it was a practical thing, he liked the application of mathematics, and the creative aspect,



Baku was a booming city due to its oil sector, while her historical wonders, such as the Maiden Tower, represented the Azerbaijani capital's roots into its past.



achieving something that was of value in peoples' lives," says Ilham Aliyev. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the poet and educator, wrote:

Ah, to build, to build! That is the noblest art of all the arts. Painting and sculpture are but images, are merely shadows cast by outward things on stone or canvas, having in themselves no separate existence. Architecture, existing in itself, and not in seeming a something it is not, surpasses them as substance shadow.

Heydar enjoyed the arts, the best of Azerbaijani and Soviet literature and



(above) Heydar joined fellow trainee draftsmen at the Azerbaijan Industrial Institute. (left) The neoclassical Palace of the Soviets won Stalin's attention, but would never be built.

poetry, and would indeed dabble in these himself. Yet with his analytical mind he could turn his particular talents to what Longfellow had dubbed 'the noblest art of all the arts'.

If feasibility reports, building audits, building design, structures and spaces, were not ordinary fare, after mostly breezing through his education up until then, the now 17 year old was at last getting to grips with a real challenge. There were exams and marks, but in architecture it was not just a matter of getting a grade, but an opportunity to excel further. Beyond the acquisition of top grades, as he had unrelentingly achieved in Nakhchivan, there was the

possibility to become a legend. If Ferenc Puskas was emerging as a footballing great during this period, the Lionel Messi of his day, then the opportunity existed for Heydar to lay foundations to emerge beyond the Institute.

Boris Iofan, whose neoclassical Palace of the Soviets had captured Stalin's attention and made him the darling of Soviet architecture for a time, was a fine example. Born in Odessa, Ukraine, he was a graduate of Italy's Regio Istituto Superiore di Belle Arti and his work on the Barvikha sanatorium defined his reputation. Barvikha was surrounded by a pine forest nature reserve on the south bank of the Moscow River, and it was here that the elite played, surrounded by the most desirable state *dachas* for party elite, government officials and leading intellectuals. This catapulted him to national prominence.

Following in the prominent footsteps of Iofan, on the first rung of the ladder, Heydar had begun to learn the nuances of the profession. It was a potential career choice that interested him greatly. Says Gasimli: "As well as classic styles, and the likes of Rotunda, Portico and Flying Buttress, students were being taught more practical aspects, methodologies that would serve the Soviet Union over ensuring decades."

As several people interviewed for this book observe, Heydar "could" have made this a career. Yet as for so many people in the Soviet Union and Europe as a whole, cherished hopes for the future were about to be swallowed by the megalomania of one man.

On June 22, 1941, Heydar was in Baku. He was coming to the end of his second year at Azerbaijan Industrial Institute. He was enjoying life in Baku, a city which showed few signs of being part of a nation at war. He was looking forward to an impending break for summer, back home in his native Nakhchivan. Unbeknown to him, however, his time as a student was about to come to an abrupt end and his life was to take an altogether different turn.

By June 1941, Adolf Hitler was ready to launch 'Operation Barbarossa', Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. What followed was a war of annihilation and the most destructive conflict in history. In his semi-autobiographical *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had been clear. As well as destroying the Jews, among his objectives was to subjugate the Slavic race.

Despite the vast land mass of the Soviet Union, Hitler and his generals

believed they could take victory in as little as ten weeks. So confident was the Nazi hierarchy that they only provided their troops with summer uniforms but made no provision for the fierce Russian winter that lay ahead.

“You have only to kick in the door,” Hitler predicted, “and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down,” who also foresaw a campaign of “unprecedented, unmerciful, unrelenting harshness.”

Two tonnes of Iron Crosses were struck, one for each member of the armed forces they believed would have a role in the capture of Moscow. On the eve of attack, Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Minister for Propaganda, wrote in his diary, ‘One can hear the breath of history... May God bless our weapons!’

At 4am on June 22, 1941, Operation Barbarossa was launched, the largest attack ever staged comprising of some three million Axis troops along a 1,400 kilometre front from Finland in the north to the Black Sea in the south. A few hours later, news reached Baku.

“We were shocked. Devastated,” says one war veteran. “The war had, until that point, seemed a long way away. Suddenly there was a massive army that, if not on our doorstep, was certainly headed in our direction. Everyone knew that Baku was one of the most strategically important places in the world because of our oil.”

Baku would indeed be the ‘Jewel in the Crown’ for any invader, a fact acknowledged by all World War Two leaders. Stalin, Hitler and Churchill all believed that Baku had potential to be the difference between victory and defeat. Indeed in early 1942 Adolf Hitler was presented with a large birthday cake topped with icing showing a map of the Caucasus. He immediately grabbed the largest piece, the one with Baku on it — so convinced was he that his war machine would gobble up Azerbaijan and, with it, claim the oil that would drive his armies on to global dominance.

In June 1941, initial shock had given way to a sense of the gravity of the situation that now faced the Soviet Union — and Azerbaijan. Newsreels showed the ferocity of the attack. The Germans employed their *blitzkrieg*, or lightning attacks, that had proved so successful against Poland and France. Their tanks were advancing 80 kilometres a day and, within the first day, one quarter of the Soviet Union’s air strength had been destroyed. The Soviets had left rows



People retrieve their belongings from their burning homes, in a wave of German attacks during Operation Barbarossa.

of uncamouflaged planes on their airfields, providing easy targets for the Luftwaffe.

Heydar and his friends were still wondering what would happen next when Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov made a shattering address to the nation which was relayed across Baku by loudspeaker. Molotov's statement was no more than what people already knew but, as official recognition of the facts, was nonetheless shocking. As his measured tones echoed across Baku, the city stopped as people listened in disbelief.

He formally acknowledged the attack and declared that the Soviet Union and Germany were now at war, calling Hitler's aggression an "act of treachery unprecedented in the history of civilised nations." Molotov's words brought it home that the Soviet Union was in a grave situation.

Within days, 18 year old Heydar had made his way home to Nakhchivan. Architecture was on hold. Tens of thousands of young Azerbaijanis were besieging hastily opened Soviet armed forces recruitment centres. He had resolved to be one of them.

**ДАВАЙТЕ ПОБОЛЬШЕ ТАНКОВ
ПРОТИВОТАНКОВЫХ РУЖЕЙ И ОРУДИЙ,
САМОЛЕТОВ, ПУШЕК, МИНОМЕТОВ,
СНАРЯДОВ, ПУЛЕМЕТОВ, ВИНТОВОК!**



**ВСЕ ДЛЯ ФРОНТА!
ВСЕ ДЛЯ ПОБЕДЫ**

A World War Two Soviet propaganda poster. It was during this conflict that Heydar Aliyev joined the Soviet intelligence services.

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy

What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless,
whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the
holy name of liberty or democracy?

— *Mahatma Gandhi*

An 18 year old Heydar returned home to Nakhchivan in June 1941 intent on volunteering to join the Soviet army. He and his youthful friends were much needed. He visited his local Komsomol group, as was his habit when home, and put forward his name as wishing to serve.

Across the nation there were men and boys ready to stand up and do their duty. Among the young men of Azerbaijan, within the Komsomol especially, there was a growing sense of duty and patriotism, a sense of readiness to defend the nation from a heinous attack.

It was Herbert Hoover who had declared that: “Older men declare war. But it is the youth that must fight and die.” And this was already proving the case. Hitler’s body count in Europe was rising and Stalin’s folly in alliance with Germany to carve up Europe was costing thousands of Soviet deaths. If there had been a lukewarm response to recruitment drives when the Soviet Union was on the offensive, at the beginning of World War Two, that had now changed. The Soviet Union — and Azerbaijan — was under a cloud. There were signs that Hitler’s war machine was not just heading east, although Stalin refused to believe it could happen.

“We, boys, were under no illusion. The newsreels showed the brutality of

the Germans. The *blitzkriegs* were frightening,” says Dovlat Mammadov.

Heydar always threw himself into his activities with the Komsomol. To the uplifting strains of The Anthem of Young Pioneers, the boys were told and retold of their commitment to the homeland. It was not a subtle message, but with a conclusion that Heydar and his colleagues had already reached for themselves anyway.

During World War Two, some 700,000 Azerbaijanis were recruited into the Soviet armed forces (tragically some 400,000 would not return home). Men and boys across the nation would either be called up into active duty, or drafted in to industrial jobs in order to replace men who had already gone to war. Heydar prepared to register his papers with the Nakhchivan Military Registration and Enlistment Office.

Yet amid heightened activity across Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan, in mid-June Heydar was summoned to the offices of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), forerunner of the Committee for State Security (KGB).

Tsar Alexander II had formed the Department of State Police, which was known to the Russian people as Okhrana. But it was under the NKVD that it became an effective tool to combat counter-revolution and sabotage. A subsidiary of the NKVD, nicknamed *Cheka*, was charged with maintaining an effective grip over society. Lenin quickly found that he was unable to accomplish his goal without the “persuasiveness” of the *Cheka*. This included the power of arrest, trial [term used loosely] and execution without ever really having to answer to anyone since their leader, Felix Dzerzhinsky, was considered by Lenin as one of the heroes of the revolution and was beyond question in his actions. The *Cheka* was Dzerzhinsky’s creation, designed to suppress internal political threats. Dzerzhinsky and the *Cheka* were granted increasingly significant powers and resources. They came to be feared for their ruthless pursuit and elimination of any perceived counter-revolutionary elements.

In 1922, the *Cheka* was renamed the GPU (State Political Directorate), before being converted to the All-Union State Political Directorate, which was separate from the NKVD. Later, under Stalin and its Georgia-born chief Lavrentiy Beria, the NKVD began to reshape itself, not necessarily in

People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs head Lavrentiy Beria was reshaping the organisation for the challenges of serving the Soviet Union during a war.



operational terms but in the shape of personnel. He aimed less for ideologues, but for calibre. He aimed to stock a new generation of personnel, of an expanded NKVD, with an eye on intellect and promise rather than purity of thought, although this remained a key component. With an impeccable record as part of the Young Pioneers and Komsomol, and already marked as a potential high flyer, Heydar was the archetypical sort of recruit that Beria had in mind.

Heydar had already turned his back on the Azerbaijan Industrial Institute and architecture for a time, and was preparing to go to war. The NKVD in Nakhchivan had other ideas. On June 21, 1941, Heydar made his way to the somewhat plain and nondescript office of the NKVD in Nakhchivan town. He had been allocated a position in the organisation's 'secret archives', but in a job that would be far from desk-bound.

By the end of October 1941, Nazi forces were only 105 kilometres from Moscow. More than a million square kilometres of Soviet territory had been captured. A huge number of Soviet troops and civilians had been killed. In Moscow there was panic among the hierarchy. As was his style, Stalin attempted to micromanage. After one week of disasters, he lamented; "Lenin founded our state... and we've messed it up."

Many historians agree that this would be the most ferocious war ever known, it lasted three years and claimed the lives of over five million Axis troops, nine million Soviet troops, and up to 20 million civilian deaths.

Some three million Red Army soldiers would be taken prisoner. The established norms of war barely registered with the Germans and, of the five million Soviet Prisoners of War taken during the course of the conflict, three and a half million would die of chronic malnutrition, disease and brutality. Chillingly in Stalin's Soviet Union, those who survived and later returned home at the end of the war, were branded traitors and, in many instances, sent to *gulag*.

From Hitler's point of view Operation Barbarossa was, during its initial phase, proving an outstanding success. Helpfully for him, Russian armed forces were now also engaged on a second front, one which intimately involved Azerbaijan's borders. In the wake of the aggression, Britain and the Soviet Union were now Allies, and both were attempting to support the Soviet war machine with supplies. Sharing some 618 kilometres of land borders with Azerbaijan, plus the Caspian, although Iran had declared neutrality the Shah was considered pro-German, and Iran was a country of strategic importance.

As German forces advanced, a 'Persian Corridor' was considered one of the few ways for the Allies to get desperately needed supplies to the Soviets. U-boat attacks and ice made convoys to Arkhangelsk extremely dangerous and so the Trans-Iranian Railway was the most reliable and safe route to transport supplies up from the Arabian Gulf. The British also feared that the Abadan Oil Refinery, owned by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, might fall into German hands — the refinery produced eight million tonnes of oil in 1940 and was thus a crucial part of the Allied war effort. Britain and the Soviet Union launched an invasion of Iran on August 25, 1941.

With two major war fronts to contend with, along with Stalin's self confessed failure causing great loss of life across the country there was a massive effort to fend off the invaders, now almost at the doors of Moscow.

It was during this period that Heydar would first come to prominence, outside of the somewhat cloistered world of academia. 'Secret archives' were little more than a euphemism for the information gathering operations that the NKVD was involved in. Around Nakhchivan lay three vital areas of activity to the war effort. First was the Nazi invasion and meeting that threat. Second lay across the Araz River and Iran, now strategically vital to the war effort if the Soviet Union was to save itself. Third came the 10-kilometre border that Nakhchivan shared with Turkey.



*(above) The Abadan Oil Refinery in Iran was one of the most strategic elements of World War Two.
(right) Heydar Aliyev served in the Soviet intelligence services throughout the conflict.*



Turkey was of great interest to both sides in the conflict. Prime Minister Mustafa Ismet Inonu's policy was to keep Turkey neutral unless the country's vital interests were clearly at stake. The Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of August 1939 prompted Turkey to agree a treaty of mutual assistance with Britain and France, then also a non-aggression treaty with Germany, signed just four days before Operation Barbarossa was launched. Under the terms of this agreement, Turkey also agreed to supply Germany with chromium, a critical raw material used in weaponry manufacture, for three years.

Many historians agree that this period saw increased pro-German sentiment



(above) Turkey had pledged neutrality in World War Two, a guarantee that would underpin the Allied effort to defeat Hitler. (left) President Mustafa Ismet Inonu of Turkey.

in Turkey, including official circles. The Germans poured millions into a public relations campaign which, among other things, according to Saban Calis in his paper *Pan-Turkism and Europeanism*, claimed that there were about 40 million people of Turkish origin in the Soviet Union awaiting ‘liberation’ and some form of ‘affiliation’ with Turkey. Inonu was himself markedly neutral, yet it was clear that the country was under sustained pressure — indeed threat — to allow the passage of German troops, ships and aircraft through Turkey and its waters.

Turkey’s entry into the war on the German side, or even just allowing

German passage across its territories, could have been a powerful and decisive factor in determining Operation Barbarossa's success. The Soviet Union and its allies were being ultra watchful. Via its Nakhchivan operation, the NKVD directed surveillance on its strategically placed neighbour.

Alexandre Adler, French historian, journalist and former editorial director of the *Courrier International* and member of the editorial board of *Le Figaro*, wrote of; '...regular reconnaissance missions in Turkish territory... (during which) a young lieutenant Heydar Aliyev stood out.'

It was not John le Carre-style and tinged with the sort of excitement that underpins *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, but the work of Heydar and his colleagues from the NKVD in Nakhchivan was nevertheless vital to Soviet strategic interest, and the interests of the people of Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan as a whole. Turkey, after all, had the potential to provide an open door to Germany, which would have found Nakhchivan easy picking, and a wonderful launch pad from which to strike out towards Baku.

"It was no secret that Hitler coveted Baku. Soviet armed forces were fuelled by the oil of Azerbaijan...tanks, artillery, aircraft, ships, troop carriers, all depended on Baku supplying millions of tonnes of oil every month," says Ramiz Mehdiyev.

Heydar's task, therefore, had implications for his homeland, and for Moscow. Monitoring events in Inonu's Turkey was of strategic value.

According to many contemporary sources, he was, in effect, serving as one of le Carré's *lamplighters*. His primary task was to forge reliable sources of material, gathering information on the activities of known German sympathisers, the movement of Germans in Turkey, monitoring of ports and airports for unusual traffic or arrivals, and generally keeping tabs on public sentiment and the ebb and flow of prevailing political thought. It was a job that fitted his character well.

"He was always very diplomatic in his manner, as we would see in his political career, so he was well suited to his war time role" says Ramiz Mehdiyev. "The full extent of Heydar Aliyev's work during the war is well hidden, today, but we can say for certain that his language skills and ability in information assessment made him a valuable asset."

He was also considered someone who preferred action to words. He hated procrastination. He liked to do things, achieve things. In that sense, he was better suited to field work. He hated being desk bound and hated endless meetings and disliked repetitive, open-ended discussions that wasted time 'To be or not to be' goes the opening phrase of a soliloquy in William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. Hamlet spends most of the play procrastinating, contemplating, musing, philosophising and in general putting off what he needs to do.

"Heydar Aliyev could not stand for endless discussion, which was a common defect in the Soviet system. He was a practical man. He decided to do something and did it," says Deputy Prime Minister Ali Hasanov.

This is what made him an effective operative for the NKVD. He was thorough in his paperwork and his record keeping, and was fluent in Turkish, an obvious asset. Yet if accounts of the full extent of his war time work are accepted it was perhaps his practical achievements, getting into the field and sourcing the information, that was so vital at the time. His assiduous approach, coupled with an ease in moving around Turkey, would have allowed him to gather vital information effectively, and this endeared him to his superiors. This was the period that first got him really noticed.

Germany and Turkey were not the only subjects of NKVD's focus and Heydar and his colleagues would be kept busy in other spheres. According to author Arthur Jay Klinghoffer in his 1977 book *The Soviet Union and International Oil Politics*, should Hitler advance on the Azerbaijan capital and its vast oil wealth, the French believed Baku could only be hit by aerial attack via Turkish airspace. The Turkish government resisted this, but an 11th hour allied attack on Caucasus oilfields, while seemingly off the table for most of the war, remained a possibility.

For how long Baku would not be targeted directly by either side of the conflict was pure conjecture. As news of the Nazi army capturing the city of Rostov and invading Maikop's oilfields reached Baku, orders were given to prepare plans for sealing the wells and send all drilling equipment to Turkmenistan should the necessity arise. The Soviets had themselves withdrawn from Maikop, destroying most of its wells. Eventually the Germans would manage only 80 barrels a day from there, making Baku an even more fundamental target for their campaign. Many oil workers in Baku were sent to an area near Kuybyshev, which became known as the Second Baku, as the



The Germans captured Russia's historic city of Rostov, just 1,100 kilometres from Baku.

Azerbaijanis developed an existing oil industry in the famous Baku Way, in the winter often working waist deep in icy cold waters to keep the wells going and throughout the year, keeping a 24/7 routine.

A workforce of 5,000 Azerbaijanis opened five new oil and gas fields and built a pipeline linking Kuybyshev and Buguruslan, their efforts playing a vital role in the war effort. Eventually this would also lead to the Soviet Union becoming the largest oil industry power in the world and enhancing Azerbaijan's status as a global player. Baku was a tempting target for the Nazis, a necessity for the Soviets, and a valuable piece on the wartime chessboard that the Allies would not have hesitated to flatten should Hitler draw close. If the NKVD in Nakhchivan was just a pawn in the game, its role was nevertheless strategic.

According to published reports, for several years Heydar would operate effectively between Nakhchivan and Turkey, part of a swathe of Soviet operatives who provided Moscow with a comprehensive picture of activities in the nation.

And he was also reported to be active at times in Iran. Post-invasion, the Soviet Union and America moved over five million tonnes of munitions and other war material through Iran and to the Soviet Union in order to bolster efforts against the Nazis. Iran signed a tripartite treaty of alliance with Britain

and the Soviet Union under which Iran agreed to extend non-military assistance to the war effort. In September 1943, Iran declared war on Germany.

The foray into Iran was meant to be brief. But managing an occupation, even one that had significant domestic support in ethnically sympathetic regions of the north, was never easy. Again the NKVD played a role, keeping this vital supply artery in place, although later efforts driven by Moscow, to maintain influence in Iranian affairs through the communist Tudeh Party and others, did not succeed.

Without Turkish acquiescence, and with some poor decisions by Hitler, the Soviet Union failed to collapse as had been anticipated by German commanders. Soviet resistance stiffened, yet by late September 1941, German forces reached the gates of Leningrad and they took Smolensk in the centre and Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine. There was fighting in the Crimea and German units reached the outskirts of Moscow in early December.

Yet German planners had not equipped their troops for winter warfare and had neglected to provide sufficient food and medicines. German troops outran their supply lines, meaning their flanks were vulnerable to counterattack. In early December 1941, the Soviet Union even launched a major push, driving the Germans back from Moscow.

The Germans recovered for a time. The zenith of their campaign through the Soviet Union came in September 1942 when they reached the outskirts of Stalingrad and approached Grozni, capital of the Chechen Republic, less than 200 kilometres from the shores of the Caspian and some 475 kilometres from Baku itself.

Yet Hitler had stretched his army too thin. As a strategic objective of Operation Barbarossa, Case Blue later renamed Operation Braunschweig saw a two-pronged attack against the rich oilfields of Baku as well as an advance in the direction of Stalingrad along the Volga River, to cover the flanks of the advance towards Baku. The German's Army Group South was divided into Groups A and B. A was tasked with crossing the Caucasus Mountains to reach Baku. Hitler ignored his Field Marshals, who beseeched him to send more forces to stiffen the embattled Sixth Army. It was a tactical mistake that

*The ruins of Stalingrad — a city
almost completely destroyed after
some six months of brutal warfare.*



probably cost him the war. German supply lines were all the poorer for Turkey's neutrality, and Soviet forces were strengthening thanks to Iranian supply lines.

As it was, Stalingrad remained unbowed, the strengthened Soviet Army, powered with plenty of Azerbaijan oil, began to press back the Wehrmacht.

In Azerbaijan, the people rallied. The Germans had cut off oil pipelines leading into Russia from the Caucasus, so they came up with a brilliant idea, unique in the oil industry, of supplementing the limited Baku oil tanker fleet, which was not large enough to maintain supplies across the Caspian, by floating improvised tanks and cisterns filled with oil across the Caspian and up the Volga River. It had never been done before, but it worked.

Local factories were re-tooled to manufacture sufficient piping to repair some 25 old and redundant wells, further increasing oil supply that would aid the war effort.

Elsewhere, despite difficult conditions, workers across the nation were increasing the production of tea, vegetables, fruit, cotton and tobacco on Azerbaijani soil, in order to send across to the embattled Soviet Union. In Azerbaijan, thousands of injured were arriving from the war zone to be treated each month — some 440,000 soldiers would be cared for between 1941 and 1945.

In the fighting, Azerbaijanis were suffering greatly but served with valour. Azerbaijani Major General Hazi Aslanov led forces in Belarus, his men pushing back the invaders, with their commander being awarded the highest Soviet national medal of heroism twice. Leyla Mamedbeyova became the first Azerbaijani female pilot of the war, fighting alongside her son, Rustam.

Azerbaijani oil, and its people, played an important part in defending the Soviet Union. Some half a million soldiers died in the uniform, fighting on battlefields hundreds of miles away from home. Although 130 Azerbaijanis would be named Heroes of the Soviet Union, it has always been a source of disappointment to Azerbaijan that the honorary title of Hero City, awarded for outstanding heroism, was awarded to twelve cities, but that Baku, for all its sacrifice, was passed over.

“This serves to illustrate the prejudice against Azerbaijan,” says Mehdiyev. “The comfortable elite too often viewed Azerbaijan through the prism of being a buffer republic against the Soviet Union’s Muslim neighbours.”

For Heydar himself, in career terms, the war was a success. By Victory in Europe Day he would have been awarded a Medal For Labour Valour, the Soviet Union Medal for Meritorious Service in Battle and the Order of the Red Star, the latter a military decoration for bravery. Yet he would have swapped them all, swapped everything perhaps, in order to avoid the loss that had hit the Aliyevs hardest.



Baku was a hub of Soviet resistance in World War Two and hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis would die. Yet she was passed over from being named a Hero City.



A German officer of the Waffen SS marches at the head of a line of prisoners. After their initial losses, the Soviet armed forces had turned the tide against them.

Repelling the Reich

...we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds,
we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills;
we shall never surrender.

— *Winston Churchill*

On June 22, 1941, some three million soldiers of Germany and her allies began an attack on the Soviet Union. The invasion was supposed to be over in a matter of months, but it lasted for four years, and grew into the largest and most costly conflict in history. The enormous scale of this particularly ferocious war is hard to comprehend. It started with Russia totally disadvantaged, but the turnaround was total. Stalin's war machine revved into action.

It was here, in the vast struggle between two dictatorships, that the German army was defeated and the outcome of World War Two was decided in favour of the Allies — Britain, the United States and Soviet Union. The cost to the Soviet Union was estimated at 27 million lives. The turning point of Hitler's misguided and mistimed invasion came in November 1942. A German attack failed at Stalingrad. After weeks of chaotic retreats and easy German victories, the Red Army solidified its defences and, against the odds, clung on to the battered city. In November 1942 Operation Uranus was launched by the Soviets, and the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad was encircled.

News from the fronts had started to improve. In January 1943 some 90,000 survivors of the 300,000-man German Sixth Army surrendered. The Soviets advanced from the Don, some 500 kilometres to the west of Stalingrad. Kursk

was liberated on February 8. Kharkov on February 16. Each day, newspapers in Nakhchivan and radio broadcasts across Azerbaijan told of an improving situation. When he was home, like his compatriots and friends, Heydar revelled in the beginning of a turnaround in Soviet fortunes. His friend, Dovlat Mammadov, met him in the town one evening in early 1943.

“People had gotten to know that Heydar was working for the NKVD and, although it was not broadcast and he certainly said nothing, people also knew that he was working outside of our borders in intelligence,” says Mammadov. “When asked about his work, he shrugged and changed the subject.”

The year 1943 would be memorable in so many ways for Heydar. His country was seemingly pushing back from oblivion. His own sharp turn away from a career as an architect had seen him excel in service to the nation. And while his country was at war, with the inevitable social tremors that this caused, it was for him personally a year of soaring highs and plummeting lows.

To foreign observers, not least because of the legion of Hollywood films that touch the subject, everyone who lived in the Soviet Union was a fully paid up member of the Communist Party. Yet it was not like that. Then known as the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), the organisation that became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was as selective as it was for the elite. Authors Dmitriy Gershenson and Herschel Grossman note in their paper *Cooptation and Repression in the Soviet Union*:

From Lenin's death in 1924 to Stalin's death in 1953 membership in the Communist Party (CPSU) increased from only about one-half of one per cent of the adult population to about five per cent of the adult population... Membership in the CPSU increased rapidly from 1924 to 1934, then decreased sharply until 1938, only to increase rapidly again during the war and immediate post-war years, before levelling off in the few years before and after Stalin's death. Interestingly, the peak of party membership in 1934 coincided with the first stage of the Great Purge, and the following period of decreasing party membership coincided with the intensification of Stalin's policy of ruthless political repression.

As Heydar had himself observed in Nakhchivan during the era of Stalin's



A membership book for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Heydar became a party apparatchik in May 1943.



ruthless purges, there were significant downsides to being a member of ‘the party’. Yet, as he had with his studies, when it came to the party, he had quietly and diligently delivered. He had passed through the Young Pioneers years and, at the age of 14, graduated to the Komsomol. Here he had attended meetings and shown party discipline.

Combined with his burgeoning reputation as an academic achiever, he was someone that people in the right places had taken note of. In fact, given his status as a talent, he was both a shoo-in because of his position and as someone the party needed to keep ‘on side’. As author Jerry Hough explained in his 1980 book *Soviet Leadership in Transition*:

The Soviet government has thus far been skilful in the way it has tied the fate of many individuals in the country to the fate of the regime. By admitting such a broad range of the educated public into the party, it has provided full opportunities for upward social mobility for those who avoid dissidence, while giving everyone in the managerial class reason to wonder what the impact of an anti-Communist revolution would be on him or her personally.

On May 10, 1943, his 20th birthday, Heydar was — not unexpectedly — admitted to the Communist Party. It was a proud moment for the son of a humble railway worker and former oiler from Nakhchivan. It was also a further sign that he was edging towards the centre of the new system, a journey that would make him the very antithesis of argument that said the Soviet system

could never work. He would be a card-carrying member of the party for all of 48 years, until the frustrating months in the wake of a massacre on the streets of Baku saw him turn his back on the party.

In a way, turning 20 and becoming a party *apparatchik* was Heydar's coming of age. He was a believer — in a Soviet system that had paid off for him spectacularly. In terms of social status he was a boy from nowhere, but had surged into Nakhchivan Pedagogical School and gone on to earn a place at one of Azerbaijan's foremost seats of higher learning. It was a journey that was perhaps impossible a generation earlier. By the time of his actual birthday, he had already served Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union well, apparently in Turkey and Iran, and emerged as an effective operative within the NKVD's operations.

From the party's angle, Heydar was ideal. He had an unblemished Young Pioneers and Komsomol record, was on an upward trajectory in intellectual terms and was considered a bright prospect in the corridors of power in Nakhchivan and now Baku. He was, therefore, ideal party stock. Where he was going was anyone's guess, but Heydar was already considered a rising star. Gershenson and Grossman characterised the upper echelons of the system as being in the hands of an elite called the *nomenklatura*, saying:

Under the communist system of resource allocation and income distribution, although the nomenklatura received relatively modest money incomes, they enjoyed a variety of lavish perquisites, such as high quality apartments, access to special stores, and superior health care. The high standard of living of the nomenklatura mainly reflected these perquisites. The membership of the CPSU consisted of the nomenklatura and a much larger number of rank-and-file party members. The nomenklatura co-opted talented and ambitious people by inviting them to become rank-and-file party members.

Author Michael Voslensky offered much insight into the scope of the Soviet elite in his 1984 work *Nomenklatura: The Soviet Ruling Class*. (*Nomenklatura* being the ruling class, people within the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries holding various key administrative positions in all spheres of those countries' activity). Voslensky estimated from 1959 census data that there were around 750,000 *nomenklatura* across the Soviet Union. They comprised all of the Soviet Union's political leaders, across all 15 republics, some 250,000



(above) In Baku, Heydar Aliyev was increasingly considered an emerging talent. (right) He joined the Communist Party in May 1943.



people. The other half million lead the upper echelons in industry, research, education and the arts.

If Heydar was being co-opted into the lower rungs of the Communist system on May 10, 1943, party bosses may nonetheless have been aware that he was heading in their direction. At Nakhchivan Pedagogical School his close friend was Mammadov, who says: “People were a bit jealous, but they respected him for his intellect. He spoke and people listened because he had a kind of gravity about him. I think everyone knew he was going somewhere and that he would become someone important.”



The tide of World War Two had begun to change: (above) Some of the 91,000 German troops taken prisoner at Stalingrad. (left) Azerbaijani Major General Azi Aslanov was one of the Soviet Union's most decorated military heroes.

At the time of his entry into the Communist Party, Heydar was certainly going places. Mostly to Turkey according to several sources. The noble Turkish state had done exactly as it had told both sides in the terrible conflict — it remained neutral. Yet the walls were beginning to close in on Hitler. Just in May 1943, the same month that Heydar joined the party, the Allies captured Tunis and some 130,000 members of the German army surrendered in Tunisia. The infamous Dambusters Raid hit the Ruhr and the Conseil National de la Résistance was formed in Paris. In the Soviet Union, German forces were on the back foot.

With Hitler struggling to cope with decision making when his armies were not on the offensive, his tactical ineptitude was exposed, the chances of his lashing out heightened considerably. It remained a concern in Moscow that Germany would take its aggression to Turkey and strive to reach Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan, which would transform the dynamic of the conflict completely.

During the winter and spring of 1943, the Soviets continued to gain ground, while Moscow prepared for a massive summer offensive. From August 1942 until February 1943, the Battle of Stalingrad proved disastrous for Hitler, among the bloodiest battles in the history of warfare, with the higher estimates of combined casualties amounting to nearly two million. Among the many heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad — and indeed the whole war — was Azerbaijani Major General Azi Aslanov, who led the 35th Guards Tank Brigade from Stalingrad through Borisovo, Vileyka and Minsk to Vilnius and Riga, and participated in the battles of Rostov and Taganrog. Aslanov became fabled for his tactical mind, especially his ‘thrust from flank’ technique, which involved launching an attack by heading straight towards the enemy. He would die in action in January 1945, and was posthumously awarded the Order of the Patriotic War, 1st degree, for his leadership of the Tank Brigade.

Hitler was still struggling to marshal his troops in the wake of Stalingrad, and Moscow was plotting its next big offensive, the Battle of Kursk. As part of his intelligence gathering, 20 year old Heydar was still flitting in and out of danger zones that flanked the borders of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan.

Across the Soviet Union, indeed Europe, the land was strewn with bodies of young men. In Azerbaijan, hospitals were full of the injured and maimed. It was a generation lost... squandered.

“Heydar Aliyev was one of the millions who served his nation, placed himself in danger, when he should have been studying and living the productive life of a young man. Instead his youth was abruptly ended by this terrible folly,” says Lord George Robertson, former Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Like almost every family in the Soviet Union during the 1940s, the Aliyevs would take their share of pain. Death stalked every household. But for all the relatives who were lost in World War Two, perhaps none would affect Heydar

more than the one that happened in the humble family home on the outskirts of Nakhchivan town.

On the morning of May 20, Heydar was called home from the NKVD office. His father was dead.

The two had remained close, and the timing of his passing, 10 days after Heydar had been admitted to the party, was full of poignancy. Alirza had not been sick. But his body was tired and worn after a life spent labouring in Baku's oilfields and later on Nakhchivan's railways. He had proudly served the Soviet Union as part of the volunteer civilian force that was stationed in Iran for a time, working to ensure that his homeland received war supplies.

His tall frame had become slightly bent over recent years. Yet, otherwise, his taut, muscular anatomy remained. Until his passing he enjoyed nothing more than afternoons pottering in the family garden, planting his own fruits and vegetables.

Heydar was now more urbane and educated than his father, perhaps a different character due to his wartime experiences. Yet the depth of their relationship had endured. When time allowed the pair took long walks in the countryside together and talked endlessly. Voltaire, the French philosopher wrote how 'pleasant it is for a father to sit at his child's board. It is like an aged man reclining under the shadow of an oak which he has planted.' And this was how the relationship between father and son had matured. Heydar, the boy student, had emerged a man. He and his father were now equals. As equals they had seemingly found even more common ground.

Heydar was grateful for the paternal care that he had received during often difficult times living in the upheaval of the first half of the 20th century. Alirza had led the family well. He was close to his wife and children, gentle, but had been a strong and determined breadwinner and leader. Heydar and his siblings were old enough to have emerged as individuals, of course, but the wisdom of Alirza's experiences, his accrued knowledge and a life well spent had remained a source of inspiration to his brood.

Sigmund Freud's prevailing thinking was that: 'I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection.' Alirza had always provided a physical and intellectual umbrella to his children. It was a lesson not lost on Heydar.

*A former oiler and railway man,
Alirza Aliyev passed away in May
1943 just days after his son had
solidified a growing status by
becoming a member of the
Communist Party.*



“He was himself a paternal character,” says Ilham Aliyev. “For myself and my sister, even in later life when affairs of state were burdensome, he was always a warm and attentive father.”

Indeed the legacy of the railwayman and former oiler from Nakhchivan would be to forge a patriarchal template within his son, one which Heydar would apply beyond family, and one that would eventually extend to an entire nation.



The famed spas of Kislovodsk had been a focal point that made the city one of the Soviet Union's top holiday destinations.

Cold War, Warm Heart

Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.

— Lao Tzu

My elder brother, the late Hasan Aliyev, a prominent scholar in Azerbaijan — at that time, he worked at the Academy — went on vacation to Kislovodsk and invited me there for the summer. I went,” said Heydar Aliyev in an interview.

Renowned as being the ‘City of the Sun’, Kislovodsk in Russia had emerged as a holiday destination in 1803, but it was its famed Narzan — the largest mineral water springs in the Caucasus — that made the resort famous. Chemist Y Rainegs was first to analyse and publish work on the waters of the Narzan in 1784. The first wooden bathhouses were built in 1812, by which time the restorative powers of Narzan’s waters had begun to attract people from throughout the region. Over 25,000 people received treatment in Kislovodsk in 1904 alone. During World War One the resort was turned into a huge hospital for wounded men and disabled veterans.

By the time that Hasan Aliyev became a regular visitor, tens of thousands of people from across the Soviet Union were making their way there each year. The Soviet elite had built themselves *dachas* and rest homes, while the city was seeing an increasing number of hotels. Fresh wells had been drilled to accommodate new sanatoriums, resort polyclinics and a revolutionary institution for mud-cures.

Even if an individual was not sick, the beauty of the countryside around Kislovodsk, the excellence of its resorts and the energising effects of Narzan's waters, made it an excellent place for a vacation. Hasan was one convert. He became a regular visitor in the post-war years.

By 1947, World War Two was over. Hitler was dead and the Soviet Union one of its victors. The so called 'Big Three' — Winston Churchill, Franklin D Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin — had met at the Yalta Conference in 1945 and disagreed on how the European map should look and how borders would be redrawn. Each side held dissimilar ideas regarding the establishment and maintenance of post-war security. The western Allies desired a security system in which democratic governments were established as widely as possible, permitting countries to resolve differences through international organisations.

Given Russian and Soviet historical experiences of frequent invasions, and the immense death toll, estimated at 27 million, plus the destruction which the Soviet Union sustained during World War Two, Stalin sought to increase security by dominating the internal affairs of countries that bordered his nation. In line with this, the Eastern European territories liberated from the Nazis and occupied by Soviet armed forces were added to the Eastern Bloc by converting them into satellite states.

In South Carolina, on April 16, 1947, presidential adviser Bernard Baruch delivered a speech which first coined a phrase that would define nearly half a century of human history. He said: "Let us not be deceived: we are today in the midst of a Cold War." Author Walter Lippmann gave the term wide currency in his book *The Cold War* and soon after it reached common usage. This speech followed Winston Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' accusation against Stalin in Missouri in 1946. The Cold War was a period of political and military tension between the two Superpowers, the Soviet Union and the US and their allies.

For Heydar, the cessation of hostilities had meant a pause when he would reassess his life. Was he to return to his studies in Baku and an eventual career as an architect? This was certainly what, at the outset of the Nazi invasion of his homeland, he had thought likely.

"Across Europe so many people put their lives on hold and the general assumption was that when we won, the next day everything would go back to



*(l-r) Winston Churchill, Franklin D Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin in Ukraine
for the Yalta Conference.*

normal. But so much had changed, including within the people themselves,” says Lord Raymond Hylton, an expert in conflict resolution.

Huge swathes of Europe and Asia had been reduced to ruins. Borders were redrawn and homecomings, expulsions and burials were under way. The massive efforts to rebuild had just begun, including across huge regions of the Soviet Union. Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan had been spared the level of destruction seen elsewhere in the nation. But the human cost was in itself incalculable.

Like millions of families across the world, the Aliyevs, their neighbours, their city and society in general, began the process of coming to terms with the loss of their dead — and to begin considering the future. Heydar believed that he would return to the Azerbaijan Industrial Institute. Architecture fascinated him. Yet the period from 1941 to 1945 had, as it had for most people, changed everything. At the cessation of hostilities he was just 23 years old. And while Heydar’s war was not played out on the front lines, in the cross hairs of the enemy, he had nonetheless played a significant role on foreign soil and at home.

Serving in the war had not particularly changed him as a person. Yet what

it had done was increase the scope of the opportunities that lay before him. He was now a medal-winning member of the party, and enjoyed rising stock within the Baku headquarters of the NKVD, a forerunner of the KGB.

Under Chairman Lavrentiy Beria, the NKVD had not only recovered from the Great Purge of the thirties, but now established itself as a trusted and indispensable part of Stalin's vast administration. Beyond this, Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov had indicated that he wished to centralise the Soviet intelligence agencies, the NKVD, MGB (Ministry for State Security) and the GRU (State Intelligence Directorate). Beria's NKVD was strengthening its hand across the Soviet Union, including Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. Heydar had been mentioned in dispatches and noted for his abilities. It was, in all probability, unlikely that the organisation would have wished to lose such a precocious talent.

"He had served the country well in the war, despite his youth, but my father assumed, like many involved in some capacity during the war effort, that he would return to civilian life when Hitler was defeated," says Ilham Aliyev.

It was not until May 1, 1945, that Reich Chancellor Joseph Goebbels ordered General Hans Krebs to negotiate the surrender of Berlin with Soviet General Vasily Chuikov. Yet even before this, Heydar was summoned to NKVD headquarters in Nakhchivan for a meeting. It was not unusual. He worked in the building and over the course of the war got to know everyone in the organisation locally.

What was unusual, however, would be the proposal that was made. Instead of releasing Heydar back to his civilian career, he was instead made an offer direct from the First Chief Directorate of the NKVD, charged with recruitment. Not only did the NKVD wish him to remain — he would be fast-tracked into the NKVD officer-training programme. It was a prestigious offer, and one that he would not refuse. He agreed instantly. Once again life had taken quite an unexpected turn.

"I think he would have been quite satisfied to be an architect, if this was what had materialised," says Ilham Aliyev. "He enjoyed that, the creativity and the mental challenge that architecture presented to him. But like any young man, he was ambitious and the opportunity to make a name for himself in the NKVD fired his imagination."



(above) The headquarters of the Soviet Union's intelligence agencies in Moscow. (right) Stalin would use the NKVD to solidify his grip on power.



Writing for *TIME* Magazine in 1984, author John Kohan commented that: “Many Soviets are still reluctant to call the organisation by name.” Kohan remarked that outside the country: “The NKVD (KGB) seems to embody Western fear and loathing of the Soviet system.” Indeed, the NKVD’s remit was wide and its role in maintaining the omnipresence of the Soviet system was important to those who held the levers of power.

The organisation held considerable influence over government policy, particularly foreign affairs, was responsible for silencing or eliminating dissidence, disciplined workers and quelled strikes. Dealing with those who

deviated from Soviet ideology was another NKVD task, as was punishment of political criminals and the dissemination of propaganda.

The NKVD had been charged with eliminating leaders of anti-Soviet exile groups and Communist leaders who were opposed to Stalin. The most prominent assassinated by the organisation was Leon Trotsky, one of the founding fathers of the Russian Revolution. Trotsky was living in exile in Mexico when he was stabbed in the head with an ice axe in August 1940, by an agent of the NKVD. Among ordinary people in the Soviet Union, the organisation had been viewed in a poor light from its days as the Cheka, and for being an instrument which Stalin wielded for his Great Purge.

Yet by the same token, Hitler's reign of terror had done much to transform the image of the group. During the war years the organisation had played a key role in helping defeat the Nazi threat, and it was lauded among the population for that. The war years — the early period of Heydar's time there — coincided with the image of the NKVD/KGB rising to its zenith among the people of the Soviet Union. While there was still a back-story given Stalin's use of the organisation, during the war it was viewed widely as a source of pride, of nationhood, and as guardians of national integrity, the latter particularly poignant in the wake of World War Two. The NKVD that Heydar was joining, for example, was responsible for the custody and transport of nuclear charges, which were routinely separated from missiles and aircraft for security reasons until the late 1960s.

Across the Soviet Union, the First Chief Directorate had little trouble finding personnel. Many had an interest in foreign operations. The NKVD offered potential foreign operatives a comparatively high salary, the respect and privileges that came with military rank, access to foreign currency and an opportunity to live abroad.

Heydar was less interested in a foreign assignment and would remain largely in Azerbaijan, until Moscow called, much later. Domestic affairs were much more to his liking. He would agree to a training placement in the NKVD's Nakhchivan City office before joining the prestigious officer programme.

It was while Heydar was still in Nakhchivan that Hasan Aliyev persuaded his younger brother to make the trip to Kislovodsk for a break. The dashing

Pictured with her father Aziz, Zarifa Aliyeva was 24 years old when she met a young NKVD officer while on holiday in Kislovodsk.

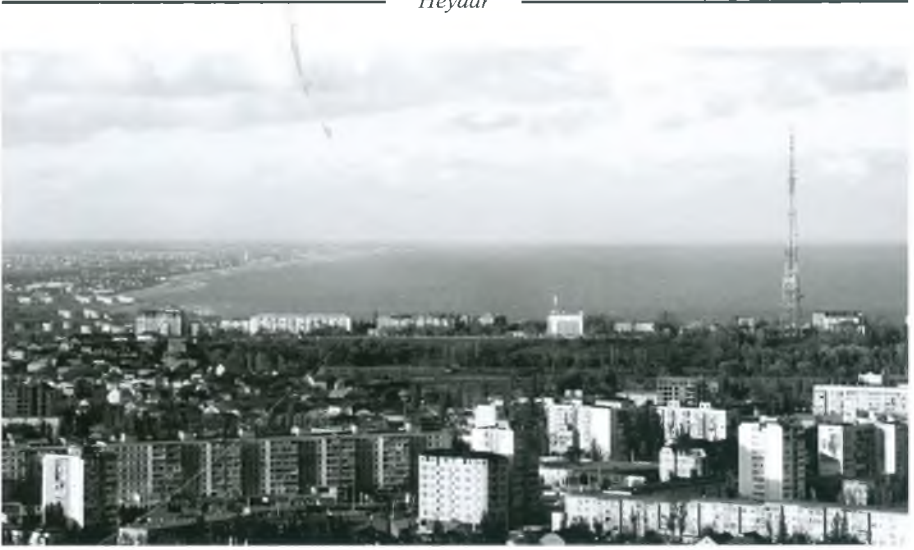


young NKVD man arrived in dress uniform, as was expected when someone from the organisation was travelling, anticipating a few days' rest and relaxation. What transpired was a shock to him. Of the visit, he himself later recalled: "I happened to see a girl and then we got acquainted. Later I found out my elder brother knew her family well. And though our meeting was short, the girl had somehow wormed her way into my heart."

Zarifa Aliyeva (no relation) was a 24 year old student hailing from Shakhtakhty, a village in the Kangarli Rayon of Nakhchivan, some 33 kilometres from Nakhchivan city. Shy and somewhat reserved, she possessed a somewhat brooding intelligence that would see her become a noted ophthalmologist and later still an academic at the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan.

Unknown to Heydar at this time, her father was the prominent Aziz Aliyev. A graduate of the Russian Medical Military Academy in Saint Petersburg, in 1938 he was elected secretary of the Azerbaijan SSR Supreme Council, served as Azerbaijan Minister of Health and, in September 1942, was appointed Secretary of the Dagestan Regional Committee of the Communist Party by Stalin. Dagestan would prove Aziz's political zenith.

He would serve in Makhachkala for six years, a period marked by significant improvements in medical, educational and cultural spheres. But unarguably his lasting achievement, certainly as far as Stalin was concerned, was to draw the people of Dagestan towards Moscow. Animosity towards the



(above) The Dagestan capital of Makhachkala. (left) Aziz Aliyev headed the region and gained a reputation as an adept leader and administrator.

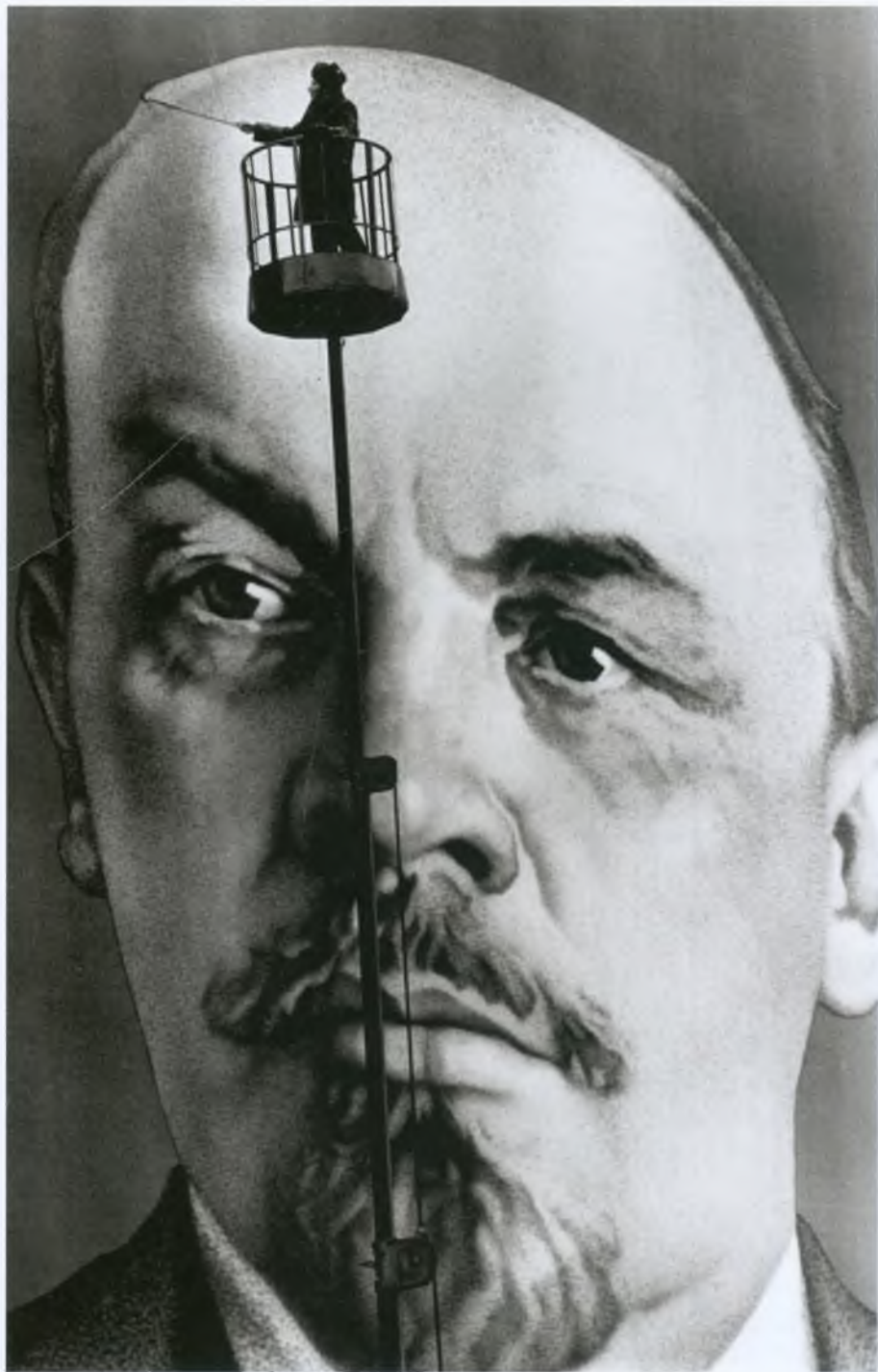
Soviet system was rife, outright hostility not uncommon. In the post-World War Two period, the people of Dagestan deeply mistrusted Stalin and the whole system. It was a mistrust shared by Moscow, who had little time for Dagestan.

Instead of sitting in Makhachkala offices, as so many outsiders did wherever they were imposed on troublesome regions by Stalin, Aziz fought to win over Dagestan. He became well acquainted with the North Caucasus Mountains, the southernmost part of Russia itself, and was a regular visitor to Buynaksk, Izberbas, Kaspiysk and other cities.

He was a natural orator and spoke with great cadence, which was attractive to ordinary people. Over time, he spoke publicly across Dagestan and became a compelling leadership figure. His message got through.

For his efforts, Aziz Aliyev would twice be awarded the Order of Lenin and was whispered of in political circles as a future contender for the top spot in the Azerbaijan's party hierarchy. Certainly in 1947, when Heydar encountered his daughter in Kislovodsk, such was the job he had done in Dagestan that Aziz Aliyev was even considered to be a candidate for eventual elevation to high position in Moscow.

In political terms, therefore, Zarifa Aliyeva was from what was considered something of a blue blooded family. That almost chance meeting in Kislovodsk would set in motion a course of events that would shape the rest of the 24 year old Heydar's life. Yet although he admitted later that the girl had caught his eye, it was a relationship that would only burst into life in the future. For the moment, career took precedence.



A worker paints the face of Vladimir Lenin in a public space in Moscow. The state's propaganda machine and its intelligence services were increasingly omnipresent.

A Toxic Romance

In dreams begins responsibility.

— William Butler Yeats

Putting aside his feelings for the girl he met amid the warm springs of Kislovodsk, Heydar had returned to his native Nakhchivan and continued with building a bright career. He had been offered something of a fast track should he continue to show promise. Nakhchivan, like many of the independently minded republics, especially those in the Caucasus which had little in common with Moscow, was increasingly under the yoke and Stalin viewed the NKVD as a guarantor. On January 14, 1998, Heydar would address a Constitutional Commission in Baku as President of an independent Azerbaijan. He noted:

...Very serious crimes were committed against people and nations during Soviet times. There were many repressions and deportations in the 1920 and 1930s. Azerbaijan had big losses as a result of the repressions and deportations. The policy of the Soviet government covered all the parts of the country. Most people were exiled to Siberia. Our people were deported. From 1929 through to the collapse of the Soviet Union, many people were deported from Transcaucasia. But our nation had more losses. There were as many repressions in other parts of Transcaucasia as there were in Azerbaijan.

...the Azerbaijani government had an unfair attitude towards



As Head of State of an independent Azerbaijan, Heydar often referenced the oppression his people suffered under Stalin.

Nakhchivan. I remember the past well. I remember the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s. I felt it even when I was the leader of Azerbaijan. Though I was the head of the country and I was born in Nakhchivan, I witnessed certain people who did not want to recognise the normal rights of Nakhchivan. I witnessed it.

...Most ...may not remember those days. But I witnessed them. I lived in Nakhchivan. Our neighbours were put into buses and deported on the other bank of the Araks. I witnessed those who were deported from Nakhchivan to Central Asia for political motive. Some people that studied with me at school were bidding farewell with us. We did not understand what was going on, but we saw they were deported from their homes.

Our people faced a lot of tragedies in the 20th century. The tragedies that happened in Nakhchivan were more horrible than those in other parts of Azerbaijan. I also need to note that despite difficulties and deprivations, the Nakhchivan people were very brave...

The role of the KGB, and in its earlier form the NKVD, in the management of the Soviet process is well documented. In February 1998 and on numerous other occasions, Heydar acknowledged in public forums, and during interviews with national and international media, the dark side of Soviet apparatus. But as a Nakhchivani NKVD officer, based in Nakhchivan, he took a phlegmatic view and attempted to work within the scope of his orders and

yet to avoid the excesses seen elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Yet he recognised that during that period, amid the post-war uncertainties, that national security agencies are very essential, powerful and important structures in every state.

Victory in Europe Day — known as VE Day — had been marked on May 8, 1945, the date when World War Two allies formally accepted the unconditional surrender of the armed forces of Nazi Germany. Over the next 47 months, Heydar would learn the rudiments of his trade in peacetime.

In May 1949, the first period of his training was over and he was invited to join the special Higher School of KGB in Leningrad. The programme there was designed to turn men into officers, boasting a curriculum that included the use of ciphers, arms and sabotage training, history and economics according to Marxist-Leninist theory, CPSU history, law and foreign languages.

Beyond the challenge that faced the 26 year old was the excitement of having the opportunity to live and study in what many regarded as the Soviet Union's greatest city.

Leningrad had been founded as Saint Petersburg by Tsar Peter the Great in 1703 and once served as the Imperial capital of Russia. During World War One, the city was renamed Petrograd, meaning 'Peter's City', to remove the German words Sankt and Burg. On January 26, 1924, five days after Lenin's death, Petrograd was renamed Leningrad. To many, the city would also be known as the 'city of three revolutions' recognising the fact that all three major developments in the political history of Russia of the early 20th century incubated there.

During that period of Heydar's arrival, the city had just begun to recover from the long, desperate war years, the epic siege and all the damage it wrought. Some of the city's world-class museums, such as the Cabin of Peter the Great, had reopened. Urgent efforts to rebuild Leningrad had paid huge dividends. The ruins of the city's most celebrated buildings were being transformed and reaching towards their pre-war grandure.

The war and siege had caused a significant part of the economy to collapse and led the population to endure harsh conditions. Food rationing continued through most of the 1940s. Some 2.8 million square metres of housing had

been destroyed and there was damage to a further 2.2 million square metres. Even into the 1960s most of the people in Leningrad lived in so-called 'communal' (shared) apartments.

Despite the perversions of the war, and the long hangover after it, the Leningrad he encountered was exciting and charmed him.

"Beyond the museums, the art and the cultural centrepieces, all of which enchanted him, it was from the angle of a young architectural student that Heydar marvelled," says Ilham Aliyev. "As one can see today, it is an exceptional city."

From Acroteria to Voussoir, Heydar viewed the Metropolis through a draftsperson's eyes. It was a city dominated by epic neoclassical styles of Jean-Baptiste Vallin de la Mothe, Antonio Rinaldi, Giacomo Quarenghi and Andrey Voronikhin, among many. Stalin had poured millions of Rubles into renovation of the palaces of Peterhof and Pushkin, which had been almost completely destroyed during the siege, as had its suburban palaces — Aleksandrovsky Palace of Nicholas II. A biographical note on Heydar states:

He said that while studying at the special school in Leningrad, he had learned many things which helped him in his future activity. He had heard of many outstanding professors of the Leningrad University invited to the school. Heydar Aliyev stated that he loved Leningrad, not only the architecture of the city, but all its history, the environment and culture that had played a significant role in his future life.

Heydar settled well into the rigorous regime within the Higher School of KGB. As well as educating, it was an institution that would prepare him for life within the organisation. Researcher Wayne Lambridge gives a broad view of the sort of individual the school was moulding in Heydar and his peers. Lambridge wrote in his influential declassified piece *A Note on KGB Style*:

The KGB like any enduring institution has a style, its own way of doing things... students are under what amounts to military discipline and are required to accept the assignment given to them. Few students see much difference among the organisations these days except for differences in pay, length and location of overseas service and other practical matters...



Leningrad was rapidly being rebuilt following the destruction of World War Two and the historic city fascinated Heydar Aliyev.

...(there is a) strongly operational orientation of the KGB as a whole. A direct involvement in operations comes naturally to almost everyone in the organisation... the typical KGB officer is a man who sees himself in a strict vertical chain of command. He expects to do everything necessary for his operation without much outside help, except in technical matters...

...Although we are accustomed to think of Soviet organisations as highly impersonal, in the KGB personalities and the private connections of individual officers are often crucial to the success or failure of an operation — or a career.

If life as a Junior Lieutenant within NKVD in Nakhchivan had suited Heydar, Leningrad would be a revelation. His academic skills had been proven in Nakhchivan, and again in Baku, but studying alongside some of the elite of the Soviet Union, he had been thrust into a more challenging and stimulating environment. Russians and Ukrainians predominated in the KGB, other nationalities were only minimally represented, and this was reflected in the intake of students here. The only Azerbaijani in his year, Heydar later told friends that this situation both inspired him, to illustrate through his performance what his nation was capable of, and stimulated him, as around

him were a plethora of new backgrounds and nationalities to experience and absorb.

Moving to Leningrad also coincided with one of the most interesting times to be within Soviet apparatus. In 1950 President Harry S Truman had ordered the development of the hydrogen bomb, in response to the detonation of the Soviet Union's first atomic bomb in 1949. At Yalta, Stalin had stated: "This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes his own social system on it. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise." Heydar's NKVD would be a key guarantor of Stalin's system.

Course work in Leningrad included technical and operational subjects, but the organisation also had a defined narrative of the sort of individuals who were expected to operate in the system to be effective. According to Heydar himself: "...Security services officers must be highly cultured intellectually, to be able to speak with poets, composers, writers, scientists and with ordinary citizens. Otherwise he would be unable to distinguish white from black, bad and good, mistake from crime and crime from mistake."

Becoming a man with this skill set consumed him. But the girl from Kislovodsk also remained in his thoughts. Communications from Azerbaijan only served to pique his interest. He later recalled: "...I went to study in Leningrad. I had no information about her for a long time. I didn't know where she was or what she was doing. But my brother sensed my interest in her. He began to mention her in his letters."

While in Leningrad, Heydar learned news of Zarifa and continued to foster an interest in her. Interviewed for a documentary film he would later recall: "At that time my age was such that my mother, older brother and relatives began to say to me: "It's time to get married and start a family. I knew they were right, since I was 27 years old in 1950. Actually, I myself had thought about it. That is only natural." With this in the back of his mind, Heydar prepared to return to Baku with a string of successes. He had excelled in course work and entered his finals with high hopes. In the late spring of 1950, he sat exams and passed the Higher School's testing commission with honours.

By the summer of 1950 he had been promoted to Senior Lieutenant and deployed to Baku. Although a national agency, the KGB was mindfully highly



(above) Pictured during his time at the Higher School of the KGB in Leningrad, Heydar Aliyev and some of his fellow students. (right) His training included instruction on the TT pistol which became the Soviet Union's main military side arm and was standard issue for KGB Officers.



centralised, controlled rigidly from the top. Moscow kept a close watch over its branches in the republics, offering minimal autonomy. The republics had little involvement in their local KGB activities, ensuring that the KGB was not subordinated to the local Soviets, but mainly to the hierarchy in Moscow.

The arrival in Baku of a freshly minted Senior Lieutenant, trained in one of the organisation's top forums, was notable. In the non-Russian republics, KGB Chairmen were often representatives of the indigenous nationality, but KGB headquarters in Moscow appointed Russians to the post of First Deputy Chairman and other senior positions, so that activities could be efficiently

relayed back. Therefore a Senior Lieutenant of Azerbaijani extraction, with Leningrad on his CV, was immediately viewed through the prism of the position he was capable of attaining.

If the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a union of 15 sub-national Soviet republics, and if Russia a first among supposed equals, and Ukraine a second, then Muslim Azerbaijan viewed Moscow and its order as an imposition. The 250+ million citizens of the USSR either accepted the realities of the Soviet system, and moved within that system, or remained on its cold, dark fringes. The Soviet motto was *Proletarii vseh stran, soyedinyaytes'!* (Workers of the world, unite!), and uniting was, in most cases, the only way of bettering one's life in the totality. Whether part of the Komosol, or the Communist Party, the KGB, or in any other spot within the system, to no small degree tens of millions of men and women now existed within that omnipresent structure.

Heydar was now a part of that fixed order. It was one that had been good to him and his family. Whereas in the past, a promising young student in Nakhchivan had only so far to go, such were the limited opportunities that were available, now that Azerbaijan was part of a larger entity the future had more scope. The Soviet system presented a greater whole. By the age of 28, he was a Senior Lieutenant in the Soviet security apparatus and, apparently, on a fast track.

Yet there were inherent dangers to the framework, even to someone whose rise owed something to this structure. Society, as well as the face of Baku itself, was taking on an increasingly Soviet hue. The Palace of Soviets (today called House of Government and one of the most attractive buildings in downtown Baku) was completed in 1952 and the main Soviet landmark in the city, amidst iconic Stalinist buildings, a mixture of Baroque, Socialist Realism and Oriental Architecture. A Soviet era Sports and Concert complex, railway station and some theatres would all serve to put Moscow's stamp on the Azerbaijani capital. As in Moscow, Baku's many Metro stations would be beautifully decorated and come to be dubbed by officialdom as people's palaces.

Yet perhaps the most significant symbol of Sovietisation in Azerbaijan — and a useful metaphor for the imposed ideology and its all-pervading shadow over the people of the nation — was a statue. Influential Bolshevik leader Sergei Kirov had been responsible for leading the Red Army to capture Baku

A statue of Sergei Kirov dominated the Baku skyline, a towering reminder of Azerbaijan's defeat by the Red Army.

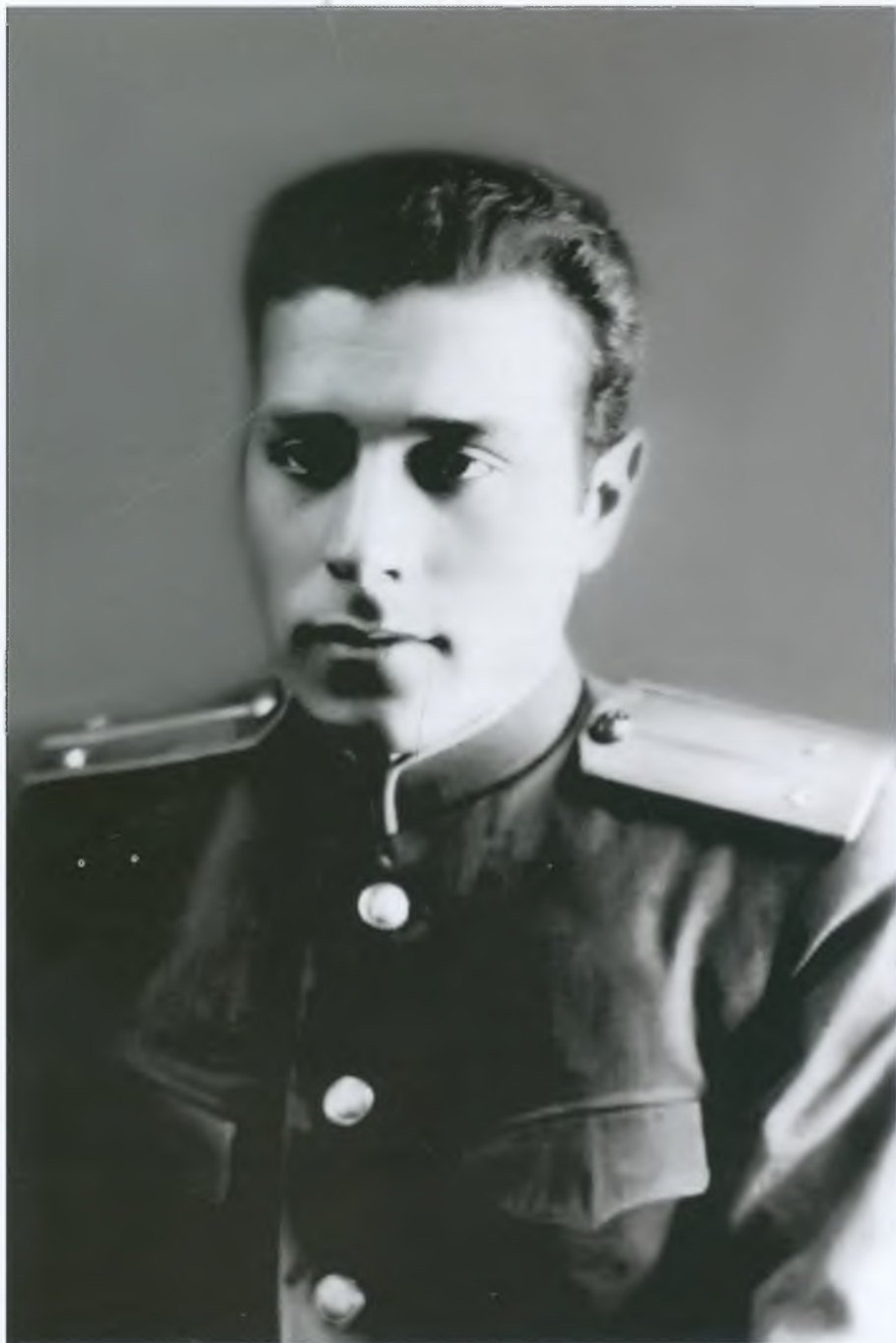


in 1920. A huge statue of Kirov, in granite and bronze, was erected on the crest of Baku's highest hill, a tall imposing monument to Azerbaijan's defeat. To add insult to injury, the statue was erected over a cemetery for victims of the March Days slaughter of 1918. Dignitaries including Mir Jafar Baghirov, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan had attended its opening, Baghirov praising Kirov as a hero. In schools, children were taught that Kirov was a close friend of the leader of the Soviet Communist Party and an ally of Lenin, with whom he worked to free the poor from the oppression of the rich.

The symbolism of Kirov's permanent gaze over Baku, which would be maintained for the next half century, until independence, was powerful. The Soviet order was primed to keep watch over the people of the republics. And, like many of his fellow citizens, the ubiquitous oversight of the structure in people's lives reached into the private life of Heydar.

At 28 years old in late 1951, it was time for the eligible Senior Lieutenant to marry. He later recalled: "As is the custom in Azerbaijan, my mother and relatives began to introduce me to prospective brides. Among those to choose from, there were some very good and pretty girls. But evidently my feelings for the girl whom I had met in Kislovodsk were so strong that I wanted to see her again. It so happened that her older brother, Tamerlan, began visiting us. He was a doctor. I had also become acquainted with him in Kislovodsk."

Yet circumstances had changed dramatically for Zarifa Aliyeva and her family. As noted in earlier chapters, her father, Aziz had emerged in political terms thanks to his successes as head of Dagestan in the North Caucasus



Embarking upon the courtship of his future wife, Heydar was warned that the subject of his affection threatened to derail his career due to political concerns.

region. Heydar had met the daughter of the Dagestan supremo in 1947, when he was at his political zenith. Much had occurred in the three years between their meeting in Kislovodsk and Heydar's return from Leningrad.

In contemporary times Aziz is honoured in Dagestan with the central street in Makhachkala named in his honour, along with Derbent State University and the Caspian Medical Centre. During that period, Aziz was rewarded for his success with a call to Moscow where he would work in a number of high-level posts, first at the Ministry of Health and later within the Council of Ministers. His steady rise within Moscow won him his supporters, but also attracted jealousy. Mir Jafar Baghirov, Azerbaijan's leader, was in the latter category, especially when Aziz was ordered back to Baku to serve as Deputy Chairman of Council of Ministers, a position that placed him in potential succession to Baghirov. It was a top position, but would not last. One year after this appointment he became a victim of political intrigues and was dismissed by Baghirov for 'hiding his parents' social status'.

By the time of Heydar's return, Aziz was a social pariah. His was a house under a cloud when a Senior Lieutenant visited to pay respects. Recalled Kamil Aliyev, brother of Zarifa: "Once a friend of Tamerlan's came to Aziz Aliyev — he was Heydar Aliyev. He was a young man then and quite handsome, tall and with intelligent eyes. We were glad Tamerlan had such a friend. I too was introduced to him. After he left, we asked Tamerlan: "Who is he? Where does he work?" Tamerlan said he was in the KGB... I learned from a co-worker that a young Azerbaijani had returned from Leningrad recently after graduating from a KGB college. They felt he was talented and able."

Heydar, in his professional capacity, was fully aware of Aziz's precarious position. "Since I worked in the Committee for State Security, I knew that the father of Zarifa, Aziz Aliyev, was under intense observation by the KGB and that some steps had already been taken. For one, his home phone was being tapped. But I continued to speak with her on the phone. We usually agreed on when and where to meet." Yet recollecting events from that period his tone was surprisingly matter-of-fact and his thoughts on the issue quite straightforward. He recalled: "My feelings for that girl became even stronger. And I decided she was the one for me. I sensed she loved me too."

Yet to pursue a relationship with Zarifa, even if his feelings were reciprocated, was far from a straightforward decision. One observer recalls:

“People who visited Aziz Aliyev’s home disappeared as if carried away by the wind. Even his closest relatives stayed away. People were afraid of being persecuted... I could only imagine what it was like to enter the house of a family that was under observation, where the phone was tapped and all that. So Heydar Aliyev was taking a certain risk, visiting the family, and having contacts with them.”

If Heydar had made a conscious choice to ignore this, and pursue Zarifa, she herself took the matter more seriously. He later recalled:

I remember how several days later I met with Zarifa. The first thing she said to me: ‘We must not meet anymore.’ I asked why? She said: ‘You know that my father was removed from office. And you work in the KGB. You may have problems. I think after this we shouldn’t meet anymore.’ I objected and told her that a relationship should not depend on who works where, neither her father nor me.

By that time we had come to love each other very deeply. And really, we both loved each other very much. And so I told her not to worry. She answered that she was not worried about herself, but that her father had already lost his job. ‘I’m worried about you. This could affect your career.’

Heydar would not accept. His mind was, by now, made up. This put him on a dangerous path for both his career, but ultimately for his liberty and even his life. Aziz and his family were toxic. And as the family were being closely monitored — ordered by no less than the somewhat paranoid First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan — Heydar knew that it would not be long before his bosses in the KGB would intervene in order to put an end to a budding romance. He recalled:

My closeness to Aziz Aliyev’s family could not remain unnoticed by the KGB. I knew something might happen, but I did not pay attention to it all the same. At that time the Chairman of the KGB in Azerbaijan was Stepan Yemelyanov. One time, he asked me to see him. We spoke about work a little, and then he asked me ‘Do you meet with such and such a girl?’ I answered yes. He said ‘Do you know that her father Aziz Aliyev has been removed from office?’ I answered yes. He told me ‘Comrade Mir Jafar Baghirov has a very bad opinion of him.’ I answered that I

Stepan Yemelyanov, the head of Azerbaijan's KGB, warned Heydar on several occasions that an association with the ousted Aziz Aliyev could cost him his career.



had no information. Then again he advised me to stop seeing the girl, since it could hurt my career. 'If you don't stop seeing her, then you can't work for the KGB anymore,' he said.

I remained of the same opinion and continued seeing her. I went on in the same spirit. At that time Baku was not so lit up. There were many dark corners. I would take note of those places where neither she nor I could be seen for our meetings. For example, next to our house there was a garden, now its Azadlig Avenue. There is a monument to Dzhaparidze there. And there was a trolleybus stop nearby. It was quite dark there. So we agreed to meet at the bus stop. I was young and daring, I did not fear anything. I had a pistol. She was a young girl and very beautiful. And you know, pretty girls usually attract attention. They can even be pestered. I would wait for her at the bus stop and she would come on the trolleybus. I met her and then we went into the garden.

"The chairman of the KGB, Yemelyanov, again asked me to see him. He said 'I warned you!' I agreed 'Yes, you did.' 'Then why don't you do as asked?'

There was a big difference in age between us. That was in 1952. I wasn't even 30 yet, but he was over 50. I said to him "You know there is work, and there is one's personal life. I love my work, and you value me as an employee. So there's no problem there. The other side of my life, which is perhaps more important to me — is my family, my feelings,

my love. I love that girl and she loves me. How can I part with her?"

I told him that it just didn't make sense to me. And what would I say to her? That I didn't love her, or that she had some shortcomings that I could not live with and therefore must part with her. I cannot say that I am parting with her in order to stay in the KGB. He was an intelligent man and agreed with me. "So what am I to do?" I asked. He said "Think of yourself. But if you disobey, continuing to work in the KGB will be a big question. You will probably lose your job."

In defiance of the KGB — his employers — and the personal requests of KGB Chairman Stepan Yemelyanov, Heydar continued to build a relationship with his future wife, even spending time with the blacklisted Aziz.

Mir Jafar Baghirov, the most powerful figure in Azerbaijan, had decreed Aziz to be *persona non grata*. Therefore this was a romance that was based on considerable risk, and not a small element of danger. Not for the last time, however, circumstances were to intervene and help shape his life in quite extraordinary fashion.



Fresh Start

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams.
Live the life you have imagined.
— Henry David Thoreau

Then Stalin died and everyone was mourning. He was such a figure that even those who had suffered under him mourned. In the Soviet Union then there was the opinion that Stalin was something like God. That the country would collapse without Stalin. That the people couldn't live without Stalin," said Heydar in a documentary. "And therefore all mourned his death including me and Zarifa's family. All wondered what would become of the country, how things would be."

Such was the cult of personality that had been built around the Soviet leader that even a man who had witnessed first hand the oppression, and whose own relationship remained under a cloud due to the nature of the Soviet system, would fear for a future without him in command. However, Stalin's carefully crafted image would quickly begin to dissipate and unravel.

On February 5, 1956, during the Soviet Communist Party's 20th Congress, Nikita Khrushchev shocked the Soviet Union by denouncing Stalin in a special address to Communist Party comrades. Dubbed the 'secret speech' as it was so incendiary to sections of society that Khrushchev delivered it to a private session of Congress, detailing heinous crimes. Just three years after Stalin's death he was still mourned by a majority of Soviet citizens, many of whom viewed him as a divine father. Now Khrushchev was informing them that they

had made a cataclysmic error. Far from being divine, Stalin was satanic. At one point in his address, the First Secretary of the Communist Party stated:

Lenin used severe methods only in the most necessary cases, when the exploiting classes were still in existence and were vigorously opposing the revolution, when the struggle for survival was decided assuming the sharpest forms, even including a civil war.

Stalin, on the other hand, used extreme methods and mass repression at a time when the revolution was already victorious, when the Soviet state was strengthened, when the exploiting classes were already liquidated and socialist relations were rooted solidly in all phases of national economy, when our party was politically consolidated and had strengthened itself both numerically and ideologically. It is clear that here Stalin showed in a whole series of cases his intolerance, his brutality and his abuse of power. Instead of proving his political correctness and mobilising the masses, he often chose the path of repression and physical annihilation, not only against actual enemies, but also, against individuals who had not committed any crimes against the party and the Soviet government.

In the wake of the denouncement, Khrushchev's pictures were torn down in Georgia, Stalin's home state, amid riots in Tbilisi as people reacted angrily to the denunciation of their hero. Indeed, so incendiary were Khrushchev's comments that while news of the 'secret speech' leaked almost immediately, the official Russian text was only published in 1989. Yet Khrushchev's bold repudiation of the Stalin era and the 'cult of personality' began a period of a marginally softer system. He had observed:

(Stalin) absolutely did not tolerate collegiality in leadership and in work, and who practiced brutal violence, not only toward everything which opposed him, but also toward that which seemed to his capricious and despotic character, contrary to his concepts. Stalin acted not through persuasion, explanation and patient cooperation with people, but by imposing his concepts and demanding absolute submission.

It was a description that was familiar to Senior Lieutenant Heydar Aliyev, a rising star within the KGB in Azerbaijan. In his professional capacity, Heydar



Pictured greeting President Kennedy, Nikita Khrushchev's repudiation of Stalin shook the Soviet Union and marked a change of direction.

had worked often to soften somewhat, within the scope of his orders, excesses of 'brutality', 'abuse of power' and 'repression' to which Khrushchev referred. And for several years he conducted his private life under a cloud, defying the 'absolute submission' represented by an order to leave a woman he loved because her father had been blacklisted by a Stalin ideologue, Mir Jafar Baghirov.

Interviewed for a documentary Jalal Aliyev, Heydar's brother, said: "I know that they told him not to, not to marry the daughter of that man. Yet he would not listen and was determined to do as he wished. In our family, no one tried to prevail upon him. We were younger. Mother could have said something, but she felt he himself knew best what to do."

Between 1950 and 1952, Heydar and Zarifa conducted their relationship in the open, almost in defiance of Baghirov. Indeed, only decades later did Heydar reveal the cheeky nature of his impudence. Of their meetings he said: "The area behind the residence of Azerbaijan's leader was called the English Garden then. There was not a soul there in the evening. So we preferred to spend our time together in that garden. Interestingly enough, that garden was right next to Baghirov's house."

By his own admission, they were now in love and were beginning to plan for the future. The question was, perhaps, what future? While the authorities had somewhat left the couple alone, despite warnings, a marriage would have been a step too far. Ex-communication from the Communist Party, from his job, from the social mainstream, would be a heavy price. It was a situation that the couple were facing, and discussing at length, when everything would change. Instead, it would be the nature of Soviet society and its landscape that altered.

Stalin had suffered a series of minor strokes before 1953. He was generally in declining health, although this was a state secret and little known outside the confines of the Kremlin. Yet on the night of February 28, 1953, he watched a film and returned to his *dacha*, going to bed at 4am. He was discovered at 10pm that evening lying on the floor in a pool of urine, helpless and unable to speak. Stalin was partially paralysed, breathing with difficulty and vomiting blood. At 9.50pm on March 5, Stalin passed away. The next day his body was lying in state in the Hall of Columns, not far from Red Square. It was estimated that several million citizens came to pay their respects to him one final time.

After a protracted struggle in the corridors of power of the Kremlin, it was not until a Central Committee meeting in January 1955 when, according to Khrushchev biographer William Tompson: 'Khrushchev's position as first among the members of the collective leadership was now beyond any reasonable doubt.'

Events had been more decisive in Azerbaijan. Stalin had passed away on March 5. In Baku, 32 days later, Mir Jafar Baghirov was dismissed as First Secretary. Today, Baghirov remains credited with resisting Armenian expansionism and demands to cede Nagorno-Karabakh, yet is recorded with overseeing a dark period when up to 70,000 Azerbaijanis lost their lives in a series of bloody purges. Tried and sentenced to death by a Military Tribunal, he was recorded as being executed in 1956, although some contend that he was exiled in Siberia, where he later died.

In his wake went a host of the ruling coterie in Azerbaijan. KGB chief Stepan Yemelyanov, the man who had warned Heydar not to pursue his relationship with Zarifa, was quickly sacked and, later, sentenced to 25 years in prison. Almost immediately, the death of Stalin led to the sweeping away

*Under the new regime in Moscow,
Azerbaijan head Mir Jafar
Baghirov was dismissed. His
departure, and the political
rehabilitation of Aziz Aliyev, would
allow Heydar to pursue his
relationship with even
greater vigour.*



of the old guard in Baku. It was time for a fresh start, one signalled by Khrushchev's bold words in February 1956. For Heydar, the departure of Stalin would be a transformational moment. Interviewed for the same documentary, he recalled:

After that, my meetings were legal and there was nothing to fear. Finally, in 1954, I married Zarifa and we were both very happy. I have told about my feelings, about my love. Naturally, if I had not felt that she sincerely loved me, I could not have created a family with her. Considering the hard trial our love went through — that they wanted to separate us but neither she nor I gave in — it shows that my faith in the strength of true love was justified.



*In the news in 1954 were (clockwise from top left) Dwight D Eisenhower;
Nikita Khrushchev, Joseph McCarthy and Imam Mustafayev.*

The Rise and Rise

Whatever you are, be a good one.

— *Abraham Lincoln*

In 1954 US President Dwight D Eisenhower unveiled his ‘domino theory’, a doctrine that speculated that if one state in a region came under the influence of Communism, then the surrounding countries would follow in a domino effect. Senator Joseph McCarthy’s hearings on Communism in Washington were at their zenith. The Soviet Union exploded a nuclear weapon at its Totsk test site. The Vietnam War was beginning to rumble.

• In September, Nikita Khrushchev was named First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In Azerbaijan, discredited Mir Jafar Baghirov was removed from his position as First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party, which was now occupied by the moderate and nationalist Imam Mustafayev.

Mustafayev would head Azerbaijan for over five years, a period when Heydar would himself progress and one when Azerbaijan at last began to assert its identity within the Soviet Union. Arguably Mustafayev’s biggest success was to amend the constitution to state that Azerbaijani was the nation’s official language.

November 1954 was a red-letter period for the Aliyev family — two in fact — as Heydar Aliyev and Zarifa Aliyeva — were set to tie the knot. Weddings



With the death of Stalin and a political thaw underway, Heydar Aliyev would now get his wish, to marry Zariifa.

in Azerbaijan are colourful and sometimes extended events, often comprising of ceremonies that take days to complete.

Heydar had decreed that he and his bride would follow traditions of their society, the norms, but also took care not to celebrate with too much ostentatiousness. He and his wife had defied Soviet convention in pursuing their relationship. Having won that battle, it was no time to enrage the new administration in Baku by flaunting dictates on grandiose celebrations. Neither Heydar or Zarifa sought the spotlight and the days of ceremony and traditional protocol were draining to them. The evening after their marriage they spurned visitors and well-wishers to slip away for an evening alone together, visiting the cinema.

Nine and a half months later the two families gathered at a hospital in central Baku. Zarifa's parents, Aziz Aliyev and Leyla Abbasova, Heydar's mother, Izzet Aliyeva, and a host of aunts, uncles and siblings. A child was a source of immense pride and pleasure. Sevil was born.

"My mother was deeply devoted to us. She was a homemaker in the traditional sense, as well as an accomplished scientist in her own right," says Ilham. "Although both my parents had full time careers, my sister and I were never deprived of their time or affection."

For the new parents, the birth was a moment of joy, but also one tinged with sadness for Heydar. Although his father had passed more than a decade earlier, when he was alive they had spoken often of the future, plans for family and hopes that a new generation would be able to aspire to a better life. It was Eleanor Roosevelt who commented that: "A man who thinks that helping with the dishes is beneath him will also think that helping with the baby is beneath him, and then he certainly is not going to be a very successful father."

It perhaps does not correlate to see Heydar's somewhat stiff image as a KGB officer or, later, the head of Azerbaijan and later still pillar of the system in Moscow, and be able to see him as a relaxed family man. Yet to those who knew him well, this was the other side of the coin.

Zarifa viewed herself as the homemaker first and an academic second. In some ways she was very traditional. Yet no matter how hard Heydar's work pushed him and how long the hours that this demanded from him, he somehow

Heydar



Heydar and Zarifa Aliyev married in November 1954 and their partnership would remain unshakable until her passing.

The intrigues of Moscow affected the KGB in Azerbaijan very little, although Heydar Aliyev and his colleagues saw a shift in emphasis. Under Beria, the body pandered to Stalin's wild conspiracy fantasies. The beginning of the Khrushchev era, a watershed marked by his bold Secret Speech, introduced the beginning of a softer KGB. Never again would the KGB inflict the Stalin-esque purges, terror campaigns and forced depopulation of old, on the Soviet people.

A more enlightened leader, Khrushchev championed what was termed 'The Thaw', a powerful shift in political, cultural and economic course for life and society in the Soviet Union. This was headlined by increased openness domestically and less censorship, fresh social and economic policies. For ordinary people, life changed as there was more emphasis on producing commodity goods, which allowed living standards to rise dramatically while supporting domestic economic growth.

Yet the KGB would remain an important instrument of Soviet power. In the West it was viewed with fear and loathing, the theft of America's atom bomb secrets by agents Julius and Ethel Rosenberg the KGB's greatest coup, its spies, double-agents and espionage being the stuff of legend. That was the work of the KGB abroad.

The domestic service of the KGB was less James Bond than its sister. From Moscow to Baku, the work of the organisation was standard case work which included identifying threats to the system and using detention, questioning and 'prophylactic work' against dissidents in order to suppress. And if the Soviet characters who battled with '007' seemed to have an element of glamour, then their comrades engaged in domestic work — among them an eager young senior officer in Baku — were far more likely to be behind a desk than fighting the MI5 or the CIA. Author Wayne Lambridge notes:

The KGB case officer is his own Intel assistant. At headquarters he does his own traces, gets his own documents from the archives and hand carries his own messages. Not too long ago, he also often wrote or typed his own dispatches. Even now he may write his own telegrams and personally take and dispatch them to his supervisor for review. In the field he is, if anything, even more responsible for doing everything connected with his operation except for technical surveillance and the like, where he must call on experts.

Although the amount of paper that he sees is small, the KGB case officer is held strictly accountable for each sheet of it. When he destroys a document, a notation to that effect is included on a record. Even his scrap paper may bear a serial number and have to be accounted for. At the Moscow headquarters each document is sewn into the file by the senior officer directly responsible for the case. A special record of all documents in the file is kept by the case officer and its accuracy is regularly verified by the case officer's supervisor.

This was the sort of work that consumed Heydar in the 1950s as Moscow sought to maintain and strengthen its grip over the union, especially its disparate Transcaucasian, Ukrainian and Belorussian republics. The Soviet Union was some 22.4 million square kilometres, the world's largest state and covered fully one sixth of the Earth's land surface.

After marriage in 1954 and then the birth of Sevil the following year, Heydar quietly and assiduously got on with the job of building a career and raising a small family.

Imam Mustafayev, First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party was said to have taken a liking to the young officer. Like Heydar Aliyev he had risen from peasant stock and, hailing from a village of the Qakh area, was drawn from regions far away from Baku and had a similarly self-made background. Mustafayev liked people who had pulled themselves up and made something of their lives. Some 13 years his junior, Heydar may have had something of the nationalist Azerbaijani leader in him.

During the second half of the decade he rose rapidly through the ranks of Major, Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel in quick succession. He may have not appeared affected by promotion with his friends, but a smooth transition through the ranks had a seismic effect on the lives of the Aliyevs. A new more comfortable home came with his improved rank, as did a higher pay grade.

As Heydar was rising through the ranks, his nation was engaged in an explosive Cold War with the United States. During the 1950s Vietnam was split at the 17th parallel, the Warsaw Pact was formed, a rebellion was put down in Communist Hungary and Cuba was taken by Fidel Castro. Amid escalating tensions between East and West, in pursuit of advantage both sides engaged in scientific and technological research that would have both a positive and



A set-piece May Day parade through Red Square in Moscow was an opportunity for the Soviet Union to illustrate its might.



Sputnik II Launched With Dog Aboard

Zhukov Ousted from Party Presidium and Committee

Marshal Is Assailed By Konev
Blamed for Soviet Losses in War II

By B. J. Carter

MOSCOW, Nov. 3.—The Communist Party of the Soviet Union today assailed Marshal Georgy Zhukov, the Soviet Union's most famous military leader, for his role in the Soviet Union's losses in World War II.

U.S. Sees Red 'Stresses and Strains'

WASHINGTON, Nov. 3.—The United States today stressed the "stresses and strains" in the Soviet Union's political system, as it watched the Soviet Union's new satellite, the People's Republic of China, move closer to the Soviet Union.

U.S. Files Protest in Damascus

By Joe Alex Morris Jr.

DAMASCUS, Nov. 3.—The United States today filed a protest with the Syrian government over the arrest of a U.S. citizen.

New Satellite Heavier, Higher

The report of Nov. 3.



Satellite's Altitude: 936 Miles

Projectile Weighs About Half a Ton
Reported in this Page 8

By B. J. Carter

WASHINGTON, Nov. 3.—The Soviet Union today announced that it had launched a second satellite, the Sputnik II, into orbit around the Earth. The satellite is a spherical object with various instruments and antennas attached to it. The satellite is reported to weigh about half a ton and to have an altitude of 936 miles.

In 1957, the Soviet Union cemented its position at the head of the space race, launching Sputnik I and II, the latter carrying Laika, the world's first space dog.

negative impact on our species. In 1957 there was one such seminal moment.

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik I from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, some 1,230 kilometres from Baku. It was the world's first artificial satellite. About the size of a beach ball, Sputnik I took about 98 minutes to orbit the Earth, an hour and a half that ushered in new political, military, technological and scientific development. On November 3, Sputnik 2 — carrying Laika, a Soviet space dog that became the first animal to orbit the Earth — also made history.

For Heydar Aliyev, personally, 1957 would also mark a watershed. The 34 year old had brought his aging mother, Izzet, from Nakhchivan some years earlier. She lived in the family home, a colourful and knowledgeable character who spent her last years enjoying caring for her granddaughter Sevil.

Across a long life she had been ethnically cleansed from her ancestral home, as a refugee had established a new life from scratch in Nakhchivan, gone on to bring up seven children, and proven a rock around which young Heydar and his siblings could anchor their lives. They owed a lot to her — and knew it.

Izzet, especially in the long years after Heydar's father had passed away in



In October 1957, Izzet Aliyeva passed away in Baku. The matriarch of the family had gone from refugee to head of one of the most prominent families in Azerbaijan.

1943, had represented for her children a link to the past, and to Nakhchivan itself. Heydar spoke openly about the impact of his father and mother in shaping him. In October 1957, Izzet passed away in her sleep at their home in Baku.

The family mourned the loss of its matriarch. In a way, Izzet Aliyeva's journey from a displaced refugee to the grande dame of a family that included doctors, historians, academics and a promising KGB officer, was the very rationale of what the Soviet Union was said to stand for. The tragedy of her death was that she would never live to see just how far Heydar would eventually go.



The grave of Imam Mustafayev can be found in the Alley of Honour in Baku, alongside other notable personalities from Azerbaijani society.

Institutional Memory

Before we acquire great power we must acquire
wisdom to use it well.

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Today the body of Imam Mustafayev, First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party between 1954 and 1959, lies in a prominent spot in the Alley of Honour, a well-maintained, green and tranquil resting place in central Baku. Around his grave are those of others who served Azerbaijan, in a variety of areas. Created in 1948, the Alley of Honour is the final resting place of political figures, writers, poets, musicians and other notable figures. It is a peaceful place. Tourists visit. Azerbaijanis move along the graves, quietly discussing the lives of some of the nation's most prominent individuals. Many graves are marked with red carnations left there by well wishers.

Mustafayev is at peace now, but after half a decade in charge of Azerbaijan, he certainly was not. In 1955, Moscow had granted its republics greater autonomy. For Azerbaijan, a source of anger had been the oppression of Islam. Moscow vaguely demonstrated its pro-Islam stance by sending Soviet-trained Muslim leaders on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

The general relaxation under Khrushchev paid genuine and, in some cases, sustainable dividends. In Azerbaijan many dissidents were released. Mustafayev found some leeway in a battle with Khrushchev in a tug-of-war over control over the Azerbaijan Oil Ministry. The Georgian and Armenian

SSRs had won a concession to have their own languages enshrined in their respective constitutions as their official language. Azerbaijan had not been granted this privilege under Mir Jafar Baghirov, but Mustafayev succeeded in winning this basic right.

Perhaps these and other small victories emboldened Mustafayev too much. His republic had begun to assert itself. With this in mind the often difficult relationship between Moscow and the people of Azerbaijan had warmed and become more comfortable. The second half of the 1950s — a period when Heydar had flown through the ranks within the KGB — had been a period of *detente*. During this time Mustafayev had spotted the young Nakhchivani and been keen to see him promoted.

Yet while Mustafayev was gaining a stellar reputation at home, he was growing dangerously unpopular with Khrushchev. The Soviet leader was a liberal compared to Stalin, but to reach the pinnacle of power in the Soviet Union one could not be without a ruthless streak.

In 1959, Mustafayev finally picked a fight too many with the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Moscow had dictated that Russian was the first language of the education system, a point of principle in a structure that was built to eventually draw all the republics into greater unity. Mustafayev and his supporters may have got away with a string of small victories, but when the republic began to assert that Azerbaijani should be the first language of education, ahead of Russian, Khrushchev's patience snapped.

On June 12, 1959, Khrushchev acted decisively. Mustafayev was fired for 'not being able to cope with his work'. Simultaneously he was stripped of his membership of the bureau of the Azerbaijan Communist Party Central Committee and demoted from a handful of other posts. While this shocked many in Baku, certainly those who had applauded Mustafayev's assertion of his nation's language and sense of identity, a more neutral observer should have been able to predict that Moscow would only be pushed so far before it pushed back... hard.

For Heydar, who had gone through a handful of promotions during the five years that Mustafayev had, the uncertainty of his departure must have been troubling. Yet even in the early days of his career, he had gained a reputation as a consummate diplomat.

*The head of Soviet Azerbaijan
would lose his job over the
fight for language rights in
Azerbaijani schools.*



“He was not tribal, he didn’t gravitate to groups, and this was one of the reasons that his career remained constantly on an upward curve for maybe half a century,” says Ramiz Mehdiyev. “Diplomacy is essentially the art of negotiating, imbued with a depth of understanding of protocol. It is a skill that can be inherent to a person, it can be learned, but some people could live to old age and never grasp these skills. Heydar Aliyev was in the first category, he had been born a diplomat.”

Although many perceived that his Azerbaijani bosses in the KGB, and indeed Mustafayev himself, were nurturing Heydar along a fast track, he himself had been careful not to be seen as inextricably linked to any particular individual or faction. In the quagmire of Soviet political circles, power and influence could be fleeting. Even good men — such as Mustafayev — were apt to be cut down by infighting.

As Malcolm X wrote in *By Any Means Necessary*: ‘You’re not to be so blind with patriotism that you can’t face reality. Wrong is wrong, no matter who does it or says it.’

It was a fact that Heydar, armed with a nose for diplomacy, understood. When Mustafayev was swept away, inevitably along with many of those officials perceived as being in his coterie, the 36 year old survived and, ultimately, would continue his meteoric rise.

Khrushchev would turn to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan, Vali Akhundov, to provide a safe pair of hands and a more

Moscow-centric line of leadership. Although cut from different cloth to his somewhat bold predecessor, Akhundov shared with Mustafayev a liking for Heydar. Indeed, it was under Akhundov that the KGB officer would catch Khrushchev's eye.

By most accounts Akhundov was a likeable fellow. He was born in Baku and shared many of the proud nationalist inclinations of Mustafayev. Yet he was first and foremost a doctor. As Deputy Minister of Public Health and later as Deputy Chief of the Central Committee of Communist Party he was a good functionary. Yet, in a leadership position, he was not a charismatic or inspiring figure.

The political tides were now, somewhat, turning against Azerbaijan. On July 10, 1959, Akhundov was named First Secretary of Azerbaijan Communist Party, a position he would fill for ten years and four days. According to one publication:

In his decade-long reign, he had made little headway on crucial issues such as Baku's serious shortage of fresh water. Membership of the Communist Party had increased among Azerbaijanis — largely because professional promotion was dependent upon a party card. But during Akhundov's tenure, serious social problems emerged — youth violence and extensive drug abuse.

It was also a period when Armenia began a gradual creep into Azerbaijani affairs. Moscow appointed increasing numbers of Armenian officials into positions in Baku, unresisted by Akhundov. Author Tadeusz Swietochowski noted that in the mid-1960s, the number of ethnic Azerbaijanis in the Azerbaijan Communist Party apparatus grew, making up 61 per cent, yet many key posts in Azerbaijan continued to be held by ethnic Russian and Armenians. From Yerevan, Yakov Zarobyan, First Secretary of the Armenian Communist Party between 1960 and 1966 succeeded in placing the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region on Moscow's political agenda. Yet while another author noted that Akhundov could be credited with rebuffing Armenian claims, the surreptitious and creeping Armenian campaign was not decisively dealt with. This allowed a Machiavellian plot to gain traction and erupt later — with genocidal consequences.

That would come later however and, as Swietochowski notes, where



In 1959 Vali Akhundov (left) was appointed to lead Azerbaijan, considered by Nikita Khrushchev a more pliable character. Akhundov promoted Heydar Aliyev (right).

Akhundov would excel was in continuing to nurture the careers of his countrymen throughout government apparatus. Inside one year of his own appointment as First Secretary, Akhundov issued a decree promoting Heydar to the rank of General.

The character of James Bond is often considered to be simply a product of the Cold War, and the state security apparatus played an important part in a number of the Bond novels and movies. Indeed, Ian Fleming's early novels featured a host of KGB villains. Sean Connery's 007 in 'From Russia With Love' does battle with an enemy headquartered in Leningrad and headed by a Colonel General Grubozaboyschikov. Fleming claimed that he was describing an actual KGB secretariat and a general who existed.

General Heydar Aliyev's job would be less Fleming's 007 and more a mixed bag of frustration. Author Wayne Lambridge noted in his study that:

(The KGB) is in many ways admirably suited to running operations, it appears to have limitations in the way it makes use of the product of its operations and in evaluating whether the operations themselves are really worthwhile... The ambitious case officer may find himself frustrated by pressure to conform... To a large degree this is probably



The defection of Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko was a blow to the KGB and served to further highlight the need for the Soviet institution to modernise.

an inevitable manifestation of the extreme isolation from the outside world in which the Soviet policy makers live and their lack of exposure to unwelcome information. In addition, the emphasis on operations as such and the overall environment of the KGB, which is predominantly an internal security, criminal investigation, and anti-subversive organisation, probably discourages the kind of critical intellect by whom frank reporting, regardless of its content, is most prized...

Bigoted and inflexible ultimate consumers are problems enough. But also the older generation of KGB officers, including many of today's residents, were largely trained in war time and internal security operations.

Heydar Aliyev was 37 years old, at that time, the youngest man ever appointed as a General in Azerbaijan, and one of the youngest ever in the post-war Soviet Union. It was not without reason. He was at the spearhead of a much-needed new generation. Throughout the Soviet Union, and in Moscow especially, the KGB was dominated by the grey, old men who had served their nation in senior positions during World War Two. Those who had survived Stalin's purges had emphatically stayed in their positions and come to dominate the organisation. They had served the Soviet Union well, but Lambridge's observations rang true at the outset of the 1960s. The KGB was not evolving, and therefore threatened to lose its effectiveness.

In the United States, the 1947 National Security Act drew lessons from World War Two. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 brought about further

intelligence reforms, The 1949 Dulles Report had introduced far reaching reforms in the intelligence community's form and practice. The CIA was evolving to face the challenges, especially its nemesis from the Soviet Union. Across the Atlantic, Britain's MI6 remained highly effective and arguably the best-respected entity of its kind in the world. Although somewhat crusty at times, MI6 managed to remain highly effective.

In order to retain its effectiveness, the somewhat stale KGB required a revolution, not an evolution. Heydar's youth compared to many of his fellow senior office holders in the KGB, both locally and nationally, was no coincidence. Akhundov saw the same in him as did Mustafayev. The KGB in Baku was burdened by archaic methodology and a preponderance of bureaucracy.

Heydar represented a new generation. He was a relative youngster amid an older generation which was conservative and disciplined, liked rigid and unmoving formality and a top down chain of command. And he knew that this had to change. Like the KGB throughout the Soviet Union, the Azerbaijani KGB was almost entirely governed by institutional memory, run by men at all levels who preferred to make decisions based on what worked in the past. He was young and thought for himself, something that was quite out of place within a stolid and uncompromising social order.

After joining the KGB during World War Two, Heydar had risen through the ranks quickly during the 1950s and seen — from all angles — the deficiencies around him. Of course, in 1960, the term Institutional Memory had not been coined, but challenging the status quo was what endeared Heydar to Akhundov, and Mustafayev before him.

He was not averse to risk and strongly committed towards teamwork and collaboration, where so many of the systems in the KGB were tailored to individuals operating in relative isolation. There was something of a culture of fear, and this caused people to work well below their personal capacity. Echoing this, one report in the structure of the KGB stated that:

The strictness of the chain of command and the limited amount of communications place a great weight of responsibility... if something goes wrong, someone must be found to have been responsible. This can encourage an extreme culture of caution.

Heydar was known to hold the view that change was needed. He was opposed to the strict command-and-control leadership within the KGB, which was reminiscent of military operations, a hold over from World War Two. That was a battle that was won a decade and a half earlier. The Cold War, and the work of the Azerbaijani KGB, were being played out to the backdrop of a quite different set of circumstances and demands.

In 1960, his ideas of teamwork, collaboration and group decision-making, less process- and more result-oriented, would have represented something of an earthquake if rolled out heavy-handedly. Indeed Heydar had a handful of superiors who were decidedly 'old school'. So even though the First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party understood what Heydar was about, it was realised that the 37 year old was engaged in a gradual revolution — perhaps too gradual, but some degree of much-needed change nonetheless.

While the head of Azerbaijani KGB was supportive, many of those Moscow appointees in Baku were resistant to these new-fangled ideas. This can perhaps be attributed to their being products of that same older more traditionalist generation. Or, just as possibly, because their role was perhaps to act as a hindrance to the KGB of an outlying republic gaining traction over headquarters. Either way, none were particularly enthusiastic.

Their task was of course, in part, to monitor for Moscow what was going on in Azerbaijan, reporting about Akhundov and other leaders to Alexander Shelepin, Chairman of the Committee for State Security.

Ironically, however, the work of Moscow's stooges within the Azerbaijani KGB may have had unexpected consequences. While there was a certain amount of consternation as to the ideas being expounded by the young General in Baku, his almost reformist credentials were brought to Moscow's attention and created interest. Shelepin, his successor Vladimir Semichastny and, ultimately, Yuri Andropov, the latter serving as an influential Chairman of the Committee for State Security from May 1967 to May 1982, would become well acquainted with the man and his opinions.



At 37 years old, Heydar (first row, centre) was the youngest man ever appointed to the rank of General in Azerbaijan and one of the youngest in the Soviet Union at the time.



Smiles and Handshakes

A baby is God's opinion that life should go on.

— *Carl Sandburg*

If 1960 had been a year to remember for the Aliyev family, then 1961 would go a whole lot better. In late spring, Zarifa fell pregnant with the couple's second child. The couple's daughter, Sevil, was a robust six year old and the focus of their small family. She was a bright child, with a happy and warm disposition who demanded the attention of parents, family and visitors to their home.

In many ways, 1961 would be a seminal year. John F Kennedy succeeded Dwight D Eisenhower as President of the United States. The disastrous Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba was one of his first foreign policy acts, but there were high points, a Vienna Summit with Nikita Khrushchev to discuss nuclear tests, disarmament and the fate of Germany. The Soviet Union witnessed the terrible Kurenivka mudslide in Kiev that claimed up to 2,000 lives (only 146 people were officially recognised) and the submarine K-19 suffered a nuclear reactor leak. Of major importance were the Soviet Union's detonation of a 58-megaton hydrogen bomb, known as Tsar Bomba, which remains, even today, the largest ever man-made explosion and Vostok 1 was launched, in which cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human in space.

In Baku, things were quieter. Azerbaijan hosted the finals of the All-USSR Chess Championships and noted composer Amirov Fikrat released *Azerbaijan*

Capriccio, considered among his finest works. Nationalists across Azerbaijan quietly mourned the death of Akbar agha Sheykhulislamov, a prime mover in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the nation's brief flirtation with independence and democracy some four decades earlier. In the last days of the year Anvar Alikhanov, a senior politician who knew Heydar, was made Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan, in effect Azerbaijan's Prime Minister, a position he would hold for the remainder of the decade.

Just a few days before Alikhanov's appointment, Zarifa was admitted to hospital in Baku. During the afternoon of Christmas Eve, December 24, she gave birth to her second child. A son. As they had with their daughter, Sevil, the couple had thought out of the box when considering a name. Rejecting the popular choices, they had opted for Ilham. In Azerbaijani this means 'inspiration' while, in Islam, Ilham is often used as the name for the revelation experienced by a *Wali*, one vested with the 'authority of God'.

On New Year's Eve 1961, Heydar, Zarifa and Sevil drove the infant Ilham home to their apartment.

The same year as Ilham was born, Vladimir Semichastny had become KGB Chairman. He would be a mixed bag, most notably from an international perspective as instigator of the disastrous arrest of Professor Frederick Barghoorn, Yale University professor, in October 1963, which provoked Kennedy. He was released after 16 days.

Yet he was also a modernist in some way. He was behind an unprecedented article which appeared in the newspaper *Izvestia* that quoted 'a senior KGB officer' — widely known to be Semichastny — as stating "many young Communist Party and Communist Youth League workers have joined the KGB and none of the people who, during the time of the personality cult of Joseph Stalin took part in the repressions against innocent Soviet people, is now in the service."

Semichastny continued his predecessor's interest in Heydar and was signalling a desire to draw new talent into senior positions. And his ambition did not stop with the KGB. Semichastny's name may not be well-known around the world today, but at the pinnacle of his career he was behind one of the most dramatic events in modern Soviet history. In his 2001 obituary, *The Economist* noted:

The surprise ousting of Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964 would lead to an end of warmer relations with the West.



In October 1964 Nikita returned to Moscow after a holiday at a Black Sea resort. He was met at the airport by Vladimir Semichastny, the head of the KGB. As Soviet leader, Khrushchev might have expected a more royal reception than a formal embrace from the security chief. Mr Semichastny's explanation was polite but brutal. While Khrushchev was sunning himself at the seaside, he had been removed by order of the Politburo.

But why? Mr Semichastny shrugged. Khrushchev pressed for an answer from the man he had regarded as a close friend, and whom indeed he had appointed as KGB chief three years earlier. Mr Semichastny offered an explanation that Khrushchev must have guessed already. He had been considered too liberal in his guidance of the country following the death of Stalin.

Later, in defending the dismissal of Khrushchev, Mr Semichastny said that Soviet society would have rotted away under him. "The fruit of liberalisation was overripe." Khrushchev had gone too far. Mr Semichastny thus foresaw that freedom was incompatible with the Soviet system, although a quarter of a century was to pass before the system finally collapsed.

"You cannot protect a state with smiles and handshakes," he said.

On October 14, 1964, Leonid Brezhnev was elected General Secretary of



Leonid Brezhnev was appointed General Secretary of the Central Committee in October 1964.

the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Born in the Yekaterinoslav Governorate of Ukraine, Brezhnev had joined the Komsomol in 1923, the year Heydar was born. His 18-year term as General Secretary, second only in length to Stalin, would mark the period when Heydar would rise from KGB General to a senior figure in the whole Soviet Union.

With an ideological ally in power, Semichastny moved fast to modernise his organisation. The same year as Brezhnev was appointed General Secretary, 1964, Semichastny signed a decree appointing Heydar Aliyev as Vice Chairman of the Azerbaijan KGB, only three years after he had been made a General. Semichastny had signalled his intention to drive the KGB behemoth forward. Heydar now had a green light to instigate change.

In the history of the post-Stalin KGB, there had been several attempts to reform. These either ended in job loss for their proponents, in failure, or simply petered out. Heydar argued in a series of reports that all KGB employees should possess core skills and that the organisation needed to move away from concepts of ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’. He believed that the KGB needed across the board, measurable and objective improvement in performance, and that the historic unitary model was now redundant. Whereas such open discussion had — quite literally — been the death of men in the past, that Heydar felt able not only to discuss such issues, but commit them to paper, shows how seriously the issue was now taken.

It is understood that each wave follows the previous wave and moves the

evolution of all major organisations on. That is how these things are bound to work. Every situation needs something a bit different from the next. It was a process of adaptation and development, rather than a big once-and-for-all change, that would have shaken the KGB.

The importance that this process was viewed in Moscow can be taken from the comments of Semichastny himself, which draws an inextricable link between the state and the KGB.

“The KGB was an inseparable part of the Soviet Union and the whole structure of Soviet society. We believe that the achievements of the Soviet Union and of society, were the same as the achievements of the KGB, because they were working for the same end result,” Semichastny told one media source. Asked how the achievements of the Soviet state were connected with achievements of KGB, he added: “What do you think? That they were stealing only the nuclear secrets? No, we’ve done a lot for the development of the different branches of science and industry and medicine. You can name any subject or development in the Soviet Union, and the KGB were participating in it.”

Brezhnev and Semichastny clearly believed that there was an inextricable link between the social and economic well-being of the Soviet Union and success of the KGB. Therefore, the success of Heydar, and those who followed him, was intrinsic to the success of the Communist project.

After 1964, Heydar was a regular visitor to the large Neo-Baroque building in Moscow’s Lubyanka Square that served as KGB headquarters. In his capacity as Vice Chairman, but also as someone widely considered to be a capable reforming entity in the KGB, he continued in the ascendancy.

Indeed, the rise of Heydar came over the politicking of General Semyon Tsvigun, Chairman of the KGB of Azerbaijan. Tsvigun was toxic to anyone he did not like, a brother-in-law of Brezhnev and therefore having the ear of the General Secretary. According to author Christian Schmidt-Häuer in *Gorbachev: The Path to Power*, he played a key role in the affairs of Brezhnev and was instrumental in a number of cover-ups to protect the children of the General Secretary.

Tsvigun may have not been offended directly by his ever-diplomatic Vice

Chairman, but Heydar's frequent business trips to the Soviet capital must have been somewhat of an irritation.

This aside, and with Tsvigun otherwise engaged in back-scratching elsewhere, Heydar was given extraordinary leeway over the operations of the KGB in Azerbaijan, a *de facto* Chairman in many regards. Just as he had been called on by Moscow to voice his ideas on how to modernise the organisation's domestic form, in many ways Azerbaijan would be the canvas on which he would adopt and adapt his ideas.

Heydar's concepts had been forged to a backdrop of the Khrushchev era, a more liberal post-Stalin period, yet Brezhnev's stabilisation policy had meant an end to his predecessors liberalising. The cautious openness of Soviet intellectual and cultural policy was in reverse. Writers, poets and artists faced a much more conservative landscape. Heydar balanced the competing forces of maintaining his own rising star, and less cautious approach to controlling Azerbaijan.

"Heydar was, even then, sympathetic to us," says Anar Rzayev, Chairman of the Writers' Union of Azerbaijan. "Despite the pressures from Moscow, Azerbaijan existed in a cautiously more liberal space than most of the Soviet Union. I remember him once telling me that he was himself a dissident, as he allowed us to exist as what would be considered dissidents elsewhere in the country. And he was correct. And it worked. I think that we writers and poets in Azerbaijan, we trod a more careful line, simply as no one wished to upset a balance that allowed us more freedom in Azerbaijan."

One must remember that Heydar's Azerbaijani KGB was liberal by comparison with others in the Soviet Union — but was nevertheless the national security agency charged with internal security, intelligence and secret police. It was not cuddly, but was certainly less oppressive. Bob Arnot notes in *Controlling Soviet Labour: Experimental Change from Brezhnev to Gorbachev* that by the mid-1970s, there were an estimated 10,000 political and religious prisoners across the Soviet Union, living in grievous conditions. Proportionally Azerbaijan had less than others.

Heydar set about streamlining his organisation's internal structure and systems and transforming a somewhat archaic and compartmentalised approach to training. Over the course of just a couple of years, the Azerbaijani



While certainly under Moscow's microscope, Baku and Azerbaijan nevertheless existed in a more liberal environment than some of the other Soviet republics.



In 1967, the Kremlin rubber stamped a KGB decision to appoint Heydar Aliyev as the head of its Azerbaijan arm. He was the youngest KGB head in the Soviet Union.

KGB morphed. By 1967, Baku was a favoured destination of several fact-finding missions sent by the KGB of other republics, as they sought to build their own models of internal evolution.

Heydar did not have to wait long for his reward. It was almost inevitable that Tsvigun was treading water and would soon be called to Moscow. On June 21, 1967, Heydar was appointed by Semichastny as Chairman of the KGB of Azerbaijan. As far as most people were concerned, he now ranked number two in the nation after Vali Akhundov, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.

In 1960, he had been appointed a KGB General. In seven years, Heydar had climbed the pyramid to head the organisation in Azerbaijan. Still only 44 years old, he was among the youngest in the Soviet Union ever to hold that position.

For too long, Azerbaijan had suffered from Moscow's interference in its leadership, and its chopping and changing. Weak and incompetent leaders, short-term thinking, pandering to Stalin and then Khrushchev, they had all taken their toll. Heydar had an image. He was considered an Azerbaijani first and a Soviet second, and that meant something to people in Azerbaijan.



The picturesque Mount Ararat overlooks the city of Yerevan, today established as the capital of Armenia after being ceded from Azerbaijan territory in 1918.

The War Room

Governing a great nation is like cooking a small fish
— too much handling will spoil it.
— *Lao Tzu*

In 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), the first democratic state in the Muslim world, was formed. One of the first measures of the ADR's government was to yield the town of Erivan (Yerevan) to newly declared Republic of Armenia, which did not have a capital. Tragically for both fledgling states, and the region as a whole, the nascent Armenian state would not be satisfied just with Erivan, variously pushing claims on Azerbaijani territory such as Nakhchivan, Zangezur and Nagorno-Karabakh. A succession of leaders in Baku learned that when British Victorian author George Eliot wrote that; 'Mortals are easily tempted to pinch the life out of their neighbour's buzzing glory, and think that such killing is no murder.' In Armenia's case he was entirely correct.

There was war between Armenia and Azerbaijan between 1918 and 1920. During the summer of 1918 alone, 115 Azerbaijani villages were destroyed, some 7,000 people killed and 50,000 Azerbaijanis forced from Zangezur. Responding to Armenian pressure, on July 5, 1921, the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party reiterated that Nagorno-Karabakh was Azerbaijani, while stating that 'proceeding from the necessity to maintain ethnic peace between Muslims and Armenians, economic ties with Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh is to be left within Azerbaijan SSR and to be granted broad regional autonomy with the

administrative centre in Shusha, which is a part of the autonomous region.' Despite this and other decisions during Soviet times, which reaffirmed Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, Armenia would continue to assert a claim on various regions.

Fast forward to the late 1960s and Vali Akhundov was First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. The Armenian republic and its head, Suren Tovmasyan, were constantly lobbying Moscow over Nagorno-Karabakh. Akhundov found himself under pressure from his flank. Moscow was steady on its position vis-a-vis Nagorno-Karabakh, but there were also efforts to placate Tovmasyan. By 1969, political temperatures were boiling over. Moscow leaned on Akhundov. This resulted in an extraordinary and controversial decision in May 1969, when the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan adopted an unexpected and illogical decision to cede 2,000 hectares of land of Azerbaijan, in the north west of the nation, and give this to Armenia.

Explaining the outrage felt by ordinary people Ramiz Mehdiyev invokes Martin Luther when he says: "Blood alone moves the wheels of history. Azerbaijanis had spilled their blood for their nation, indeed for the Soviet Union, and suddenly we find there are backroom deals, underhanded deals, going on that gave swathes of our territory away. There was widespread anger."

The rural region and its tiny capital, the town of Doveg, were of little strategic importance to either Azerbaijan or Armenia. Baku had done some work on the process of developing farming and creating enterprises that produced agricultural goods. And although this area was a long way from the Azerbaijani capital, if Yerevan, or Moscow or even those in the Presidium thought that the Armenian land grab would go unnoticed they were wrong. The 2,000 hectares involved in this illicit deal represented a miniscule area of the entire land mass of Azerbaijan as a whole. But that was not the point.

There was outrage. It was rural and not an important area, but in the lexicon of indignities that the Soviet Union had handed down to the Azerbaijani people it was another slap in the face. Moscow was chipping away at territory and somehow rewarding Armenia.

Akhundov believed to have resisted Armenian pressure over



The head of the KGB Yuri Andropov (left) was convinced of Heydar's credentials to lead Azerbaijan and influenced Leonid Brezhnev's (right) decision.

Nagorno-Karabakh, but his decade long rule had been marked by an increase in corruption and nepotism. This scandal, however, would be his *mea maxima culpa*. He was swiftly retired; 'after prolonged party criticism for his performance failures associated with corruption, matters of party discipline, and what were termed problems of 'localism in recruitment, placement and functioning of cadres'.

Azerbaijan would require a new leader.

In Moscow, the Chairman of the Committee for State Security was now Yuri Andropov. He, like Heydar Aliyev, was the self-made son of a railway worker. Alexander Yakovlev, later an advisor to Mikhail Gorbachev, was quoted in the book *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* as saying of him: "In a way I always thought Andropov was the most dangerous of all of them, simply because he was smarter than the rest."

Andropov was sure who should replace Akhundov. The influential head of the KGB had a place at-the-table. He sat alongside Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Central Committee, for all key discussions. On July 14, 1969, Brezhnev signed a decree ordering the appointment of Heydar as First Secretary of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan Communist Party.



In 1969, Heydar swapped his uniform for the suit of a politician and embarked upon a programme to revitalise Azerbaijan.

Little known outside of Azerbaijan and the corridors of power in Moscow, he nevertheless came with a reputation. Eduard Shevardnadze, then Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, had already encountered the 46 year old when Heydar had visited Tbilisi.

“He had a brilliant, sharp mind. I remember telling my colleague that this fellow from Azerbaijan had the potential to have a big future ahead of him,” says Shevardnadze. “He was on, I think, his first visit to Georgia. He greeted me with a few Georgian words, clasped my hand, and engaged me in a long discussion about Georgian history.”

From then on Shevardnadze watched his colleague’s rising career with interest. “What I always found, whether it was in that first meeting, or later in the Kremlin, or even later when we were Presidents of our respective, independent nations, was that he was always so well on top of his brief,” says Shevardnadze. “And that helped him in his career. We were friends and I could always rely upon him for good advice. He read situations very well, anticipated events.”

On July 14, 1969, Heydar was installed as the head of Azerbaijan. And he would need to be on top of his brief and employ all the talents to which Shevardnadze referred. What he quickly discovered was what a mess Azerbaijan was in. As KGB head, he had worked against vested interests, corruption and nepotism, pursued gangs, drugs and crime. In this new position, he now had the full powers of state behind him.

In his book *Patronage and Politics in the USSR*, author John Willerton noted the strong existence of patronage networks in Azerbaijan in that period, writing:

Azerbaijan has had an especially strong reputation for pervasive crime networks. Azerbaijani patron-client relationships have been rooted in geographical and clan ties that transcended the political rivalries of the Soviet period...

Not only were such organisations inherently anti-Soviet, they were anathema to his own sense of fairness. They were also at the heart of a vast majority of crime in Azerbaijan, behind the drug trade and were vassals for the corruption that was such a drag on the nation. According to one definition:



Corruption and crime represented a significant challenge to Azerbaijan's socio-economic status, the republic's prisons filling with criminals as Heydar Aliyev tackled this malaise.

Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It hurts everyone whose life, livelihood or happiness depends on the integrity of people in a position of authority. Corruption holds back economic development, prevents a free market operating for businesses and consumers and further exploits already marginalised groups.

Breaking the backs of these insidious organisations, therefore, would be central to Heydar's agenda. With the full levers of state at hand, coupled with the information at his disposal from his period in the KGB, perhaps no one could have been better placed at that juncture to go to war against Azerbaijan's cancer.

His office would now serve as something of a 'War Room'. In respect to the fight against corruption, there was evidence of a serious credibility gap in Azerbaijani society. Leaders had loved to talk about commitment to beating corruption, immoral and unlawful behaviour but that had been where it ended. When Brezhnev rose to power, the Soviet system was already deeply corrupted. Bureaucracy was also large and inefficient. Corruption and the black market grew under Khrushchev, as people were less afraid of the state, and this issue would increase under Brezhnev as he was to prove unwilling to reform the economy.

Azerbaijan also had its problems. As KGB boss, Heydar had conceived an across-the-board package of countermeasures. Now, with additional powers at his disposal, and the political will, he would personally manage an internal

conflict from his War Room. The existence of a campaign was no secret, but Heydar resisted the temptation of so many before him to make grandiose statements in public. People had heard it all before from their political masters. They wanted action. It was time to deliver beyond the podium.

His administration hired researchers in an experiment to literally create a map of crime in Azerbaijan. The result was a flowing picture of the situation — captured on huge graphic maps on the walls of his office. This tailored specific responses to each type of offence and location, but beyond this mapped the activities of each of the crime elements, building into a definitive picture. Action against these organisations was once based on educated assumptions, not empirical evidence. Knowledge was carried in the minds of individual officers. The system was accustomed to responding after the fact.

The War Room-approach plotted a crime and its perpetrators. For the next two years, Heydar would hold a bi-weekly meeting with the heads of all Azerbaijan's security-related organisations. He would not flinch from difficult decisions that were inevitably going to be required. Willerton records that immediately after his arrival, Heydar implemented:

Extensive personnel turnover... within all leading party and state bodies, and at both the republic and regional levels... Within just two and a half years of Aliyev's succession, the Azerbaijan Communist Party Central Committee Bureau included only one Azerbaijani member not recruited by the new party boss.

“My father was also forced to take stock of a tragic economic picture,” says İlham Aliyev. “Azerbaijan was starting to suffer from chronic under-investment. The Soviet Union had taken much from us, but delivered little. He needed to reverse this. And quickly.”

Time was of the essence, not only because of the need for change, but because of public perception of change. Having won a decisive victory in the United States Presidential election of 1932 — and with his party having swept Congressional elections across the nation — President Franklin D Roosevelt entered the White House with unprecedented political capital. Americans demanded immediate action, and it was Roosevelt who responded by promising electors a remarkable series of new changes in the “first 100 days” of his administration. This was to become a benchmark against which the

media and much of the public judged the beginning of all subsequent Presidencies, and increasingly this somewhat arbitrary period became a factor in the absurd early judgement of governments all over the world.

While there were no 24-hour media outlets focusing stories on Heydar's first 100 Days, he had made a start as though there was. Before the end of July, his War Room was operational. And by October 22, 1969 — his 100th day as First Secretary of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan Communist Party — he had begun to attack the social and economic malaise that was also apparent.

“He grasped with clarity that Azerbaijan had to embrace a reliable path to economic growth and that she was being held back by institutions that did not allow any degree of professional management,” says İlham. “When this happens, today, or back in 1969, efficiency suffers, talent is wasted, education is undervalued, competitiveness is hobbled and growth is imperilled.”

Ensuring sustainable growth within a highly controlled Soviet structure would not be easy, but trying was better than accepting the parameters and accepting Azerbaijan's slow decline.

Heydar viewed his political institutions as too conservative and burdened by institutional secrecy. The aforementioned ‘extensive personnel turnover’ caused by his effort against crime also allowed an opportunity for rebirth as Heydar's programme swept away a chastened old guard and brought through a new generation that he hoped could spur change.

“The Soviet Union in general, but also Azerbaijan for sure, was burdened by overly bureaucratic attitudes in which decision-making was complex, laborious and above all, slow,” says Natiq Aliyev. “It was hoped that by bringing through a new generation this would unlock human potential and set out paths for growth, recovery and progress. But everyone recognised that Azerbaijan could only go so far when operating within a union-wide system that was already showing signs of distress.”

A 2002 paper titled *The Growing Problem of Corruption Under Brezhnev* states that:

When Brezhnev rose to power, the Soviet system was already deeply corrupted... issues would increase under Brezhnev, being as he was



Heydar Aliyev emerged on the Azerbaijani political stage and quickly gained popularity as he made good on a promise to attack corruption and improve the economy.

mainly unwilling to reform the economy. His policies were actually overtly protective of the elite's privileges... Even before Brezhnev's time party officials knew the economy needed to reform. The Soviet economy was not capable of continuing post-war growth through the old-formula of massive investments and the constant expansion of the labour.

Heydar Aliyev was architect of the 'Contract of the Century' nearly quarter of a century later but, in a parallel to the situation he would inherit as President of a newly minted independent Azerbaijan, as head of Soviet Azerbaijan he would oversee a once proud industry in retreat.

There is evidence of petroleum being used in trade as early as the third and fourth centuries. Reference to production of oil on the Absheron Peninsula can be found in the manuscripts of many Western and Oriental authors. Heydar's own father had been an oiler. Azerbaijan had the capacity to be an oil giant. Yet Moscow had underinvested, with woeful consequences.

Azerbaijan's once proud oil industry did not fare well. Fearing Baku's capture by the Nazis, Stalin had ordered plugging the oil wells with concrete, rendering many unusable after the war. Soviet oil production was increasingly focused on Russia's oilfields and Azerbaijani oilmen employed there, despite proven vast, largely untapped, deposits in their own country. Pre-war Azerbaijan accounted for up to 70 per cent of Soviet oil production. By the time of Heydar's promotion this had dwindled to under 20 per cent and was dropping significantly year-on-year.

"Our once impressive oil industry was in tatters," says Khoshbakht Yusifzadeh, an Azerbaijani regarded as one of the Soviet Union's top oilmen. "Heydar called the republic's leading industry experts together to discuss what could be done to reverse this decline."

In 1969 Heydar visited Azerbaijan's unique oil rocks, situated some 50 kilometres off the coast from Baku, a small city constructed from interconnected oil platforms and residential areas sitting atop rocks, piles of sand and landfill. In 1949, the Oil Rocks were the site of the world's first successful offshore venture in oil drilling, and by the 1960s, 21 million tonnes were being extracted each year. Yet even this innovation was in decline. Moscow sent Azerbaijani crude across the Soviet Union — and gave very little back.



Azerbaijan's oil industry was in tatters, a lack of investment and strategy resulting in diminishing returns.

“I was actually surprised about his willingness to engage,” says Yusifzadeh. “Azerbaijan’s oil industry was not just lacking in investment, it had been allowed to rot away by those who came before him.”

Although couched in diplomatic terms, Heydar remarked on the crazy situation that Soviet Union was buying grain from the United States with cash during the early 1970s, yet below the Caspian lay billions of barrels of oil, the most valuable export commodity in the world. Just as he had in the fight against crime and corruption in Azerbaijan, Heydar would go to war on the failures and stupidities he saw around him. His own fate, and that of Azerbaijan, would rest on his success or failure.



A farmer stands by wheat grain that cascades from a combine harvester. Turning around Azerbaijan's spluttering agricultural sector would be a key strategic aim.

Waging War

One of the greatest pieces of economic wisdom is to know
what you do not know.

— John Kenneth Galbraith

When the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917, Vladimir Lenin's grand plan was to bring socialism into Russia and eventually spread it around the world. Near the end of his life though, Lenin realised that the Communist Party was moving away from his vision. By the time Leonid Brezhnev was in the Kremlin, Soviet bureaucracy was huge, gorged and inefficient as officials used their positions for personal gain. Brezhnev used patronage to maintain influence. The system was already becoming institutionally corrupt. As Hendrick Smith wrote in *The New Russians* that ministries and agencies "grew like mushrooms" stuffed with bureaucrats who had "ill-defined responsibilities" and fat salaries relative to those paid to ordinary citizens.

This burgeoning, top-heavy administration contrasted with a stagnant national economy. Agricultural production was stalling. In July 1972 the Soviets concluded a \$750 million grain deal with the United States. A month after the announcement of the deal, the US Department of Agriculture announced that Moscow would purchase a billion dollars worth of farm products from the US over the next twelve months.

All this pointed to the deep structural deficiencies within the Soviet system. Azerbaijan was no different.

Stalin had launched a process of industrialisation in the republic. The wartime economy would define Azerbaijan's progress as lack of investment in the oil industry of the entire post-war period, but this would not be the sole factor.

Baku became a key military industrial centre, with vast complexes that produced steel and electrical equipment. The republic's canning and textile sectors increased their range. Food processing and cotton production evolved, as did many light industries and machine building. The city of Sumgait became a noted metallurgical and petrochemical centre. Ganja evolved as a centre of food processing and textile production.

The landscape that faced Heydar in the first years in charge, in the early 1970s, was dire. Azerbaijan's industrial output was doing badly due to chronic underinvestment. Coupled with a woeful lack of infrastructure, there was a dearth in power capacity. All combined to see a year-on-year reduction in production.

Agriculture was another area of huge concern. Despite immense land resources, extensive machinery and chemical support industries, a large rural work force and two decades of massive investment in the agricultural sector, the Soviet Union continued to rely on large-scale grain and meat imports to feed its population. Persistent shortages of staples, the general unavailability of fresh meats, fruits and vegetables in state stores and a bland, carbohydrate-rich diet remained a fact of life for citizens and a perennial embarrassment to their government.

The USSR's leadership repeatedly used coercion towards the agricultural sector in Azerbaijan and elsewhere, believing that threats could produce results. Yet the inability of the farm sector to supply adequate amounts of food saw Moscow lurch towards extreme solutions. Farm products were forcibly procured, miracle cures were embraced. Collectivisation was pursued, brutally in some cases and even several bizarre attempts to change the climate.

Yet all evidence pointed towards Moscow being the problem. The paper *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, published in 2003 by The University of Chicago, states:

Before World War One, the farm sector of Russia's Czarist Empire

As part of the planned economic system, Azerbaijan produced the likes of wool, silk and cotton for the All-Union Fund and received staple foods and goods back in return.



produced enough food both for domestic consumption and for export. Production expanded under the Soviet regime, but nature, impatience, and human blunders combined to prevent agriculture from developing at the rate necessary to satisfy the needs of an economy that was pursuing rapid industrialisation and urbanisation.

Azerbaijan had been blessed with a climate that varied from subtropical and dry in central and eastern areas to subtropical and humid in the southeast, temperate along the shores of the Caspian and cold at the higher mountain elevations. The nation possessed huge potential.

Under the Soviet system, Azerbaijan had a built-in market for its vegetables, fruits, cotton, wool and raw silk. Everything produced was supplied to the All-Union Fund. In turn, Azerbaijan received products that it needed, such as meat, dairy products and grain. Yet collectivisation of agriculture had been a disaster in Azerbaijan, as in most other republics of the Soviet Union. A heavily centralised and bureaucratic administration led to inflexible production with directives from central planning organs that failed to take conditions into account. Needless bureaucratic interference in the day-to-day management of farms fostered resentment and undermined morale. The result was diminishing productivity.

This troubling decline in Azerbaijani manufacturing and agriculture faced Heydar on his appointment as head of Azerbaijan. Author Svante Cornell asserted in his book *Azerbaijan Since Independence* that in 1970 the per capita

income in Azerbaijan stood at an appalling 63 per cent of the Soviet Union-wide figure.

Mark Sandle noted in his book *A Short History of Soviet Socialism* that, in general, the Communist Party had too many vested interests to take care of the declining fortunes of ordinary people and had become 'ostrich-like', unwilling and unable to confront the problems. Increasingly, across the nation as a whole, even the fear of repression by the Party was not enough to check people's growing disillusionment.

Heydar's office served as a war room that served as the epicentre of Azerbaijan's war on organised crime and corruption. But there were other battles to fight.

Heydar used public appearances to invoke the spirit of World War Two, a period when the people of Azerbaijan had pulled together. He stated that the war had represented a time when convention was thrown out, and when innovation had become a buzzword when it came to overcoming the Nazi threat.

In private, Heydar was just as metronome. His cabinet was put on notice that he would brook no excuses. He expected people to work together for the common good. There were instances when people lost their jobs when they showed themselves not to be team players.

"While he recognised that there was no golden bullet, he was not content to use that as an excuse," says Khoshbakht Yusifzadeh. "Yet he was hard-nosed in demanding a cognitive effort from those around him. Nothing less than that was acceptable to him."

Stalin's initial 'Five-Year Plan for the National Economy of the Soviet Union' had morphed into a series of nationwide, centralised economic plans developed by a state planning committee based on the Theory of Productive Forces. Fulfilling the plan became a watchword of Soviet bureaucracy, no matter the human cost, and these were often unrealistic one-dimensional targets relating singularly to output figures.

In July 1969 Heydar's reshuffled economic team, along with his cabinet and other state entities, was charged with producing something more three-



In public appearances, Heydar Aliyev openly stated that Azerbaijan had failed to keep up with the rest of the Soviet Union in economic terms.

dimensional. Each of the republics had its own Five-Year Plan, mostly slavishly tied to Moscow. Heydar needed something more substantial.

“The war on corruption and crime in Azerbaijan was fought in tandem with my father’s oft declared economic war,” says Ilham Aliyev. “It was a pivotal moment in our history. For so many reasons, at the time when my father took charge, in 1969, the standard of living and prospects of the people of Azerbaijan had begun to seriously slip well behind the median in the Soviet Union.”

Over ensuing months following his promotion, Heydar’s secretariat focused its efforts on forging a coherent, all-encompassing, national development programme. This would focus on industry, especially heavy industry and allocated inter-agency responsibilities for specific programmes in areas like energy, agricultural rehabilitation, transport, communications and social services.

In the latter category, education was a focus. If there was one area in which the Soviet Union had had a dramatic forward impact it was education. Across Azerbaijan education levels rose dramatically from a very low starting point. In Azerbaijan, according to Soviet data, 100 per cent of males and females



Recognising that education was a key socio-economic building block, investment in the sector surged under Heydar Aliyev.

between the ages of nine and 49 were literate by 1970. Lenin's policy of *Likbez* (liquidation of illiteracy) had been a huge achievement.

Albert Einstein had said that: "The school has always been the most important means of transferring the wealth of tradition from one generation to the next. This applies today in an even higher degree than in former times, through modern development of economic life, the family."

If anything, Heydar was himself a product of Soviet policy beyond *Likbez*, to put in place an education system that gave the young every possible opportunity. He had grasped it, and recognised it. The birth of the theory of human-capital came in 1960 in a statement made by Theodore Schultz, who went on to win the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences. The classic theory defined by Schultz and others that followed him was little known in the Soviet Union. Schultz defined a core of competencies that embodied an individual's ability to perform in the economy that would produce economic value. If such economic theory was simply viewed as 'western' jargon in the early 1970s, it nevertheless was something that Heydar understood.

"There was a legible improvement in education funding during the early 1970s," says historian Musa Gasimli. "Resources were found. As a faculty, there was a feeling that education was back on the national agenda. Heydar

Aliyev was visible at occasions like graduation ceremonies. He visited pedagogical schools. He supported initiatives that saw more of our brightest students being able to study abroad and in elite universities in other parts of the Soviet Union.”

“High-quality education does little in the short term. But Heydar Aliyev recognised that it does help young men and women get the knowledge they need to live successful lives and contribute to society at large. Education equals development,” says Elman Rustamov, Governor of Azerbaijan’s Central Bank.

Across the Soviet Union, leaders imbued with a desire to perpetuate their own survival in their posts placed little emphasis on long term planning and on educating future generations. Investment in education was investing in a future that they were largely unconcerned with. Their horizon largely rested in the targets set out in a Five-Year Plan.

“As he would prove, Heydar Aliyev was a nationalist. He could have been First Secretary for just a couple of years, but as someone who valued his homeland he saw the merit in developing our education sector,” says Rustamov. “He saw the big picture and if that was a notion of human capital, however remote the actual phraseology was to us at that time, then I would say that he was thinking along those lines.”

Every morning, sharp at 6.30am, Heydar would leave his home and take the short drive to his office. The days of a lazy 8.30am start for staff were over. At 6.45am he would be behind his desk, before many ordinary Azerbaijanis were out of bed.

“Working for Heydar Aliyev meant that you worked his hours,” says Natiq Aliyev.

By seven in the morning, Heydar had got the preliminaries of his day, after a quick review of the newspapers and examination of cables from Moscow, out of the way. At least several times each week, in a meeting room adjacent to his office, his economic team was already assembled.

In the decade that Vali Akhundov had been First Secretary he had called the Cabinet together for round-table meetings less frequently, preferring instead to deal with ministers and department heads individually. Heydar liked one-on-one interaction, but expounded the idea of collective responsibility. If

the war on crime, or his much-trumpeted war on the economy was to work, then it required a group effort. The full cabinet met at least once a week. His economic team -- comprising ministers, department heads and industry representatives -- met with him twice a week. Beyond these, he chaired strategic sub-grouping covering areas such as oil, education, agriculture and industry.

“Heydar Aliyev was easy to work for, as long as you were straight with him, did what you said you would do, and did your best,” says Natiq Aliyev. “Otherwise he would accept no feeble excuses. People who were unproductive, bureaucratic or self-serving did not last long. He had no time to waste as he pushed ahead.”

By 1970 Heydar had swept away much of the old guard from the top of Azerbaijan’s bureaucracy and drawn around him a new generation of leaders. He had shaped Azerbaijan in his own image, ending the by-now time honoured Soviet tradition of promotion based on longevity and rank. Talent was now a factor.

Just after 7am, Heydar would convene either the Cabinet or one of his committees. He loathed the idea of wasting time with talking shop, where discussion was the main activity and no decisions or actions arose from the time invested.

The Japanese company meeting, held with executives standing up, is perhaps stereotypical. In 2012 the *Wall Street Journal* reported that an increasing number of companies were saving time by replacing traditional meetings with daily stand-ups, adding that stand-up meetings dated back to at least World War One.

Heydar’s meetings were seated. But he ran these with hawkish attention to avoid blustery. An ability to be breviloquent was something he appreciated.

“Heydar Aliyev never liked wasting time wrangling on minutiae,” says now Deputy Prime Minister Ali Hasanov. “He liked people to get to the point, provide information and their perspective on this, and go on within the framework of the meeting to reach some positive conclusion and direction. Throughout his life this was consistently his *modus operandi*.”

In the economic war that Heydar had declared, and also in his well-



Heydar Aliyev was at his desk in Baku very early every day and expected those who worked with him to do the same.

publicised war on crime, there was no time for pontification. “He said that Azerbaijan was at a crossroads. And that we did not have time,” says Hasanov.

The rest of Heydar’s day was spent largely in pursuit of his strategic goals — centrally the two wars he had declared.

Yet there were confines. Today, if any Western leader wishes to pursue growth or engage in a blitz on crime, the parameters are largely the legal frameworks of their nation. For Heydar in the early 1970s, First Secretary of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan Communist Party, his parameters would be the same as the aforementioned leaders, but also burdened with the interference of a top heavy Soviet system. The 2011 *European Stability Initiative* paper *The country Heydar Aliyev built* notes that:

Heydar Aliyev carried out a balancing act between korenizatsia (nationalism) and remaining on good terms with the central authorities. He promoted Azerbaijanis to nearly all positions of authority. In a symbolic gesture, he brought back to Azerbaijan the remains of a writer, Huseyn Javid, who had died in Siberian exile in 1941 during the Stalinist purges. At the same time, Aliyev cultivated his relationship with Leonid Brezhnev, avoiding confrontations with Moscow.

Achieving those goals also meant sacrifice — and not just his own. The Aliyev family would themselves pay a price for Azerbaijan being at a ‘crossroads’. Times had inevitably changed. In their early days together, Heydar and Zarifa had owned small cars. Over ensuing years they owned a succession of Volgas and Chaikas.

As he had climbed through the ranks of the KGB, Heydar was seen in the likes of the ZIL-111. Heydar now travelled to work in a chauffeur driven ZIS-115, a Russian-built and heavily armoured version of the ZIS-110. As standard operational practice, his car was always accompanied by two vehicles filled with armed agents and outriders on motorcycles. This was not for show. It was a necessity.

“If anyone wants to do it, no amount of protection is enough. All a man needs is a willingness to trade his life for mine,” observed President John F Kennedy less than a month before his words came tragically true.

Heydar Aliyev found the ubiquitous agents and his security bubble — a necessity as he fought organised crime — stifling and hard to live with.



“The war on crime made Heydar Aliyev a target, for sure,” says Aleksandr Ivanov, who served as his bodyguard and managed his protection for many years. “Where before there had been a stand-off, Heydar Aliyev had openly taken the fight to organised crime. Some elements were threatened by this. They wanted to stop him.”

Heydar professed not to enjoy being a public figure and the bubble of security in which he now travelled was viewed as an unpleasant necessity. As far as possible, he avoided having Zarifa, Sevil and Ilham caught in the glare of notoriety. In 1969, Sevil was 14 years old and Ilham eight years old.

“I grasped that my father was in some way important,” says Ilham. “But to us he was just a ‘father’. At school we were treated the same as others. In fact, with hindsight, I see that if anything, because my sister and I were his children, more was expected of us.”

The result of Heydar’s War Room strategy, in addition to his being forced to travel in a boxy ZIS-115, was that the KGB were now also required to shadow the First Secretary’s wife and children. Family life would never be the same again. There were benefits to status, of course, not least a plush *dacha*. Many Soviet citizens owned small seasonal homes away from the city. But for Soviet VIPs, the plush *gosdacha*, a state *dacha* was a particular perk. The family’s times at the First Secretary’s *gosdacha*, although all too fleeting, were occasions when Heydar would attempt to compensate his children for all the times he was forced to miss so many ‘normal’ events in their lives.



(above) As head of Soviet Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev went to work in a gleaming black armoured ZIL-115. (left) His war on organised crime began to pay dividends.

Heydar made fleeting attempts at ‘normal’. A few times each year, he would gather his wife and children together and break with protocol to visit a park, or walk along the street to a local restaurant. On these fleeting occasions the KGB were thrown into confusion by orders to stay well back or to leave the family to their own devices.

“Sometimes Heydar Aliyev was not easy to protect,” says Ivanov. “Although he accepted that there were dangers in his position, he always found it difficult to reconcile his personal safety with a need to get out among the people, to stay close to ordinary concerns, and to have something resembling

a family life. He felt that his children deserved to have as normal childhood as possible.”

The war on crime in Azerbaijan during the late 1960s and early 1970s would make this virtually impossible. In independent Azerbaijan, there were over a dozen credible assassination plots reported in the media. The secrecy of the Soviet Union, plus the mists of time, distort any true understanding of the danger that faced Heydar and his family as he sought to crush the crime families of Azerbaijan. Yet several of those interviewed for this book state that there were at least a handful of credible threats during this period.

Neither Heydar’s war on organised crime, nor his efforts to transform Azerbaijan’s economy, often over vested interests, would be welcomed by everyone. Yet his decision to pursue these, in the face of the aforementioned figure that in 1970 the per capita income in Azerbaijan was a grim 63 per cent of the Soviet Union-wide figure, would prove entirely correct. Within a decade this had risen to 80 per cent.





The Aliyevs: Heydar with Zarifa, Sevil and İlham. The family were forced to take security measures as the Azerbaijan government took on crime gangs.



Heydar Aliyev had attracted much attention from the Kremlin for his ground-breaking ideas and fresh leadership style.

The Esoteric Guy in the Room

First comes thought; then organisation of that thought,
into ideas and plans; then transformation of those plans into reality.
The beginning, as you will observe, is in your imagination.

— *Napoleon Hill*

In his work *Alcibiades*, around 400 BC, Plato uses the expression *ta esô* meaning ‘the inner things’. Aristotle began to use this as an expression of individual thought and in 1701 the term ‘esoteric’ first appeared in English, in Thomas Stanley’s *History of Philosophy*. Stanley referred to the school of Pythagoras, in which those under training were referred to as ‘esoteric’ and those who had achieved a level of deep thought were considered to be ‘esoteric’, part of the inner circle. In 1828 the noun ‘esotericism’ was coined for the first time. Today the *Oxford Dictionary* defines the adjective as: ‘Intended for, or likely to be understood by, only a small number of people with a specialised knowledge or interest.’

The position of First Secretary of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan Communist Party would bring Heydar further into the orbit of the Kremlin. Presiding over the vast Soviet nation, Leonid Brezhnev regularly called the leaders of the republics to Moscow for meetings and consultation. Yuri Andropov, Chairman of the State Committee for State Security, had done much to draw Brezhnev’s attention to the Azerbaijani. After appointing Heydar to lead Azerbaijan, Brezhnev had learnt of his ideas and methodology.

Was Heydar Aliyev among the first to step back and see the beginnings of troubles that were forming over the Soviet Union? It is difficult to be sure.

But after 1969 he had embarked on top-to-bottom structural changes and attempted to address the issues that faced Azerbaijan, which were much the same as those that faced the Soviet Union as a whole.

Leon Trotsky, the Russian Marxist revolutionary and first leader of the Red Army, had pointed out that to measure social and economic growth in purely terms of volume, was equal to measuring the strength of a man solely on the basis of chest measurement. Even within that narrow definition, there was cause for concern.

Brezhnev had already abandoned the utopia of economic *autarky* ('socialism in one country') and was attempting to stimulate the economy by participating in the world economy. Yet by the 1960s, growth had gone into terminal decline, and with this a much-touted rise in living standards. Between 1951 and 1960 industrial production was growing at double figure levels. By both 1963 and 1964, even the officially claimed industrial growth rate, which lacked credibility because it was often wildly optimistic, fell below eight per cent, the lowest peacetime figures apart from 1933. Aside from some notable exceptions, decline would be the overall pattern.

Trotsky believed that a Soviet-style national planned economy required some form of democratic management. Under Stalin, all economic decisions were zealously taken in-house by the 15 ministries in Moscow. Independent control was almost abolished.

In Azerbaijan in 1969, Heydar had met, head on, rampant corruption, waste and nepotism that had infected the system. He had sought to devolve control and management, prompt active workplace communication and instigate the right to discuss, and even criticise, without fear of repercussions.

Heydar was frustrated, not only because of what he saw in Azerbaijan, but over the whole malaise that the Soviet Union found itself in. He believed that there was immense and latent potential in the system bloc — if Moscow could succeed in creating an integrated unit. Beyond this he believed that the opportunity of Comecon, a block of nearly half a billion people, was being squandered, and that China's one billion people had staggering potential. Comecon was an economic grouping that comprised the countries of the Eastern Bloc along with a number of socialist states — Moscow's answer to the formation of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation.



Leon Trotsky's (left) warnings on the Soviet system went unheeded. Heydar Aliyev believed that the Soviet needed to tap into Mao Zedong's (right) China to boost the economy.

While foreign affairs would never be within Heydar's purview, through Azerbaijan, and later within the scope of the departments and ministries he oversaw from Moscow, economic integration and cooperation remained something he believed in. As did the need for Moscow to get its economic house in order — or face the consequences.

“He was not outspoken in a bludgeoning people way, but he was diplomatic in getting a message across, of what he felt must be said,” says former Ukraine President Leonid Kravchuk. “This made him — potentially — a game changer.”

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was envisaged by Vladimir Lenin to be ‘The supreme authority of the Party’, and would therefore take on a leadership role in the Soviet Union. In fact, the Central Committee acted as the USSR's ruling body in the intervals between Congresses, which usually met twice a year. The Central Committee was the ultimate authority for defining the political leadership and directing the work of the party and local organisations, also being responsible for choosing top personnel and directing the workers' central state and public organisations. The Central Committee was involved in all aspects of life, even appointing the editorial boards of newspapers and magazines. The Central Committee had several key departments, including those responsible for party building, cadre



Heydar Aliyev was elected to the Central Committee at the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

work, scheduling and appointing party personnel. The Central Committee's State and Legal Departments oversaw the armed forces, KGB, Ministry of Internal Affairs and the trade unions. It was always the centre of Soviet politics. Members of the Central Committee had to be well-qualified leaders, as the body implemented the general consensus of the Congresses of the CPSU and its decisions were binding on all party organisations and their members.

Given this importance, Brezhnev was unhappy. In one account published in the 1979 book *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, during the May 1966 Central Committee plenum, Brezhnev openly complained that only one

member had asked him personally to be allowed to speak. As the problems of the Soviet Union mounted, so did the need for an adept and forward-looking Central Committee.

On March 29, 1971, Heydar flew from Baku to Moscow. The following day would see Brezhnev oversee the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Some 5,000 delegates had assembled in the capital. As First Secretary from Azerbaijan, one of a small niche of senior leaders from the republics, he sat in a prominent position in the hall and attended all 10 days of the event.

At 47 years old he was relatively young amid the grey men who made up the party grandees, and who cluttered the ranks of the Central Committee. If anything, this set him aside from the herd, made him stand out. And the old seniors were a remarkably pompous bunch. Considering they were the representatives of the proletariat, they enjoyed their perks and moved within a deeply hierarchical structure. Even if these aristocrats of the Communist Party did not know it yet, something was afoot. Brezhnev was desperately seeking a new direction.

Heydar had attended several such meetings, yet the 24th Congress would be a little different for him. After less than two years as First Secretary, he had been nominated for the Central Committee. Brezhnev wished to shift the demographics of the Central Committee and bring in something of a new generation. He and Andropov were fully aware of the change that was underway in Azerbaijan, the economic progress in particular.

The ‘highlight’ of the event was undoubtedly Brezhnev’s six-hour televised speech, during which he was repeatedly interrupted by the thunderous applause, with delegates jumping to their feet chanting. But as far as Heydar was concerned, the highlight must have been learning that he had been elected to the Central Committee.

Delegates had largely spurned the plethora of new blood, and clung to many of the old guard. Only around one in eight of those elected to the Central Committee were debutants. Only a handful of committee members were under 50 years old. Ironically, when their careers could cross in such bloody fashion later, another to join in 1971 was Mikhail Gorbachev.

“Heydar Aliyev was relatively young. Through his work in Baku he also possessed rare modernising credentials,” says Eduard Shevardnadze, who would be made First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party in 1972. “I had gotten to know him a little. If there was a gathering of leadership, he was the esoteric guy in the room. His ideas were a little ahead of their time.”

President Theodore Roosevelt referred to the White House as a “bully pulpit”, by which he meant a terrific platform from which to advocate an agenda. Heydar would use his rise in the system to bring his thoughts onto a wider stage, but was still not far enough up the pyramid to be notably boisterous. However, a seat in the Central Committee, and serving as one of 15 First Secretaries, inevitably gave him a voice. Shevardnadze, who like Heydar had been appointed with a mandate to end corruption in his republic and suppress grey and black-market capitalism, says: “Heydar was a diplomat. He did not get involved in public rhetoric. He worked quietly behind the scenes.”

Shevardnadze recalls discussions in which Heydar railed against narrow national interests between the republics and the Comecon states, of bureaucracies defending their own frontiers against neighbours. He saw waste in neighbouring states not pooling resources in a rational way. Most of all, Shevardnadze says, Heydar felt that Moscow needed to get back to basics. He recalls Heydar stating:

“There are two Superpowers. But how can the United States produce twice as much electricity compared to us? How can the United States produce nearly double the amount of oil compared to ourselves each year? And three times as much natural gas? If we are going to be a Superpower, we have to be an economic Superpower.”

How esoteric such a statement can be considered depends on who, where and when it was delivered. The fact that Heydar could be called esoteric for delivering this hardly revelatory critique gives an indication of how stunted thinking was. And it was not as though officialdom was not being warned. A report prepared for the 23rd Congress of the USSR had stated:

As a result of the lag in agriculture, the food and light industries fell short of their targets and this could not help but slow down the growth of national income and of the nation's prosperity.

Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze recalled his Azerbaijani counterpart's frustration at the economic malaise afflicting the Soviet Union.



Yet lessons were not being learned. Hungarian economist, János Kornai had coined the term *Hiánygazdaság* — shortage economy — to describe one of the key public failings of the centrally planned economies of the Eastern Bloc. This only encouraged crime and a black economy, poisoning the system, while both Heydar and Shevardnadze put in place measures in their respective republics to attack this corruption. Shevardnadze remembers his counterpart from Azerbaijan telling him: “How can we consider ourselves to be an evolved state when people have to queue to get bread and milk. It’s just not acceptable.”

Shevardnadze recalls that with like-minded First Secretaries in place, both with similar credentials, Azerbaijan and Georgia forged perhaps the closest cooperative relationships of any of the Soviet republics. Yet the pair could only do so much, bound as they were to the fate of the greater entity. The impasse of the bureaucracy was paralleled by the monstrous burden of arms expenditure. Some 11 to 13 per cent of Soviet GDP went on its military spending, compared to about eight per cent for the United States. In bare figures, the creeping bankruptcy of the Soviet Union was cruelly revealed.

After the spring of 1971 Heydar Aliyev now had a foot in Moscow and would use his role in the Central Committee to make his voice heard. At home in Baku, he would continue to pursue a reforming agenda. In Moscow he was perhaps outspoken. In Baku, he was First Secretary and held the levers of power. His thinking trickled down and began to change things.

When an idea becomes esoteric, it has relegated itself out of the mainstream and into the confines of a small group, or inner circle. This usually becomes a self-defeating accomplishment, unless the circle that maintains this belief is exceptionally powerful. The inability to communicate an idea, however wonderful it may be, might be one of the largest hurdles when it comes to philosophical revolutions.

Leonid Kuchma, future President of an independent Ukraine, was a delegate of the 27th and 28th Congresses of the Communist Party of Soviet Union. He got to know Heydar well and recalls the First Secretary saying that the Soviet Union needed to: “release the bludgeon of bureaucratic control... end the chaos.”

The fact that this could perhaps be considered a unique view gives tragic indication as to the state of mind of those in Moscow. The writing, it seems, was already on the wall.



In his new political role, Heydar Aliyev became more aware of the Soviet Union's precarious economic situation.



Agriculture would be one of the industries that Heydar Aliyev would transform during his tenure as First Secretary of Azerbaijan.

Raubwirtschaft

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some
other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for.
We are the change that we seek.

— Barack Obama

Lankaran was so productive that they called it *The All-Union Garden*,” says a farming expert at Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Agriculture. Lankaran Region, and the city of Lankaran, sit on the coast of the Caspian Sea, near Azerbaijan’s southern border with Iran. The region boasts an excellent humid subtropical climate, lavish arable land and good water supplies, making traditional agrarian activities the bedrock of the nation. It has a strong agricultural base headlined by vegetable crops, tea, paddy cultivating, cattle breeding, citrus, honey production, fishing and grain production. The region is also famous for its prized ‘ironwood’ (*Parrotia persica*), said to be the only wood that sinks in water and an excellent source of firewood since it burns for a long time and is not easily extinguished.

In August 1969, within weeks of his appointment as First Secretary, Heydar had visited Lankaran Region. What he discovered horrified him. The Soviet Union’s state-owned agricultural cooperatives, *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos*, seemed to have sapped the life out of the Lankaran Region. Indeed, over the next six months Heydar would learn intimately of a republic-wide malaise in agriculture.

Moscow mandated which crops would be grown and where those crops would be sent once they were harvested. In this, Moscow was proving

ham-fisted. Azerbaijan sent 500,000 to 600,000 tonnes of vegetables each year to the All-Union Fund, a clearing-house for national production.

None of the other republics sent as many vegetables to the Fund. Early in April, Azerbaijani cabbages were already being sold in Moscow and Leningrad, at a cheap price.

Azerbaijan had abundant potential for vast new development in fruit and vegetable production. Yet Moscow's agricultural mandarins seemed unwilling, or unable, to mandate change. The same crops on the same land, no research or experimentation was undertaken.

"It was farming-by-numbers on a vast scale, and nowhere in the world has micro-managing from the top succeeded anywhere near as well as letting local leaders, or farmers, make well-rounded decisions based on the facts on the ground," says Saeed bin Mohammed Al Ragabani, former UAE Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

"During the Soviet period, we developed the branches of agriculture that Moscow considered necessary for the union (cotton, vine and vegetable growing)," says the same expert. "But too few of those crops were kept in Azerbaijan. For instance, we sent cotton to Russia, which they used to process and produce cloth. Of course, it enabled them to take all the profit. Moscow always wanted Azerbaijan to be dependent in cattle breeding, as well as in other things. Each year, Azerbaijan received an average of 1.2 million tonnes of milk and dairy products and about 35,000 to 40,000 tonnes of meat and meat products from the All-Union Fund. We could not breed our own cattle because we were not allowed to grow the proper feed for them. With the so-called 'planned economy' excuse, Moscow hampered cattle breeding."

The All-Union system and system deficiencies at a national level, coupled with Moscow's meddling, had pushed down ordinary Azerbaijanis. The aforementioned statistic that Azerbaijan's GDP per capita was 63 per cent of the national average in 1970 tells a succinct story.

Another and even more telling figure is that at the same juncture Azerbaijanis consumed far less meat and dairy products than people in other Soviet republics. If an average citizen in the Soviet Union ate 65 kilogrammes of meat each year, for an Azerbaijani the figure was closer to 37 kilogrammes.



Due to systematic failures in the national system, Azerbaijanis consumed 43 per cent less meat and dairy products than the average citizen of the Soviet Union.

This equates to a shocking 43 per cent less than the national figure. Considering that meat is a rich source of nutrients, a rich and important source of essential amino acids, vitamins and minerals, it represents a distinct and an important nutritional element of human nutrition. That Azerbaijanis were receiving so much less in their diet, compared to others in this apparently uniformed and just Communist system, was a failure.

Heydar Aliyev knew that there would be no panacea to Azerbaijan's problems, as they stood in 1969 when he took power. Now for the first time, there was someone in power in Baku with the personal attributes and, just as importantly, the desire, and the political capital, to now seek solutions.

Heydar's election to the Central Committee in April 1971 would only serve to cement a status in Moscow that would be utilised to gain traction for Azerbaijan.

"My father viewed himself by definition as an extension of Azerbaijani influence in Moscow. Perhaps it can be said he had a foot in both camps, Baku and Moscow, and this in effect made him a bridge," says Ilham Aliyev.

Heydar may have been a bridge, but too often he would find himself faced



Cotton was one of Azerbaijan's major crops. Heydar Aliyev won a concession from Moscow that allowed the Republic to have its own ginneries in order to process raw cotton into finished goods.

with a brick wall in Moscow. It had become the nature of the system that tough decisions tended only to happen under duress. A basic, common sense idea, such as allowing Azerbaijan to grow its own feed so it could produce cattle, instead of mindlessly importing its meat via the All-Union Fund, sometimes across tens of thousands of kilometres, would take years to effect.

The cotton industry was another area that was important to Azerbaijan and had been established in the republic since the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Cotton plants of the genus *Gossypium* were planted in vast numbers across Azerbaijan and the crop had been dubbed as 'White Gold'. Yet cotton

production had fallen foul of two quite separate entities — in the shape of Moscow and the crime organisations that blighted Azerbaijan.

Dealing with the latter first, from his War Room, Heydar had plotted the methodology that Azerbaijan would use to cut out the cancer of crime. A massive programme of auditing had uncovered widespread under reporting of production figures, which allowed these crime cabals to skim off a huge proportion of cotton produced. Many corrupt officials had been arrested and a huge number of criminals were imprisoned. The First Secretary constructed a strict system of oversight. By 1977 the crime networks had been driven completely out of cotton, taking away perhaps their biggest source of revenue.

Next on the agenda was Moscow. Under previous administrations the All-Union Fund had been given the green light to systematically rape the republic's cotton harvest. Cotton produced in Azerbaijan was fed cheaply into the All-Union Fund with very low fees paid to producers. Shipped to other republics across the Soviet Union (incredibly Azerbaijan was not permitted to have a major cotton ginnery, a factory where fibres are processed into clothing or other goods), the cotton was processed and made into goods, which were then shipped back to Azerbaijan, via the All-Union Fund, and sold back to Azerbaijan at significantly higher rates. It was institutionalised plunder of Azerbaijan's natural resources.

The common image of a First Secretary of one of the republics was of being the big fish at home, but being a far lesser light in Moscow was perhaps true. Yet it would also be fair to say that he had established a voice. His speedy progress against crime and corruption in Azerbaijan had won him a favourable view at the highest level. Heydar's political capital in Moscow was spent working the system, circumnavigating the brick wall of bureaucracy that normally blocked progress.

The global price of cotton, adjusted for inflation, had been trending downwards since the 1950s. Estimates of average prices (with adjustment for inflation) were more than \$3 per pound in today's dollars in the early 1950s, falling to between \$1 and \$2 in the 1970s. For international producers this was a disaster. The republics that produced cotton had less price pressure. Moscow's planners had decreed that the Soviet Union should be self-sufficient in cotton. Uzbekistan — where they drained the Aral Sea to irrigate millions of acres eventually became the source of a majority of the Soviet Union's



With thousands of new acres of land under the plough, Azerbaijan emerged as the largest grape producer in the Soviet Union.

cotton. Azerbaijan's work with the *Gossypium* would improve dramatically under Heydar. With the republic's crime networks cut out of the equation and rigid accounting in place, production levels jumped. And with demand for cotton growing across the Soviet Union, the First Secretary set his agricultural team a task of getting further acreage under the plough.

Heydar argued in Moscow that Azerbaijan required help to overcome inadequate production incentives, low-quality inputs, deteriorating infrastructure and a crippling centralised setting of prices through a central procurement system. Alexei Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers in Moscow, supported this view. Azerbaijan was finally granted dispensation to open its own ginning mills. This allowed the republic to supply a finished product to the All-Union Fund and therefore obtain a more equitable price for its produce.

As a result, as the 1970s went on, Azerbaijan's cotton production rose. In the 1970s and 1980s the Republic consistently produced around one million tonnes of cotton a year. If Azerbaijan had been independent, it would have ranked high in the top ten of world producers. Svante E Cornell would write in *Azerbaijan Since Independence*:

Aliyev focused on agriculture, and specifically on two major crops: cotton and grapes. Cotton production doubled in the 1970s from the previous decade, and grape production increased several times faster than that, making Azerbaijan the largest producer in the USSR...

“Heydar Aliyev was engaged in a gradual process to roll-back the decisions that were detrimental to Azerbaijan,” says Mehdiyev. “Necessarily he did this within the confines of the system of which we were a part of, but he won a string of concessions from Moscow that impacted heavily.”

Certainly in the agricultural sector, there was a shift during the 1970s. Whereas Moscow continued to exercise powers over so many areas in Azerbaijan, within the parameters of what leeway was possible, Heydar sought to put in place an evolutionary, experimental and bottom-up approach, over the comprehensive top-down process that Moscow preferred. Decision-making was tightly monitored by Moscow, but as First Secretary, Heydar attempted to devolve powers. The plunder of Azerbaijan’s natural resources had, at last, begun to see some systematic correction. Cornell adds that:

...Between 1976 and 1980, Azerbaijan had the highest rate of industrial growth in the Soviet Union, 47 per cent. This economic revival led to higher living standards, if official statistics are to be believed. By the late stages of Aliyev’s tenure, Azerbaijan’s standard of living was still below the Soviet median; nonetheless its per capita income had improved from 62 per cent of the Union average in 1970 to 80 per cent in 1980...

An example of how this was achieved, in part, showed the sometimes random nature of Soviet economic planning. General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev had visited one of the republics, afterwards complaining bitterly to Heydar that he had not been able to sleep as the air conditioner in his room was loud and ineffective. Heydar seized on the opportunity and won from Brezhnev a concession for Azerbaijan to open an air conditioner manufacturing plant. In a handful of years Azerbaijan came to dominate the sector in the Soviet Union — in doing so creating revenue and, more importantly, thousands of jobs directly and indirectly.

As Cornell hints, official figures could not always be relied upon. Mark Sandle notes in *A Short History of Soviet Socialism* that the black market was so pervasive by the 1970s that it represented a parallel economy that was engulfing most of the nation. Ordinary people would go through the motions existing in the official economy, but when they wanted access to goods and services, like new clothes, an apartment space, car parts and even basics like meat, they interacted with a, by now, omnipresent black market network.

While this was illegal in the Soviet Union, and the focus of periodic squeezes from officialdom, the black market was now an established fact. Yet while it served to fill in some of the gaps that the system created, it also had a corrosive effect on society and undermined the legitimacy of the state. In Azerbaijan — as in other parts of the Soviet Union — Heydar would experiment with what would come to be called the ‘grey economy’, government-authorised economic activity that fell well outside of the perimeter of Soviet ethos. In effect, during the early years of the 1970s, Heydar would see the growth of a functioning private sector within the Communist state. Obviously, this was at odds with the doctrine of Lenin, Stalin, *et al.* Yet the decision would have an effect on relieving the burden on many in Azerbaijan. This came in the floral industry, but in other areas also. Baku was now quite prepared to allow its agricultural sector, in the margins of its state-orientated business, to utilise some land and some resources, to grow flowers. Baku would even support their shipment and supply to neighbouring republics.

Such a scheme was, technically, illegal. Yet by the mid-1970s farms across Azerbaijan were engaged in limited private enterprise. Much of the Caucasus region, including the likes of Armenia, Georgia and Dagestan, would provide expanding and welcoming markets for Azerbaijani Iris, Camomile, Orchid, Roses, Chrysanthemums and Carnations. In parallel with official channels, Azerbaijan grew what effectively amounted to a private sector supply chain, a system of organisations, people, technology, activities, information and resources involved in moving flowers from supplier to customer.

There is an inherent difficulty in measuring unofficial activities, meaning that it is impossible to put a figure of the grey economy that Heydar Aliyev allowed in Azerbaijan. Yet anecdotal evidence was that by the late 1970s and into the 1980s the grey economy supply chain was allowing swathes of the population to supplement their receding official incomes. Especially during the worst period of economic malaise, in the 1980s, this was of huge benefit.

Indeed, the grey system was more efficient as independent agents were circumventing artificial price and production controls. In Azerbaijan, people’s entrepreneurial spirit buffered average citizens from the inefficient allocation of resources by central planners. At times, growth in Baku’s shadow economy defied the moribund growth of the official economy.

Raubwirtschaft is a German word relating to economic plunder, a form of economy where the primary goal is to strip the wealth and resources of a



(above) Pictured on a visit to an agricultural project, Heydar Aliyev liberalised the industry and allowed a grey economy to flourish, especially in flower production (right).



country or geographical area. The Colonialist era and especially its ‘Scramble for Africa’ period, the plunder by global powers of the natural resources and assets of their colonies is frequently described as a *raubwirtschaft*. Many historians believe that the economy of the Roman Empire was based on this. In many ways — from an Azerbaijani perspective — Moscow had been engaging in *raubwirtschaft*. Either by accident or design, the system had been utilising the republic’s wealth and resources and returning far too little.

At last Azerbaijan now had begun to push back against the *raubwirtschaft* of the 1950s and 1960s. While the republic would always lag behind in so many ways, she was at last catching up. Having a prominent voice in Moscow had helped. And that voice was about to grow.



General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and (right) KGB boss Yuri Andropov. Brezhnev recognised the economic failings of his nation, but did not deal with them.

Thursdays

He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery.

— *Harold Wilson*

With due regard for the historical achievements of the Soviet people, the CPSU's Central Committee is fully aware of the difficulties, the drawbacks, and the unresolved problems. Ministries and enterprises have yet to fulfil their plans, and yet there are still disproportions in the economy. The reasons include the influence of situational circumstances, flaws in planning and management, softness from a number of party structures and leaders, breaches of discipline," said Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was March 1976 and Brezhnev was addressing the 25th Congress of the CPSU. It was an unusually plain spoken recognition from a General Secretary, more so considering that he had himself been in power for 12 years.

Oscar Wilde had said that: "There is a luxury in self-reproach. When we blame ourselves we feel no one else has a right to blame us." But even when admitting the problems of the Soviet Union after more than a decade under his leadership, Brezhnev gave no indication of being self-effacing. Yet in a public admission of the problem — even if only scratching the surface of the malaise that was apparent — Brezhnev had at least cast light onto the issue.

"In order to buy furniture, a washing machine, a fridge, not to mention a

car, one had to subscribe to a waiting list in a store, or more often at a plant, and be ready to wait for several months or even years,” wrote historian Leonid Katzva. “At the same time, if one somehow fell on the wrong side of the authorities, one could just as easily lose one’s place on the list.”

In 1971, Heydar had been appointed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the *de jure* highest body of the nation. As First Secretary in Azerbaijan, and one of the 141 Central Committee members in Moscow, his stock had risen markedly. Yet Brezhnev had initiated a process of co-opting the ruling elite, boosting the system of patronage and perks that was so costly and degrading of the ideal on which Communism was founded. He rapidly expanded the size and composition of the Central Committee. By 1976 the Central Committee had jumped from the 141 members, when Heydar joined, to a mammoth 287 in 1976.

Above the Central Committee, the inner sanctum of the party, the nucleus of leadership was the Politburo, the executive committee. The Politburo was re-established in 1966 when the 22nd Party Congress amended the Party Charter so that this ruling body would comprise of 15 full members and six to eight ‘candidate’ members, the latter present at all the meetings but with no right to vote.

Across the Soviet Union, on National Holidays and other special days, portraits of Politburo members were hung along main roads. This was the zenith. “The club” consisted of influential party secretaries and key-members of the Soviet government. Members of the Politburo were elected by delegates of the Communist Party Congress, but mostly reflected the opinions and desires of the General Secretary. For more than 70 years — until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 — it was the central policy-making and governing body of both the Communist Party and the state.

Held between February 24 and March 5, 1976, the glitterati of the Communist Party met in Moscow for a grand set-piece meeting, Brezhnev hosting some 4,998 delegates, along with observers from 96 countries. This Congress would provide the usual talking-shop, of long-winded speeches, time consuming procedures and plenty of rhetoric.

Brezhnev, at 69 years old, presided over a Politburo that was dominated by male sexagenarians and septuagenarians. The grey men of the Politburo



Both Harold Wilson (left) in Britain and Gerald Ford (right) in the United States headed administrations that were far younger than the old men of the Soviet Politburo.

had served their time in the system, but now they had become an impediment to its future. As Brezhnev had himself conceded, the Soviet structure had its problems. Solutions would have to come from a new generation.

Yet the 4,998 delegates balked. And Brezhnev stalled. It was a pivotal moment. The Soviet Union was already showing signs of built-in stress within its system. The Congress' collective 'ephebiphobia' (the fear of youth) would have profound consequences. Two new faces would join the Politburo in 1976, and it was indicative that one of those was Dmitriy Ustinov, who was already 62. Also elected, and by far the young pup of the grouping, would be Grigory Romanov, who was only 52. In the wake of this election, the average age of Politburo members, in whose hands actual power in the Soviet Union resided, was 66. By contrast the cabinet of Gerald Ford in the United States averaged 53 years old, and the cabinet of Harold Wilson in Britain averaged 56 years old.

Romanov and Aliyev had many parallels. Born three months apart in 1923, both served in World War Two and they joined the Communist Party within a year of each other. A year after Aliyev held a First Secretary's post, in his case of the Leningrad Region, and Romanov also became a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1971. If Romanov



Heydar Aliyev on a public appearance. In 1976, he became the highest placed Azerbaijani ever in the Soviet system when elected a Candidate Member of the Politburo.

represented the crux of a much-needed generation, a generation that was being allowed 'in' slowly, then Heydar was alongside him. Also at 52, he would be one of the few that defied the leadership's inability to rejuvenate. Heydar was elected as a Candidate for the Politburo. It was the highest that any Azerbaijani had climbed in the Soviet Union.

It takes only a glance at the list of Candidate Members of the Politburo to understand the importance of this position in the hierarchy. Former candidates included Vyacheslav Molotov (who went on to be First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs), Georgy Malenkov (later Chairman of the Council of Ministers) and many others. Indeed, Brezhnev had himself been a 'candidate' on his way to becoming General Secretary. Yet there was a downside. Author Mike Simon writes of the position that:

...being a candidate Politburo member was a rather precarious position in the political intrigue, no less than 16 being executed for 'crimes against the state' and several 'committing suicide'. Although in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s the intrigue continued, candidates who lost favour were often moved into other positions. In this cauldron of ambitious members and candidates, to survive required a steely character with lots of experience and a high intellect.

Sections of a Top Secret CIA study and *modus operandi* of the Politburo were declassified in June 2007. The report was produced to 'dispel some of the aura of mystery which has traditionally shrouded Kremlin decision-making.' This document's introduction states that:

The picture which emerges is of decision-makers who are neither infallible giants nor glorified clerks, but hard-driving, able politicians whose ambitions and diverse responsibilities tend to create cross purposes; in short, human actors within a high-tensioned, but strong and flexible, political system. The study also concludes that General Secretary Brezhnev, as the focal point of the decision-making machinery, wields sufficient authority to play the central role in deciding and expediting important Politburo business, but not to override his fellow oligarchs on policy issues; that the Politburo's structure and procedures actually encouraged its members to lobby on behalf of their own institutional vested interest and private ambitions.



(above) As Candidate Member of the Politburo, Heydar Aliyev was granted an office suite in the Kremlin. (left) Over the course of a typical year he would fly some 200,000 kilometres.

This was the body that Heydar would join as a Candidate. He would not vote for now, as Candidates did not have that privilege. Yet was expected to take on the full array of responsibilities and participate. When in Moscow on official business, as First Secretary he maintained an office in the Azerbaijan Representative Office, a few hundred metres from the Kremlin and kept an apartment in the city. Now he also had an office in the Kremlin and the budget to maintain a full-time support staff. Heydar brought in a small cadre of young, dynamic Azerbaijanis and some Moscow-based officials who had caught his eye.

“In a large gathering, you knew who Heydar Aliyev’s staff were,” says Eduard Shevardnadze with a laugh. “The older members of the Politburo were staffed by men in their 50s. He had 30 year olds, the best and the brightest from Baku. They stood out. But, you know, in my experience, they reflected his agenda and did it effectively.”

Heydar Aliyev may have been a newcomer, but he built round him something of a ‘Think Tank’, a body of people who had ideas, who would focus on a problem and find solutions. He also needed a team that could function without him. He was now a player in the highest body of the Soviet Union, but also remained as First Secretary at home. As such, he was required in Baku just as much as Moscow. Thursdays would be writ large in his diary — the regular day for meetings of the Politburo — and his weeks would be moulded around this, and split between his commitments in both cities. According to some estimates, just on the Baku-Moscow route, Heydar would take up to 50 round trips a year. This equates to nearly 200,000 kilometres a year, or the equivalent of five circumnavigations around the earth.

Policy decision-making within this, the highest body of the Soviet Union, was complex. Under Stalin, the Politburo rubber-stamped and enforced his will. Under Khrushchev and Brezhnev it was far more collective, systematic and efficient. The central event in this process was the weekly Politburo session. A typical cycle would begin with Brezhnev’s receiving and reviewing various memoranda and proposals on Monday for possible inclusion in that week’s agenda. On Tuesday, Brezhnev and his Secretariat would agree on the agenda. On Wednesday, government apparatus would flesh out the agenda. The Politburo would normally meet on Thursday at 3pm. The average length of standard Politburo sessions was about four hours. However, at times of national or international crisis, or when key decisions were debated, this could easily range up to an energy sapping eight hours.

From Friday to Sunday individual Politburo members would go about implementing decisions made in the meeting and drawing up proposals for the next Politburo session. The same CIA report states that:

The custom in recent years has been to consider only a few items at each session. Accordingly, if a member expresses viewpoints which raise new aspects of a problem, he is generally asked to submit them in writing for detailed consideration at a later session. While Politburo

sessions probably are reserved for the most important issues of broad policy, much of the time of the policy-makers between sessions is devoted to coordination of secondary or lesser questions which demand resolution...

...Whatever the scope of the agenda at Politburo meetings, the reported statements of several Soviet officials, including Brezhnev himself, suggest that most sessions are now fairly strictly ordered and conducted so as to avoid digressions or disruptions. Brezhnev, of course, plays the leading role in Politburo sessions. Anatoly Dobrynin, Soviet Ambassador to the United States, stated in February 1969, for example, that the General Secretary presides at Politburo meetings and has the function of summarising the views expressed. The general practice, he added, is to seek a consensus on the issue under discussion, and the General Secretary's 'rulings' usually are accepted, although formal votes are taken occasionally in sessions when there are some disagreements...

As the needs of the day, and the Politburo, demanded, the grouping formed *ad hoc* committees of a small number of its members that functioned with full Politburo authority, and only later reported back to the whole. At various times, Heydar would be co-opted onto commissions on industry, agriculture, the national-economic plan, domestic trade and others. These commissions covered specific policy-making areas and would encompass not only the Politburo, but also a number of specialists from various related departments, meaning that they were pertinent and well equipped to fulfil their briefs.

Whereas Stalin convened the Politburo only twice between 1947 and 1952, under Brezhnev it was organised to ensure coordination among Politburo members, even between sessions, and provided for the participation in decision-making of an ever widening circle of specialists from various agencies. By including the First Secretary from Azerbaijan into the decision-making process, Brezhnev had shown that this was not just for show.

“Of course, he was an outstanding personality. Heydar Aliyev did a lot for Azerbaijan,” says Yevgeny Primakov, later to serve as Chairman of the Council of the Soviet Union, one of two houses of the Soviet Parliament. “He and Eduard Shevardnadze (First Secretary in Georgia) had a private competition. Heydar Aliyev was the winner, so was Azerbaijan, as its leader was better organised and better prepared.

Prominent Soviet figure Yevgeny Primakov spent time with Heydar Aliyev and gained the impression that he was a progressive.



“I met Heydar Aliyev rather frequently. Once, I even enjoyed a break in his country house in Mardakyany for three days. We went to the sea and talked. We had a good conversation about people, the destiny of the state. We talked about the country in general and about Azerbaijan in particular... Heydar Aliyev certainly did not express his ideas on everything openly, but we exchanged our views rather sincerely. He was a progressive man. This craving for progress, combined with tough exactingness. He possessed democratic principles, on the one hand, but understanding of the need for strict order, on the other. These contrasting beliefs were mixed up in him.”

Having recognised the deficiencies of the system he tried to overhaul in Azerbaijan, Heydar appears to have emerged with ideas as to the structural changes that were needed for the whole. If this included any thoughts of democracy, this remained firmly in the background. Instead, he would influence events in Moscow.

Yevgeniy Chazov, Chief of the Fourth Directorate of the Soviet Ministry of Health and widely recognised as personal physician to most of the senior Soviet leaders during this period, wrote in his autobiography *Health and Power: Memoirs of the ‘Kremlin Doctor’* that Brezhnev would often meet Heydar at his home, in addition to frequent meetings in the Kremlin. Heydar had the ear of the General Secretary, and he would use this to prescribe the same medicine as he continued to provide in Baku — change.

“You would not believe how controversial it was when he said something



(above) Playing catch up with the rest of the nation, Baku and Azerbaijan had begun to develop rapidly during the 1970s, but if Heydar Aliyev had ideas to be too radical in his approach the fate of Czechoslovakia's Alexander Dubcek (left) was a reminder of the dangers.

like: 'managers at production plants are protected from international competition, so we have no competition. Because of this their thinking is not geared to consumer choice, and they have no notion of what is in demand, and what is not. Rather than consumers, bureaucrats were deciding what was to be manufactured. Our planners could not keep up with changing needs.' But this was not something that was said openly in the Politburo, or in private meetings with Brezhnev," says Eduard Shevardnadze.

Yet it was something that was evidenced across the Soviet Union in the

form of metal goods rusting away at railway sidings, or in state shops, where shelves groaned with summer clothes in winter time, and then the opposite situation six months later. Cynicism was rife.

“My father said that a massive effort across the Soviet Union in education had created a skilled work force that was being asked to enter an employment market that did not challenge them, instead it demoralised them,” says Ilham Aliyev. “He spoke out on this, despite the risks at that time.”

The risks were tangible and no secret. Czechoslovakia’s Communist leader Alexander Dubcek, had talked of creating socialism with a human face. This would lead to the Prague Spring and the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact rolling into Prague in August 1968. Life as a reformer at any level of the Soviet government played to a backdrop of Dubcek’s fall from grace, and the shadow of being labelled a dissident. The penalties for loose talk could range from disgrace, to the death penalty.

Heydar had arguably risen to the fringes of the Politburo through his reformist successes in Azerbaijan, successes that had seen him win the ear of the General Secretary. Yet even in such exalted company there was a danger of overreach. Walking that fine line between being viewed as a reformer, or just an agitator, was now his task.



Leonid Brezhnev presents Heydar Aliyev with the medal of Hero of Socialist Labour, one of the highest civilian honours in the country.

Metastasising of the Malaise

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.

— Martin Luther King, Jr

Today we honour Heydar Aliyevich Aliyev,” said the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. “For in his service to our country he has exemplified everything we look for in a comrade, a man who cares for the people...”

It was August 24, 1979. Heydar and much of the Politburo were assembled at the Kremlin. A day earlier, during a meeting of the body, the grouping had voted unanimously to honour the 57 year old Azerbaijani. The honorary title of *Hero of Socialist Labour* was the highest decree of distinction awarded for exceptional achievements in the development of agriculture, transportation, trade, science, culture or technology; ‘to the might and glory of the Soviet Union’. The Hero of Socialist Labour also received the Order of Lenin, and certificate from the Presidium of the Supreme Council. It also came with practical perks, such as free bus transportation and priority on housing lists, underlining the genuine Communist elements of this title.

The first recipient of Hero of Socialist Labour was Josef Stalin in 1939. It was said he never wore the medal, as he did not feel worthy. Neither did he utilise the transportation or housing privileges afforded him.

As of 1991 at the dissolution of the Soviet Union, over 20,000 people had



Heydar Aliyev's star was in the ascendancy under Leonid Brezhnev.

been awarded the title, a meagre 0.000682 per cent of the population. Other famous figures to have been bestowed the medal included Mikhail Kalashnikov, inventor of the AK-47 assault rifle that bears his name, and famed singer Lyudmila Zykina.

The award Gold Star 'Sickle and Hammer' motif was made of gold with the suspension of gold-covered silver, the five-pointed star weighing 15.25 grams. Today antique collectors worldwide offer high prices for these very rare medals. On August 24, 1979, a decree issued by the Politburo stated that:

For great organisational and political mobilisation on behalf of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. For working to ensure the successful implementation of the 25th Congress of the Party. For improving the efficiency of social production in the national economy, the annual over-fulfilment of development. For meeting Socialist obligations to deliver to the State all agricultural output targets. On that basis it has been decided that the Candidate Member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, has been decreed by the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR as a recipient of the Order of Lenin, and the Gold Medal 'Hammer and Sickle' by assigning to him the title of Hero of Socialist Labour.

That evening, Brezhnev, other senior officials and several hundred party figures gathered in the Georgievsky reception hall at the Kremlin to honour a man already considered the highest ranking Azerbaijani ever in the Soviet Union. A black tie reception was followed by a presentation. After pinning the honour to Heydar's chest, the General Secretary was reported to comment that in presenting the Hero of Socialist Labour, this emphasised the great work and leadership qualities he had shown. He said: "You, Heydar Aliyev, in the ten years of leadership of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, have consistently demonstrated the qualities of a true Communist leader. You have done a great job. As a result we have seen our comrades in Azerbaijan consistently produce excellent results. Heydar Aliyev you have eliminated the problems that afflicted Azerbaijan and worked to improve the lives of people within your republic, and the Soviet Union as a whole. For your numerous achievements, this is a worthy reward."

Over the preceding 42 months, Heydar had gone from a new Candidate Member of the Soviet Politburo with a reputation as a safe pair of hands, to an acknowledged force within the group. It was not by accident. States his then bodyguard: "I recall the guards at the Kremlin always being surprised to see him leaving his offices at 10, or 11 at night. They told me it was unusual, as most of the old men of Politburo, Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev included, arrived at the office mid-morning and departed in mid-afternoon."

Heydar was a spry 57 years old in 1979. By comparison Brezhnev was 73. Yuri Andropov, Chairman of the State Committee for State Security, was 65. Alexei Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, was 75. Yet according to those who knew him intimately this had more to do with personal ethics than age.

"With Heydar Aliyev it was not about age," says Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh. "In his Moscow days he gained a reputation for his work ethic. Yet this was in his DNA. When he became President of an independent Azerbaijan in 1993 he was 70 years old. Heydar Aliyev served, throughout his life, in positions of responsibility, where his work directly affected the lives of tens of millions of people. Because of that he would never have countenanced being half-hearted."

When Heydar was being feted in Moscow for his successes, it was both as a member of the inner-circle of the system and as arguably the most





The leaders of the Communist Party and Supreme Soviet on February 1, 1978. Leonid Brezhnev is at the centre of the front row. Heydar Aliyev is fourth left on the third row.

progressive First Secretary and successful among the 15 republics that comprised the nation.

“Azerbaijan had changed under him. After stalling during the early period of the Soviet Union, we were by now seeing economic growth rates in excess of national figures. This impacted directly on people’s lives,” says Fatma Abdullazade, head of the Department of Humanitarian Policy Issues of the Presidential Administration.

Beyond official figures, Heydar’s ‘grey economy’ had also impacted, as had his success in breaking the back of once deeply pervading crime syndicates. The Soviet Politburo may have paid less attention to the rising standard of living in Azerbaijan than to what Azerbaijan was doing for the Soviet Union. Production was flat lining before his appointment as First Secretary. Nearly a decade later the per capita GDP of the Soviet Union in 1980 was 13,300 Roubles. In Azerbaijan this stood at 19,500 Roubles. Just two and a half per cent of the population of the Soviet Union lived in Azerbaijan. Yet by the beginning of the 1980s, some 70 per cent of the oilfield units production, 10.5 per cent of welding equipment, more than a third of wine production, 100 per cent of domestic air conditioning systems, nearly six per cent of refrigerators, a shade under ten per cent of cotton and 12 per cent of raw silk were among the republic’s input into the union.

Across the nation, but particularly in Russia and Ukraine, state enterprises were operating or utilising raw materials derived from Azerbaijan. This had always been the case, but the Heydar-led government had been successful in negotiating a coherent price for produce. The All-Union Fund’s once one-sided relationship with Azerbaijan had shifted to a more equitable arrangement.

The success of Azerbaijan had cast Heydar as a reformer, yet in burnishing his traditionalist, conservative credentials he was able to move with relative ease between all the many hues that represented the Politburo. Heydar would be one of the few who could be said to sit in both camps. Nowhere was this more important than in the issue of succession. Brezhnev had battled heart disease, leukaemia, jaw cancer, emphysema and circulatory disease. He suffered a stroke in May 1982 from which few expected he would recover.

While the government denied rumours of the General Secretary’s ill health, behind the scenes in the Kremlin there was white-hot jockeying for position.



Yuri Andropov and Mikhail Gorbachev led the conservative and reformist wings of the Soviet Politburo.

Two distinct groups coalesced. Seen as the ‘KGB candidate’ was Yuri Andropov. So-called ‘regime liberals’ seemed to rally around the young Mikhail Gorbachev.

At 7.15pm on November 10, 1982, television channels across the Soviet Union suddenly went off schedule. From Moscow, Central Television replaced its regular programming with a dour documentary on Lenin. On *Vremya*, the Soviet Union’s state television newscast, the hosts wore sombre clothes.

Within hours, the ever-active rumour mill went into overdrive. Most chatter was that Andrei Kirilenko, First Secretary of the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Party Committee, had died. In typical Soviet-style the confusing picture of events and the swirling rumour mill would continue for nearly 15 hours. At 11am Moscow time, veteran newsreader Igor Kirillov appeared on television to tearfully announce that Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was dead. Brezhnev had served as General Secretary for 18 long years. His death would spark a generational change in the Soviet leadership, heralding the exit from the scene of the so-called ‘Class of 1937’ — the leaders that emerged following the Stalin’s terrible purges — and ruled the country for decades thereafter.



Yuri Andropov won the General Secretary's position in November 1982. He was considered a conservative, but was more inclined to meet the Soviet Union's economic challenges than his predecessor.

On November 11, Heydar was present at a meeting of the Politburo called to elect a chairman of the committee in charge of arranging, managing and preparing Brezhnev's funeral. In the opaque world of Soviet politics, even something as seemingly mundane as this task was heavy with symbolism. Heydar was a Candidate Member and therefore not accorded a vote, but nevertheless everyone in the room would influence the decision.

Andropov won this poll, would organise the funeral and, therefore, became widely seen as General Secretary-designate. Momentum was now with him.

A day later, on November 12, 1982, Andropov was confirmed in the position. Even his erstwhile rival for the position, Gorbachev, recognised in his memoirs that the victor; "...was a brilliant and large personality, generously endowed with gifts by nature and a true intellectual..." The former head of the KGB may have reached the pinnacle of the pyramid, but was also being handed a poisoned chalice. The economy, perilously dependent on commodity exports, was stagnating. The political system was ossified, corruption rampant and public cynicism endemic. The fundamental issue facing him was how to carry out essential reforms when these reforms also threatened the existing elite's continued dominance.

Andropov, of course, had been one of the first in Moscow to take note of the young KGB General in Baku. As Chairman of the State Committee for

Made a full member of the Soviet Politburo, Heydar Aliyev and his family would be forced to give up Baku and live full-time in Moscow. They spurned apartments in the Kremlin for a private home in the city.



State Security, Andropov had been keen on Heydar and been one of those who had seen him elevated in Azerbaijan, eventually to First Secretary.

Heydar had forged a reputation as a reformer. He was someone who Andropov could rely on as he faced up to the herculean challenge of attempting to fundamentally overhaul a moribund national system, while maintaining a strategic balance.

While the methodology was not altogether clear, what was apparent was a need for the Politburo to morph somewhat. In November 1982, long-time member Andrei Kirilenko retired for reasons of health. Octogenarian Arvid Pelshe was also set to stand aside amid controversy as to whether he was already dead. On November 22, the full Central Committee met to rubber-stamp the reshuffled Politburo in Andropov's image. One of those earmarked for a step up was Heydar. The same day he was confirmed as a Full Member.

That evening Heydar, Zarifa, Sevil and Ilham went for dinner to celebrate. As they passed through the streets that cold, dark evening in Moscow it was gently snowing. Passers-by shuffled about their business, dressed in thick clothing to keep out the chill. Moscow always looks somewhat bedraggled in winter, but amid the funk of the Soviet Union at that time it was filled with people trying to get by. By contrast, the Aliyevs swept by in their black Zil car on their way to a restaurant.

“Even now I can see my father looking out of the window. We were happy. But even in that moment he was not content. He saw what was around him,” says Ilham Aliyev.

It was clear what Andropov wanted and why Heydar had been promoted to the highest body in the Soviet Union. Azerbaijan was no paradise, not many places were in the almost 22.5 million square kilometres of the nation. But under Heydar, Azerbaijan had fared significantly better than most other corners of the union. His gentle reformist agenda, while working within the system, had shaped a republic that worked better for its millions of citizens and improved their lives, while also allowing Azerbaijan to contribute better to the wider entity. Facing a myriad of issues, Andropov needed Heydar to bring some of that to a wider audience. Almost over 250 million people of the Soviet Union were seeing a broad drop in their living standards. The Soviet Union was saddled with fundamental problems within its system.

On November 24, 1982, Andropov went a stage further. He appointed Heydar to the post of First Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, under the premiership of Nikolai Ryzhkov, who had taken over from Alexei Kosygin. It was a key position in government with previous office holders that included globally known figures such as Vyacheslav Molotov, Nikolai Bulganin and Lavrentiy Beria.

With this position came a grace-and-favour home within the walls of the Kremlin, although this was a benefit that Heydar would mostly shun. He believed that too many people became isolated within the high walls of the Kremlin, and this made them lose touch. Thomas Carlyle wrote that: ‘Isolation is the sum total of wretchedness to a man.’ Inside the gilded cage of the Kremlin, with its servants, lavish sense of life and nothing lacking, it was easy to forget that beyond its walls, people were gradually being worn down by the deficiencies of the system.

“My father believed that if you could not look your people in the eye knowing that you had done your best, and that if you could not understand them, you could not possibly be their leader,” says Ilham Aliyev. “He always sought to remain connected.”

At the very summit of the Soviet Union, the cadre of leaders there had become sheltered from life, as they were isolated from everyday struggles being in the top one per cent of the population. Across his 18 years as General



(above) Heydar Aliyev believed that the high walls of the Kremlin served to cut off the Soviet Union's leaders from the people they were there to serve. (right) The Kremlin would serve as his workplace, but not his home.



Secretary, Brezhnev for one had become gradually more remote from the millions of people who relied upon him. The Aliyevs stayed in the plush First Deputy Premier's residence often, but maintained a home in Moscow, where they spent most of their nights.

The First Deputy Premier had responsibility for coordinating the activities of ministries and state committees and other bodies reporting to the Council of Ministers. First Deputy Premiers, along with the Premier and the Deputy Premiers would comprise the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. Yet it was a position that brought with it frustrations. When Kosygin had resigned



Andrei Gromyko (left) was an ally of Heydar Aliyev, but the conservative Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nikolai Tikhonov (right), forged a directionless Five-Year Plan.

in 1980, Nikolai Tikhonov, at the age of 75, was elected Chairman of the Council of Ministers. He was now 77 years old, and a dogmatic figure, who refrained from reforming the economy despite all evidence showing it was stagnating. He was the architect of the country's apathetic Eleventh Five-Year Plan which ran from 1981 to 1985. While admitting publicly that agriculture was not producing enough grain, economic 'shortcomings' and acknowledged a worsening 'food problem' that faced people, Tikhonov advocated more of the same. The Era of Stagnation, which had started under Brezhnev, would be allowed by Andropov to metastasise via a directionless Tikhonov Five-Year Plan.

At 77, Tikhonov was a party grandee. The 59 year old Heydar was a relative newcomer and, despite his credentials, was a whippersnapper by comparison. Their 18-year age difference was more of a chasm. Purposely or not, Andropov had forged a government headed by a veteran who, in the words of Margaret Thatcher of the same decade, was "not for turning", working alongside a deputy known to champion a reform agenda.

The other First Deputy Premier during this period was Ivan Arkhipov, a likeable yet not hard-nosed character and, in March the following year, a third First Deputy Premier was appointed in the form of Andrei Gromyko. Gromyko

was a genuine statesman who was simultaneously serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs. In the West he was given the nickname 'Mr. Nyet' (Mr. No). A strong personality, Gromyko was well travelled and understood the need for an evolution in the Soviet Union. But nevertheless he was also burdened by a demanding foreign affairs portfolio and the 'Mr. Nyet' character was rarely seen in debates with Tikhonov.

In the last months of 1982, Heydar had reached the very highest echelon of power in the Soviet Union. His erstwhile mentor from the KGB was now installed as General Secretary. In theory, the moment now belonged to the 59 year old Azerbaijani. His mandate was change. He had a proven record of delivery. Instead, however, this would prove to be the beginning of one of the most frustrating periods in his life.



As First Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, Heydar Aliyev's moderniser credentials were stifled in a Conservative-led administration.

The ‘Andropov Model’

Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do...
but how much love we put in that action.

— *Mother Teresa*

Being voted into the Politburo and then appointed as First Deputy Premier in late 1982, would cap a remarkable journey for the son of a poor railwayman and former oiler from Nakhchivan. In Azerbaijan, where as First Secretary he had presided over a minor renaissance, Heydar was considered with a degree of reverence.

“It was no secret that things had changed for the better under him,” says Vafa Guluzade, who would serve as one of Heydar’s foreign policy advisors. “In Azerbaijan we knew what we had, and we knew the challenges that people faced elsewhere.”

More than 13 years earlier, in July 1969, Heydar had inherited a republic in worrying decline. Almost half a century later Barack Obama would comment that: “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

But the offices that he now held, especially in the Politburo and as First Deputy Premier, did not allow for a First Secretary’s workload and there was no possibility to keep one foot in Azerbaijan. Moscow was an all-consuming mistress.

On December 3, 1982, Andropov signed a decree appointing his successor as First Secretary of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan Communist Party. This would end an unbroken stretch of 4,891 days in which Heydar had sought to be the aforementioned agent of change.

Kamran Bagirov would replace him in Baku. He was a man whom Heydar would have a troubled relationship with. As First Deputy Premier, he would mostly be prevented from direct involvement in Azerbaijan's internal affairs. Bagirov's near six-year reign would prove divisive. He failed to act as Armenia successfully dragged Nagorno-Karabakh back onto the agenda and engage in a low-grade conflict. The war on crime effectively ended and the corrosive creep of corruption began again.

For the Aliyev family, 1977 represented a watershed. Until that point Zarifa, Sevil and Ilham had spent most of their lives in Baku. In 1977, Ilham had joined the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) and Sevil began a postgraduate course at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. Ilham's biography states:

In the summer of 1977, 16 year old Ilham arrived at Sheremetyevo Airport. The drive along Leningrad Highway into the city, to the family's Politburo home, was one he had taken often in the past. But Baku had remained home and visits to Moscow relatively fleeting. This time there was an air of permanence. He had come to study. Ilham's decision to enter MGIMO was not unusual for an aspiring son of one of Moscow's grandees. Heydar wanted to groom his son for a future within the Soviet system. What was unusual was the way he would go about this. He had achieved grades sufficient to jump from Baku to Moscow a few years ahead of what was considered 'normal'. He would join the facility in his teens, when most of those who would study around him had turned 20 or more. He had, therefore, set himself a stern challenge. Jumping ahead a number of years, at this stage of personal development, would stretch his abilities.

Says Ilham Aliyev: "My upbringing was not greatly different in nature to that of others in Azerbaijan," he says. "My father did not like to see great distinctions between us and others. My upbringing was normal. I had friends from school, drawn from families at every level of society and there was no special treatment."

Ilham Aliyev joined the prestigious Moscow State Institute of International Relations in 1977.



In Moscow, Heydar and Zarifa had guarded against the pitfalls that had befallen so many 'Politburo brats'. Perhaps the most famous Politburo child was Svetlana Alliluyeva, daughter of Joseph Stalin, who provoked worldwide headlines by defecting to the United States. Yet although the press in the Soviet Union was pliant, the children of many senior officials still managed to scandalise. Leonid Brezhnev's son Yuri was a legendary drunk and Yuri's sister Galina had a reputation for promiscuity. And bawdy behaviour was far from confined to the General Secretary. In Moscow, many of the children of Politburo members partied together.

"It was not uncommon for the sons and daughters of people well placed in the system to throw their weight around, to hide behind their names and not engage at all," says Alexander Gurnov, a leading journalist at Russia's English-language television, *Russia Today*, who studied at MGIMO during the mid-1970s alongside Ilham Aliyev. "This sort of person was the bane of the university. They were disruptive and they brought nothing to the table."

Heydar and Zarifa expected more. And if Heydar was often burdened with a great deal of work, in the family home Zarifa was omnipresent in pursuing that line. When it came to MGIMO, Heydar may have served as First Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, but he personally maintained a distant yet consistent eye on both Sevil's and Ilham's studies.

Life for the Deputy Prime Minister, coupled with the weekly cycle of Politburo Thursday's and the work connected with that, meant that the early

1980s would prove demanding. Heydar rarely ventured into the foreign policy arena, in public, but the whole Politburo was drawn into the debate and the debilitating war in Afghanistan costing billions of Rubles and tens of thousands of lives. It had been Brezhnev's venture that would haunt the three General Secretaries who followed him into power. Due to the interminable nature of the war, the conflict in Afghanistan has sometimes been referred to as the Soviet Union's Vietnam.

Beyond his death, Brezhnev's folly split the Politburo. Increasingly debate polarised the forum, broadly older members being more hawkish. The US viewed Afghanistan as a Cold War struggle, and the CIA provided assistance to anti-Soviet forces through the Pakistani Intelligence Services. Cold War thinking prevailed with a majority on the Politburo.

Yet while the younger element could not be called doves, they were more pragmatic. The war was causing central government to bleed money and, while no one wished to see a proxy-war go the way of America, the strategic value of propping up a puppet government in Kabul was negligible by contrast. One February 1987 paper produced for the CIA titled *The Cost of Soviet Involvement in Afghanistan* noted:

...We estimate that from their initial invasion in December 1979 through 1986, the Soviets spent around 15 billion Roubles on the conduct of the war... Much of the rising cost of the war is traceable to increases in Soviet air operations and the resulting higher aircraft losses. During 1984 and 1985 the Soviets have lost more than 300 aircraft from all causes.

Above this there was the human cost. By the time the Soviet Union withdrew with a bloody nose almost 15,000 troops had perished, along with 18,000 Afghan forces and up to 100,000 Mujahideen. It is estimated that up to two million Afghans were killed and five million made refugees.

Minutes from a meeting of the Politburo on March 17, 1979, show that Andropov was one of those who played a dominant role in the decision to invade Afghanistan. By 1983 Heydar was considered one of the pragmatic voices in Politburo, recognising that the financial and human cost was not helping to deal with the economic malaise. Yet Andropov remained committed and took much of the Politburo along with him.

Anti-Soviet warrior puts his army on the road to peace

"What I lived in two years in Afghanistan I could not have lived in a hundred years elsewhere," said Osama Bin Laden

281

co-opted onto a committee which studied the Soviet submarine K-431's reactor accident, named by *TIME* Magazine as one of the world's worst nuclear disasters. In 1984, Andropov positioned him in a Politburo committee that began broad work on the Soviet Union's Twelfth Five-Year Plan.

Author Robert Vincent Daniels summarised in *Russia's Transformation: Snapshots of a Crumbling System* that the hallmark of the Brezhnev era was the status quo, which in turn led to the development of a great paradox that "the contradictions of what it was and what it could be became obvious". Brezhnev's Era of Stagnation was dragged into the 1980s by a moribund Eleventh Five-Year Plan. Premier Nikolai Tikhonov was no innovator. Perhaps the most famous elements of the brief Andropov-Tikhonov era was the initiation of widespread daytime raids on cinemas across the Soviet Union to check that patrons were not skipping work. Under this pair, the government also initiated a system of taking sick days out of vacation time in order to tackle the growing problem of absenteeism, particularly through alcohol abuse, which was becoming prevalent. These two initiatives illustrate how far morale had fallen among ordinary people.

Something had to change. Olga Kryshchanovskaya, director of the Institute of Applied Politics, Russian Academy of Sciences articulated Andropov's vision in a 2007 interview, stating: "Andropov thought that the Communist Party had to keep power in its hands and to conduct an economic liberalisation. This was the path China followed. For people in the security services, China is the ideal model. They see this as the correct course. They think that Boris Yeltsin went along the wrong path, as did Gorbachev."

Today it is called the 'China model', defined by the *New York Times* on May 12, 2012, as 'a vaguely defined combination of authoritarian politics and state-guided capitalism'. But it could well have been called the 'Andropov Model' if circumstances had been different. In February 1983, Andropov suffered total renal failure and that same year entered the Central Clinical Hospital in western Moscow, where he would spend the remainder of his life. Heydar would visit the General Secretary, who for a time was something of a mentor to him. Their conversations also looked forward, to the changes that both foresaw if the Soviet Union was to recover from its precarious position at that time.

Yet Andropov was no fool. He understood that the Central Clinical Hospital



Work place absenteeism grew so overwhelming that Soviet authorities instigated daytime raids of cinemas in order to catch work-shy fops.

would be his final home. On February 9, 1984, Andropov died. His 455-day reign as General Secretary had been brief, hardly enough to establish direction. On February 14, Heydar participated in Andropov's funeral. Britain's *ITN* reported that:

Thousands of people filled Red Square on February 14 for the funeral of Soviet President Yuri Andropov... Andropov's body, which had lain in state for four days, was brought from the Hall of Columns to Lenin's Mausoleum in Red Square on a gun carriage preceded by officers who carried wreaths and red cushions bearing Andropov's medals. The funeral cortege moved slowly along the one kilometre journey as the military band played Chopin's Funeral March. Atop the Lenin Mausoleum, new Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko delivered the first of six funeral orations. Chernenko's delivery was hesitant and unclear at times. Observers reported that the 72 year old leader fully looked his age.

Heydar served as a pallbearer for Andropov's coffin, then, along with other Politburo members, stood to attention around the coffin, as an artillery salute was fired. The *ITN* report, while illustrating the death of one General Secretary, also touched on the accession of another. By the time that Andropov was being

buried, Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko had been selected as the fifth General Secretary of the Communist Party. He had spent his whole lifetime aiming for the top position. As head of the Communist Party's propaganda department in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, Chernenko met and gained the confidence of Brezhnev, who would be his mentor. He rose to become Candidate Member of the Politburo in 1977 and then a full member one year later.

In the days after Andropov's death, the Politburo had again assembled in the Kremlin seeking quick consensus on a replacement. Some 15 months earlier, when Brezhnev passed, Gorbachev had viewed himself as the candidate of the reform wing, yet conservative support had congealed around Andropov, who went on to overcome him in a straight up-and-down vote.

Gorbachev had again positioned himself in the wake of Andropov's death, reportedly with Andropov having instructed that he should succeed him. Despite this Politburo member Yegor Ligachev wrote in his memoirs that Chernenko was elected General Secretary with little opposition, notwithstanding, the fact that the 73 year old was in ill health. Even at Andropov's funeral he struggled to read the eulogy, coughed repeatedly and sweated profusely while appearing ghostly white in complexion.

Chernenko was a Brezhnevite. At a time when the reformist wing of the Politburo — Heydar included — was pursuing an 'Andropov Model', the Conservatives sought to turn the clock back, and in doing so elected a General Secretary also burdened by sickness. Just to complete their victory, the Conservatives sought to humiliate Gorbachev, denying him the automatic right (as nominal number two in the hierarchy) to head Politburo meetings in the absence of Chernenko. This would be often due to his declining health. Instead he would require a personal invitation from the General Secretary. Nikolai Ryzhkov wrote in his autobiography that 'every Thursday morning he (Gorbachev) would sit in his office like a little orphan — I would often be present at this sad procedure — nervously awaiting a telephone call from the sick Chernenko: Would he come to the Politburo himself or would he ask Gorbachev to stand in for him again?'

The election of Chernenko was reckless. It was also the last stand of a discredited conservative wing. Andropov, while himself no champion of reform, was engaging with Gorbachev, Heydar and others in a process that could have preceded the China model. Ultimately, because of this, instead of



(above) Mikhail Gorbachev saw himself as the natural successor to Yuri Andropov. (right) Despite the need for a new generation, the ageing Politburo elected one of its old guard in the form of Konstantin Chernenko.



a gradual change, the inevitable revision in the Soviet Union would come later as an agent of war, poverty, social upheaval and other malaise. Viewed through the prism of what would occur, Chernenko's supporters were feckless.



Zarifa Aliyeva had married Heydar Aliyev in 1954. They were inseparable until her death from cancer in 1985.

Zarifa

Pale Death with impartial tread beats at the poor man's
cottage door and at the palaces of kings.

— Horace

Behind every great man there is a great woman. Both a cliché and truism. The first known printed citation of this phrase appeared in a Texas newspaper *The Port Arthur News*, in February 1946. A writer for the newspaper recorded American football player Meryll Frost receiving an award, stating:

As he received his trophy, the plucky quarterback unfolded the story of how he 'came back'. He said; "They say behind every great man there's a woman. While I'm not a great man, there's a great woman behind me."

Frost's quote indicates that the phrase was already in common usage well before it was adopted as a feminist slogan. Today the phrase is considered something of a cliché. It is a 21st century 'in' word — 'Super wife' — a woman who juggles her professional career with those of a mother, wife and public figure. But when Zarifa Aliyeva was married to Heydar Aliyev in 1954 she considered it quite natural to be a mother, a doctor, research professor and support her husband in his career. A year after graduation Zarifa married Heydar, a dashing young KGB officer, who had ignored his superiors' warnings that it could affect his career, to marry the girl with whom he had fallen in love. She maintained her life as wife, doctor and academic, and

continued her personal development through a 1950 post-graduate degree specialising in the treatment of trachoma.

Up to 1967, Zarifa worked in a scientific capacity at the Ophthalmology Research Institute and that year became a lecturer in the Eye Diseases Department in the Azerbaijan State Doctors Improvement Institute. The family had now come full circle, the institute having already been named after her father Aziz Aliyev, who had led the department during the last years of his life.

Zarifa wrote and published 12 manuals and was author of some 150 scientific works covering her research at the Ophthalmology Department at the Azerbaijan State Doctors Improvement Institute. She was awarded a number of honours for her work including the most important prize in Soviet ophthalmology, presented by the Academy of Medical Sciences of USSR. In 1983 she was elected 'Academician of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan for her services and a lifetime of research'.

By the time of the Academy of Sciences honour, however, she had reluctantly left Baku behind and was living in Moscow with her family. From 1977 onwards, daughter Sevil and son Ilham were studying in the Soviet capital. Heydar was on an upward trajectory in the Soviet pyramid.

Reluctantly was an apt word. For while Moscow was the natural home of the family, her spiritual home would always be Azerbaijan. Moscow represented something alien. The higher echelons of the system had something of Nero about it, the Emperor who infamously 'fiddled while Rome burned'. Especially in the 1980s, while the population at large suffered from grim economic stagnation, the elite of the establishment partied.

In the centre of Moscow there were restaurants, nightclubs and bars at the heart of a lively social scene. The Aliyevs mostly spurned this. The Kremlin had its own life. Most evenings there was something going on; receptions, official dinners or presentations. While not always mandatory, quite often attendance was simply expected. Many of Heydar's evenings each week were taken up with official socialising and spouses were frequently expected to attend.

"My mother enjoyed the theatre, or the opera, or some form of arts. This

While supporting her husband during his rise within the Soviet pyramid, Zarifa Aliyeva was also one of the nation's premier ophthalmologists.



is what interested her,” says Ilham Aliyev. “Being part of the social set that surrounded power in Moscow never appealed to her.”

As the official social scene demanded, she would participate in order to partner Heydar. Yet as an academic, and having her own opinions, Zarifa found having to engage in small talk mindless. Anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski coined the term ‘phatic communication’, meaning communication whose only reason is to perform a social task, as opposed to conveying information.

Social restrictions aside, the family had settled well in Moscow and, as Heydar proceeded up the Soviet ladder, they prospered. By 1984, 25 year old Ilham had emerged as a lecturer at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations. Sevil was at the Institute of Orientalism of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. While running her household, Zarifa continued to research and write on ophthalmological subjects. She served on the Presidium of the All-Union Ophthalmologists Society and the editorial board of *Ophthalmology Bulletin* magazine in Moscow. She was also a board member of the Peace Protection Committee, which was responsible for coordinating peace movements throughout the Soviet Union.

But the tranquillity enjoyed by the family was about to be broken. In 1984, Zarifa was diagnosed with cancer. Like any family, anywhere in the world. It was news that was shattering. “We were sent into a downward spiral,” says Ilham. “We could not believe what was happening to us. We went through the



(above) The Aliyevs (l-r) Ilham, Zarifa, Heydar and Sevil. (left) Heydar and Zarifa pose with a new grandchild.

full range of emotions as we came to terms. My mother's illness hit my father particularly hard."

Heydar had nothing to prove when it came to Zarifa. While some gained power and then enthusiastically philandered their way through Moscow, even Heydar's most vociferous opponents never lay any such charge against him, even as a widower. The love that had propelled them together in the 1950s had grown into a partnership that allowed Zarifa to pursue her own career while running a home and providing support to a man who was now one of

the most powerful in a nation that spanned one sixth of the surface of the planet.

“They were best friends. This is what I saw,” says Leonid Kravchuk, later President of Ukraine, who was third in the leadership of Ukraine prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Yet Zarifa was no wallflower. She would fight the disease.

Heydar’s angst over his wife and best friend came to the backdrop of a challenging time in Moscow. The death of Andropov had brought in a more conservative approach to planning the upcoming Twelfth Five-Year Plan. Heydar was one of a handful of permanent members serving on a Politburo sub-committee that was overseeing direction and planning. As a starting point, Heydar and his colleagues had set themselves ambitious targets for the five years: An average growth rate in national income of around four per cent yearly, achieved with increases in labour productivity, boosting agricultural output, development of natural resources, investment in infrastructure and technology, development of growth in nuclear power capacity and others.

With those targets in mind, which were ambitious given the slump that marked the current Five-Year Plan, the group began with a white sheet of paper. If it was a commendable effort that was underway, vital to the survival of the nation in fact, then there was surprisingly little goodwill around in the Kremlin in 1984. Chernenko was a relic of the Brezhnev era. Dmitriy Ustinov, influential Minister of Defence until his death in December 1984, cared only for his military complex. Premier Tikhonov moved within this conservative clique. Belief in the ‘Andropov Model’ had all but evaporated.

Despite the reluctance of seniors around them, the Twelfth Five-Year Plan sub-committee of the Soviet Politburo was being called upon to come up with national solutions across an area of 11 time zones, five climate zones and some 10,000 kilometres from east to west.

To this backdrop, Heydar continued to serve within the demanding weekly cycle of the Politburo and as First Deputy to Tikhonov. As far as possible, during the second half of 1984 Heydar remained in Moscow and next to Zarifa. She responded well to chemotherapy, although it is a tough treatment where the patient literally wastes away, their body under attack by both the

cancerous growth and the cytotoxic chemical agents used to kill the growth.

By New Year 1985, Zarifa had returned home. Despite her own efforts, and what was probably the best medical care available in the Soviet Union at the time, the cancer was back and it was aggressive. She was 60 years old and had no more fight in her. Palliative care was all that was now left. Her grief-stricken children and husband gathered around her for her final months.

“She was stoic over everything. Instead of being sorry for herself, I think she helped us come to terms with the situation rather than the other way around,” says Ilham.

Heydar, often called a strongman, was never one to hide his emotions. He once cried publicly at the fate of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh. When appropriate and genuine, he was willing to let people see how he felt. At home now he shared painful moments of utter emotional hopelessness with his children.

“I felt he never, ever came to terms with what happened to his wife,” says Boutros Boutros-Ghali, United Nations Secretary General between 1992 and 1996. “When I got to know Heydar Aliyev, he spoke about his wife and her impact upon his life. He was one of the few world leaders I encountered who were so open.”

Through this period Heydar began to work from home. In the evenings he sat in their bedroom and spoke with Zarifa, often sleeping in an armchair beside their bed.

During the early months of 1985, he was rarely seen in public, perhaps his only major appearance came at the funeral of yet another General Secretary. In March the Soviet Union buried its third in three years. The folly of the revolving door of accession had impacted upon domestic progress and international relations. Informed in the middle of the night in Washington of Chernenko's death, US President Ronald Reagan — seven months older than Chernenko and just over three years older than Andropov — was said to have commented: “How am I supposed to get any place with the Russians if they keep dying on me?” In so many ways this time it would be different, however. Spurned twice by his Politburo colleagues, the momentum behind Gorbachev was unstoppable. The *New York Times* reported:



(above) A relaxed Heydar and Zarifa Aliyev with one of their grandchildren. (right) Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary in 1985.



The Kremlin today announced the death of Konstantin U Chernenko and, within hours, named Mikhail S Gorbachev to succeed him as Soviet leader. The announcement said Mr Chernenko died Sunday evening after a grave illness at the age of 73. He had been in office 13 months, and had been ill much of the time, leaving a minor imprint on Soviet affairs. The succession was the quickest in Soviet history, suggesting that it had been decided well in advance. Whereas the Central Committee had taken several days to name a successor to Leonid I Brezhnev and Yuri V Andropov, Mr Gorbachev was confirmed



*Two days on from her 61st birthday, Zarifa Aliyeva passed away
in Moscow on April 17, 1985.*

in his new job four hours and 15 minutes after Mr Chernenko's death was announced.

In his acceptance speech, Gorbachev stated: "I am well aware of the great trust put in me and of the great responsibility connected with this... I promise you, comrades, to do my utmost to faithfully serve our party... We are to achieve a decisive turn in transferring the national economy to the tracks of intensive development... We should, we are bound to attain within the briefest period the most advanced scientific and technical positions, the highest world level in the productivity of social labour..."

Chernenko's funeral and Gorbachev's accession was accompanied by all the drawn out meetings and pomp that so encumbered the diaries of the elite in the Soviet Union. Heydar would attend as many as he felt he could. But the machinations of government were becoming secondary. As every opportunity presented itself, he would slip home to be beside Zarifa.

On April 15, Zarifa was 61 years old. She was weakening now and had come to terms with her fate, just as she tried to prepare her husband and children. They gathered around her with a few gifts, but little mood for celebration.

Two days later she was gone.



*Mikhail Gorbachev was set to launch the Soviet Union into its most radical era of change...
but the pace of reform would split the liberal wing of the Politburo.*

A Party of One

An insincere and evil friend is more to be feared than a wild
beast; a wild beast may wound your body,
but an evil friend will wound your mind.

— Buddha

We first knew each other at a distance and it all started with great interest in each other, which was justified. Heydar Aliyev came to power in the Caucasus, on that side, and I did, on my side,” said Mikhail Gorbachev about his Azerbaijani counterpart in the documentary *A Story of One Envy*. “This was the Caucasus after all. Changes were taking place in Azerbaijan that raised my interest. The fight against corruption. The change of personnel. All the nepotism. You know, all this was very interesting. I started to subscribe to newspapers, Azerbaijani newspapers, and I started to read them, to absorb information. It seemed to us that the republic was deteriorating and then, suddenly, it started to develop. The agriculture industry was growing especially quickly, to a background of progress.”

Interviewed in 2002, Gorbachev offered rare comment on Azerbaijan and Heydar Aliyev on camera. In the same film, Heydar recalled their first close interaction: “In 1972, I went to Pyatigorsk with my family. We were spending a holiday in a sanatorium. I knew Gorbachev already then. We met in Moscow, at the sessions of the Supreme Council, at the plenary sessions of the Central Committee of the Party. Gorbachev learned that I was there. You see, Pyatigorsk is on the territory of the Stavropol Region and Gorbachev was a leader of the region. He called, asked after me, asked how my holiday was going. There, of course I enjoyed a lot of attention from the local authorities,

besides, I was there with my family. Then he said that he was going to visit us. And so he did.”

Keen to forge a relationship with another young and emerging leader, Gorbachev invited the Aliyev family to the mountains in the Karachayevo-Cherkesk Region, to Tiberda, a very well known resort. He took the trouble to take them personally. The two men would become acquainted, the beginning of an association that would bloom into friendship.

“I liked Heydar Aliyev, he was a very sociable person, very smart, clever. He had the ability to maintain a conversation at the highest level and, then again, at a simple level,” said Gorbachev. “I was like this all my life, it was my nature also, and this is probably why we became friends... I was on very good terms with Heydar Aliyev.”

In 1970 — within months of Heydar’s elevation in Baku — Gorbachev was appointed First Party Secretary of the Stavropol Region, the two becoming among the youngest party chiefs anywhere in the Soviet Union. Again there were parallels — just as Heydar attacked the malaise in Azerbaijan, Gorbachev was credited with radical reorganisation of his collective farms, improving the income potential and lifestyle of ordinary people and inhibiting corruption.

As a reward, in 1971 — the same year as Heydar — he was appointed to the Communist Party Central Committee. In 1978, Gorbachev had been made head of the Central Committee’s Secretariat for Agriculture. Interviewed for one documentary, Heydar Aliyev said: “...there were several candidates (for the aforementioned position), including Gorbachev. However, other candidates were greatly supported. I was in Moscow, and Brezhnev asked my opinion, since we had been neighbours in the Caucasus. I characterised Gorbachev positively and told him ‘You won’t be disappointed if you appoint him to the post of the Secretary of the Central Committee for Agriculture...’ Later, when Gorbachev was Secretary of the Central Committee for Agriculture, we often met in Moscow. And when he was elected to the Politburo member, Brezhnev asked my opinion, and I supported the nomination.”

It was during the tenure of Andropov as General Secretary that the likes of Aliyev, Gorbachev, Ligachev, Grigory Romanov and Nikolai Ryzhkov emerged strongly. “I mentioned Gorbachev to Andropov even as I came to Moscow and I talked about him positively, because at that time I already



A counterwoman shows a hunk of meat to shoppers amid a pressing crowd hoping to beat the shortages that were starting to consume the Soviet Union.

formed a good impression about Gorbachev,” Heydar Aliyev recalled. The Azerbaijani believed that they were cut from similar reformist cloth and could add to the moderate body of leaders in Moscow. And indeed it was during this period that Heydar and Gorbachev had had the opportunity to work more closely than ever before.

The Eleventh Five-Year Plan was in motion, a mediocre cycle. In the book *The Healthy Glow of Organisation*, Alexei Kosygin would admit that he feared the complete failure of this Five-Year Plan as the nation’s leadership consistently shied away from reform. Because of this the Soviet Union imported close to 42 million tonnes of grain annually, almost twice as much as during the Tenth Five-Year Plan, just one indicator of the problems that Moscow was seemingly powerless to solve, or did not have the political will to counter.

Andropov’s Politburo had begun early planning for the Twelfth Five-Year Plan. It was here that many of his young moderates, Heydar and Gorbachev included, finally had the opportunity — albeit tentatively — to begin the process of nurturing reform. The Twelfth Five-Year Plan was such an important document that it may have shaped a quite different future for the near 300 million people of the nation.

The period under Chernenko had put paid to that for a time. Yet the young guns of the Politburo had coined the reformist term *uskoreniye* and their ideas on social and economical development, liberalisation and change had reached a critical mass of support. Chernenko would, in effect, represent a 13-month freeze on reform. Nevertheless they believed that *uskoreniye* would have its time. On the alliance between himself and Gorbachev, Aliyev would recall: "...under Andropov and Chernenko, we always used to sit by each other's side during Politburo meetings..."

Heydar was in a useful position in one sense that he had reached what was, for him, effectively the pinnacle. He was the highest ever Azerbaijani to serve in the system. Perceived as a 'Turk' amid a Politburo full of 'Slavs', in a Slavic-led system, there was almost an inevitability that he could never be General Secretary. Therefore he had the relative peace of mind of not having to jockey and manoeuvre.

Instead he was a thinker. He applied what he had learned in reforming Azerbaijan, and his experiences in Moscow, to the *uskoreniye* that he and his fellow young guns on the Politburo and in the council of ministers saw inevitable. With Chernenko gone, so was the last realistic champion of the old guard. Passed over twice for General Secretary, support coalesced around Gorbachev to a degree that could not be denied. "...I actively supported his candidature..." said Heydar.

Gorbachev would be the party's first leader to have been born after the Revolution. He and those who shared his thinking understood that change was needed. The Soviet Union had fallen behind the West in nearly all social and economic measurements — it was time to roll out their vision of *uskoreniye*. The reformers were, at last, in place and the notions of acceleration of economic development, decentralisation of the planned economy, devolution in decision-making and greater autonomy for the republics now possible. The elephant in the room was that 'devolution in decision-making' looked a lot like democracy, and that 'greater autonomy' had the feel of a measure of independence. *Uskoreniye* would have had a profound — but measured and controlled — impact on the Soviet Union.

The reform wing of the Politburo, even with the newly minted General Secretary among them, knew that there would be resistance. The party state, especially its higher echelons, had grown fat on perks and the trappings of



As a reformer, Heydar Aliyev was a co-architect and avid public proponent of uskoreniye — or planned reform.

power. Among this element, acceptance of *uskoreniye* would be, to adopt a phrase, like expecting turkeys to vote for Christmas. If the gentle thaw of the Khrushchev years had seen him abruptly replaced, or the ‘Andropov Model’ had been acutely resisted, then Gorbachev and his ilk were never going to be embraced.

How far they would take reform would largely depend on the steadfastness of Gorbachev. He said of Heydar: “We were friends, co-operated closely. He gave support very actively. He was a very serious, reliable person.”

In December 1984, Aliyev stood within metres of Gorbachev when, before a television audience of tens of millions, the new General Secretary unveiled a new direction for the nation. Gorbachev offered a future wrapped in a raft of new initiatives — *uskoreniye*, *glasnost* (transparency) and *demokratizatsiya*. These, he said, would comprise his ethos.

Uskoreniye would define a planned economic revival, *glasnost* represented a shift in relationship between government and citizens whereby the former would be more open and *demokratizatsiya* had elements of a multi-candidate (but not multi-party) elections for local party positions. This would give limited, yet genuine, representation to ordinary people in government.



Mikhail Gorbachev led a 'charybdis of the populist reformers' in the Politburo, but the unity of his group started to unravel.

The shock waves of this had hardly subsided when, during a Soviet Party Plenum on April 20, 1985, Gorbachev repeated a bold reform agenda. Television footage of the event shows Heydar close by, smiling gently and applauding where necessary. This period would represent the zenith of the reform agenda. *Uskoreniye* was derived from the Russian word meaning 'to uproot', representing what needed to be done with the basics of the stagnated economy.

At 61 years old, Heydar had been cast in a role that would have seemed unlikely even a handful of years earlier. Like Gorbachev and the other reformers around him, he was now an agent of system-wide change. Ultimately, quite what the extent of that transformation would mean, was up for debate. However the moderates fully understood that the *uskoreniye*, *glasnost* and *demokratizatsiya* that they advocated would transform the Soviet Union completely and irrevocably.

"He believed in a reform agenda," says Ilham Aliyev. "He believed that it was time to reshape the system, to de-centralise, to hand power back to the republics. And within this, he wished to see Azerbaijan rise again."

But Gorbachev — and indeed the moderate group — underestimated their opposition. They had buried Chernenko, but not all the conservatives. There were many reasons for the crisis that quickly engulfed Soviet moderates in

1986. The system resisted, of course, and even pushed back. The enormity of the scope of their reform project also hit home. Gorbachev and his reformist grouping, Heydar being a key component of this, were pitched in a dog fight for the political culture of the Soviet Union. Quickly, the reform wing of the Politburo began to unravel. Said Heydar Aliyev: "Gorbachev's relation to myself changed abruptly after he became the leader of the Soviet Union. I felt it. And gradually his relationship to me was getting worse and worse, notwithstanding the fact that I actively supported his candidature and always treated him well. And continued to treat him well."

Heydar quickly became trapped in the uncertain middle ground of the Politburo. This was the undertone of a now faltering relationship.

One writer notes that now there were two camps attempting to exert power; 'the Scylla of the hardline CPSU conservatives, who fought every change, and the Charybdis of the populist reformers'. Author Michael Totten wrote that: 'Gorbachev also understood that the Soviet economic structure was much too centralised to be allowed to unravel on its own without economic chaos.' Yet amid the multitude challenges that faced his leadership, and to the agenda for change, Gorbachev did the unthinkable. He blinked. He panicked. He tacked quickly towards an even more radical agenda. In doing so he would set in motion a chain of events that would lead to chaos, meltdown and unbelievable suffering.

Which position was correct? Even with the benefit of hindsight it is impossible to say. Heydar, one of those firmly in the reformist camp, suddenly found himself out in the cold. Responding to the resistance he encountered, the General Secretary shifted stance. *Uskoreniye* was abandoned in favour of a unplanned *glasnost* and *perestroika* on steroids.

Gorbachev stated: "Heydar Aliyev was one of those who actively and truly supported *perestroika* and the democratic processes."

This was only partly true. The Azerbaijani was never one of the aforementioned Conservative Scylla or reformist Charybdis. He had been in the latter when a planned, acutely managed *uskoreniye* was on the agenda. By the time that the vague motto *perestroika* was evolving, it meant little more than a set of measures that were unstructured and whose effects were unpredictable when rolled out in one big, crowd-pleasing speech.

Popularity was not supposed to be the point of the process. Gorbachev was being feted in Washington and London, but at home he was preparing to unleash havoc.

“From my father’s perspective, there were nearly 350 million people in the Soviet Union, and the system was already in trouble, severely affecting people’s lives,” says Ilham. “What was not needed, at that juncture, was to introduce chaos.”

Throughout its history the Politburo had been a group of cliques and alliances. Heydar now found himself isolated in the Politburo, a group of one. He identified neither with the pace and unplanned scope of *perestroika* nor, on the other side, what remained of the Chernenko conservatives. He was instinctually a reformist. Yet he believed that *perestroika* would shock the system too quickly. To paint a metaphor that would become quite apt soon after, the corpse of the Soviet system needed a defibrillator, not to be hit by a bolt of lightning.

“Heydar Aliyev continued to advocate fundamental change,” says Eduard Shevardnadze, who served as Gorbachev’s foreign minister. “But he argued against the pace of change Gorbachev was advocating.”

Indeed, Shevardnadze states that as someone not drawn from Russia, Ukraine or Belarus, often seen at the heart of the Soviet Union, Heydar was more disposed than most in the Slav members to picture a future where the Republics enjoyed almost total independence.

By the end of 1986, however, Heydar’s methodical evolution was flatly rejected by reformer wing of the Politburo and Gorbachev in particular. In his 1986 speech in Khabarovsk, Gorbachev went public with notions of *perestroika*. His vision was not framed to end Moscow’s dominance, nor to create a free market, but to invoke a raft of new policies. Where the two men differed was in delivery and scope. Those privy to the machinations in the Kremlin at the time state that Heydar, by now firmly outside of Gorbachev’s inner sanctum, remained set against *perestroika*, believing that dramatic upheaval was not what was needed. He advocated a step-by-step approach. Perhaps he even wanted to go further than Gorbachev, albeit at a slower pace.

Either way the General Secretary had lost patience. For a decade and a half,



(above) Heydar Aliyev believed that the new direction of reforms, meant that their effect and impact on ordinary people could not be predicted. (right) Mikhail Gorbachev was feted abroad, but was a divisive figure at home.



since sharing a 1970 road trip on the way to Karachayevo-Cherkesk, they had shared a political journey. This had led both men to the highest body in the Soviet Union, and into a broadly symbiotic relationship, as they had fought for change amid a powerful tide of conservatism. Now, at the very moment when it was finally possible for them to unshackle the nation from the dogma of the past, there was a split.

The party was over. And for Heydar this fracture was to have quite unimaginable consequences.



The disaster at Chernobyl would be a first test for the openness called for in the spirit of perestroika and glasnost — and the government failed miserably.

Crisis Management

I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts.

— *Abraham Lincoln*

In the town of Chernobyl, all was quiet and peaceful. It was April 25, 1986. International Worker's Day, also known as May Day, was just a few days away and there was a feeling of festivity in the air. There was much chatter, as there was across the Soviet Union, on the nation's new General Secretary and his extraordinary concepts of *perestroika* and *glasnost* — Mikhail Gorbachev's vision of openness and a government that did not hide from its citizens. Gorbachev had staked his reputation on these new, revolutionary concepts.

Night time drew over Chernobyl and the town slept peacefully. Little did they know that, before the night was over, their lives would be shattered. An accident would cause the largest uncontrolled radioactive release into the environment ever recorded for any civilian operation, large quantities of radioactive substances causing serious social and economic disruption for large populations in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. Chernobyl, some 130 kilometres north of Kiev, was the product of flawed Soviet reactor design and serious mistakes made by management. Today the disaster is considered a direct consequence of Cold War isolation and lack of any safety culture.

Gorbachev had been General Secretary for some 14 months. Chernobyl would be the first serious test of his credentials. Yet instead of informing other

countries of their blunder and helping with safety precautions, Moscow covered up the accident. The first inkling that something was wrong came from Sweden, two days after the accident. Similar reports then came from parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden. Finally, on the Monday evening, Moscow television read out a bland statement then consisted of four sentences and explained next to nothing. In the case of Chernobyl, the new era of *glasnost* was a failure. The supposedly brave new world of the post-Chernenko era had failed to materialise. Beyond the human and financial cost, at home and abroad the crisis was also a public relations nightmare.

Heydar was a participant in this. A member of the Politburo, First Deputy Premier of the Council of Ministers, he was a cog in the government machinery that failed its people. Like some in the Politburo, and others around him in the Cabinet, he was prepared to throw his hands up and admit that the response to Chernobyl was criminally poor. For decades, in similar situations, this had been the case. The system would struggle to change, and would be tested again just four months after the Chernobyl disaster. This time, Gorbachev would turn to Heydar in order to overcome another crisis.

It was a warm, sultry August evening with music playing and passengers dancing on the deck of the passenger liner *Admiral Nakhimov* as it sailed to the port of Sochi. A crew of 350 and 884 tourists had boarded the aging Russian vessel at Novorossiysk. Everyone was in a jovial mood for the 185 kilometre journey. The band playing popular tunes as the ships lights cast romantic reflections from the flickering waters of the Black Sea. Yet the revellers and the guests who had already retired to their cabins were not aware of the frantic calls from the pilot of their ship to the captain of the 18,000 tonnes freighter *Pyotr Vasev*, which was heading ominously in their direction.

“You’re on a collision course, change direction,” warned the pilot of the *Admiral Nakhimov*. “No, we’ll be perfectly fine. Relax,” came the reply from the freighter.

Captain Viktor Tkachenko did not slow his freighter. Nor did he change direction. Reassured, on the deck of the passenger liner Captain Markov decided that everything was under control. He went to bed leaving Second Mate Alexander Chudnovsky in charge on the Bridge. Chudnovsky was not so sure. He frantically sent more messages, repeatedly ordering the freighter to slow down and alter course. Seeing no reaction from the other vessel, he



*The tragic sinking of the
Admiral Nakhimov in the
Black Sea was a
preventable disaster.*



changed his ship's course by 10 degrees portside. It was not enough.

Just after 11 at night, on August 31, 1986, the *Admiral Nakhimov* was struck by the *Pyotr Vasev*, tearing a gaping hole amidships between the engine and boiler rooms. The band stopped playing and the lights went out, leaving passengers below in total darkness as they tried to crawl their way through the sloping hallways now filling with torrents of water. The ship sank in less than 10 minutes with no time to launch lifeboats. Passengers had no option but to jump into the oily sea in a desperate bid to survive. Sixty four ships and 20 helicopters rushed to the scene, many sailors bravely leaped into the waters



(above) Heydar Aliyev flew to the historic port of Novorossiysk from where he would run an emergency effort. (left) He would spend time with survivors of the Admiral Nakhimov disaster.

to save people who were so slick with fuel oil that they could not grip the hands of rescuers. The collision occurred just 15 kilometres from the port of Novorossiysk, but the *Admiral Nakhimov* sank so quickly that of 1,234 passengers and crew, some 423 people perished in the sea.

Even as people were drowning, news of a disaster had reached the population of Novorossiysk. The system reacted in its usual way, imposing an information blackout. The event was not reported in the news. Survivors, including those plucked from the water, were only allowed to send telegrams saying “Alive and well in Novorossiysk.”

All mention of the disaster was censored in the media. Once again the theory behind *glasnost* was ignored and impeded. Widespread disquiet among ordinary people over Chernobyl and its handling had barely subsided, indeed, it rumbled on gravely.

News of the *Admiral Nakhimov's* sinking was spreading fast by word of mouth. And the blackout had allowed the disaster to become a game of Chinese Whispers, with wild stories circulating on the number of dead and the causes of the sinking. Once again, the system was losing the control it worked so hard to gain.

On September 4, at the request of the General Secretary, Heydar flew to Novorossiysk to take charge and begin an investigation. His first act was to release survivors of the sinking who, unbelievably given they were victims of a horrific experience, had been held almost incommunicado from friends, relatives and the outside world. Secondly, he allowed the media to report on the *Admiral Nakhimov* disaster. On September 5 *Pravda*, official organ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and distributed nationwide, published news of the accident. Across the Soviet Union, other media followed suit. Coverage was tame, unquestioning yet in an era of supposed *glasnost* was the bare minimum that the people could expect.

Heydar also cast off the normal, remote *modus operandi* of Politburo members. Retail politics, engaging real people, was not built into the culture. Arriving in Novorossiysk he made for the hotels in the town where survivors were being held against their will.

"He waded into a sea of people," says Aleksandr Ivanov, who headed his security detail. "People were angry. Many had lost friends or family and were grieving. Everyone there was shocked and traumatised, both by the accident, and then how they had been treated."

That evening, Heydar began by announcing that he was removing the travel ban, that the local government had been charged with finding clothes and arranging travel home for everyone there (most of whom had lost all their possessions in the sinking). The following morning this would begin.

And then he sat down. It was unparalleled for someone from the Politburo, or a Deputy Premier. For the next few hours, in the dining room of a local

hotel, he was surrounded by survivors of the *Admiral Nakhimov*.

“He stayed until the last question had been answered, until no one had anything else to say,” says Ivanov. “For those in the room, me included, it was quite an experience. In more than two decades with him, I only saw Heydar Aliyev become emotional a few times. This was one of those. As he heard people’s stories.”

Heydar remained in Novorossiysk for a week. He began work on forming a commission of inquiry, and was around to guarantee that his promises to the victims of the disaster were met. While there, he was informed by the relatives of victims that the local authorities, on identifying the many bodies that were being pulled from the water, were issuing death certificates giving the cause of death as ‘drowning’. Stating that in future the children, or grandchildren, of those claimed by the tragedy needed to know that their relatives were victims of travesty, not a simple accident, he ordered all death certificates to reflect this.

Over ensuing months Heydar oversaw a commission that would determine that both Captain Markov of the *Admiral Nakhimov* and Captain Tkachenko of the *Pyotr Vasev* had violated navigational safety rules. Despite repeated orders to let the *Admiral Nakhimov* pass, Tkachenko refused to slow his ship and only reported the accident 40 minutes after it occurred. Captain Markov was absent from the bridge. The concluding inquiry took place in 1987, in Odessa. Both Captains were found guilty of criminal negligence and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Both were released in 1992.

The handling of the *Admiral Nakhimov* transformed Heydar’s standing for a time, even while his relationship with Gorbachev was becoming frayed over their diverging ideas. In preventing a second public relations debacle, hot on the heels of Chernobyl, the Azerbaijani had given some credibility to *glasnost*. After four initial days’ panic, the government’s handling of the *Admiral Nakhimov* had gone on to emerge with some credibility.

Heydar’s reward for this came quickly. The Era of Stagnation under Brezhnev, and the failure of his successors, left Gorbachev with a multitude of crisis situations. One of those was the nation’s social welfare apparatus. The situation was in such a mess that handling the issue was widely considered a quicksand appointment, a poisoned chalice, as there was no way of satisfying

Heydar Aliyev confronted the scandal of growing homelessness in Soviet society when given the social welfare brief.



the increasing demands on this area of government. The nation was increasingly finding it difficult to fund this vast commitment, while a succession of political figures had allowed it to sink into a morass. Every department was considered a basket case in its own right. Together they made up a monolithic disaster of enormous proportions.

By September 1986, in his capacity as First Deputy Premier, Heydar was overseeing the Soviet Union's social welfare brief, a caseload he would manage alongside his role in the Politburo. Some interviewed for this book believe the appointment was not so much a reward for his work in Novorossiysk, but a poisoned chalice for someone that Gorbachev considered increasingly out of step with his agenda. Yet the veracity of this must be measured with the dangers of failure at that time, which would become quite apparent to the government and its 350 million people later.

The first social security regulations in Soviet Union were enacted in December 1917, covering unemployment insurance. There followed provisions for invalidity pensions, old age pensions for factory workers and clerical staff. After 1964 collective farm workers were also embraced by the system. Payments for people with disabilities, and family allowances were introduced after 1968. These and other benefits were broadly in line with social security services typical in the western world. Soviet citizens did not contribute directly to social security and insurance coverage, but funding was secured through compulsory deductions from industrial and agricultural

enterprises. The biggest proportion of the Ministry's budget was spent on retirement pensions and disability benefits, but finances were spread extremely thin.

As Heydar took on the brief, the Soviet Union had over 56 million pensioners. Pensions were relatively low, in itself an issue, as the average payment was only slightly above the unofficial poverty line — *malooebespechennost* — which stood at 70 Rubles per month per person. The average monthly pension in 1986 was 75.1 Rubles, but went as low as 48 Rubles for collective farm workers.

At 63 years old, Heydar would not (for the moment) suffer the same travails. He maintained an apartment in Moscow, had an official home in the Kremlin, a *dacha* befitting his status, and a home in Baku. During his youth, his life had not always been so rosy.

Most turned to drugs and especially alcohol. HIV was starting to make a significant appearance in Moscow. No one in government had given much of a thought to these unfortunates reduced to the street, other than to order the police to arrest them — and to ensure that their unsightly appearance was kept away from main thoroughfares. One of Heydar's first decisions as Minister was to open a programme to support the homeless, first in Moscow, which was later rolled out to major cities throughout the republics.

Before 1990 the programme would be, literally, overwhelmed as *perestroika* bit. In 1986, however, the cracks of Soviet failure were only just beginning to make themselves fully apparent.

"Heydar went out into the city," says Aleksandr Ivanov. "This is how he learned."

Speeding along the thoroughfares and main roads of Moscow in a convoy was, for many officials, as close as they got to the people they theoretically served. With police sirens blaring and roads cleared of the embattled proletariat and their battered cars, in their Zils Politburo members and ministers were saved the embarrassment of eye contact with ordinary people by heavy curtains.

"I used to be with Heydar Aliyev, he would suddenly tell me to call the driver, to come along myself, and we would leave with one of his aides, just



Dismissing standard security protocols, Heydar Aliyev spent time with informal communities of homeless people in order to understand the problem.

the four of us. We went in the car, one car, and he would tell us where to go,” says Ivanov. “It was highly irregular.”

Senior officials in the security apparatus of the Kremlin would rail against Ivanov, but were powerless to stop someone of his boss’ status from doing as he wished. However, it seemed unconventional to some. Heydar’s target was initially the state’s ‘total-care’ facilities for the elderly, veterans homes and other entities of his new ministry. What he found was dire. But what to do about it was another question. Reform in Azerbaijan had been easier. There were clear solutions to many of the problems. Social welfare was in a woeful mess. What he discovered was chronic mismanagement, from top to bottom. Above this, those within the system, the elderly, veterans, those disadvantaged, were not treated particularly well.

Every few weeks, Heydar made a point of slipping most of his security and visiting parts of the Soviet Union’s social welfare empire. The picture he discovered only continued to become bleaker.

A 1593 law signed by Queen Elizabeth I had provided for a weekly tax on parishes so that disabled army veterans ‘should at their return be relieved and rewarded to the end that they may reap the fruit of their good deservings, and others may be encouraged to perform the like endeavours.’ In 1865, in his



Heydar Aliyev discovered that the cuddly image of well cared for Soviet veterans was often far from the true picture.

second inaugural address, President Abraham Lincoln famously called for good treatment of veterans: “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.”

The phrase “military covenant” came to refer to a moral contract that is supposed to exist between servicemen and women and the nation on whose behalf they are willing to die. The Soviet Union’s government was charged with overseeing this social compact. The aftermath of a disastrous nine-year war in Afghanistan was typical. Over 50,000 Soviet troops were injured, some half a million fell sick with problems such as hepatitis and typhoid fever, and nearly 150,000 of other diseases. According to the book *Combat Losses and Casualties in the Twentieth Century*, of the 11,654 who were discharged from the Soviet armed forces after being wounded, maimed, or contracting serious diseases, some 10,751 were permanently disabled, a staggering one fifth of the overall total.

In 1993, the Russian Ministry of Defence issued a report authored by G I Krivosheev detailing Soviet military casualties in World War Two, from the Battle of Khalkhin Gol in 1939 to the end of the conflict in 1945. Krivosheev numbered 14,685,593 veterans as ‘Wounded and Survived’. If the permanently disabled ratio was similar to that of Afghanistan, then some three million veterans conceivably ended the conflict with a disability.

The situation that Heydar discovered in veterans affairs, he considered a shame. He encountered homeless, disabled veterans from Afghanistan begging in the streets. A whole generation of World War Two veterans, too, were being failed. It was a picture of systematic neglect. While having an intimate understanding of the fiscal issues that faced the government as a whole, Heydar also believed that the way his nation was now treating its military veterans was absolutely disgraceful. Men and women who had given everything were being neglected. He viewed as an outrage the suicide rate among veterans, a backlog of applications for veteran benefits that sometimes went on for years, homelessness and unemployment among veterans at much higher level than the general population. In the months after being handed the social brief Heydar placed more emphasis on veterans affairs.

Those with Heydar during this period recall an incident just after the turn of 1987. January and February tend to be the coldest time of the year in Moscow, when the climate is freezing both day and night, dropping to -10°C or below on the very coldest nights. He was informed of a spike in the number of people being taken to hospital with frostbite or hypothermia, the majority of them homeless veterans or others who had fallen through society's cracks. Although hospitals would not turn them away, it was after being discharged that their plight grew worse. Most had no winter clothing. Many were disabled. A large proportion had turned to alcohol or drugs.

That year, hundreds were perishing in Moscow's brutal winter, and this was a picture repeated in Leningrad, Kiev, Almaty, Tashkent and all the major cities of the Soviet Union. The issue of homelessness had always been one to be swept under the carpet. Homeless people were brutalised by the authorities in order to keep them out of sight. But if you cared to look they were there, huddled in the darkest corners of subways, metro stations and doorways.

"I remember distinctly one of his fact-finding missions, on a dark and very cold evening in Moscow. It was snowing and windy. He got out of the car at Arbatskaya, the second largest station in Moscow," says Ivanov.

In Arbatskaya he found not so much a disparate group of homeless people as a community. Ivanov recalls a stench of alcohol and dirt, people huddling over small fires to catch some warmth. The Politburo member and Vice Premier, dressed in plain pants and a large overcoat, spoke to some. They were suspicious of the authorities and therefore guarded, but over a 45-minute period he got to know the stories of several. There was an assortment of

veterans, men with bad luck stories and simply those frozen out of the system. Many were disabled.

That evening he left without his overcoat, having given it away, but he did leave with something more chilling than the weather — the understanding that Arbatskaya was the tip of a very large iceberg, not just in Moscow but also throughout the Soviet Union.

“A terrible malaise, he called it,” says Ilham Aliyev. “Perhaps for the first time, my father got a sense of a huge problems facing the Soviet Union. As a leader, he had a sense of the structural and economic challenges of the era, but perhaps only someone overseeing social welfare departments could quite understand the humanitarian issues that faced the nation.”

Maybe it was Arbatskaya, and his other visits during this period, which provoked an epiphany. Heydar exposed himself to the underbelly of the system. Everyone knew it was there, but few grasped the sheer scale.

By February he had established five massive hostels across the Soviet capital, where the homeless could sleep and wash, receive basic support services and medical treatment. These were opened in empty factories or unused buildings, seized by Heydar for emergency use. But even these together could only accommodate several thousand people out of tens of thousands in Moscow alone. Similar facilities were opened in a dozen major cities — Baku included — but again could only scratch the surface and the ministries involved, with so many pressing problems, simply did not have the means to address the issue.

The dark winter months of early 1987 were reflected in Heydar’s mood towards the departments responsible for this sphere of work. With each day he was uncovering institutionalised decrepitude. The Soviet Union spend on social welfare was in excess of the national budgets of more than half the world’s nations, yet it also represented a fraction of what was needed to remedy the situation. Says Ivanov: “It was in this period that he became famous for his working days, 18 hours was normal.”

Sadly for the nation as a whole, what was being recognised was a hitherto largely unrecognised and largely unacknowledged array of social problems which would underpin the cataclysmic collapse of existing support systems as the nation began to disintegrate under Gorbachev. If knowledge of these

During the freezing winter months of 1986-1987 Heydar Aliyev began to get to grips with the social welfare problems that afflicted the Soviet Union — but it came to nothing as he was quickly sacked.



issues was one of the reasons, Heydar was so opposed to the wholesale and unplanned change of the *perestroika* era, then he was perhaps guilty of not being able to make the reformers in power understand the dangers. *Perestroika* and *glasnost* would combine to be twin forces, an unpredictable whirlwind of change when ‘new’ social problems were being confronted at the very time at which society was least able, in material and legislative terms, to deal with them.

If in his capacity handling social welfare — and not least as a Politburo grandee and Vice Premier — Heydar had the opportunity to effect change, then his enemy would be time. A faltering relationship with Gorbachev was one problem. Another was Heydar’s own health.

Inside seven months of assuming the nation’s social welfare brief he would himself be incapacitated. Inside one year he would be hastily dismissed in the name of reform.



Heydar Aliyev's successful reforms in Azerbaijan had been achieved as a planned evolution.

Was it ‘Mokrye Dela’?

I think, if you have enough inner resources, then you can live in isolation for long periods of time and not feel diminished by it.

— Aung San Suu Kyi

Heydar Aliyev was a capable man. He could lead the government, as he really did sometimes in the capacity of the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers. He was an active Member of the Politburo and a very serious leader. He was a man to discuss key issues, he had the required level of knowledge and the intelligence to process his information, but he was also very strong-willed.”

In an interview, Mikhail Gorbachev was reflecting on the abilities of a man who had been his ideological ally for many years. “He was one of those who actively and truly supported *perestroika* and the democratic processes,” he added. The relationship had quickly soured, and at the cusp of the reformers finally grasping the levers of power necessary to embark upon their systematic changes. Heydar supported the concept of the liberalisation, modernisation and democratisation. What he did not support was Gorbachev’s reaction to resistance in the Soviet system, to go for broke through wholesale reform that was unplanned and unpredictable. Heydar equated the *perestroika*, that Gorbachev now advocated, with chaos.

In his time as First Secretary in Azerbaijan, Heydar had brought about a planned evolution. It was a chessboard approach. One calculated move, a pause to measure effect, then another move. In the 21st century this is called

strategic planning. In his day he called it common sense.

In the closing months of 1986 the pair clashed repeatedly. Gorbachev came to view his erstwhile colleague as an opponent. Heydar thought Gorbachev's ideas laudable. Indeed, he shared most of them. But he challenged what he perceived as an unhealthy addiction to headline-making announcements and heady timetables. As Gorbachev said himself, the Azerbaijani was "very strong-willed" and for the first time they were pitted against each other. Heydar was always likely to lose a debate given that Gorbachev had already, and very publicly, stated his course.

On January 27, 1987, he called a meeting of Central Committee members in Vladivostok. If the General Secretary had launched the concept of *perestroika* in Khabarovsk some months earlier, it was in Vladivostok that he showed his hand fully. Dutifully, as a senior figure in government, Heydar travelled. Yet his misgivings were only to be exacerbated by events in the port city. Gorbachev presented an argument that justified *perestroika* and *glasnost* being the only solutions to the Soviet Union's problems. He mapped out the change that was required in economic, social and political arenas. And he staked out a breakneck timescale. If there is a moment that sealed the end of Heydar's period at the pinnacle of the Soviet Union then Vladivostok was it. There was no going back.

Heydar would dutifully continue his work in government and maintain a silence in public. Yet his misgivings were all too apparent to Gorbachev and his reformist allies.

"It was sad to see a rift appear, but this is politics," says Eduard Shevardnadze. "Many people felt that in losing Heydar Aliyev we had lost a strong voice for reform, a moderniser. He was someone that the older generation respected, because of his days in the KGB, and his successes in Azerbaijan. He could perhaps have influenced some of those who worked against change."

Shevardnadze, Gorbachev's Foreign Minister, admits to being one of those who thought that. But amid a startlingly myopic atmosphere a headlong rush into reform was now underway which left little room for debate or detractors. Heydar's methodical, chess-like approach rendered him utterly redundant amid the new reality in Moscow.

*Informally Heydar Aliyev and
Ilham Aliyev had begun to
undertake a number of public
engagements together.*



Said Gorbachev: “It was time for renewal. And I have to tell you there was great pressure from the republic. Great pressure. It was considered that by his position here he hindered the development of the republic... I also came to this conclusion.”

On May 11, 1987, Heydar Aliyev had just celebrated his 64th birthday. He remained in place in Moscow, a fixture within the Politburo and served as First Deputy Premier, the latter giving him vast powers in the day-to-day running of government. While no longer on the inside track of the Gorbachev clique, he continued to ritually throw himself into an extended working day.

“He was robust. That is the only way to describe him,” says former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma. “He was famous for being in the office at 6.30 in the morning and working into the late evening. He liked to get things done.”

With his children grown, and Zarifa gone, there was less to bring him home. In the evenings he would often stroll in a local park with friends. He did not drink or smoke and he ate relatively frugal meals, and had escaped the paunch which afflicted many of his well-fed colleagues who enjoyed the social scene of Moscow a little too much.

Which is why what happened next is so baffling to the people who knew him. Just at the juncture when his political capital was falling, tragedy struck.



Heydar Aliyev worked a full diary up until the day of his heart attack.

Says Ilham Aliyev: “I was working in Moscow as a lecturer at MGIMO. I received a call and I was told that my father had suddenly been taken ill, but not exactly what was wrong with him. I went straight to the hospital to see him surrounded by doctors. He was lying, connected to various machines, and his doctor told me immediately that my father had a severe heart attack, and that the prognosis was dire. It was a great shock, as he had been as vigorous as ever.”

“There were no signs at all of this. He was just as active, in good health and — considering the situation at that juncture in political terms — in good

spirits also," says Aleksandr Ivanov, who headed Heydar's personal security unit through most of his time in Moscow. Ivanov perhaps saw more of his boss on a daily basis than anyone and was arguably best placed to judge his frame of mind and physical health.

"No. Categorically I can tell you he was fine. There was not a single warning sign. He would have a complete check up every few months, something that all the Politburo did, and had received a perfect bill of health every time."

Heydar had been in his office in the Kremlin. There were the standard schedule of meetings in his capacity as First Deputy Premier, the regular Thursday Politburo sitting was looming, which meant papers, reports and memos needed to be produced. Everything was normal. Half way through his working day, without warning, he crumpled to the floor. One of those with him during that period, an individual present throughout the grizzly affair, states that the heart attack occurred within two minutes of Heydar drinking a cup of tea. Heydar would himself recall: "Yes, I got ill. Even now I can't understand why. I never had any complaints of a heart problem."

Adds Ilham Aliyev in more contemporary times: "Of course my reaction to his illness was different then to now. Now, analysing everything that happened, including those which preceded his illness, I have suspicions as to whether it was provoked."

Asked about this incident when interviewed for this book, Eduard Shevardnadze pointedly said nothing but shook his head.

It was no secret that the Soviet Union frequently engaged in 'executive action', known within the KGB as 'liquid affairs' (*mokrye dela*). There were numerous examples of *mokrye dela* employed against Soviet citizens, Soviet émigrés and even foreign nationals, the long list of those who had been victims including no less than Leon Trotsky. A declassified CIA report titled *Soviet Use of Assassination and Kidnapping* states that:

The executive action component of the Soviet government is currently designated the 13th Department of the KGB intelligence directorate (First Chief Directorate)... The defector Khokhlov described two laboratories associated with the executive action

department. One produced special weapons and explosive devices; the other developed poisons and drugs for "special tasks"... The laboratory for poisons was supposedly a large and super-secret installation. No agents were permitted access to it or even knew of its location. Khokhlov could provide no first-hand information on it. Other sources, however, have reported the existence of this type of laboratory, dating back to the purges in the late 1930s.

The report also stated that in the post-World War Two period the preferred method of *mokrye dela* was the use of poison rather than guns or explosive, stating that:

It is conceivable that the Soviets tend to favour poisons because murders can be accomplished more surreptitiously in this manner and in some instances without leaving easily recognisable traces of foul play... There appears to be no consistency in the use of poisons by Soviet intelligence to cause disability or death, or in the repetitious use of any one drug. Chemicals which have been used in cases known or suspected to be Soviet-instigated include arsenic, potassium cyanide, scopolamine, and thallium. Other likely substances are atropine, barbiturates, chloral hydrate, paraldehyde and Warfarin. Combinations of two or more substances may also be used, which further complicates diagnosis and tracing.

For two whole weeks Heydar would be prone in the Intensive Care Unit. He slipped in and out of consciousness. Day and night, the machines that were helping him to survive blinked and beeped, as doctors fought to keep him alive. Ilham slept in his father's room. It took a week before Heydar began to respond to treatment. Some eight days after his attack, he regained consciousness for the first time.

The danger was not over, and even then Ilham and Sevil, along with family and friends, did not consider that foul play could have put him in hospital. Focus was on the patient and his recovery, not any abstract ideas of what had put him there, beyond the shock of a man seemingly in such good health having a heart attack.

Quickly, however, there were signs of an agenda that disturbed the family. Heydar would recall: "One day the doctors came to my bed, well-known professors, academicians. I don't want to name them. I don't think they were

Known for his robust work schedule, Heydar Aliyev was instructed by doctors that he should "retire" in a manner that aroused his suspicions.



to blame. This is what they told me. 'You know, Comrade Aliyev, or Heydar Aliyevich,' as they used to address me, 'your health is in such a state that it will be difficult for you to carry on with your work.' I got very angry with them. Very angry. I told them that their business was to treat me; you've got nothing to do with whether I will or will not work afterwards, this is strictly my decision."

Spurned by the patient, the same doctors turned to his son, who adds; "As the time approached for him to leave the hospital, the doctors started to work with me. They called me to their conferences and told me that my father would not be able to work actively in the future. He won't be able to do his job, so, I should tell him to resign."

As the family began to come under sustained pressure, so their suspicions grew. Dubbed "very strong-willed" by the General Secretary, Heydar responded with typical hard-nosed belief in himself and his decisions. Retirement would have come with benefits: a generous pension, a luxurious *dacha*, large homes in Moscow and Baku, a permanent full-time staff and government cars, plus all the respect earned by a retired senior figure. Returning to work came with all the disappointment of being on the outside of the clique that surrounded Gorbachev. Yet the latter was always his choice.

After having a heart attack, people have to come to terms with the emotional impact of what had happened to them. Some victims are surprised



A couple of months on from his heart attack, Heydar Aliyev was back at his desk and taking on public engagements.

how tired and weak they felt during the first few days or weeks at home. Recovering from a heart attack can be a long process, often requiring big changes in lifestyle.

For Heydar, a non-smoker, who enjoyed walking, light exercise and swam at least twice a week, the transition to a post-attack lifestyle was relatively easy. Exercise is known to improve cardiovascular health.

“He always walked in the park, perhaps once or twice a week, but he took care now to exercise most days,” says Aleksandr Ivanov.

Within a month after leaving hospital, he felt ready to return to his desk and busy diary.

“I underwent medical treatment, recovered, returned to work and my illness didn’t stand in the way of fulfilling my duties,” said Heydar.

His heart attack weakened him, for sure, but within months the 64 year old was back at the Kremlin in his Politburo office, and sitting as Deputy Premier within the Council of Ministers. Uncontrolled stress is linked to increased coronary artery disease risk. Learning adaptive time management and relaxation techniques helped reduce stress levels, it was recommended.

“I was surprised how he returned. He worked just as hard as ever, kept the same long hours, and refused to be browbeaten into taking it easy,” says Ivanov. “Aside from taking care to exercise more, within a month of his heart attack he was back in the Kremlin and over ensuing weeks he returned to what I considered to be the normal, hard-working, resilient Heydar Aliyev.”



Not yet fully suspecting the nature of his heart attack, Heydar Aliyev returned to work in the Kremlin as soon as he felt physically capable.

The Fall

One life is all we have and we live it as we believe in living it.
But to sacrifice what you are and to live without belief,
that is a fate more terrible than dying.
— *Joan of Arc*

I was acquainted with life in the Politburo,” said Heydar. “I remember when the late Alexei Kosygin was the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and he fell ill and was in the hospital. In the same hospital, where I was treated. Brezhnev was leader of the Soviet Union then. He and his entourage tried to use this and to make him retire from the position. I know that it was suggested, through his doctors, that he retire. I also know that people were sent to him. Then... they got what they wanted. Kosygin sent his resignation from the hospital and asked to be released from the position of the Chairman. I was participating in the session of the Supreme Council of USSR, where his resignation was read and he was released from the post, while still in the hospital. And I think that this only worsened his health. In about 10 days he died in the hospital.

“I knew about this and Gorbachev was well aware of it. So he tried to do the same with me.”

For a month after suffering a massive heart attack on May 11, 1987, Heydar had fought for his life. He remained in an Intensive Care Unit for two weeks. By June, he had surprised those around him by resuming work from his bed. Not everyone seemed happy with his recovery, however. Pressure was exerted via doctors, and through the appearance of visiting colleagues, who had a

surprisingly similar views of his future — a future, they opined, which should begin with his retirement.

“He was a fit man, robust for his age, so he bounced back relatively quickly,” says Ilham Aliyev.

In July Heydar was discharged, returned home, and the same month was back at his desk. At his side was Aleksandr Ivanov, whose years of service give him excellent insight into the well being of his boss post-hospitalisation.

“He had lost weight, no doubt,” says Ivanov. “But we began to see that spark in his eye. His sense of humour returned. More importantly, I think, he was exercising and getting stronger. Soon he was working the same sort of hours as before.”

Heydar arrived at his office before Gorbachev and the majority of the Politburo, and left hours later. It was not a game and he did not feel he had anything to prove. But Heydar’s heart attack — whatever its cause — had interrupted what he viewed as a vital task, to reform the Soviet Union’s social welfare system. More and more people were gravitating towards and below *malooobespechennost*, without the safety net that the system had promised.

Already that year — the same month as Heydar’s apparent heart attack — Gorbachev had engaged in a clear out. Western newspapers had dubbed Mathias Rust “the new Red Baron” and the “Don Quixote of the skies” when the 19 year old German with about 50 hours of flying experience, managed to evade Soviet air defences before landing his Cessna in Red Square. The story of Rust’s flight from Helsinki to Moscow in 1987 is probably one of the strangest episodes of the Cold War, with Rust describing his flight as an attempt to create an “imaginary bridge” between West and East. The fact that a German teenager could fly unhindered right up to the walls of the Kremlin was deeply symbolic of the ineptitude and bankruptcy of the Soviet system.

It was also an opportunity. Gorbachev used this embarrassment to remove many of the strongest opponents to his reforms, such as Defence Minister Sergei Sokolov, dozens of officials and hundreds of military officers. The Rust debacle sparked the biggest turnover in the Soviet military since Stalin’s purges 50 years earlier. Heydar survived the Rust crisis and a heart attack, but would become a victim of widespread political struggle at the highest level.

Mathias Rust's flight from Helsinki to Moscow and landing in Red Square was used as a pretext for a series of high level sackings in the Gorbachev administration.



In October 1987, *Associated Press* reported that:

Moscow Communist Party chief Boris N Yeltsin tendered his resignation after criticising party policy-making and the pace of reforms championed by Mikhail S Gorbachev, a party official said Saturday. Anatoly I Lukyanov's remarks at a news conference were the first public confirmation of discord in the Kremlin since Gorbachev became Soviet leader in March 1985. It was an extraordinary acknowledgement of disagreement in the Soviet Union's highest policy-making bodies, which official statements and the state-run media depict as monolithic.

Yeltsin, 56, has been considered a protégé of Gorbachev and one of the most outspoken supporters of the Soviet leader's social and economic reform campaign. Lukyanov indicated Yeltsin made sharp criticisms during an October 21 closed-door meeting of the party's Central Committee, but it was unclear whether he criticised Gorbachev or party officials he considered to be slowing the general secretary's reforms. Yeltsin, a non-voting member of the ruling Politburo, spoke "on the style of activities of the leading organs of the party and the pace of reconstruction," Lukyanov, a member of the party Secretariat, said in response to a question.

The same month the *New York Times* quoted unidentified Soviet officials as saying Yeltsin's speech sparked a political crisis in a Kremlin already

gripped by intrigues. The same month as Yeltsin resigned, as he wished to see more and faster reforms, Gorbachev dismissed Heydar. The two had shared an ideological journey for nearly two decades. Ironically Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Aliyev shared a broadly similar vision, but disagreed vehemently on how to achieve it. Gorbachev increasingly found himself caught between criticism by conservatives who wanted to stop reform and liberals who wanted to accelerate it.

In October 1987, Heydar received news of his dismissal in a one paragraph note. He was to be removed from the Politburo and Deputy Premiership with immediate effect. The same day Gorbachev appointed him State Counsellor, a meaningless title that left him with no responsibilities.

“I underwent medical treatment, recovered, returned to the office, worked and my illness didn’t stand in the way of fulfilling my duties. I did work so my illness couldn’t be the reason for my dismissal,” said Heydar.

In the same documentary, the then General Secretary who dismissed him, Gorbachev, disagreed, saying: “He left due to the state of his health. He was very ill then.”

The effect of the dismissal on Heydar was a hammer blow. But not for the reason one may assume. At 64 years old he was just not ready to be painted out of the picture. While his heart attack was somewhat suspect, and he was clearly out-of-favour, Heydar believed that he remained a valuable component and had something to give.

“Mentally, he was at the height of his powers,” says Eduard Shevardnadze, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union until 1991. “He was not as close to Mikhail Gorbachev by this time, but I believe that most people thought of him as one of the most sagely and knowledgeable leaders we had. Certainly I ranked him as someone whom we could rely.”

This is a view reflected in the comments of Leonid Kuchma, who says: “A great many things may have been different — and better — if Heydar Aliyev had remained in Moscow.”

For nearly a year, Heydar would remain on the outside looking in, trapped in a role that meant nothing. Gorbachev had engaged in a battle for the heart



(above) Out of the blue Heydar Aliyev received a one paragraph dismissal letter from Mikhail Gorbachev (right).



and soul of the Soviet Union, during 1987 and 1988 gradually unshackling himself of traditional dogma in the name of reform. Heydar continued to believe — particularly from his own experiences, of the damage being wrought on ordinary people's lives — that change needed to be managed.

“Decades of a planned economic model, and in the midst of a long period of stagflation, would inevitably, Heydar Aliyev said, result in collapse,” says Ramiz Mehdiyev, today Head of the Presidential Administration in Baku.

Gorbachev's reforms would quickly spiral out of his own control, resulting

in chaos. David Wedgwood Benn gives an excellent summary when he explains how the meaning of *glasnost* evolved:

Soviet politics from 1985 to 1991 fell roughly into three periods; and in each one of them, glasnost took on a different meaning. Initially, it was seen as an aid to economic 'acceleration': that is, as part of a campaign to get the economy out of the doldrums. It was also a weapon in the anti-corruption campaign first launched by Yuri Andropov. Thus, in 1985, glasnost still looked like no more than another example of the "criticism and self-criticism" which all past Soviet leaders, including Stalin, had talked so often about.

In the second phase — and most visibly from the end of 1986, when Andrei Sakharov was released from exile — glasnost was treated as a lever for political reform of the Soviet system within a one-party framework. This phase saw a progressive and very substantial relaxation of censorship, when a growing number of previously taboo subjects were thrown open to discussion. The culmination of pluralism within a one-party framework came in March 1989 with the holding of the first multi-candidate parliamentary elections, which effectively ended the old 'rubber stamp' Supreme Soviet.

Finally, by early 1990 — with the rise of openly secessionist movements in the Baltic and the abolition of the Communist Party's previous monopoly of power under Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution — the idea that 'reform of the system', or what Gorbachev had termed 'socialist pluralism', gave way to the widespread expression of openly anti-communist views in the media. In any case, during the previous year, the concept of glasnost had to a large extent been equated with, or superseded by, the notion of free speech.

Heydar would remain on the sidelines now. It was an unusual position he was in, something of a gilded cage. As State Counsellor he was in theory retained in an advisory capacity, to share knowledge, expertise even. But in demoting the Azerbaijani and freezing him out of the inner circle, Gorbachev had effectively signalled Heydar was to be sidelined. In political terms he was considered poison. Anyone who wished to remain in their place in Moscow would be wary to be viewed as being even associated with Gorbachev's erstwhile friend.

Prominent dissident Andrei Sakharov's return to the Soviet Union from exile was a notable moment in the demise of the nation.



He did, however, attempt to use the State Counsellor position to provide a voice in Moscow against what he saw as an emerging Armenian nationalist threat. The Sumgait crisis of late February 1988 was, he believed, just a potent to a disaster that was set to emerge if not handled properly by Moscow. On the morning of March 2, 1988, Heydar demanded a meeting with Georgi Razumovsky, a Candidate Member of the Politburo. He wanted to warn Razumovsky of the dangers that were emerging and to implore him to act quickly in relaying this to the General Secretary and fellow Politburo members. Yet Heydar was prevented from seeing Razumovsky.

Heydar's repeated warning during this period were, to his frustration, simply ignored. Not only did this illustrate the impotency of the State Counsellor title he had been given, but allowed the tragic events of Sumgait to be, as he had predicted, part of a sharp worsening of the situation.

Heydar was circumspect over his new job as State Counsellor. His abrupt sacking, so soon after a suspicious heart attack, made him careful now not to oppose Gorbachev too blatantly. Instead his days were transformed as a State Counsellor from whom people were too afraid to take council. Since the death of Zarifa in 1985, and as Sevil and Ilham had matured and taken on lives of their own, Heydar's rigorous work ethic had grown. He had become used to long hours and enjoyed his profession. As this was taken from him, he had been jolted into the life of someone his own age.

During his days in Azerbaijan, Heydar had enjoyed literature and books.



*Heydar Aliyev bade farewell to the Kremlin and his place in government —
but his fall from grace was not over.*

In his enforced quasi-retirement, he reacquainted himself with some of his favourite authors and poets. He had more time for the theatre. One of his favourite occupations now was to read daily newspapers and periodicals, instead of having just a few minutes to flick through them in the car on the way to his office.

In June 1988, Gorbachev would call the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Nineteenth Party Conference, the first held since 1941. This would provide a platform for more reform. This event was to radically reshape the governing landscape. He pressed ahead with calls for multi-candidate elections and separation of party and government apparatus.

As a party grandee — albeit one on the outside looking in — Heydar was present, although a peripheral mover by now. Observers would call the conference a successful stepping-stone for Gorbachev, and indeed such progress was made that in its wake, Gorbachev felt able to deliver a forceful *coup de grace* against those who disagreed with his strategy. In September 1988 Andrei Gromyko, Yegor Ligachev and Boris Pugo were removed. In November Heydar was also purged, dismissed as State Counsellor. The same day he was stripped of government provided security, transport, staff, administration and office space. That afternoon even his home telephone was cut off, and officials visited his house to remove items considered official, right down to the stationery pens and pencils that sat on the desk in his study.

The fall of Heydar Aliyev seemed to be complete. But the ignominy of a loss of power and position, was nothing compared to what was just around the corner.



Prominent in history's house arrestees have been (clockwise from top left) Nelson Mandela, Galileo, Aung San Suu Kyi and Nikita Khrushchev.

Dr Samuel Mudd

Isolation is the sum total of wretchedness to a man.

— *Thomas Carlyle*

In 1633, Galileo was sentenced by the inquisition to imprisonment, commuted to house arrest. His crime was the heresy to believe that the sun was in the middle of the universe and all the planets and stars revolved around it. He remained under house arrest for nine years until his death. In more contemporary times, in Burma, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi was kept under house arrest for almost two decades, while in South Africa, in addition to 27 years spent in prison, Nelson Mandela spent two years under house arrest. For centuries, house arrest has been used by governments as a punishment, and to isolate errant individuals from the rest of the world. Closer to our subject, former General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev was placed under house arrest for the seven years before his death, after being deposed in 1964.

Heydar had been held in place in Moscow between October 1987 and November 1988 through the clever use of a title. As State Counsellor, his counsel had not been sought. Yet an official position meant that he was effectively held on ice and, in many ways, incommunicado. As a serving member of the administration he was unable to travel or speak openly, without permission.

By November 1988, stripped of salary, perks and services, Gorbachev's decision seemed a small mercy. Heydar had one thing on his mind.



Mikhail Gorbachev's appointee as head of Azerbaijan, Abdurrahman Vazirov could not speak Azerbaijani, had little knowledge of the situation in Azerbaijan and was politically inadequate.

“He wanted to go home... to Nakhchivan,” says Ali Hasanov, today Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan.

Home was some 1,926 kilometres from Moscow, far enough from Gorbachev for his comfort. But there was another player, a big player, and someone with a part to play in Gorbachev's intrigue. And in Baku Abdurrahman Vazirov viewed Nakhchivan, some 400 kilometres from Baku, as far too close for his comfort.

Heydar had left the position of First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party in 1982. In his wake both Kamran Baghirov and Abdurrahman Vazirov had done a spectacularly poor job. Corruption was again on the rise and the economy was on the slump. Using the opportunity, Armenia had reignited the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. To this backdrop, Gorbachev had appointed Vazirov as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and the leader of the Azerbaijan. He could not speak Azerbaijani, was remote from those around him, and was also known to be deeply opposed to Heydar.

In discharging his erstwhile State Counsellor, Gorbachev had eased out a problem for himself in Moscow, but created one for his stooge in Baku. In Azerbaijan, a weary population viewed Heydar and his time as First Secretary with nostalgia. As the highest-ranking Azerbaijani ever to rise in Moscow, he was also perceived as a local boy made good. Vazirov had quite a different perception of him -- as a threat.

Interviewed for a documentary on Heydar's position at this juncture, Gorbachev opined: "There was a lot of pressure from Azerbaijan. A lot from the Azerbaijanis. And this situation had to be settled somehow."

Heydar countered: "This, of course, is absurd. Azerbaijan cannot put any pressure on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Especially since there were no forces in the leadership of Azerbaijan that could influence Gorbachev and make him dismiss me."

Evidence has gradually emerged, however, of a comprehensive effort to keep Heydar from returning home. Vazirov would champion plans to keep his rival in Moscow. Ziya Yusifzade was hand picked by Vazirov to become Chairman of the KGB in Azerbaijan. In the documentary *A Story of One Envy* he states: "Vazirov invited me as the Chairman of the KGB of Azerbaijan and told him: 'Ziya Mamedovich, I am being sent to Azerbaijan to fight Aliyev. I have to be open with you and you have to help me.' Said Yusifzade later: "He asked me first of all to give him certain materials, files of certain members of the Politburo and other leaders of Azerbaijan. I told him that such files are not set up for the members of the Politburo or the leaders of Azerbaijan. This was forbidden by the regulation on the State Security Services."

Dirty tricks are inherent to the nature of politics and the 'dark arts' had been practiced since the rise of mankind. The story of dirty tricks in American politics began with the first campaign for President of the United States: Thomas Jefferson hired a journalist to slander his opponent, Alexander Hamilton. Compared to the US, however, Soviet politics were often a snake pit of deceit. That had not changed with the new administration in Moscow. In his paper *The Other Side of Perestroika, The Hidden Dimension of the Gorbachev Era*, author Brian Crozier writes that: 'Mikhail Gorbachev played an important role in the history of our troubled twentieth century. But the role was not the one attributed to him by Western public opinion while he was in power; nor was it the role he claimed to be fulfilling.' Crozier went on to write:

There was, however, a hidden dimension to perestroika, which passed largely unnoticed by the Western media and by Western political leaders: the restructuring of the "active measures" (aktivniye meropriyatiya) apparatus. In contrast to the "restructuring" of the economy, the perestroika of the overt and covert propaganda apparatus of the Soviet Union was considerably strengthened and made more

sophisticated under Gorbachev. Active measures by their nature were unknown to the general public, but constituted the hidden heart of the Cold War on the Soviet side.

A rough Western equivalent would be 'dirty tricks' including dezinformatsiya or disinformation — the deliberate spreading of falsehoods or distortions of events by planting of stories in the media or other means, not least by forgeries of allegedly Western official documents. Another technique was the use of "agents of influence" who might be witting (that is, aware that they were spreading disinformation for Soviet ends), or — the ultimate subtlety — unwitting (persuaded that the falsehoods they had been fed were in fact true).

None of this was unique to the Soviet Union, of course, the point being that while Gorbachev's ultimate aims were perhaps laudable, his political methodology was just the same as Thomas Jefferson and thousands of politicians before and after him. The cuddly 'Gorby', as he was perceived in the West, had all the political teeth of Stalin, Brezhnev and other General Secretaries. In fact, in order to pursue a somewhat radical agenda, he needed to be even more aggressive in some ways.

This applied to his pursuit of political rivals of course. And, either in Moscow circles, or in Azerbaijan, Heydar represented a significant threat. Yusifzade's disinclination to support an effort against Heydar was not the end of it. With little to go on from credible sources, Gorbachev and Vazirov would go the Mudd route. Dr Samuel Mudd was an American physician, convicted and imprisoned for aiding with John Wilkes Booth in the 1865 assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. In the absence of evidence of conspiracy, he was pardoned by President Andrew Johnson in 1869, yet his conviction was never overturned. Dr Mudd lived out his life under a cloud, which gave rise to the term that 'mud sticks' said to mean that people are likely to believe something bad that is said about someone, even if it is not true.

In the same documentary Azim Piriye, then Head of the Azerbaijan Criminal Investigation Department, made the amazing statement that: "Gorbachev sent to Azerbaijan an investigation group of 1,500 people to gather compromising materials on Heydar Aliyev. The investigation team, under the supervision of Aslakhonov and Barannikov, was to collect testimonies, using for these purposes violence, threats and blackmail of the leading personnel

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The disinformation campaign that saw Dr Samuel Mudd convicted of involvement in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln gave rise to the term that 'mud sticks'.



who used to work with Heydar Aliyev. With this purpose, an Investigation Unit, based on the Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was transferred under the control of an investigation team. Investigation work was undertaken there under the supervision of Vladimir Alexandrovich Shkolin. People were recruited among the convicts to put psychological and physical pressure on prisoners to get false evidence against the close entourage of Heydar Aliyev.”

If Piriye’s extraordinary claim of a vast investigation team, at large across the Soviet Union looking for dirt, is taken at face value, then the end result deserves some scrutiny. Was the 64 year old a threat in Moscow or, realistically, a political spent force? On a more local stage, could he have challenged Vazirov as First Secretary?

“I don’t think there was any blood-lust here, and, especially, no vengeance,” says Gorbachev. “...I must tell you that everything was done humanely. No one trampled him down, humiliated him, nothing like that. I don’t care what people say. I know one thing for sure, I have a clear conscience.”

The answer probably comes in events that materialised in 1988 over Nagorno-Karabakh, and especially in the weeks that followed Heydar’s dismissal as State Counsellor, his final position in Moscow.

In March that year, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and Council of Ministers adopted a resolution on ‘Measures on intensification of

the socio-economic development of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast between 1988 and 1995'. This reaffirmed the long-standing status of Nagorno-Karabakh (in line with what would be international law) as Azerbaijani territory.

Armenia responded on June 15, when the Supreme Soviet of Armenia gave unilateral consent for Nagorno-Karabakh's inclusion into Armenia. This would spark increasing unrest, leading to Moscow declaring martial law across Nagorno-Karabakh on September 21. Recalled Heydar: "Just 25 days, after I had been dismissed from all posts in Moscow, the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis started. Rallies were held in Azerbaijan against the unjust policy of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in relation to Nagorno-Karabakh. These rallies grew into larger rallies. These certainly led to the destabilisation of the situation in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani historians have given little credit to Vazirov for his defence of Azerbaijani territory during this period. If Soviet administrations in Moscow or Baku feared a nationalist backlash, then one of the figures around which a movement could potentially rally was Heydar. And he was only too aware of Gorbachev's personal tendencies, that made him better disposed towards Armenians: "I was sure that Gorbachev had a very wrong approach to this issue and knew that he did not work well with ethnicities other than Slavs. I learned this during my discussion with him. Sometimes he was forgetting that I was not a Slav and, while talking to me, used racist expressions that gave grounds for my statement."

With Nagorno-Karabakh very much back on the political agenda, Vazirov failing in response to this, and Gorbachev, for all his *glasnost*, unwilling to see an ally-turned-foe become a poster boy for Azerbaijani nationalism and self expressions, this was a perfect storm of reason why Heydar required sidelining. The vast investigation to which Piriyevev referred, invariably, found what it was looking for as it trawled through a long career. Some mud would stick.

"My father recognised, in late 1988, that his days in Moscow were effectively over," says İlham Aliyev. "He was resigned to that, albeit sadly, as he believed he had something to contribute."

With Nakhchivan in his mind, Heydar had taken the loss of an almost



In 1988, Moscow reaffirmed that Nagorno-Karabakh was legally a part of Azerbaijan, but rabid Armenian nationalism was about to spark a war.

worthless State Counsellor position without disquiet. During this period he spoke openly to friends and colleagues of his delight at the prospect of returning home. Yet it was not to be, while the investigation into him had thrown up nothing that could lead to formal charges, and never did, the ‘case’ was in itself enough to hold him. Heydar was informed that he was to remain in Moscow while the inquisition was underway.

His home became his jail.

While Heydar was free to move around Moscow, the authorities engaged in quite open and intimidating observation. A car of armed agents sat downstairs from his apartment round the clock. When Heydar went for a walk, he was followed by the car driving at walking pace adjacent to his shoulder. His phone was tapped and his access to telephone lines that reached Azerbaijan greatly restricted. His house was regularly searched by burly agents who seemed to look for nothing in particular, but delighted in upturning furniture and breaking things. His state pension was frozen. Most weeks he was called in for several hours of questioning at least once. At 65 years old, he was stoic about the experience in itself, but increasingly frustrated at the process.

The worst part of this enforced stay in Moscow was the isolation. Perhaps

there was nothing the Soviet hierarchy was better at than creating pariahs among those it cast out. Those out of favour with the system became poisonous. Heydar had openly won the displeasure of the General Secretary. Those who fraternised with him during this period risked their own careers. Heydar was gregarious and enjoyed a wide circle of friends. Almost overnight this narrowed to a few souls who were either brave or foolhardy. Neighbours averted their eyes and avoided even a casual greeting.

This would become the pattern of his life for almost two years. The corruption that authorities attempted to link him to seemed to have come to nothing, even in theory. With his pension stopped Heydar broke into his savings and these quickly dwindled. Heydar's days became dominated by short walks (accompanied by a ubiquitous and intimidating tail), books and newspapers, and a small group of friends.

"I visited him most days during this period," says Ilham Aliyev, who was a lecturer at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. "He accepted his fate and became accustomed to the isolation. We would talk a lot about his life, he enjoyed reminiscing, whereas his life was so busy when he was in government that he did not have the time before."

Heydar did not give up hope of being allowed to go to Nakhchivan. During the dreary process of a repetitive weekly interrogation, during which he would be asked the same questions and give the same replies, he would formally request permission to travel home. It never came. While Heydar would not have projected himself in the same company as Galileo, Aung San Suu Kyi, or Mandela, the crushing boredom, isolation and sheer mindlessness of a life virtually frozen in time was common to them all.

For 618 days, an isolation that lasted from November 10, 1988, to July 20, 1990, Heydar remained in Kremlin-imposed segregation and sequestration. This would only come to an end amid the chaos he had predicted, and having sparked the pain of terrible tragedy at home in Azerbaijan. He would rejoice in neither.



Rising tensions over Armenian pursuit of Nagorno-Karabakh began a chain of events that led to a bloody Red Army incursion into Baku, a war and decades of strife.



More than a million people packed the streets of downtown Baku for the funerals of the unarmed victims of a Soviet Army incursion into Baku.

Silenced No More

Where we love is home — home that our feet may leave,
but not our hearts.

— *Oliver Wendell Holmes*

The freedom fighters huddled around a makeshift wood fire that they had started next to a barricade. The expected snow had not fallen, but a cutting north Caspian sea wind — the *Khazri* — roared through the dark, empty streets of Baku. It was just after midnight on January 20, 1990, when the Azerbaijani protestors heard the rumble of massed Soviet tanks heading towards them. They looked helplessly at each other. They were mostly a symbolic force, a token show of resistance.

But the noise grew louder. As it reached a crescendo they could smell diesel fumes of the mighty 40-tonners which smashed through flimsy barricades of cars and trucks. The men leapt aside to try to escape the growling monsters and their heavy machine guns. Worse was to come. Following the tanks were 26,000 Soviet troops, most armed with AK-74 assault rifles. A few hours later, daylight broke over Baku to a scene of carnage. Crowds gathered to protest this outrage. At this point ill-disciplined troops began firing again, indiscriminately. In minutes, hundreds fell back injured and dying. In the days following the storming of Baku there were more killings and hundreds of critically injured civilians dying in hospitals.

Peaceful demonstrators were ruthlessly murdered, while Soviet forces blew up radio and television station electrical supplies in order to prevent news of

the outrage spreading. Clumsy and incompetent local authorities had created an impasse of which the Soviets took advantage. At the end of Black January, sometimes dubbed the January Massacre — for it was a massacre — some 800 had been injured and 137 were dead. One broadcaster later reported:

For several days, those 26,000 troops cracked down on protesters, firing into crowds without warning and killing more than 200 people. At least 700 were injured. Moscow declared emergency rule, which lasted for more than a year. Thousands of Popular Front members and sympathisers were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured.

I remember that cold, windy January night well. I was keeping vigil with some friends on one of the main roads leading from the airport into the city. I couldn't get in touch with my parents, who had gone into the city in hope of finding me. Later I saw my father's tears for the first time in my life; he and my mother had gone to the morgues in search of me, finding instead the bodies of dozens of dead lining bloodstained corridors. They saw the bodies of women and children, of Azerbaijanis, of Tatars, of Jews, of Lezgins, of Russians. All of them ordinary citizens of Baku.

I remember walking the streets as the sun rose that morning, seeing tanks and armoured personnel carriers topped with young soldiers with guns at the ready. The country was in a state of disbelief... Later, I remember the mass burial of hundreds of victims at Baku's Shehidler Khiyabani (Martyrs' Alley). Millions attended the funeral. The harbour was clogged with small private boats blaring their horns. Azerbaijan was united like never before. The era of the Soviet Union was over.

The traditional 40-day mourning period was marked by a national strike in honour of those who had stood up and sacrificed their lives for freedom. Factories ground to a standstill and people stayed home from work. Soviet officials tried in vain to spin the tragedy. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev defended the invasion by citing the supposedly imminent danger of Islamic fundamentalism in Azerbaijan.

Gorbachev's massacre was a blundering attempt to regain control in Azerbaijan, amid a sea of problems nationally. As Heydar had predicted, Gorbachev's scattershot, unplanned approach to *perestroika* had caused dire



Scenes from the January 1990 disaster which claimed the lives of 137 people as the Soviet army suppressed unarmed protestors.



(above) The office of the Central Committee of the Community Party of Azerbaijan was daubed with slogans calling for freedom. (left) Tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis symbolically defaced their Communist Party memberships.

consequences. Where Gorbachev and he differed to reform, was in approach. *Perestroika* should have been a process that revived the economy, improved social conditions, and brought about a more gentle, democratic system. But Gorbachev's delivery suffered from a downfall in strategy and planning. This directly resulted in complete collapse of the system, which led to empty shops and industrial breakdown. Economist Peter Boettke called Gorbachev's Soviet Union "a well-developed third world country".

A year prior to this, by late 1989, Gorbachev was in a fight for survival,

his own and that of the Soviet Union. *Perestroika* and Deng Xiaoping's reforms in China were based on similar needs and aimed for similar results. Yet their execution was quite different. It is easy to oversimplify. Both were rolled out across large communist countries attempting to modernise their economies. But while the Chinese acutely planned their effort, the Soviet Union did not. Gorbachev's reforms were a top-down effort, and maintained many of the macroeconomic aspects of a command economy, such as price controls, inconvertibility of the Ruble, exclusion of private property ownership and a government monopoly in industry.

Heydar had been one of several architects of the 'Andropov Model' which had been left on the drawing board when Andropov died. This had shared a great deal of the liberalist and gently democratic ideals of *perestroika*, but shared much of the cautious, measured and planned approach of the China Model.

By 1989, *perestroika* and its architect were in crisis. The Soviet Union's slow decline had become a collapse. The nation was unravelling, politically and economically. Azerbaijan had become a microcosm of the malaise that afflicted the Soviet Union as a whole. The economy was in freefall, industrial output was dropping by double digits each month and, ironically for a nation blessed with vast oil resources, there was an energy crisis.

Politically, the republic was on the verge of becoming a failed state within the borders of the Soviet Union. Abdurrahman Vazirov, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, was losing control, and the situation was undermined by what was perceived as Moscow's pro-Armenian stance when it came to Nagorno-Karabakh.

In February 1988, half a million Armenians had been encouraged to rally in Yerevan in support of Nagorno-Karabakh's 're-unification' with Armenia. By September, tensions between Armenian and Azerbaijani nationals, with communities of both living in each country, had erupted into violence on both sides. Moscow had done nothing to quell this. In Baku, Vazirov had been ineffective. Armenian leaders were almost cheerleaders for emerging tensions.

By 1989 Nagorno-Karabakh was trending towards crisis. Violence in the city of Sumgait, third largest city in Azerbaijan, saw 26 ethnic Armenians, six ethnic Azerbaijanis dead, many injured, and dozens of homes vandalised and



*Amid a frenzy of violence,
thousands of ethnic Azerbaijani
refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh
were displaced.*

looted. A subsequent trial would hear that this was organised under the auspices of the KGB and headed, according to multiple witnesses, by Armenian Eduard Gregorian. The Sumgait murders would begin a slide into anarchy. Attacks were made on Azerbaijanis, most notably a bloody breakdown of civil society in the Armenian town of Spitak. The crisis saw refugees hurriedly exiting Armenia and Azerbaijan. Inter-ethnic conflict grew.

Gorbachev's proposal for enhanced autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh was a messy compromise that satisfied neither side. In August, Azerbaijan cut all

ties with Armenia and, on December 1, the Supreme Soviet of Armenia adopted a resolution on re-unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Amid the tensions that swirled across the region at the time, this was an unnecessary and incendiary act.

On January 9, 1990, Armenia announced that it would include Nagorno-Karabakh in its budget and allow Karabakhians to vote in its elections. Armenia had disregarded Soviet authority and Azerbaijani jurisdiction. In Baku, the fury of ordinary people contrasted with the hapless response of their leader, Vazirov, who himself became a target. He was isolated as a grass roots movement emerged, a national defence committee with branches in factories and offices that sought to mobilise people to defend Azerbaijan.

In 1995 Gorbachev reflected that: "Before the troops arrived in Baku, the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet and other political bodies were paralysed, dozens of people had fallen victim to extremists, power had been toppled by force in some regions, a 200-kilometre section of the border with Iran had been destroyed, and a state of emergency had been declared to prevent arbitrariness and robbery... the measures taken in the prevalent condition of the time prevented greater dangers."

Gorbachev was correct, a state of emergency had, indeed, been declared. But by not announcing this publicly, this meant that those already on the streets were in breach of marshal law and, therefore, cannon-fodder for the army's guns. Minister Vadim Bakatin had established a command post on the outskirts of Baku, the same day that Gorbachev's decree, which declared a state of emergency in Baku and other parts of Azerbaijan.

Within hours, the Kremlin had begun to spin the massacre. Gorbachev would defend the invasion, as a move to counter "imminent dangers of Islamic fundamentalism", but later admit his order to invade Azerbaijan was the biggest mistake of his career.

In Moscow, one very important person had also been kept in the dark. Heydar was largely incommunicado in January 1990. From his dismissal in November 1988, he had been forcibly sidelined by the authorities and kept against his will in Moscow. Heydar's home telephone was bugged, and lines to and from Azerbaijan to him proved almost impossible to connect. His mail was routinely delivered having been checked.

News of what had occurred in Baku was not covered on Soviet television, of course. The first Heydar would hear of the travesty was through friends. The students and faculty of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, drawn from across the Soviet Union, always provided an excellent source of information. Ilham Aliyev quickly began to hear of what had happened. As he was at liberty to contact his homeland, Ilham was the first in Heydar's circle to obtain reliable information.

"We were in a state of absolute disbelief," says Ilham Aliyev. "My father could not conceive of what had happened. He had been a part of the Soviet system for so long, and it was an alien concept to him that this system had so completely failed."

Heydar had been part of the Politburo just 28 months earlier. Nominally he was State Counsellor until just 15 months before.

Heydar Aliyev was not blind, he had witnessed the failures of the Soviet Union. Indeed, he had been preparing to be one of those who orchestrated its evolution and renewal. Yet he was manifestly shocked by the Soviet Union it had become, which turned on Azerbaijanis, and killed in cold blood. He was devastated.

Quickly a picture began to emerge, via *Radio Liberty* and other independent news sources, which began to report on the full extent of the travesty that had occurred..

He might have been one of the leaders in the Soviet Union in earlier times, but as far as he was concerned this was treason of the highest order. It was populicide, plain and simple. Heydar considered that, as the one who signed the decree ordering the move in Baku. Mikhail Gorbachev was guilty, along with Yazov and Bakatin.

In Moscow, the authorities had been prepared. Heydar's telephone was cut off. Ilham's telephone quickly also went dead mysteriously. Others in their clique found themselves suddenly without communications, telephones malfunctioning, normally reliable lines rendered unusable by crackling and interference. On January 20, even as news was filtering through to Heydar, the authorities placed a burly guard on the door of his apartment and one on the entrance to his apartment block. Their message was abundantly clear. By now, however, Heydar was not listening.

The Republic of Azerbaijan representative office in Moscow, just a few hundred metres from the Kremlin, would be the setting for one of Heydar Aliyev's most dramatic public appearances.



This increased intimidation, coupled with Heydar's disgust at the depths to which Gorbachev had sunk and his shock at events in Baku, was the end for Heydar. At the time of the massacre he was 66 years old. He had been personally vilified and humiliated. He had been prevented from returning home and the opportunity to retire gracefully.

"Amid all of this, Heydar Aliyev had been compliant, suppliant and law abiding in the hope that Moscow would lose its interest in pursuing him. He had been loyal even," says Hasanov, "yet this was the end of his patience. His pliancy with the system had snapped."

Just a few hundred metres from Red Square, the epicentre of power, on Leontiyevskiy Row, the Republic of Azerbaijan maintained a representative office. Today this building remains the Azerbaijan Embassy in Russia. In January 1990, it was here that many of the estimated 10,000 Azerbaijanis living in Moscow turned to express their grief. Outside the Representative Office, several hundred people gathered. The trigger-happy security forces kept their distance, perhaps fearing that the bloodshed they had been happy to see in Baku would come to Moscow.

This had allowed the otherwise unremarkable Leontiyevskiy Row to see the appearance of something of an impromptu shrine. People left flowers and lit candles in front of the Azerbaijani office. It was freezing cold, being Moscow in January, but in the absence of anywhere to express themselves, some hovered close by.

Heydar was determined he would go. He had something to say. He had been quiet long enough.

"It was dangerous. Frankly I feared for him," says Ilham. "The authorities had gone to enough trouble to prevent him from communicating with the outside world. At this time especially there was no telling what they would do in order to prevent him speaking out."

At 6pm on January 21, 1990, Heydar called a press conference. Former First Secretary in Azerbaijan, a former Politburo member, former Vice Premier, even widely considered someone who had been a friend of Gorbachev, he was also the highest-ranking Azerbaijani ever in the Soviet system. For all these reasons, his voice mattered. He had allowed himself to be silenced. No more. But first, he had to get to Leontiyeviskiy Row.

"I was worried, genuinely worried," says Ilham. "For so long he had been, politically speaking, on the margins. As long as he had been silent, my father had been permitted to live quietly. But in Baku, just a day earlier, we had seen ample evidence of how the system reacted to being challenged."

Heydar spent much of his Sunday preparing notes for what he wished to say that evening and receiving information of the tragedy in Baku and its aftermath. Meanwhile his friends and family fretted over safety issues, while the call went out to local and international media and news outlets that the old Soviet grandee was making a sensational comeback from retirement and had something to say.

Around Leontiyeviskiy Row more people began to assemble. Word quickly got around, and it was generally accepted that the authorities would be less than happy. It was not so much a human shield as a gathering of interested parties, people interested in what Heydar had to say and in anticipation of his anger, but had the same effect.

That evening Heydar pulled on his suit. In his apartment were his son, a few friends and supporters. All had resolved to be next to him in case of trouble. He was himself quiet. Thoughtful. If he was nervous he did not show it, yet he was about to deliver a stinging rebuke to a morally bankrupt system. He had been sidelined in more recent years, but what he was about to do was sever, permanently, all links with the Soviet Union.



Heydar Aliyev's prepared a very public denunciation of the massacre in Baku, which would mark his final break with Moscow.

Three cars left from outside his apartment building. Heydar was driven in the first. The second was filled with supporters, following closely in case of trouble. The third was Heydar's ubiquitous government tail.

At Leontiyeyskiy Row, the function hall of the Azerbaijan Representative Office was filled to bursting. The media was out in force, local and international. Dozens of senior Azerbaijanis from Moscow were there, along with representatives of Azerbaijani companies and organisations, and other interested parties. Several hundred people were in the hall.

"As we entered the office and made our way to the hall, I was watchful," says İlham. "So much was at stake. We all knew the essence of what my father would say. But in delivering it, there was the highest ever ranking Azerbaijani in the Soviet Union, preparing to admonish the system, and to point to the people he had been serving alongside just a short time before."

Adds one observer from this period: "Such were the circumstances, such was the man delivering these words. It was always going to be incendiary, even if the speech was relatively diplomatic."

A few minutes after six, preambles completed, Heydar stepped in front of

a microphone. The natural bustle of a room filled with so many angry, shocked and frightened people quickly ebbed into pin-drop silence as Heydar began to speak...

Regarding the events events taken place in Azerbaijan, I think that they contravene human rights, the principles of democracy, humanity and the building of a state of law in our country... There are certain reasons why this situation developed in Azerbaijan. I would not like to go into details, it would take too much time. The ethnic conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia has been going on for two years. This arose in connection with the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Two years is long enough for the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, top officials of the party and national political leaders to settle this matter...

Had the necessary measures been taken by the top party leadership over Nagorno-Karabakh, we would not now observe the escalation of the tension and losses on both sides and that military assault undertaken.

For all that, the former first secretary of Central Committee of Azerbaijan Communist Party, Abdurahman Vezirov, is to be blamed... he practically did nothing to stabilise the situation in Azerbaijan. On the contrary, through his attitude and manner of work, political maneuvering, he set himself in opposition to the people, he could not inspire trust, and this created a gap between himself and people. People were indignant.

...Even then there remained the possibility of calming the situation and placating the people.

Vezirov ran away from Azerbaijan, but it is he who should bear responsibility. Those who misinformed the country's leaders should also bear responsibility. I think that top political leaders of the country did not have access to precise, true and objective information in good time. The country leaders were misled and as a result such decision was taken. Those who created this slaughter must be punished.

Ending his address with some tender words towards the fallen in Baku and their families, an emotional Heydar quickly left the building. That night several

Heydar Aliyev called for those responsible for the January Massacre to be punished and called events in Baku a contravention of human rights.



of his friends would sleep on the floor of his apartment, mindful that even before he had publicly distanced himself from the regime and rebuked its actions he had been subject to a mysterious heart attack and then several years of persecution.

“He told the international media it was an outrage. All his years dedicated to the Communist Party disappeared overnight as he wept for the deaths of his fellow countrymen,” says Atakhan Pashayev, Chief of National Archive Department.

Human Rights Watch would describe events as; ‘Violence used by the Soviet Army... out of proportion to the resistance offered by Azerbaijanis’, while *Helsinki Watch* stated; ‘Soviet troops had used unjustified force, resulting in many deaths, including the use of armoured vehicles, bayonets and firing on clearly marked ambulances.’

Millions of Azerbaijani’s would show their anger, as they attended the funeral and mass burial of the victims at Baku’s Martyrs Alley.

Yet this brutal use of force, and Heydar’s subsequent declaration, would have an unintended consequence for his former friend in the Kremlin. As news of the massacre in Azerbaijan emerged, it would startle the people of the Soviet Union and send shock waves across the republics. This would bury, once and for all, notions of holding together a collapsing empire. The Soviet Union now teetered on the brink...



Scenes from the Berlin Wall in November 1989. The unravelling of the Soviet Union would have profound effects across Europe.

Reception Committee

I kiss the soil as if I placed a kiss on the hands of a mother, for the
homeland is our earthly mother.

— Pope John Paul II

In 1989, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Adviser to United States President Jimmy Carter, published one of his most seminal books, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Decay of Communism in the Twentieth Century*. In this, he analysed Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms and predicted Communism's collapse, going on to describe what he viewed as Lenin's conspiracy of power to force a destruction of society by mass terrorism, systematic consolidation of one-party rule, Brezhnev's corruption, nationwide economic backwardness, mass social stagnation and the corrupting vested interests of those in leadership positions. He wrote:

Marxist-Leninism is an alien doctrine imposed on the region by an imperial power whose rule is culturally repugnant to the dominated peoples. As a result, a process of organic rejection of communism by Eastern European societies — a phenomenon similar to the human body's rejection of a transplanted organ — is underway.

Brzezinski would later state that in his 1950 master's thesis he argued that "the Soviet Union was pretending to be a single state but in fact it was a multinational empire in the age of nationalism. So the Soviet Union would break-up."



*Ayaz Mutallibov should really
have been an ally of Heydar Aliyev.*

The latter comment had always been clearly apparent, no more so than in Azerbaijan, where for seven decades a mainly Shia Muslim population speaking Azerbaijani had been squeezed to conform into a Russia-first, Slav-dominated, pseudo-Christian system. The nationalism of the Azerbaijanis, driven by hundreds of years of struggle for nationhood, had been replaced by deference to a monolithic system headed by Moscow. The relationship between Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union had, therefore, always been somewhat characterised by strained, difficult relations and came with a measure of resentment.

The same Baku that Mikhail Gorbachev had felt comfortable sending troops into, for example, was not one that the Soviet Union felt worthy of awarding as a 'Hero City' for its human, economic and oil efforts during World War Two. To say that this slight, and others, gave an indication of second-class status in a notional structure of 15 equal republics, was an understatement.

On January 21, 1990, Heydar had publicly demanded that "...*All who are involved in this tragedy should be punished...*" Then he returned to his apartment in Moscow and waited. His speech was widely reported in Azerbaijan. There too, in the wake of the emotional mass burials of victims of the massacre, they waited.

Abdurrahman Vazirov, First Secretary in Azerbaijan, was widely believed as culpable for the deaths of innocent people and, as Heydar's speech seemed

to indicate, was considered responsible for gross mismanagement of events and offering up poor information to Moscow, which led to the crisis. On January 24, three days after Heydar's statement, he was sacked and replaced by Ayaz Mutallibov (who was in Moscow at the time and hurried to Baku). Vazirov's removal would be Moscow's only tangible response to the massacre.

Heydar attempted to see officials in Moscow, to discuss the crisis, but got nowhere. Those few that would speak to him — in private and always off the record — said that nothing could be done.

Moscow responded with nonchalance. In an era of much-touted *glasnost* — openness — the Kremlin and its government shut up shop and dealt with a Gorbachev-ordered invasion of Baku with a heavy veil of silence. For several years Heydar had suffered his own indignities without complaint. The massacre of Black January was a bridge too far. Yet it was the Kremlin's obstinacy over its actions that was the final straw.

"He was hurt deeply by events in Baku, but beyond this was crushed by what he viewed as a conspiracy of silence in its aftermath," says Leonid Kuchma.

The relationship between Gorbachev and Aliyev had soured immeasurably since the days when they were reformist allies in the Politburo. Heydar's suspect heart attack, his dismissal and then virtual house arrest had been ample indication of this. Yet while the two men were now estranged, they were supposed to be cut from the same cloth. And if Gorbachev had believed in *perestroika* and *glasnost*, there was no room for events in Baku, or the conspiracy of silence in its aftermath. Black January was at odds with everything Gorbachev was so feted for in the West.

If Heydar even held out any hope that his statement would shock Moscow into facing up to its responsibilities, then he would yet again be disappointed. During 1990, there was ample evidence that the Communist Party was starting to shed. On July 12, 1990, Boris Yeltsin would resign from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in dramatic fashion, during the 28th Congress. Many delegates responded by calling "Shame!" and attempting to shout Yeltsin down. *The Washington Post* would report in a story titled *Yeltsin resignation starts exodus from Communist Party*:

The mayors of Moscow and Leningrad today joined populist Boris N Yeltsin and leaders of the reform bloc of the Communist Party by quitting the party in the first split since the time of Lenin. The dramatic events came as Mikhail S Gorbachev was wrapping up a personally victorious 28th party Congress with adoption of new party rules and the election of new members of the Central Committee... "I have to obey the will of the people and the all-powerful representatives," Yeltsin said. "Therefore in connection with my obligations, I declare my exit from the party."... Moscow Mayor Gavriil Popov and Leningrad Mayor Anatoly Sobchak issued a statement today saying they were quitting the party because of its inability to offer a realistic programme for transition to a new society.

Yeltsin had powerful ideas and wished to shape the political agenda. At 59 years old he was ambitious and driven. Heydar was less so. He had been forced into retirement, but at 67 years old in 1990 believed that it was not time for him to be part of a new political bloc. He was already being courted by several party splinter groups and new organisations. Vladimir Polokhalo announced the formation of a new bloc called Democratic Unity in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was 'designed to chip away at the party's traditional base' and made attempts to sign up Heydar. The Democratic Reform bloc made similar outreach. There were others.

Yet despite invitations to throw his weight behind several of these new organisations, Heydar was reluctant. He had other plans.

"Absolutely my father wished to return to Nakhchivan and live a quiet life," says Ilham Aliyev. "He was not in the best of health and was not ready for the cut and thrust of politics. He was tired of Moscow and tired of politics. He wanted to live peacefully among his own people."

Heydar was also broke. For over two years, his pension had been frozen and he had eaten deeply into his savings. The prospect of more dogfights with the government left him cold, and he could ill afford to continue paying the cost of living in Moscow. Especially amid the economic collapse that Gorbachev was presiding over. The Russian capital was difficult to afford.

For some weeks following Black January, Heydar persevered. He knew people. He pursued his agenda, pressing for an investigation or enquiry into

*Despite efforts to intimidate him,
Heydar Aliyev prepared to
leave Moscow after being
under virtual house arrest in
the Soviet capital.*



Black January. But getting nowhere and remaining in Moscow seemed foolhardy. With a freeze on his movements, amid an intractable investigation seeking dirt, Heydar looked for a way home. This was to come from home.

In May 1990, there were to be ‘elections’ for the Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Membership of Nakhchivan’s parliamentary body presented an opportunity, for with a seat came a measure of what could be called parliamentary immunity. Legally Heydar would be free to return home, and if his state pension was still frozen, he would be entitled to a small stipend, enough to exist upon at least.

While Heydar was still in Moscow, under what was effectively house arrest, his friends in Nakhchivan submitted his papers. He was elected with 92 per cent of the vote in a straightforward election, where no Nakhchivani candidate of any standing sought to oppose a man who was widely considered the region’s most famous son.

It was now time to go home. But the newly created deputy of the Supreme Soviet of Nakhchivan was determined not to slink away from Moscow. Over more than two years, the Kremlin had run a nationwide investigation into Heydar’s activities, in some cases dating back decades. Nothing had come to light that approached evidence of wrongdoing that he could be charged with. ‘Slinking’ was not in his DNA. In the wake of his election, Heydar made it abundantly clear that he was preparing to leave Moscow, almost challenging them to stop him.



(above) Heydar Aliyev in happier times with Zarifa and their granddaughter. (left) Heydar Aliyev was openly threatened of the consequences should he return to Azerbaijan.

In Baku, Ayaz Mutallibov should really have been an ally of Heydar. In 1977 he had been appointed as the Second Secretary of Azerbaijan Communist Party for the Narimanov district of Baku, while Azerbaijan was under Heydar. In 1979, Mutallibov was made Minister of Industry and worked closely with the First Secretary during a period when the republic was being reformed and revitalised. The two men had worked together well, during a period when Heydar was at his zenith in Azerbaijan. Things had changed for the better.

Within five months of his elevation, in May 1990, Mutallibov had the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan change his title from First Secretary to become

the First President of Azerbaijan. This was an elevation in status that he enjoyed. The pending return of any rival, perceived or otherwise, and one of Heydar's popularity, was not something he wished to see happen.

Heydar had turned down the opportunity to reinvent himself on the national stage as a grandee of the Democratic Unity in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, or a prime mover in Democratic Reform. Several Azerbaijan based groups had also made contact, seeking his support, encouragement, or indeed his leadership. All had been rebuffed. On either stage — the Soviet Union or Azerbaijan — Heydar considered himself done.

“We heard from Baku that Heydar Aliyev would not be welcome at all,” says Ali Hasanov, Head of Department on Social Political Issues in Azerbaijan's Presidential Administration. “There were a series of menacing threats and plenty of dark insinuations that all would not be well if he tried to return.”

May 1990 gave ample indication as to the historic situation that was materialising across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. On May 4, Latvia declared independence. In May, East Germany and West Germany signed a treaty to merge their economic and social systems effective July 1. In June there were Czechoslovakian parliamentary elections, Bulgarian Constitutional Assembly elections and the parliament of the Russian Federation declared its sovereignty. So much was going on, so much change, each evening local and international news broadcasts were dominated by breaking news. Black January was quickly forgotten, and the prospects of an inquiry, or even a cursory investigation, by the government became steadily less likely.

To this backdrop, Heydar was emboldened. The norms of Soviet society were changing fast, including belief in what you could, and could not, do. Mutallibov may have been against his return to Baku, but that did not hold the certainty it would once have. Heydar was stoic in the face of threats from Baku. He was not a young man. The prospect of being home in Nakhchivan was more powerful than the dangers that were being implied.

During this period of regional upheaval, Heydar prepared for Nakhchivan. He was not wealthy and needed a place to stay, so asked his niece if he could occupy a room at her small home. He tied up loose ends in Moscow and prepared himself.



Armenian nationalists were responsible for a series of bombings on civilian targets during this period.

In the final analysis, one of the things that tipped the balance was the instability that was becoming apparent over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Soviet crisis had created something of a vacuum as central government sought to firefight. This emboldened those in Yerevan who worked on a much-touted Greater Armenia project. On July 11, Armenian terrorists blew up a passenger bus travelling from Kelbecer to Tartar. The bomb killed 14 people and injured 35. This was by no means the worst travesty in a programme to destabilise Azerbaijan. But it was a significant moment in a campaign of random bombings that was just gaining momentum and would extend to dozens of car, bus and metro bombings that would leave hundreds dead.

While investigations into the July 11 bomb were only just beginning, a pattern was emerging after similar attacks on civilian buses in September 1989 and February 1990. With tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia at their highest, and evidence mounting regarding the perpetrators of the bombing campaign, there was little doubt as to the instigators.

For Heydar himself, the July 11 bombing, and the widespread anguish that this caused, was a reaffirmation that it was time for him to return. He and his small circle of friends booked on an Aeroflot flight to Baku on July 20, 1990.

In the days leading up to this, overtly threatening telephone calls to Heydar and his friends continued. One recounts being in Heydar's apartment when Mutallibov himself called, to intriguingly state that he could not guarantee

Heydar's safety if he was in Azerbaijan. The implication was easy to spot, especially to a backdrop of similar dark threats.

"He was ready to die, I think, if that was what was to come," says a witness to events that day. "Heydar Aliyev was isolated and out-on-a-limb in Moscow. Staying there, away from what was dear to him, was a worthless exercise and he would have been prepared to die instead of remaining where he was." Natig Aliyev (no relation) adds: "I don't think anything could have stopped Heydar Aliyev returning to Azerbaijan. He was determined. His time in Moscow was over. And if you knew anything about Heydar Aliyev, it was that he did not respond to threats."

On July 19, Heydar visited Zarifa's grave to pay his respects and left some red carnations for her. This was something he did weekly, but on this occasion it was done with an added degree of poignancy. He would perhaps not be back to see her for some time. On the morning on July 20, Heydar packed one small suitcase with his belongings and headed for Sheremetyevo International Airport.

"He did not appear nervous at all," says that same source. "If anything, he was happy, smiling, I think in a way excited at the prospect of getting to Azerbaijan. I don't think he dismissed the dangers that perhaps lay in wait, but he was confident that he was doing the right thing."

In the departure lounge at Sheremetyevo he was greeted by many of his countrymen travelling on the same flight. He chatted amiably with anyone who wished to speak to him. Four men travelled with Heydar. They were significantly less relaxed.

"I was very nervous and tense, not for myself, but for Heydar Aliyev," says the same observer. "There were people with lots of power in Baku who did not want him back in Azerbaijan. Political assassinations were not uncommon. And it was a time of great uncertainty. The July 11 bomb was evidence enough of that."

If the administration in Baku did not want Heydar back, neither did Yerevan. In Armenia, Suren Arutyunyan had been First Secretary of the Communist Party from May 1988 to April 1990, when the bombing campaign on Azerbaijan began. By the time of Heydar's return Vladimir Movsisyan was in that position. He was cut from the same cloth as his predecessors. Indeed,

if anything, across his tenure this terror campaign would increase in numbers and intensity.

The emerging tensions between these neighbour states – particularly over Nagorno-Karabakh — were escalating. Armenia was benefitting from Baku's fractious political leadership. The last thing Yerevan would wish to see was a unifying figure emerge, or arrive home from exile.

“Even after several years in relative isolation in Moscow, among ordinary people, Heydar Aliyev was wildly popular, by far our most popular political figure,” says Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh.

Word had inevitably spread in Baku that Heydar was preparing to return home, and with this news hopes rose. Baku's tainted, corrupt and unpopular ruling elite were increasingly nervous at this possibility. Some believed that Heydar would be at the vanguard of a new beginning for Azerbaijan. Needless to say, this idea was not well received by Mutallibov and those with whom he shared power.

Yet even as the Aeroflot flight took off from Sheremetyevo International Airport, bound for Baku, Heydar had made his intentions clear. There was no press pack accompanying him, no melee of supporters, no reception committees in Baku and calls to the streets to meet him.

“Here was a private citizen returning home. It was as simple as that,” says Rasim Musabayov, in 1991 an advisor to the President. “The grapevine in Baku spoke that Heydar Aliyev was coming home sometime soon, but on the day of the flight, no one knew he was even going to arrive on that particular day.”

As a member of the Supreme Soviet of Nakhchivan, Heydar was entitled to be met off the plane and escorted through the terminal building. As a former Vice Premier of the Soviet Union, protocol demanded he be provided with a car. As one of the only 126 men who would serve on the Politburo between 1917 and 1991, he was also entitled to a reception committee including Mutallibov being at Baku Airport to welcome him.

Heydar was returning as a private citizen, however. He asked for none of the fringe benefits allocated to his current or former status. His plan was to



An Aeroflot Tupolev would ferry Heydar Aliyev home to Baku from his enforced exile in Moscow.

spend a few days in Baku, and then fly into Nakhchivan and a welcome semi-retirement. In Baku, though, Mutallibov had organised a different kind of welcome committee. He and his acolytes did not buy into the story. They believed that a soft coup was underway and were determined to protect their positions.

Even as the Aeroflot's Tupolev was in the air, Mutallibov ordered sections of the airport closed and threw a cordon around the parameter. Roadblocks were established along roads leading to the airport. A dozen buses of government supporters arrived.

"There were a few intrigued people on board, who wanted to know what he was doing, returning to Azerbaijan," says Heydar's companion on the flight. "But he explained that, like them, he just wished to be at home and live quietly."

The Tupolev landed and taxied far from the terminal building, to an isolated spot, where the bused-in government supporters were waiting, chanting. Aboard the Tupolev, Heydar's four companions were in a state of panic, the prospect of the 67 year old being beaten, or at least mauled, looked likely.



Heydar Aliyev planned a few days in Baku visiting friends, before flying to his native Nakhchivan.

Just then, one man they did not know stood up and shouted: "They should not do this. I will stand by Heydar Alirza Aliyev. Who will stand with me?" A handful of others agreed, stating that they would form something of a human shield. Eventually a dozen men escorted him through the angry mob.

It was very courageous of Heydar's fellow passengers, as they had no personal stake in Heydar Aliyev's well-being. Presumably each was returning home from Moscow to their families and loved ones, so to put themselves in harm's way like that was very noble.

The shock of being targeted by a government mob quickly subsided. By mid-afternoon Heydar was in Baku and those with him recall him smiling with apparent happiness at being back in his natural element. A friend had offered Heydar lodgings in his home. Heydar had left Baku some eight years previously, the republic's First Secretary promoted to a hallowed position in the Soviet Politburo. It was rather an ignominious return for someone who had enjoyed such standing. But he did not care.

'He is happiest, be the king or peasant, who finds peace in his home,' wrote Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Heydar was more of a humble citizen in 1990 than the Soviet highflier of 1982. But nevertheless he was home.



Pictured visiting an Azerbaijan cotton project in 1977, Heydar Aliyev's return to Baku came to a significantly less peaceful backdrop, amid threats and intimidation.

End of the Party

We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibres
connect us with our fellow men; and among those fibres,
as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they
come back to us as effects.

— *Herman Melville*

He had been a victim of politics in Moscow, and in view of what he had come to realise as the truth, felt sorrow for his part in the Soviet Union. Politics were anathema to him at the time. He had no interest,” says Ilham Aliyev of his father. For a couple of days in June 1990, Heydar enjoyed himself being back in Baku. Staying in a small private home, an apartment in downtown Baku, he eschewed anything resembling work. Several news networks requested interviews. Some local politicians asked for a meeting. All were politely declined. On the evening on June 21, however, the house had uninvited visitors.

“They had guns,” says Deputy Prime Minister Ali Hasanov. “There was banging on the door of the apartment where Heydar Aliyev was staying. In burst a handful of armed men. They shouted threats and pointed their guns. It was frightening.”

After a few, terrifying moments the men left. But their message was abundantly clear. The police were called, but never arrived.

Aside from this incident there were the inevitable telephone calls and some harassment. Heydar did his best to ignore. He met with old friends — quite publicly in local coffee shops so as not to be seen to be conspiring — and took



In Nakhchivan, Heydar Aliyev lived in one room of a two-bedroom apartment belonging to his niece in this block at 75 Pushkin Street. The apartment is on the second floor at the right end of the building (above).

delight in lunching in Azerbaijani restaurants, having missed the cuisine while held in Moscow. He strolled along the corniche and took in the clear air that blew in off the Caspian.

By June 25 he had enjoyed his fill of Baku and the short flight back to Nakhchivan was booked. If Azerbaijan was home, Nakhchivan was where his heart lay. That day he arrived at its small airport. On Pushkin Street was a humble apartment block. Apartment 202 was a two-bedroom affair that belonged to his niece. She had been surprised to receive a telephone call from Moscow some weeks earlier, from her uncle, once one of the most powerful

figures in the Soviet Union, asking for lodgings. Yet she had been happy to oblige and cleared out her living room. This would be his home for the foreseeable future. If that had been surprising, even greater was the ease at which Heydar had arrived. Despite a mammoth political career, his worldly goods amounted to the suit he travelled in, his overcoat, and one suitcase of possessions. He neither owned, nor had possession of any property in Nakhchivan or Moscow, and his savings had been gobbled up during his period under house arrest.

“Having so little didn’t bother him. Material things were never his focus,” says Ilham Aliyev. “From my perspective, as his son, and I know his friends thought the same way, we hated to see a man who had worked so hard reduced to almost poverty. I never heard him complain once about it. He was not materialistic. If he had good books to read, and good company around him, he was happy.”

“Heydar Aliyev was a member of the Supreme Council of Nakhchivan. He took on the role that was his, but was not active in seeking further office, nor was he politicking,” says Vasif Talibov, current chairman of the Supreme Assembly of Nakhchivan. “He was a statesman and enjoyed experience way beyond anyone else in Nakhchivan. He brought this to the Assembly.”

Instead of aiming to become a political figure, Heydar settled into a routine of Assembly meetings and home life. His small 10 by 12 feet room in Apartment 202 became cluttered with books and periodicals. He enjoyed lunches in the town and tracked down old friends.

On a small, colour television in his room, Heydar watched, like the rest of the world, as the Soviet Union continued to unravel. This period had seen the launch of the ambitious ‘500 Day Programme’ which aimed to overcome the economic crisis in the Soviet Union by means of transition into market economy.

On August 17, Armenia declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Few would resent a desire for self determination (the same that had brought Soviet troops onto the streets of Baku in January that year), yet it came one week after A Avanesian and M Tatevosian, agents of Armenia’s security services, had contrived to plant a bomb on a passenger bus travelling from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to Agdam, a city in Azerbaijan’s Nagorno-

Karabakh region. Some 20 people were killed, and 30 were injured. The same day a car bomb exploded in the Khanlar region of Azerbaijan resulting in the deaths of 17 people.

On October 3, East Germany and West Germany reunified into a single Germany and the same month the Supreme Soviet of Kyrgyzstan chose Askar Akayev as the republic's first President. By November 17, Soviet President Gorbachev, floundering after some semblance of cohesion, proposed a radical restructuring of the government, including the creation of a Federal Council to be made up of the heads of the 15 republics.

Gorbachev's Federal Council approach was already somewhat outdated, as many had already declared independence and were taking definite steps to cement their freedom. In December 1990, the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan had already voted to drop the words 'Soviet Socialist' from the Republic's title. Azerbaijan had then adopted a 'Declaration of Sovereignty of the Azerbaijan Republic' and called for a timely end to use of Azerbaijan's Communist era flag. The old flag of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, a horizontal tricolour of blue, red, and green, with a white crescent and eight-pointed star, had been adopted in 1918 but replaced under Moscow's orders in 1920. The Azerbaijani tricolour made a welcome return, fluttering over government buildings, parks and public places, schools and private residences, a symbol of hope to most Azerbaijanis.

Heydar spent the remainder of 1990 quietly, while efforts were still being made to force him into exile. Via third parties, Mutallibov criticised Aliyev for returning to Azerbaijan and warned him to remain out of national politics, despite the fact that he himself had been given his first major break in politics by Heydar. The latter was his intention, and for someone whose opponents would later state was power hungry, he would live quietly in Nakhchivan for a year. One source states: 'Aliyev reinvented himself as a moderate nationalist' and set himself up for a speedy political return.'

Ilham Aliyev had also been hounded out of Moscow in the wake of his father's controversial post-Black January statement and had become a successful private businessman. He spoke to his father from Moscow or Istanbul each week.

"He was content," says Ilham. "After the indignities of Moscow, he was

For seven decades, having of the tricolour of blue, red and green flag of independent Azerbaijan was a jailable offence. Heydar Aliyev was the first to officially order it raised, anywhere in Azerbaijan.



happy at last. We spoke about the situation in Baku and the Soviet Union, but my father spoke as someone who was interested, not projecting himself as an actor in what was happening.”

Even into the spring of 1991, Heydar was a bit-player in Nakhchivani politics. A national stage was not on his personal agenda. One of the few times he appeared in national newspapers was a story on his surprising resignation. In 1943, aged 20, Heydar had joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. For the next 47 years — even during times of public and private travails — he had continued to believe. As a reformer he had extolled a sea change in the Soviet Union. But now the leader of his party — the General Secretary — had sold out in appalling fashion. The fact that the rest of the establishment in Moscow joined Gorbachev in constructing a wall of silence convinced the former Politburo member that the party was now rotten to the core.

One evening in late January 1990, Heydar sat down at the small desk in his study to construct a letter. He had resolved that his near six-decade membership was over. With a heavy heart, and no little emotion, he wrote:

I am informing you that I have decided to withdraw from the Communist Party of the USSR. I want to state that, in this decision, I am not just following fashion, but that it is a result of my evaluation of the hardships, happenings and the many disappointments that I have



In January 1990, Heydar Aliyev penned a damning letter that renounced his membership of the Communist Party and laid bare the failures of Soviet leadership.

lived during recent times. The following reasons compelled me to take this step:

The very idea of leaving the Communist Party crossed my mind after the military aggression against the people of Azerbaijan, committed in January 1990, under the direction of the leaders of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and USSR. During the events of January, hundreds of people were killed and wounded. I condemned those inhumane events, which contradicted the Constitution and basic law, and I expected that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR and Azerbaijan would solve this case and punish those involved.

I pulled myself together and waited. But, in response to my speeches, attacks were arranged against me in media organs of the Communist Party. All my attempts to refute baseless charges against me in the same media failed. The main achievement of perestroika and glasnost have shown itself as one-sided. Six months have now passed. Yet the criminals, who are widely known to everyone, are still not punished.

On the contrary, they are supported in efforts to conceal their guilt. They believe that time will pass, and that their role in this tragedy will be forgotten. But time has proven that crimes against nations are never forgotten — or forgiven — even as decades pass...

Secondly, my decision is based upon the hypocritical, bifrontal policy of the Communist party, appeasing the Armenian nationalists who have held Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region for more than three years. This region had been taken from Azerbaijan...

Thirdly, I can see that in times of democracy, political freedoms and pluralism in Azerbaijan, the national movement for democracy is being choked by the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, with the support of the Communist Party of USSR.

...I was against, and I am still against, the new Union Treaty as proposed by Moscow. It is impossible to have several sovereign countries within the framework of one sovereign state. All former Soviet Republics have to be given true political and economic freedoms, independence that is important so they may revive their national forms.

...All above mentioned facts force me to take this final step and declare my withdrawal from the Communist Party of USSR, notwithstanding that making such a decision was a very difficult task for me. I have grown in the Communist Family and my whole adult life has been related to the Communist Party. In 1943, when I was only 20, I bound my life to the party of Bolsheviks. I believed in values of Communism with all my heart, and participated in implementation of its plans.

But now all these beliefs are dead. All those countless declarations regarding the renewal of the party, and renewal of the union of republics, are lies. We have to say openly to the people that the Communist experiment and the way of socialism have failed, and that the union of republics, which was created and maintained by means of violence, is now set to collapse.

I realise all the difficulties that I will face because of this declaration, and can foresee every sort of attack and moral pressures that will be set against me. But an unbiased analysis of the Communist Party's past had brought me to the conclusion that I have declared above...

Those close to Heydar state that departing the party was the final act of a

journey that had begun as early as Heydar's days as First Secretary of Azerbaijan. Reform had been hard and painful. After 1969, under Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko, Heydar had a grandstand view in Moscow as Vice Premier and Politburo member as the aristocracy had fattened their fortunes and watched on, as living standards for ordinary people had dropped. He had gained a reputation as a Communist Party reformer, yet seen reform overtaken by Gorbachev's meaningless phrases and unplanned changed, which proved an unmitigated disaster. As one of the architects of the 'Andropov Model' during the early 1980s, the stalling of reform by the elite was arguably a turning point in his relationship with his party.

He remained at the pinnacle of the Soviet Union. Yet had felt the people of the nation were betrayed via *perestroika* as the Communist Party — in a desperate bid for survival — threw the 350 million people of the nation to the wolves.

'Reform is not pleasant, but grievous; no person can reform themselves without suffering and hard work, how much less a nation,' wrote Thomas Carlyle. Heydar thought Carlyle correct, but considered that the party had been cowardly in insulating themselves to the suffering around them, allowing the rest of the population do the "suffering and hard work".

In the weeks after his startling resignation Heydar got on with life after the end of the party. It was a quiet life, in some ways not unlike any man his age.

"He had rarely had time to engage in the arts — literature and poetry — and in Nakhchivan he had time to absorb Azerbaijani and Nakhchivan culture," says Anar Rzayev, chairman of the Writer's Union of Azerbaijan. "Heydar Aliyev once told me that during this period, his semi-retirement, he was getting through three or four books every week."

If Heydar considered it semi-retirement, by the second half of 1991 the 'semi' part was being chipped away gradually. In Nakhchivan, like Azerbaijan as a whole, the economic situation was dire. Gorbachev was presiding over a dismal economy in serious trouble with shortages of even the most basic items like bread. Industrial and agricultural output crashed during 1990 and 1991 leading to a drastic fall in Gross National Product and national income.

According to one source, GNP in 1991, as a percentage of 1989, was over 20 per cent down, while all economic indicators were in a tailspin. By the



(above) A Moscow resident picks from dustbins. Amid the destitution caused by Mikhail Gorbachev's (right) policies of perestroika and glasnost, millions of former Soviet citizens suffered.



second half of 1991, the economy had stopped declining and gone into complete collapse.

His attempts to energise people with meaningless slogans calling for ‘intensification and acceleration’ would fall on deaf ears when people could not feed their families. It was a period of madness.

Social and economic hopelessness descended on the Soviet Union as people sought solace from their abject position. This was also true in Azerbaijan. In 1991 Moscow attempted to curb the production and sale of alcohol, yet this only served to drive the industry underground like America

during prohibition. Homelessness became common, and those who clung to the roof over their heads were also made to suffer through bouts of power cuts and a shortage of heating fuel. In Nakhchivan the situation was just as bleak as in Baku, and the rest of the nation.

“It was a dark period in our history. People were suffering. Some days there was danger that even something as basic as wheat for bread would not be available,” says Talibov. “People were scared, the traditional values that held together families in this region were strained to the limit.”

Central government, it seemed, was engaged in a change of course without fully understanding the ramifications. One 1990 initiative from Moscow, leasing land to farmers, was not new. Heydar had been one of the first in the Soviet Union to pioneer this when First Secretary. Yet it took time to deliver and, as the experiment in Azerbaijan proved, must be pursued in a measured and deliberate system. Another initiative was to allow loss-making factories to go bankrupt. Correct in principle, although proper reform may have been preferable given that this exacerbated already spiking unemployment.

In Nakhchivan, the executive faced up to poverty, alcoholism, joblessness and a collapsing economy in the face of terrible leadership from both Baku and Moscow. James Graham wrote in *Perestroika and the Soviet Economy*:

When more radical changes were made they were mostly too late to prevent the slide in the economy and often had adverse effects. This was the case with the long overdue 1991 price rises which caused panic buying of any and all goods. Perestroika was too little too late to revive the Soviet economy.

The failure of perestroika was exacerbated by Gorbachev's continual boasting about the results that the reforms would have. By publicly predicting an increase in peoples' living conditions that never happened, Gorbachev was unmasked as an inept planner and of being incapable of making much needed decisions. In the last years of perestroika erratic policy shifts were common with wide ranging reforms soon clamped down on...

Failing to bring any significant change to the Soviet economy, Gorbachev lost the support of the people. By steering a course between



In Azerbaijan, people were forced to jostle for bread as even basic foods became scarce amid the economic collapse.

the conservatives and the reformers Gorbachev alienated almost everybody, leaving himself with few allies.

It was to this dramatic backdrop that Heydar began to look increasingly prominent in Nakhchivani political circles. The virtual collapse of the economy was being played out around him. Heydar considered Mutallibov and his government incompetent and he would have had to possess a stony heart to remain on the sidelines. In Nakhchivan town, even on Pushkin Street where he resided in one room of a small apartment belonging to his niece, there was ample evidence of the crisis that enveloped them.

“We would sit and ponder what next,” says Talibov. “There seemed no obvious solution, but the situation of people in Nakhchivan grew worse by the day. I remember Heydar Aliyev being angered that many of those in senior positions in Nakhchivan were failing to represent our case in Baku when limited resources and money were being allocated by the national government.”

After the brutal winter of 1990-1991, by spring of that year Heydar had begun to take more of a role in the Nakhchivan Assembly. By late spring there was a perceivable shift.

“He questioned everything, the methodology of the administration in Nakhchivan, its representation in Baku, and came up with many suggestions of his own on what could be done,” says Vasif Talibov, Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

Nakhchivan’s back was to the wall and its approximately 350,000 people were in a precarious position. The territory shared a 221-kilometre border with Armenia, with whom Azerbaijan was increasingly in an undeclared state of war. At 68 years old, Heydar was drawn in to the crisis.

“Most of the people from his generation had retired by the beginning of the 1990s. Yet the issues that faced Nakhchivan were critical. One cannot understate the prospect of meltdown. There was real desperation everywhere,” said Ilham Aliyev.



A despondent Heydar Aliyev witnessed the travails of Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan amid the collapse of the Soviet Union.



In 1991, Heydar Aliyev was elected to head Nakhchivan, at a time when the region faced chronic food shortages, Armenian aggression and economic collapse.

1991

Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can't ride you unless your back is bent.

— Martin Luther King, Jr

In December 1990, Heydar's old friend, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze had resigned. This was a great blow to Gorbachev. He stated: "We are going back to the terrible past. Reactionaries are gaining power. Reformers have slumped into the bushes. A dictatorship is coming. No one knows what this dictatorship will be like, what kind of dictator will come to power and what order will be established."

Gorbachev's popularity at home was almost non-existent. Promises and failed reforms had compromised his leadership. In mid-August he left Moscow to Crimea for a vacation. In late afternoon on August 18, he was told by his chief of staff, Valery Boldin, of the presence of the State Committee of Emergency. Gorbachev was asked to sign a statement declaring a state of emergency. Boldin seized the black box, the President's briefcase that held all of the launch codes for the nation's nuclear arsenal.

This group of conspirators came to be known as the Gang of Eight. They immediately sent troops to Moscow, Leningrad and the Baltics, while Gorbachev was a prisoner in his Crimean *dacha*.

Defying the group, Boris Yeltsin installed himself at the White House (parliament building). Most people remember the moment he went outside



An Azerbaijani man chips away at an image of Lenin, a common act of civil defiance as symbols of the Communist era were gleefully removed.

and climbed on top of a tank in a gesture of defiance. The coup quickly fell apart and Gorbachev returned to Moscow. But he was fatally wounded in political terms.

The August Coup would also serve to hasten the break up of the Soviet Union. Baku, however, was gripped by the confusion that was to typify the early years of the decade, and questions if the nation was actually pursuing its freedom. On August 31, the *Los Angeles Times* reported:

The vanishing Soviet Union was wrenched by conflicting pressures Friday as another republic, oil-rich Azerbaijan, declared its independence, while two others, Russia and Kazakhstan, agreed on the urgent need to join forces to avert catastrophe. With Azerbaijan's decision, eight of the republics — a majority of the 15 ethnic homelands in the Soviet Union — have now demanded a severing of ties with Moscow and the end of the centralised state founded 69 years ago on the wreckage of the Russian Empire.

In Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, 30,000 people were bussed in by authorities to stand under a hot sun near the shores of the Caspian Sea and cheer the unanimous vote by Parliament. Nationalist activists

condemned the proceedings as a show staged by President Ayaz Mutallibov and conservative Communist leaders to pander to local patriotism.

The positivity of beginning the process of independence was offset by the struggles that faced ordinary people. There was high structural unemployment, real gross domestic product was in free-fall and that same year was at the beginning of a decline that would reach 60 per cent between 1991 and 1995. Inflation at over 1,000 per cent was crippling ordinary people.

Nakhchivan was also searching for direction and leadership. On September 3, the Nakhchivan assembly met in a meeting to consider its leadership. Without his agreeing, Heydar was nominated and seconded for the Chair. He declined the position saying: "...I humbly declare that I cannot accept this position, my friends. The requirements of leadership of Nakhchivan, especially at this difficult juncture, are too demanding. I am 68 years old. I believe that this august chamber is packed with many talented men. I pledge that I will give my full efforts, and work to support whomever you choose as Chairman."

For the next few hours, debate rumbled on. Heydar was not interested, but in the wake of his nomination no other candidate wished to throw his hat in the ring. Outside the assembly meeting, a few hundred noisy supporters made their own pro-Aliyev views known.

By early afternoon, a floor vote was called on Heydar's candidacy. Of all members present, just one voted against and four abstained. Thus, he was elected as Chairman of the Supreme Council of Nakhchivan.

During 1991, Heydar had received offers from the Azerbaijani Popular Front and others, seeking either his endorsement, his affiliation, or his candidature. He declined to be associated with any, not because he did not believe in the democratisation process they represented, but because his political-capital across Azerbaijan would probably have skewed the process towards whomever he supported. In its early stages Azerbaijani democracy needed to grow organically, he believed.

Also he did not agree with the railroading of a single, and wildly unpopular, candidate on Azerbaijan. On September 8, 1991, Azerbaijan held its first



Heydar Aliyev agreed a truce with Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, something that political leaders in Baku failed to achieve.

Presidential Election. Nakhchivan's assembly voted that the region would not participate in protest. The only candidate on the ballot was Mutallibov, who had by now performed a Judas-like turn against Heydar Aliyev. Mutallibov was running on a ticket of the discredited Azerbaijan Communist Party. He won with 98.5 per cent of the vote. The *Los Angeles Times* reported:

The 53 year old Azerbaijani leader was the only candidate in Sunday's presidential election, which was boycotted by the opposition movement... He has retained power by keeping the emotional issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has been the scene of ethnic bloodshed, high on the agenda.

In Nakhchivan, Mutallibov's single candidate election passed by with little enthusiasm amid the drudgery of life. Heydar, similarly, had little time for the myopia that afflicted Baku. On September 3, 1991, Heydar returned to a position of power as Chairman of the Supreme Council of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and a glance at his agenda betrays why he may have been reluctant to take up the position.

The same day he was elected, Heydar placed a call to Armenian leader Levon Ter-Petrosyan. The Nagorno-Karabakh situation, and the undeclared state of war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, meant tensions along Nakhchivan's 221 kilometre border with Armenia. Villages on both sides of the border had come under attack, railway stock has been seized and burnt and hostage taking was becoming commonplace.

Heydar Aliyev appealed to Turkish President Turgut Ozal for badly needed aid supplies. The Turkish state responded with help for Nakhchivan.



“We agreed on a series of measures to defuse the situation,” says Ter-Petrosyan. “Heydar Aliyev was very practical and pragmatic.”

Foremost among the issues that faced the newly minted Chairman was Nakhchivan’s precarious position regarding food. Only a few days supply of wheat and very few other provisions were available. Nakhchivan’s administration had no money to buy any, let alone pay its staff, some of whom had not been paid for months. Baku, embroiled with its own problems, was providing no help whatsoever.

Heydar sent out an appeal to Nakhchivan’s neighbour Turkey, to President Turgut Ozal and Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz for emergency supplies. Turkey agreed, understandably given the Turkic heritage and cultural ties that deeply links both nations.

Within six weeks, on October 29, a temporary bridge was opened that would allow trucks to reach Nakhchivan with food aid. On November 18 the first convoy of trucks from Konya in Turkey began arriving in Nakhchivan with desperately needed basic supplies. The arrival of statesman Suleyman Demirel as Prime Minister in Ankara on November 20 that year, a man who would become a good friend to Heydar, and Azerbaijan in general over subsequent years, would serve to forge excellent ties between Nakhchivan and Turkey at that time.

“That link with Turkey would prove vital to Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan,”



While still living in a single borrowed room, in his niece's two bedroom apartment, Heydar Aliyev brokered a truce with Armenia and an aid deal with Turkey.

says Ilham Aliyev. "Turkey has always been a solid, dependable ally for Azerbaijan."

In 1991 that alliance, built on a common heritage that had not been broken during Soviet Union, translated into vital support for the people of Nakhchivan. As the situation between Baku and Yerevan grew progressively worse, Nakhchivan became more and more isolated from Azerbaijan. Rail traffic between Baku and Nakhchivan was cut, as it passed through Armenia, as were gas supplies.

In March 1992, Heydar's former colleague in Moscow, Shevardnadze, became Chairman of the State Council of Georgia, the nation's head of state.

"Within the confines of what he could do, as being head of Nakhchivan did not give him wide powers, Heydar was very active," says Shevardnadze. "During that period the pressures that faced anyone in a position of responsibility were enormous. The collapse of the economy was a precursor for much suffering. Every day you faced decisions that meant life or death, perhaps even the survival of the nation."

Leonid Kravchuk took office as head of state in Ukraine in December 1991 but was only inaugurated as President in August 1992. He adds: "They were extraordinary times. It was lucky for Azerbaijan that he was an extraordinary man. In my opinion he worked himself to death for his nation."



Two young victims of the Khojaly Massacre: Both were gunned down as they fled their homes on February 24, 1991.

Genocide

You will be judged in years to come by how you responded to
genocide on your watch.
— *Nicholas D Kristof*

By 1991, with Heydar now in power in Nakhchivan, an unspoken state of war existed between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The creep of Armenian nationalism and pressing of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue meant that tensions were high. The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) was listed as a terrorist organisation by the United States in the 1980s. But its leader, Monte Melkonian, and his militia stalked Nagorno-Karabakh almost with impunity.

On several occasions Heydar and Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan were able to defuse situations as it spilled across the border into Nakhchivan. However, the Nakhchivani defence forces — ill-equipped and lightly manned to police a mostly remote 221-kilometre border with Armenia — struggled. Armenian forces were organised into small units, a guerilla army attacking its enemy in small, nonstop attacks with a view to becoming an intensive, repetitive strain on Nakhchivan's already stretched resources, and the moral of its people. The purpose of this was several fold, not least to ensure that Armenia's western border, with Nakhchivan, was less of a threat when it became time to roll across its eastern border, into Azerbaijan. Heydar had been able to keep Nakhchivan safe, but the skirmishing there had just been a taste of what was to come as the struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh intensified and spread into Azerbaijan proper.

The Armenian assault on the town of Khojaly, in the early months of 1992, was the most notorious event in the conflict. Originally a town of approximately 7,000 people, situated on one of the main routes through Nagorno-Karabakh and in possession of the enclave's only airport, Khojaly was, militarily, a tactically significant town. To the southwest of Khojaly was Stepanakert (Khankendi), the capital of the Nagorno-Karabakh region and a base for Armenian and Russian forces from the days of the Soviet Union. With numerous smaller Armenian settlements in the surrounding countryside, the majority of the population in the area was ethnic Armenian.

"It was a peaceful, peaceful place. People had not had problems with their neighbours. The Armenian families in Khojaly joined Azerbaijani families for Muslim celebrations, like Eid. At Christmas, Azerbaijani families shared in their neighbours Christian traditions and gave gifts. That was how things were," says Lord Raymond Hylton, a member of Britain's House of Lords who was involved in conflict resolution. That sense of unity, of cohesive community, was the norm before the 1980s. But Khojaly's cultural and religious pluralism was a victim of the politics of land-grab.

There is no doubt that the town of Khojaly will go down in history as the site of one of the most brutal and obscene atrocities in modern times. In earlier days, perhaps only a few years before, the residents of this town of mixed religions had been the closest of friends. It was therefore incomprehensible to ordinary residents when the Armenians started to shell this region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Half of them fled the explosions to await for the politicians to prevent any land-grab so they could return to their homes and see peace restored.

But the previous peaceful environment of neighbourliness would be shattered once and for all and changed into a siege mentality as the Armenians cut off supplies such as food, water and medicines to the community of 3,000 now reduced from 7,000. Helicopters were used by the Azerbaijanis to mount a Berlin type airlift. But these flights became fewer and fewer as the choppers came under fire as Armenian and Russian forces drew closer to the airport. As the firing and shelling became more intense, the townspeople realised that their own group of soldiers, containing only a few professionals, would not even be able to defend the perimeter of the airport. They were defending bravely but the ferocious attacks were now being mounted by Armenians in modern Russian equipment supported by rebel Russian troops in tanks.



The New York Times began to run stories as news of the massacre slowly reached the outside world.

On the night of February 24th with no electricity, no heating, no running water and temperatures below freezing, most of the population decided they had to flee or die despite the bitterly cold weather. Yet still they hesitated, perhaps in disbelief that such a tragedy could engulf them. At that time, most of them only knew that the sound of firing was coming closer and word had spread that Armenian forces were drawing nearer. One first hand account states:

On February 25th at approximately 7.30pm Elman Mammadov, head of the Khojaly Executive Board, was informed by outposts that Armenian Armed Forces had been spotted moving towards Khojaly from all directions. Amongst these invaders were officers, troops and tanks of the former Soviet Union's 366th Motorised Infantry Brigade who were also stationed in Stepanakert. In the months preceding this attack deserters from this regiment, who were originally from Turkmenistan, had taken refuge in Azerbaijani towns to escape the reported beatings and cruel treatment they received at the hands of Armenian and Russian officers, allegedly due to their being Muslims.

The deputy commander of the 366th regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Yuri Zarvigorov had joined the Armenians with a large part of the regiment's military hardware, including 100 armoured personnel carriers. Among the force were 54 Armenian officers and ensigns. The Battalion Commander of the Second Regiment, Seyran Ohanyan, is the current Armenian Defence Minister.



Armenia's long-time Defence Minister Seyran Ohanyan was Battalion Commander within the forces that attacked Khojaly.

Nagorno-Karabakh's fate would now be sealed by a rebellious disenchanted Russian Unit with no high military command to control them, supporting a country who had had territorial aspirations for generations which had been egged on by the Soviets.

What happened next will never be forgotten or forgiven by Azerbaijan. Between 10.30pm under the cover of darkness, the heavy weapons of the Armenian troops rained down shells on Khojaly flattening houses and other buildings and causing many fires. After the bombardment, the infantry moved in behind armoured personnel carriers and tanks. The small group of Azerbaijani militiamen, with only light arms, despite their incredible courage, were no match for the invading forces.

Some of the residents now made the decision to flee, but others sheltered in the basement until 3am when members of the Civil Defence cajoled them into leaving and to follow them into what they hoped was safety.

It proved a forlorn hope. A few armed members of the Civil Defence organised as many as possible into groups and headed for the mountains and forests. These were vulnerable citizens who were unprepared for the harsh conditions having left their homes in a panic and had little or no protection for the bitter elements.

What happened next will go down into the annals as probably the worst atrocities of internecine fighting in modern times.

International recognition of the tragedy is reflected in the marble monument erected in the Hague, Netherlands, in memoriam to the Azerbaijanis who died at the Khojaly Massacre, which was officially inaugurated on February 24, 2008, 16 years after the atrocities. On the monument it states that 613 persons lost their lives — but the marble sculpture, although a worthy memoriam, cannot tell the harrowing tales of mindless murder, barbaric mutilations and scalplings carried out by an out-of-control militia on a peaceful township of civilians.

A major monument in Baku has also been erected to remember the fallen. Perhaps it was the chairman of the Mexican-Azerbaijan inter-parliamentary friendship committee, Marcus Perez, who best described the massacre saying: “Khojaly was wiped off the map as a result of man-made actions, not in the aftermath of a natural disaster.”

A report in Britain’s *Independent* newspaper describes one incident in which Armenian army units ambushed a group of 80 mostly women and children trying to reach refuge in surrounding villages. Quoting a massacre survivor, a Mr Sadikov, it explains how only 10 people survived, with seven of his immediate family, including his 67 year old brother, being slaughtered.

There were many heroes among the Azerbaijanis. Men like Arif Hajiyev who gave covering fire to the first group but was shot dead as he struggled to change a magazine in the minus 10 zero icy night. And Elman Mammadov, the Mayor of Khojaly, who together with his men kept three Armenian armoured personnel carriers at bay as he and his group spent the whole of 26 February on a bushy hillside surrounded by dead bodies. He recalled; ‘The forest was covered with snow. Many people were barefoot, without any warm clothes since they didn’t have time to bring anything with them. Just imagine they had to cross an icy cold river and then walk through a snowy forest. Many died from exposure and others ended up with frostbite.’

A news item in *The Sunday Times* corroborates many witnesses reports:

...We had just entered their trap. The Azerbaijani defenders were picked off one by one. Survivors say that Armenian forces then began a pitiless slaughter, firing at anything that moved in the gullies, a video taken by an Azerbaijani cameraman, wailing and crying as he filmed

body after body, showed a grizzly trail of death leading towards higher, forested ground where the villagers had sought refuge from the Armenians.

There were valiant attempts by helicopter crews to try to rescue the survivors. They were usually frustrated by Armenian ground fire but Azerbaijani journalists and officials who managed to get through brought back three dead children with the backs of their heads blown off. This and some of the other horrific scenes of massacre were filmed by independent journalist Chingiz Mustafayev whose work there continues to provide some of the most potent evidence of the atrocity.

“Women and children had been scalped and when we began to pick up bodies they began firing at us,” said Assad Faradjev, an aide to Nagorno-Karabakh’s Azerbaijani Community Governor.

The *Washington Times* reported that Azerbaijani television showed a truckload of bodies brought to the town of Agdam ‘with their faces apparently scratched or their eyes gouged out.’

The official death toll from Khojaly is 613 dead of which 106 were women and 63 children, 487 were wounded, 150 people went missing and the Armenians took 1,275 as hostages. Reports from the hostages were of brutal treatment at various times in captivity. Among the dead examined by the republic’s forensic department 33 persons had severe, deliberate mutilations with eyes, noses, breasts or penises cut off and eyes gouged out.

It was estimated by the United Nations that the conflict eventually resulted in more than one million refugees fleeing from Nagorno-Karabakh and being housed by Azerbaijan in huge camps.

The events in Khojaly brought widespread condemnation of the Armenians and investigations from Human Rights Groups including Amnesty International, Helsinki Watch and Memorial — and the conflict as a whole resulted in four UN Security Council resolutions regarding cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of forces (822, 853, 874 and 884).

“I do not think nations can stand aside for ethnic cleansing and genocide,” says former British Prime Minister Sir John Major. But the sad fact is that

THE SUNDAY TIMES • 8 MARCH 1992

Morgues fill as Azeris head for all-out war

ARMENIA: It used to be a place of peace, with many Armenians living in the region. But now it is a place of war, with many Armenians fleeing the region.

The first of the morgues was set up in the town of Yeghvard, about 100 miles from the capital, Yerevan. It was the first of many.

Thomas Gills, the first to report the massacre by Armenian soldiers in the Soviet Union, reports from Agdam.

The morgue in Yeghvard is the first of many. It was the first of many.

Armenian soldiers massacre hundreds of fleeing families

How Gills broke the story in last week's Sunday Times

When I arrived in Yeghvard, I found a scene of horror. The town was filled with the bodies of Armenians who had been killed.

I was the first to report the massacre. It was the first of many.

The massacre was the first of many. It was the first of many.

The massacre was the first of many. It was the first of many.

The massacre was the first of many. It was the first of many.

The government did nothing. We were simply told that the massacre had not happened.

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THE SUNDAY TIMES



A photograph of a soldier in a dark jacket and light-colored shirt, looking down at a small, rectangular object on a table. The object appears to be a small box or container. The background is dark and indistinct.

They also found a small box containing a small object. It was a small box containing a small object. It was a small box containing a small object.

The massacre was the first of many. It was the first of many.

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12 INTERNATIONAL ***

THE INDEPENDENT

Friday 12 June 1992

As atrocities on both sides mount in the war over Nagorno Karabakh, the Azeris are compiling a grim inventory of massacre victims

Painful search for Hojoli's dead

The search for the dead is a painful task. It is a painful task. It is a painful task.

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A photograph of a woman in a headscarf, looking distressed. She has her hands near her face, possibly crying or in pain. The background is dark and indistinct.



Heroes who fought on amid the bodies

The search for the dead is a painful task. It is a painful task. It is a painful task.

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THE INDEPENDENT

The international media reported widely on the Khojaly Massacre, but this prompted only a weak response from the world powers.





Azerbaijani women mourn between fresh graves in Agdam cemetery where massacre victims from Khojaly were buried. (inset) Images from the scene of the genocide.



(above) A young survivor of the massacre in the hospital. (left) The four surviving members of one family, who would go on to be part of Azerbaijan's tragic million strong refugee and IDP community.

Moscow, Washington, Bonn, London and Paris all sat this one out and did little to nothing. In common with the aforementioned global capitals, Baku sat on its hands. Political paralysis and internal squabbling had an adverse impact on military affairs. And with no coherent response or message from the Mutallibov administration, Armenia was not only winning the public relations war internationally, but had a free hand to promote its message.

Suffering from terrible myopia, Azerbaijan was weak, and became further divided amid a revolving door of leadership. In the space of three months, in the wake of Khojaly, Mutallibov was forced to resign, replaced by parliamentary speaker Yagub Mammadov.

While Azerbaijani politicians were busy fighting in Parliament, their military was directionless and their people and lands were succumbing to real fighting. The aforementioned occupation of Shusha was the first successful military operation for Armenian forces in the spiralling Nagorno-Karabakh War. The same month the Armenians captured Lachin, buildings were burnt and razed, and entire populations forced to flee, in order to create a land bridge between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh used to supply arms to separatist forces.

In Baku there was widespread desperation. Growing lawlessness, inflation, food shortages, power cuts, alcoholism and unemployment were exacerbated by the spectre of failure to meet the emerging Armenian threat. Added into the mix was the arrival of waves of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Fund for Peace, an independent Washington-based think tank, defines the conditions for a failed state as including a central government so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory, that government's non-provision of public services, deep corruption and criminality, the presence of refugees and sharp economic decline. In all of these measures, Azerbaijan was on the brink and the situation was worsening.

"Azerbaijan needed strong leadership," says Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who had become Secretary General of the United Nations on January 1, 1992. "The whole region needed leadership, at a critical time."



The embattled Presidential Administration building in downtown Baku. Central government was finding it increasingly difficult to project its power across Azerbaijan.

The Four Horsemen

Men make history and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skilful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.

— *Harry S Truman*

Failed states have come to be feared as “breeding grounds of instability, mass migration, and murder” according to political scientist Stephen Walt. Completely collapsed states are the rare end product of a failed state typified by an absence of authority, failure and weakness flowing from a nation’s geographical, physical, historical and political circumstances. Until recently Somalia was a rare model of a collapsed state, a geographical expression only. In Azerbaijan’s case, sub-state actors were taking over and the prognosis was not good.

By 1992, Baku was becoming increasingly incapable of projecting power and asserting authority within Azerbaijan’s borders. Central government had lost authority, leaving its territories governmentally empty. The petty squabbling of Azerbaijan’s leadership had directly equated to Armenia’s territorial gains and unexpected military victories. Ordinary people across the nation were suffering.

The Presidential Election was viewed by most as a fresh start for Azerbaijan, the first election in over 70 years not held under communist mandate. Election regulations — some said deliberately — had been gerrymandered to prevent a candidate over 65 from entering the race. At 69 years old, Heydar was barred from standing.



Academic Abulfaz Elchibey won the 1992 Presidential Election promising systematic change.

Heydar endorsed no candidate and remained well away from the affray of a boisterous election. Five candidates were on the ballot and Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) leader Abulfaz Elchibey's victory marked the definitive end of Communist Party dominance in Azerbaijani politics. He received 59.4 per cent of the vote.

In an inaugural address to the nation, Elchibey had announced that Azerbaijan was entering a stabilisation phase, that his administration would pursue constitutional, economic, and cultural reforms, create a national army and a national currency backed by gold reserves, all of which would support national sovereignty.

The relationship between Elchibey and Aliyev has been the subject of much conjecture. Both hailed from Nakhchivan and had relatively poor backgrounds, and both men studied at Baku State University. His real name was Abulfaz Qadirqulu oglu Aliyev, but he had taken to using the nickname Elchibey, which means 'noble messenger' in Azerbaijani. With an academic background, he was a well meaning character and grasped that beyond his inaugural speech he would be judged solely over four central themes: Nagorno-Karabakh, the economy, corruption and breaking the political stalemate in Baku.

The two men broadly shared a background and were cordial. Political ethos and direction was another matter however. Heydar had, on a number of occasions, rebuffed approaches from Elchibey and others in the Azerbaijan

People's Front. This put him on the outside looking in when Elchibey and the APF had scooped a near 60 per cent vote and a powerful mandate in the landmark election.

At the end of the short parliamentary session and the new President's inauguration, Heydar flew back to Nakhchivan. Already Elchibey had given a green light to his armed forces to launch Azerbaijan's biggest offensive to win back its territory from the Armenians.

Back in Nakhchivan, Heydar settled back to domestic business. Links with Turkey had proven fruitful, while closer links had been forged into Tehran and especially Iran's north, which shared so much with Azerbaijan. Richard Thomas, Roger East and Alan John Day write that: 'The 15 to 20 million Azerbaijani Turks living in northern Iran, ethnically identical to Azerbaijanis, have embraced Shia Islam and are integrated into Iranian society.'

With access to Turkey and Northern Iran, two huge, sympathetic and ethnically connected populations, Nakhchivan had moved on from seeking emergency aid in the weeks after Heydar was elected to head the region.

"There were very few opportunities for growth at that time," says Vasif Talibov. "Heydar Aliyev drew into government people who were like-minded. Political affiliation was not important to him. At a time of clear crisis he considered himself to be heading a government of national unity that worked for the common good."

Heydar had been engaged in a similar situation before. Appointed First Secretary of Azerbaijan in 1979, he inherited a worsening economic situation and a myriad difficulties that required a measure of systematic change and innovation. The situation Heydar faced in 1991 and 1992 was far more dire, of course. The principle remained the same. Perhaps only the depth of the crisis, and the number of fires he was being required to fight, presented even more of a challenge.

Azerbaijan could always rely upon its agricultural base and this was the case now. This period was used to wring what progress could be achieved elsewhere, in terms of revenue, keeping jobs and perhaps even creating them.

"My father knew what it felt like to suddenly be jobless. He could

empathise. He also understood that only job creation would help those families that were crippled," says Ilham Aliyev.

Especially in the short days and long nights, he would leave his office in the centre of Nakhchivan town after dark. Often he walked the short distance home. The depth of suffering among ordinary people was obvious. He was 69 years old in 1992. If he needed a regular shot of determination, in order to keep on going, these short walks provided it. Nakhchivan, like every corner of the Soviet Union, was in a mess. Every few months Ilham would visit the region from his base in Istanbul, where he too was rebuilding his own life after being hounded out of his job in the wake of Black January and Heydar's denunciation of the government. What he found worried him.

"My father was working from seven in the morning until ten, maybe eleven in the evening, every day, seven days a week," says Ilham. "The stress on him was enormous, simply because the situation was so bad, the pressure on his shoulders was constant."

Heydar had identified a number of areas where short and medium term gains could be made. Under the Soviet Union, state management of the mining industry — of minerals such as salt, molybdenum and lead — had struggled. During this period they were semi-privatised, or leased to private firms, for fees and profit share. Economic studies had been launched for marble, lime and gypsum, and local or foreign business partners sought. Gains were made in existing areas such as cotton, tobacco and 'balbas', the local breed of sheep whose snow-white silky wool is popular among carpet manufactures and was much sought after abroad. Within a year these areas and more had been explored, markets in Northern Iran and Turkey engaged, and despite the difficult situation Nakhchivan had even attracted Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This bucked a national and regional trend. A 1992 World Bank report, *Studies of Economies in Transformation*, stated:

Despite having a larger population and more significant resource base than Armenia, Azerbaijan has attracted only very limited foreign investment. As of October 1991, only nine companies were reported operational; this represents 0.6 per cent of all joint venture firms in the former USSR, excluding the Baltic States.

This made for grim reading, yet as the new administration got over its



Heydar Aliyev is embraced by a woman during a public appearance. It was a light hearted moment in an otherwise pressure-filled existence.



(above) Azerbaijan was dotted with the carcasses of factories and industrial enterprises. The failure of this sector caused spiralling unemployment. (left) With Heydar Aliyev's old colleague Eduard Shevardnadze in power in Georgia, the two leaders would share experiences as they sought to deal with an economic crisis.

initial crisis, it settled into directing an evolution. Heydar recognised that there was no magic bullet, but a concerted effort did slow the collapse and bring about some notable successes during this period. Jobs underpinned his agenda and Nakhchivan had just slightly begun to buck a nationwide, Caucasus-wide and post-Soviet pattern of rising unemployment. One seminal report produced by the United States Congress, *The Former Soviet Union in Transition*, stated troublingly that:

...Russia's unemployed may reach as many as 11 million by the end of 1992, that is about 15 per cent of the republican labour force; the

International Labour Organisation's prediction for the 11 members of the Commonwealth of Independent States plus Georgia is 15 million by the end of the year, or about 12 per cent unemployment.

This proved conservative all round, including for Azerbaijan, as the authorities of a newly independent nation continued the very Soviet practice of massaging the figures. In a report produced for the Library of Congress in 1995, academic Glenn Curtis noted:

In 1992 unemployment was still officially characterised as a minor problem, affecting some 200,000 people, but in fact the Azerbaijani government vastly under-reported this statistic. Under-reporting was facilitated by the practice of keeping workers listed as employees in idled industries. Funds set aside by the government to deal with unemployment proved woefully inadequate...

Agriculture was the largest area of employment (34 per cent), followed by industry (16 per cent) and education and culture (12 per cent). In the industrial sector, the oil, chemical and textile industries were major employers. In spite of the standard communist proclamation that employment was a right and employment was virtually full, large-scale, chronic unemployment had already emerged in the late 1980s, especially among youth and the growing ranks of refugees and displaced people...

"Not only our future economic soundness but the very soundness of our democratic institutions depends on the determination of our government to give employment to idle men," said Franklin D Roosevelt.

"Heydar Aliyev was someone who got things done. He sought practical solutions to the problems he faced, that was his *modus operandi*," says Eduard Shevardnadze, his long time colleague who, by November 1992, was Head of the State of Georgia. "We in Georgia shared the same economic morass as the rest of the region, times were hard. Heydar and I spoke occasionally, as friends. We shared information, methodology, techniques and contacts. In doing so, there were benefits for Nakhchivan and for Georgia. I always enjoyed Heydar Aliyev's sense of optimism and his steely belief that we would get through these difficult times and emerge as strong independent nations. Today that seems obvious, but at that time there were no guarantees."

There was no instant solution to the many issues that faced Heydar in Nakhchivan, as there were none for Elchibey in Baku. The latter was, if anything, facing far deeper problems. The *de facto* state of war between Azerbaijan and Armenia required Heydar to defend the borders of his region, while Azerbaijan was now embroiled in an operation to push back Armenia's incursion.

Baku had mustered its troops, four additional battalions, nearly 100 tanks and 70 armoured personnel carriers, as well as a small number of Mi-24 attack-helicopters. But Azerbaijan's government and military were suffering a breakdown in their working relationship. By September, the operation was faltering — in no small measure thanks to the administration's incompetence.

While Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh had managed to form a 15,000 strong volunteer forces, the extra troops that Baku had promised did not arrive. Fuel supplies were allowed to dwindle and supply lines were unreliable. On the front lines, Azerbaijani soldiers were finding themselves hampered as stocks of basic equipment, like bullets and other munitions drained. Azerbaijani soldiers were left to forage for food, as battle rations failed to materialise. It was a hopeless situation, exacerbated by repeated promises from Baku, over the course of several months, that these issues were being remedied.

The Armenians, took advantage. The Azerbaijani advance was halted and they began to be pushed back. By December Azerbaijan's forces, exhausted and suffering heavy losses, with ammunition running out, were faced with an imminent defeat. In order to prevent a bloody rout they were ordered into a humbling tactical retreat to Ganja.

Tactical it may have been, but the Azerbaijani armed forces had been hung out to dry by their political masters in Baku. Many soldiers returned to their barracks in Ganja, Azerbaijan's second-largest city, with not even a single bullet. On top of the hard-won ground, now lost again, dozens of men, possibly hundreds, had been killed because they did not have the means to defend themselves.

The mood was ugly within Azerbaijan's armed forces. They blamed Elchibey and his administration, who had broken months of promises. So did the people. Elchibey had won the Presidential election with nearly 60 per cent of the vote. His public approval rating was, by now, down to single figures.



(above) Grieving women at the grave of an Azerbaijani soldier killed in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. (right) The push back against Armenia was a failure as the government failed to support its armed forces and their supply lines.



In Baku, political parties were represented on the streets by armed militias. Across the country law and order was breaking down, food was so scarce that people were dying. Parts of the country were under occupation and war stalked many regions. As the depths of winter bit hard, a lack of fuel and power meant that people were, literally, freezing to death. In the Presidential Administration, it was said that Elchibey was near a mental breaking point and drinking heavily.

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), a first successful attempt to establish a democratic and secular republic in the Muslim world, had lasted



Azerbaijan looked to be on the cusp of a devastating collapse, the country's socio-economic demise compounded by a disastrous military campaign and Armenia's invasion.

from independence on May 28, 1918, to the Soviet invasion of April 28, 1920, just 702 days.

Seven decades later, the nation had again won its independence on October 18, 1991. Hardly a year later, it teetered on the brink of collapse. It had been inconceivable that a second period of independence would be shorter than the first, the 702 days of the ADR. The nation's enemies could, it seemed, sit back and watch as Azerbaijan sank into oblivion. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are described in the last book of the New Testament as the four riders symbolising Conquest, War, Famine and Death. All stalked Azerbaijan. And it seemed there was nothing to stop them.

Civil war and structural collapse formed what was now the most likely scenario.



... was in his 70s and undertaking an arduous diary which, coupled with the pressures of the job, inevitably took their toll on him

Gettysburg

All enterprises that are entered into with indiscreet zeal
may be pursued with great vigour at first,
but are sure to collapse in the end.

— *Tacitus*

There were many factors in separatism that emerged in post-Soviet space, in most cases linked to ethnic divisions that existed before the fall of the Soviet Union. These included Abkhazia, Adjara, Chechnya, Transnistria and South Ossetia. However, there were few overt civil wars. The civil war in Tajikistan began in May 1992 when under-represented ethnic groups rose up. The Georgian Civil War resulted from inter-ethnic and international conflicts which saw a democratically elected President ousted and attempt a return.

Despite the many so-called experts who predicted utter chaos as the Soviet Union fell apart, the anarchy which ensued was more socio-economic than political. This was partly through some statesmanship, partly through blind luck, and partly through the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a free association of sovereign states formed in 1991 by Russia and 11 other republics that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. Azerbaijan joined on December 21, 1991.

Amid the entropy of the era, however, Azerbaijan would be alone in seeing swathes of its territory overrun and then see the armed forces turn on its political leaders. It was not a distinction that brought any credit to anyone in the country. It remains something of a mystery why the government so



*Heydar Aliyev welcomes Turkey's
Suleyman Demirel, a key supporter,
to Nakhchivan.*

spectacularly failed to support the armed forces and the effort to take back Nagorno-Karabakh.

In Baku, Abulfaz Elchibey had receded into himself. The academic and Arabist had surged into the Presidency as leader of the Azerbaijan Popular Front. He had quickly found that it is easy to be in opposition and more difficult to be in leadership. His virtual abandonment of Operation Goranboy, and a dreadful lack of cohesion in dealing with economic malaise that beset Azerbaijan, had seen the supportive crowds of APF supporters melt away. These had been replaced with noisy protests, several times each week, outside Elchibey's office.

Several individuals from across the Azerbaijan political spectrum interviewed for this book, state that the demands on Elchibey were simply too great. The hopelessness of his situation, the hatred he now evoked, and the pressure he was under, overwhelmed him. He was losing weight and looking far older than his 55 years, and the lure of vodka to ease his mental anguish was starting to overtake him. In the final analysis, perhaps, he was simply a good man out of his depth.

It was, perhaps, already inevitable that Heydar would return to Baku. Contrasting the fortunes of the embattled President of Azerbaijan with the Chairman of Nakhchivan, noted American journalist Thomas Goltz wrote of a visit to Nakhchivan during this period, and witnessing Heydar visiting Sharur:

"Heydar! Heydar! Heydar!" the crowd chanted. Folks were visibly disappointed to see it was just me and the Minister of the Interior. Then the second car rolled in, a smiling Aliyev emerged and the crowd went wild.

HEY-DAR! HEY-DAR! HEY-DAR! They roared.

From my position atop the truck, I watched as Heydar started moving through the crowd. The square was already packed with upwards of 5,000 people – half the town, maybe more. And Heydar was in his element, pressing the flesh, kissing babies, and generally acting like a politician on the hustings. It was the more impressive because this was actually one of those rare occasions: a spontaneous demonstration.

Across Azerbaijan people were desperate for leadership. The short period of independence had been a disaster. Even the yoke of Moscow had begun to look good by comparison. In that sense, the almost inescapable conclusion to a growing majority that Heydar was what was needed.

"He was working 14, 15 hour days in Nakhchivan, just to keep it together. I believe that there was no thought to return to Baku. Heydar Aliyev spent his days plotting how to keep Nakhchivan from economic collapse. It consumed him," says Vasif Talibov.

The Chairman himself toiled in bizarre conditions. When the erratic central power supply gave up, his office had a small generator that powered a few lights. Even in the depths of winter there was no heating. During the long winter months, he worked in the office in his overcoat. In the summer, when temperatures and humidity spiked, there was no air conditioning. He worked in his shirtsleeves, although, being a traditionalist, he never removed his tie. His car was a 'clapped out' Soviet car, used sparingly, as it was often difficult to be sure that there was petrol available.

Heydar's popularity in Nakhchivan drew from his ability to engender some progress in the region. In Azerbaijan as a whole this added to his credibility. But ironically, at a time of hard won freedom, it was his credibility as a Communist era strongman and a Communist era progressive that made him so attractive to ordinary people in times of independence.

As Mutallibov and Elchibey floundered, and the country slipped into anarchy, people began to call on Heydar to be brought back from Nakhchivan, and in ever greater numbers they demanded it. One cannot underestimate the turgid state of politics, the endemic misery that afflicted life for ordinary people. In the autumn of 1992, a group came together to voice their concerns. This saw around 100 intellectuals, independent politicians, community figures and societal figures add their signatures to an Open Letter addressed to Heydar which was published in the independent media. They called upon him to “become active in national politics” “for the sake of Azerbaijan”.

Says Rasim Musabayov, then working in the Presidential Administration: “If there was a tipping point of public opinion, then that open letter represented it, a very public, high profile expression of support for Heydar Aliyev.” In Nakhchivan, newspaper statements proved a catalyst. Heydar’s thinking evolved as it seemed that a return to national life was plausible and indeed required.

Heydar Aliyev did not actively seek this. In 1993 he would turn 70 years old and those terrible events in Moscow had been ample evidence of his own mortality. Yet the disaster in Nagorno-Karabakh, the problems in the economy, and the hapless political morass in Baku compelled him.

On November 21, 1992, a caucus was arranged in Nakhchivan. Some 550 delegates from across Azerbaijan assembled in the small city. The gathering established a political party, forged its statute and a policy platform. Heydar was elected leader unopposed. On December 18, 1992, *Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası* — The New Azerbaijan Party — an entity founded, it said, led by a desire for ‘lawfulness’, ‘secularism’ and ‘nationalism’ — was registered with the Ministry of Justice in Baku. After this offices began to open across the country.

“There were no opinion polls in Azerbaijan at that time,” says Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh. “In my position, I am not involved in politics, but I can tell you there was not so much a tide, more of a tsunami, of desire to see Heydar Aliyev return to Baku.”

Sheikh-ul-Islam, the Grand Mufti of the Caucasus, defines himself as being apolitical. Yet he had served in the role since 1980s, a period when he had witnessed Heydar’s reformist zeal as First Secretary in Azerbaijan. He



Heydar Aliyev flanked by Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh (centre) and Ramiz Mehdiyev (left).

was one of those who believed that those calling for Heydar's return were correct.

"During that difficult period he had something to give. I believed he could contribute and told him so when I saw him in Nakhchivan," says Sheikh-ul-Islam. "I was careful, in my position, not to undermine the elected President, or government, but over time saw an evolution in his thinking. He agreed that something had to be done to stabilise Azerbaijan."

Those calling for Heydar's recrudescence had set in motion events that would see Heydar begin a return to national politics. Yet as Speaker of Parliament in Nakhchivan, Heydar was now prevented from visiting Baku on the orders of Elchibey. Even if he had wished to visit Baku, as a private citizen, a blanket ban was in place.

By 1993 events would move increasingly quickly. Elchibey's administration launched a doomed campaign to disarm the increasingly unruly militias that stalked Baku and other cities. The economy was increasingly dire. Azerbaijan was experiencing stagflation, a Keynesian macroeconomic situation where a high inflation rate is exacerbated by low economic growth and high unemployment. From January 1992 until December 1994, stagflation bit hard. Inflation peaked at 118 per cent in January 1992, but remained stubbornly high in general.

With the government already teetering on the brink, circumstances also demanded a scapegoat for the disastrous campaign in Nagorno-Karabakh. In choosing whom that should be, Elchibey made a politically fatal mistake. Large numbers of the armed forces were already deeply mistrustful of their political masters in the wake of the debacle over Operation Goranboy. The Azerbaijan Popular Front sought to arrest Colonel Surat Huseynov over the failure. Elchibey initiated Operation Tufan, which deployed some 4,000 troops, headed by the Presidential Guard, in an effort to arrest Huseynov and disarm his forces in Ganja. On June 4, 1993, this created a catastrophic situation of two large sections of the Azerbaijani armed forces facing each other in a gun-battle. Dozens died. Huseynov's men delivered a sharp defeat to the President's force.

In Ganja, among those seized by Huseynov's forces was Attorney General Ikhtiyar Shirinov who, under duress, signed a warrant for Elchibey's arrest for abuse of power.

The scene was now set for the collapse of the first post-independence democratically-elected government in Azerbaijan. In Ganja, Huseynov and his men had two options, remain in place and wait to be attacked again, or move on Baku. There was only one realistic option. The battle-toughened veterans of the Nagorno-Karabakh War would head for their own capital. Hundreds of other members of the armed forces joined Huseynov, while hundreds more refused orders to move against him. On June 5, Huseynov turned his force towards Baku and declared he was marching to unseat Elchibey and his government.

By this point, Elchibey had virtually become a prisoner in the building of the Presidential Administration, even sleeping there. Several militias in Baku had declared that he was a criminal for sending the country into a state of civil war. His own troops were now also defecting and others were laying down their weapons.

Elchibey was, judging from several accounts, approaching a nervous breakdown and drinking heavily. His political supporters, his ministers and his friends were melting away quickly, distancing themselves in anticipation of what was to come. His power to affect events was effectively gone — apart from one. For months he had done his best to sideline Heydar, keeping him at arms length in Nakhchivan.

*The President of Azerbaijan
dispatched a series of small
aircraft to Nakhchivan seeking
to bring Heydar Aliyev
back to Baku.*



But by June 1993, the 70 year old was now the last and best hope of restoring peace and avoiding a slip into anarchy. On June 5, a small aircraft landed at Nakhchivan Airport containing an envoy sent by Elchibey. He travelled into Nakhchivan City with a message from the embattled President in Baku. He implored Heydar to return to the capital, to intercede with Huseynov and prevent the collapse of the government and — indeed — Azerbaijan.

Heydar heard this but was stoic, believing that propping up Elchibey was impossible given that a superior armed force was heading towards Baku intent on unseating him. According to at least one interviewed for this book, when the plane returned to Baku empty, Elchibey was incensed and called Nakhchivan to remonstrate that “His President commanded him” to appear in the capital.

By the following day, June 6, it was clear that Huseynov was making speedy progress towards Baku, meeting limited resistance and, in some places, he and his men were met with cheers as they moved through towns and villages along their route. The same aircraft flew into Nakhchivan a second time, its sole passenger making the same plea, and Heydar again rebuffed the approach. Thomas Goltz wrote:

The conventional wisdom was that Heydar Aliyev was the mastermind behind Surat's uprising and putsch against Elchibey, and that all this was supported by the Russians. The circumstantial evidence



(above) The political and military situation in Azerbaijan reached its zenith in June 1993 with rebel tanks almost reaching the outskirts of Baku. (left) Leading the insurrection was Surat Huseynov.

certainly pointed in this direction, but even from the start there seemed to be a much murkier picture, mainly because most aspects of Heydar's return simply did not fit the grand conspiracy theme — especially all the talk about the 'Russian' connection.

If the Russians had a preferred regent for wayward Azerbaijan, it was the ousted first president and last local Communist Party First Secretary, Ayaz Mutallibov. You didn't have to look any further than where Mutallibov resided — a Moscow dacha belonging to KGB chief Yuri Barannikov. And the idea that Heydar would work with Mutallibov toward any mutual goal was, frankly, insane.

The reason was rather simple. If Heydar Aliyev regarded Elchibey as an incompetent dissident who had somehow stumbled into the position of president of Azerbaijan, he did not hate him. Rather, he held in that special sort of contempt reserved by prison wardens for former inmates.

Elchibey's support was now ebbing just as quickly as Huseynov's forces were making inroads towards the capital. Baku was in flux and law and order was starting to erode. Again the President sent word that Heydar Aliyev needed to return.

"This time it was more a request than an order," says one who was familiar with what was said at the meeting. "Heydar Aliyev remained deeply reluctant, believing that a solution would be found, or that Huseynov would be stopped, or that Elchibey would be replaced and stability would return."

For once, his political nose was well off the mark. Even while the plane was en route back to Baku — without Heydar aboard — Huseynov's push was becoming a sprint. Limited resistance had given way to none, pro-Elchibey forces withdrawing to Baku where they planned a last stand.

Those close to Heydar say that he had a sleepless night that evening. His decisions lay heavy on his mind. The fate of Azerbaijan, or at least its independence, lay in the balance. He remained in his office until after dawn the following morning, fielding calls and receiving messages. A situation that had looked dire continued to look worse. On June 7, the same aircraft returned on its third visit, this time containing a small delegation. Heydar was in his office to hear a situation report from Elchibey. Looking tired and pale, the Chairman of Nakhchivan heard that the position in Baku was near to collapse. Pale and patently exhausted from the long days and nights of those crisis days, he listened intently and still declined. Seemingly he continued to believe that the situation would be resolved through circumstances, that Elchibey would call snap elections, that peace would be restored.

That night the same pattern returned. From his office in the centre of the town, Heydar and his team worked the telephones, received reports and were wired news. It was morning, again, before he slumped into his bed for an hour of sleep. The night of June 7 had changed everything. By now it was clear that pro-Elchibey troops were digging in, in the suburbs of Baku along the route that anti-government forces would take. They promised a fight to the

very steps of the Presidential Administration, a five-kilometre battle that ran through areas of homes and apartments. Both sides were armed with rockets, grenades and guns.

What happened next would define whether June 1993 would be as etched into the underbelly of Azerbaijani psyche like the events of Black January. The heavily armed forces of pro- and anti-government troops were set to clash in a battle that would inevitably be to the finish. This, then, was Azerbaijan's Gettysburg. In place of Union's Major General George Gordon Meade's Army of the Potomac and Confederate General Robert E Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, were two relatively small Azerbaijani forces, yet equally determined foes.

The Battle of Gettysburg took place in a remote location and, although well armed for their day, the foes in America's Civil War were, comparative to today, lightly armed. According to Edwin Coddington in *The Gettysburg Campaign; a study in command*, one side had '159 guns stretching in a long line from the Peach Orchard to Oak Hill were to open simultaneously.'

Baku's civilian population, around two million people, cowered in their homes, many hunkering down in the expected line of fire. By contrast to Gettysburg, both sides in this standoff were armed to the teeth with high powered tanks, artillery, rockets, grenades and guns. Almost on the 130th anniversary of Gettysburg, which claimed around 8,000 souls, Azerbaijan looked about to enter into the abyss, a history defining moment that would inevitably be stained with the blood of thousands.



With rebel forces on the brink of entering Baku and pro-government forces mustered to meet them, the stage was set for Azerbaijan's Gettysburg.



Heydar Aliyev had harsh words for the nation's legislators, whom he accused of pontificating amid a worsening security situation.

Darkness or Light

Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism
or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.

— *Martin Luther King, Jr*

In the normally rambunctious, not to say combative, chamber of the Parliament of Azerbaijan one could hear a pin drop. Live, on national television, Heydar Aliyev was making his feelings abundantly clear. “The President of Azerbaijan has asked me to come to Baku in order to determine if there is any possible solution to the problems that beset our country. It is a quagmire created by you!!! The political dilettantes and dwarves in this hall,” he said.

A military showdown in the streets of Baku had been avoided, for now. Heydar was back in exuberant style, referring to “fawning dogs” and “selfish sell-outs”. Returning to the chamber where he had been stigmatised by many lawmakers when it suited them during the reigns of Mutallibov and Elchibey, he had received a sycophantic welcome.

“...But here you are again... in this lofty Parliament... Fawning on me and attempting to play political games. I will not have it. I am not here to play. Now is not time for words. Action is long overdue...”

The previous days had been as dramatic as any in the modern history of Azerbaijan. By June 6, the Elchibey administration had crumbled away. The President was in his office, simply because he slept there due to the prevailing

security situation. If he happened to call any of his ministers they were not in their office and were uncontactable. Most government staff were staying away from work, fearing the worst. The police force was active in Baku, but not in and around the Presidential Administration. A large, well-armed force of rebels was bearing down on the city and, it was said, would begin an assault within days.

History will not readily record him as being a statesman. Nor indeed would Elchibey become the saviour he had hoped to be for his country. By June 7, Elchibey was a President almost in name only. Yet in the dying hours of his tenure he remained determined to avoid cataclysm. Early that morning he dispatched several of his closest advisers aboard an aircraft to Nakhchivan, for a third time. Their brief was to not come back without Heydar on board.

Heydar had enjoyed perhaps six hours' sleep over preceding nights. He was at home when the aircraft landed and invited the men from Baku to meet him there. Throughout most of the preceding night, he had remained in his office and monitored the grave situation in his nation's capital. He had returned home that morning, for a brief nap and a shower, burdened by the realisation that he could no longer sit on the sidelines.

He was 70 years old. Since his mysterious heart attack some years earlier he was not as robust. Yet sitting to one side of his desk was a pile of telex messages, all bearing more or less the same demand. Return.

"There were hundreds, at least," says Vasif Talibov. "Including many from abroad. We stopped giving them to him eventually, because although they were appreciated, we were keeping as many small matters away from him as he was deeply preoccupied."

Among the flurry of calls to Nakhchivan was influential Turkish President Suleyman Demirel. As Prime Minister of Turkey, and then as President, Demirel had been a hugely important ally of Heydar Aliyev and Nakhchivan. Earlier he had extended friendship providing food aid, and later had been instrumental in joining hands with his Azerbaijani counterpart in developing trade ties. Both had been key as Heydar had sought to reverse a state of economic collapse. Demirel had asked nothing in return. Until this juncture. He was now arguably the most potent voice in persuading Heydar to go to Baku. Demirel told him he was the only one who would salvage Azerbaijan.

*Influential Turkish President
Suleyman Demirel insisted that
Heydar Aliyev return to Baku.*



“What can I do? Heydar was said to have told his Turkish friend of Huseynov. “Go and use your authority,” replied Demirel, who also offered Heydar, his family and associates a place of exile if the situation blew up in Heydar’s face.

On the last morning, June 8, the daily occurrence of a plane arriving from Baku was dominated by further difficult news. Elchibey sent word that the collapse of Baku was, at best, days away. He expected a bloodbath given a mix of two competing armed forces, out-of-control militias loosely tied to both sides, and a total breakdown of services and law and order. Elchibey stated that he could no longer guarantee the safety of civilians.

“The implication was that unless Heydar returned to Baku and attempted to take some control of the situation, he would be just as culpable if a humanitarian disaster ensued,” says Eduard Shevardnadze. “Could there ever be a more compelling reason to lead?”

Heydar now conceded that he must go. He began working the telephones. He spoke with Elchibey and Huseynov, other national players, Demirel and Boris Yeltsin, now President of Russia. According to Talibov: “It was common knowledge around Nakhchivan that there were efforts to send Heydar Aliyev to Baku. Word spread quickly that he had agreed to go. Frankly, people were aggrieved. He was considered something of a national treasure and the mission to Baku was personally very dangerous.”



(above) One of Heydar Aliyev's immediate tasks on returning to Baku was to rally the armed forces. (left) Russian President Boris Yeltsin was one of those who pressed for his return.

Crowds began to assemble outside Heydar's office. There were chants against him leaving. Heydar appealed to them to leave, giving an impromptu speech in which he promised to be back in "several weeks".

By the morning of June 9, Heydar had landed at Baku International Airport. Elchibey offered Heydar a pick of positions in government, including Prime Minister and Deputy President, but these were declined. Heydar sought to maintain independence. Especially when he was to deal directly with Huseynov and the rebels, and his old rival in Armenia, President Levon Ter-Petrosyan.

“Heydar Aliyev began by receiving all the major stakeholders, the Ambassadors of foreign powers, major government and opposition figures in Baku,” says Vafa Guluzade.

Under the constitution a man over 65 years old could not hold the position of President, but a 70 year old was essentially functioning as *de facto* President. The heads of pro-government armed forces visited him to take orders, Ministers, Members of Parliament, prominent officials. All beat a path to his door seeking advice and his instruction. He was taking meetings from seven in the morning until one the following morning, one after another, perhaps 50 meetings a day, a revolving door of faces and people. In a bid to gain traction on the issues facing Azerbaijan he was sitting and involved in intense discussions through the day.

Vafa Guluzade contends that just Heydar’s presence calmed the situation somewhat, the atmosphere of angst that permeated across Baku. Heydar spoke with Elchibey several times each day by telephone, but there were only two face-to-face meetings. Away from Baku, however, reports of Huseynov’s march towards the city continued.

Heydar had used his powers as Speaker of Parliament of Nakhchivan to recall the national assembly. For two days debate on events in Ganja, the Elchibey Presidency, the situation in general, raged. Communist deputies turning on Azerbaijan Popular Front deputies for the crisis and the other parties in Parliament blaming both. Speaker Isa Gambar, who had been Acting President for nearly a month, just one year earlier, struggled to reign in tempers and keep the chamber from becoming little more than a bear pit.

On June 13, four days after his return to Baku, Heydar entered the chamber to take his seat. He had something to say. It began with a savage assessment of the role of many of the people’s representatives around him in Parliament. Then he had an announcement to make: “To begin with, I will depart, within the hour, for the city of Ganja. Alone. I have requested Parliament to provide transport to any members of the media who wish to accompany me.”

Punctually, one hour later, Heydar departed Parliament having borrowed an official black Mercedes. It was not lost on those who knew Heydar that in Nakhchivan he moved around in an almost antique Zil, whereas amid national financial and economic meltdown, Parliament had been able to find the money

for brand new black Mercedes cars to accommodate a gaggle of its senior officials.

That afternoon, the *de facto*-President met with the would-be coup leader Surat Huseynov in Ganja. The latter was a 34 year old army Colonel and war veteran, just half the age of the veteran politician sitting across the table from him. For more than an hour, the two talked. There was common ground. Neither was a fan of Elchibey. Both sought change.

On June 15, Heydar returned to Parliament for another decisive moment. Elchibey attended the session. As rambunctious as ever, the chamber again incurred the wrath of the Chairman from Nakhchivan. While figures openly jostled to position themselves ahead of what looked like an impending Presidential Election, Parliament had created a commission to investigate Ganja. This incensed Heydar Aliyev, a long-winded committee to investigate while an army prepared to enter the capital.

The same day he rose to speak in Parliament ready to rebuke his colleagues for their ineffectual leadership, saying: "You ask for my impressions of my recent meeting with Huseynov in Ganja. I did not go to collect information for a committee. You have discussed the situation for two long days — and the result has been a commission of investigation."

The frustration of preceding weeks, and of seeing Azerbaijan on the verge of collapse, began to show. This would be one of the few times he showed anger in public. On national television, his voice rose and he roared: "The events in Ganja happened on June 4. Ten days have passed since then. You have been sitting here chattering, all the while you have allowed the country to fall apart."

If chiding Parliament was not an obvious way to win the body over, it nevertheless did in emphatic style. Within hours he had been elected Speaker. His passionate 30 minute acceptance speech, without notes, contained warnings to Huseynov and his men to desist, probed many of the problems that Azerbaijan faced and ended: "let there be no doubt about my purpose... I will devote all the time that God has left me on this earth to protect the independence of Azerbaijan and to promote the rule of law, democratic pluralism, the principles of universal human rights and the development of a market economy."



Azerbaijan's President made an unscheduled departure from Baku International and went into self-exile.

The situation remained deeply unstable. Heydar remained in contact with Huseynov and efforts were made to end the rebel advance. Many embassies were recommending their nationals leave Baku in anticipation of, at best, a short, sharp coup and, at worst, a bloodbath.

On the morning of June 18, Heydar was in his office when he was informed of another departure. Without notice, Elchibey had flown from Baku International, his flight unscheduled and his destination unknown. A little later, Elchibey landed in Nakhchivan and drove immediately to his native village of Kalaki. While the President had already become a bit-part player, his decampment effectively ended his tenure. His only role in the crisis from this point was as a name, although later he issued a statement proclaiming Kalaki to be his official office and that he remained in charge.

Heydar was determined that nothing untoward should happen to Elchibey, especially as he himself was still Chairman in Nakhchivan. He ordered more officers provided for the police service covering Kalaki so that they could guarantee security around the embattled President.

Further adding to the chaos, on June 21, 1993, Colonel Alikram Hummatov, Deputy Minister of Defence, seized power in the southern part of



(above) Seen signing the Ankara Declaration of 1998 (l-r) Heydar Aliyev, Bill Clinton and Suleyman Demirel. (left) One of Heydar Aliyev's key international allies would be Leonid Kravchuk in Ukraine.

Azerbaijan and proclaimed the new Talysh-Mughan Autonomous Republic in Lankaran, escalating violence. Hummatov demanded the resignation of Heydar Aliyev and return to power the former president Ayaz Mutallibov. However, as the national situation settled and Heydar rose to power, the Talysh-Mughan Autonomous Republic, which failed to gain any significant public support, was swiftly suppressed.

In the absence of the Head of State, Heydar Aliyev more-or-less continued in the same vein as before. Not much had changed, only that with him 'officially' in charge, he was better able to use proper diplomatic channels with international leaders. Bill Clinton was in the White House, Boris Yeltsin

in the Kremlin and John Major in Downing Street. Two notable allies would be Suleyman Demirel, who was President in Turkey, and Leonid Kravchuk, who was President in Ukraine.

“Frankly, one could see that Azerbaijan needed a man of his character and ability. Heydar Aliyev’s return was indeed timely,” says former Ukraine President Leonid Kravchuk. “Every day we were monitoring the problems that were afflicting Azerbaijan. And don’t forget, nations and regions are deeply interconnected. A disaster in Azerbaijan could have had profound repercussions in all the post-Soviet states, increasingly instability elsewhere. Those were times when the roots of democracy and civil society were spreading across all the former Soviet Union.

“I spoke to Heydar Aliyev, offered our good wishes towards him, and requested that he remain in touch with me. He was friendly and warm, and I ended our conversation by saying that should the people of Azerbaijan require anything from Ukraine we, as fraternal nations, would do our best to accommodate.”

With the President in self-exile, and Parliament having appointed Heydar officially as its Speaker on June 15, as per the Constitution this made Heydar *de facto* President, some 11 years after he had stood down as First Secretary in order to join the Soviet Politburo.

Heydar began to shape an administration, bringing in Ministers he trusted and forging the beginnings of a governing agenda. Yet his time was understandably dominated by the looming conflict. All the good wishes in the world would have done nothing if a civil war was not averted. Huseynov had demanded that Elchibey be tried for treason. Parliament talked and its commission rumbled on, seemingly disposed towards charging Elchibey with anything the rebel leader required. Yet the party that Elchibey had left behind, the Azerbaijan Popular Front, still had vast support. Although he was personally not liked, the APF was understandably against handing over its erstwhile leader to a kangaroo court. Whether Elchibey was guilty or not, Heydar felt it setting a terrible precedent to try, convict and punish an Azerbaijani President at the behest of a coup leader.

Between June 27 and 29, he embarked on a series of negotiations with Huseynov. The result was not so much a grand bargain as a vital compromise that suited no one and everyone, but one that would bring stability. Huseynov



(above) Pictured here with veterans of the armed forces, given his success in averting the prospect of civil war, Heydar Aliyev was considered a racing certainty for any nationwide election. (left) Azerbaijan was set for its third post-independence Presidential Election.

would end the assault on Baku and return his men to barracks in Ganja with guarantees of an amnesty.

The *de facto* President would appoint Huseynov as Prime Minister, and in the additional roles of Interior and Defence Minister so that he could oversee a renewed effort in Nagorno-Karabakh. While Azerbaijan had been engaged in internal conflict, its government and armed forces had largely looked away while the Armenians had found themselves able to take advantage and occupy large tracts of ground.

One cannot underestimate the impact of what Heydar Aliyev had achieved

at that point. A civil war had been averted, one which would have created conflict on the streets of Baku. It would have set Azerbaijan back years. It is impossible to say how deep the ramifications would have been, or how long they would have lasted.

He goes on to say that while there was a sense of elation that catastrophe had been averted, Heydar was relatively subdued. Instead of a war cabinet, his diary switched instantly into meetings with his economic teams. The first half of 1993 had seen a more than 40 per cent drop in GDP. This was his new war footing.

A national vote of confidence in President Abulfaz Elchibey was held in Azerbaijan on August 29, 1993. Voters were asked *Do you trust the President of the Azerbaijan Republic?* Only 2 per cent of responders voted 'yes', with turnout reported to be 91.6 per cent. Elchibey was formerly removed from office on 1 September.

The body also scheduled fresh Presidential Elections for October 3 and voted to remove an age bar for candidates that had been put in place by the APF in order to prevent Heydar Aliyev standing. There was no disguising why this was now off the statute books. This was done to accommodate him. And even at that stage there was little doubt that October 3 would see a runaway win for a man now widely considered to be the saviour of the embattled nation.

Perhaps the only surprise came in the form of Heydar's public utterances on the issue. Back in Baku, and back in power, he had a change of heart. The Presidency was a position Heydar now openly declared he wanted.



Having won a resounding mandate from his electorate, Heydar was inaugurated as President of Azerbaijan in October 1993.

The ‘Aliyev Effect’

Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight
a hundred battles without disaster.

— *Sun Tzu*

The Republic of Azerbaijan needed an experienced leader who could stand up — someone with the personality, guts and ability to rescue the nation’s independence. The electors decided that man was Heydar Aliyev. He received a staggering 98.8 per cent of the votes under the New Azerbaijan Party banner — and a five-year mandate. Of Azerbaijan’s 7.6 million citizens there was 97.6 per cent turn out. It was more or less inevitable that so-called experts, drawing from centuries of Western-style democracy, would condemn. The incumbent had a distinct advantage, but given that he had — even opponents agreed — almost single handedly saved Azerbaijan from civil war and collapse. Heydar’s popularity was hardly in doubt and success at the ballot box virtually guaranteed.

The 1993 events saw the arrival of Heydar in power, but also marked a beginning of a democratic evolution for Azerbaijan. But, as Heydar would later tell an American audience, transferring Western-style democracy eastwards was not like buying an apple, it was a concept that was not simple, or easy, to export.

On October 10, 1993, he was inaugurated, the third President of Azerbaijan. During a wide-ranging speech that touched on many of the problems that afflicted Azerbaijan, he noted:

...the Azerbaijan Republic gained its independence in extremely difficult conditions. The most difficult problem for us is the war, which we have suffered for five years, the aggression by Armenian armed forces against our territories. As a result of this war, the Azerbaijani people have been faced by a multitude of disasters. That is why, ending the war, if possible, and creating the necessary conditions for our people to live in peace, is the main task confronting us...

The economic, social, socio-political and moral crises with which the republic faced recently have gone deeper and, in 1993, reached a crucial point. In June of this year, the internal stability of the republic completely collapsed... Thank goodness that we managed to stave off all these dangers...

...In spite of the relative stability we have achieved in recent times, throughout the republic, we are still in a state of danger. For five years we have suffered from the aggression of Armenian paramilitaries, which have sought to occupy Azerbaijani lands. Today, approximately 20 per cent of our territory is in the hands of Armenian invaders. They have occupied the former Nagorno-Karabakh province completely. It is already a year and a half since the Azerbaijani town Shusha came under occupation. Armenian armed forces have captured, among others, the Lachin, Kalbadjar, Agdam, Fizuli, Jabrail and Gubadli regions of Azerbaijan.

...As a result, hundreds of villages, towns and settlements have turned into ruins and their populations scattered across Azerbaijan as refugees. Now they live in the hardest conditions... Having a non-violent disposition, we prefer to solve this problem peacefully, by peace negotiations, using diplomatic means and participating in peace negotiations...

...I swear to be worthy of the Presidency of the Azerbaijan Republic and the trust of the Azerbaijan people. I will attempt to guarantee that our independent state takes its rightful place among the civilised states of the international community. Placing my hand on the Holy Koran, I swear to be faithful to our national and spiritual traditions, to guarantee these traditions, and to further the development of our independent state.



Heydar Aliyev takes the Oath of Office during a ceremony overseen by Sheikh-ul-Islam, the Grand Mufti of the Caucasus.

The speech was well received and the oratory passionate. Delivery would be significantly harder. If Heydar's first term was difficult for him, it would be just as hard on the team he drew around him.

"Heydar Aliyev threw himself into the project," says Natiq Aliyev, who was appointed by the new Head of State as President the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic and then promoted to the key portfolio of Minister of Industry and Energy in December 2004. "And everyone who was invited to join his team accepted knowing that he had the highest expectations, of himself, and of those who worked for him. We served at the pleasure of the President."

The *Chicago Tribune* reported in July 1993:

Heydar Aliyev, looking old and tired, walks slowly across his cavernous office to greet a group of visitors. Such was his schedule that he says he hasn't eaten all day but hopes to find a few hours soon for a bit of supper.

"I have been working very hard," says the President. "I don't have a choice. The situation is very grave. I don't have a single free minute..." The old man has been putting in 15-hour days, sleeping only about three



Even as he attempted to bring quiet to the front lines, Heydar Aliyev spent time visiting Azerbaijan's troops.

hours each night, and eating just one meal a day, aides say... Aliyev's strenuous daily regimen would be hard for even a much younger man to maintain.

"This is the way he worked in the old days, but he was a younger man then," a diplomat noted. "And in the interim, he has had health problems, most probably a heart attack."

"No one has the courage to tell him to slow down," said another official. "He still has his tough reputation, and everyone is afraid of

him. Anyway, the country is in danger of falling apart, and he's the only one who can save it."

First on the new President's agenda came a much-needed ceasefire. Six years of fighting had been a disaster for both sides, in economic and humanitarian terms. As Heydar observed in his inaugural address, Azerbaijan had lost a fifth of its internationally recognised territory and nearly a million people had been made refugees or Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). By 1994 Azerbaijan and Armenia were embroiled in war of attrition that was going nowhere.

As head of Nakhchivan, Heydar had been able to find some common ground with Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the President of Armenia. On several occasions the two leaders had been able to calm tensions and end fighting between Nakhchivan and Armenia.

Yet an altogether higher level of statesmanship would be needed to end hostilities now. On both sides, many were against peace.

Heydar Aliyev visited the refugee camps in Azerbaijan, which were dire, and saw the suffering. He talked to ordinary people. He understood they wanted to go home. But it was a time to be pragmatic. This was hard, required difficult decisions and an acceptance that, for now, Azerbaijan would freeze the situation with so much of its territory occupied. That was particularly painful.

The historical facts on the ground showed that until the 19th century, in the whole of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh included, there was no significant Armenian population. Even in territory that is in modern day Armenia, Armenians were in the minority at that time. After the signing of Treaties Gulistan in 1813 and Turkmenchay in 1828, this began to change. Some 86,000 Armenians from Turkey and 40,000 from Persia moved there. Tsarist Russia sponsored Armenian resettlement from Persia and Turkey, which further altered the demographics.

According to the *Erivan* in the *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, published in Saint Petersburg between 1890 and 1907, at the beginning of the 20th century Yerevan city's population was over 29,000, of which 49 per cent were Azerbaijanis, 48 per cent Armenians and three per



Armenian paramilitaries were responsible for a series of bomb attacks on the Baku Metro in 1994.

cent Russians. In Azerbaijan, including Nagorno-Karabakh, the new Armenian population was accepted and settled alongside the Azerbaijani majority. All these facts and others had been held up as reasoning why Azerbaijan should hold its ground. But, as Heydar had realised, there were tangible reasons for being pragmatic.

The final battles of the conflict took place in May 1994, but the situation in Azerbaijan was not helped by a series of bloody terrorist attacks perpetrated on the Baku Metro. On March 19, a bomb planted under a seat detonated when it stopped at a station in downtown Baku. A second bomb blew apart a metro train on July 3. Across the two attacks, 27 people were killed and 91 injured. Both incidents were quickly linked with Armenian intelligence, with authorities in Moscow arresting a number of Armenians.

They also tested Heydar's resolve. "The instinct of any leader, with tracts of his lands under occupation, his people suffering, his national capital under attack like that, is not to sit down with the perpetrators and forge a ceasefire, but that is what statesmen do," says former United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

One of those who was close to Heydar during this period quotes Nelson Mandela as stating: "We must use time wisely and forever realise that the time is always ripe to do right." Heydar Aliyev knew that this was time for a ceasefire and to give diplomacy a chance. Looking back some 19 years, it is

*The capital of Kyrgyzstan
would host talks that led to
May 1994's landmark Bishkek
Protocol, a first step to
freezing the conflict.*



difficult to comprehend that representatives of Azerbaijan could sit down and negotiate a ceasefire with an entity that had occupied some 20 per cent of its territory. Yet Heydar had a major and fundamental task to bring peace and then begin the process of building a nation.

The unlikely location of Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, was chosen as the venue for the talks. It was a typical early summer day on May 4, 1994, with temperatures around 23°C and an early morning drizzle, when the delegates met in the Russian-styled government building, the White House, a seven-storey marble block overlooking Ala-Too Square. Delegates included Azerbaijan's Vice Speaker of Parliament Afiyeddin Jalilov and Armenian Speaker of Parliament Babken Ararkysyan.

Talks went well until the Russian representative of the OSCE Minsk Group, Vladimir Kazimirov, presented the agreement which showed the Armenian community of Nagorno-Karabakh as signatories. The Azerbaijani delegation refused to accept in the absence of Nagorno-Karabakh's Azerbaijani community. On May 8, 1994, the Bishkek Protocol, now amended, was signed by Azerbaijan. On May 12, four days later, this ceasefire agreement came into force.

The Azerbaijanis had insisted on one particularly significant change before signing a final draft: Paragraph 5 of the Protocol carried the words 'captured territories'. This was replaced by 'occupied territories'.



The six-year war was frozen following a ceremony in Moscow at which Russian President Boris Yeltsin witnessed his Azerbaijani and Armenian counterparts sign an agreement.

After weeks of further intensive diplomatic work, on May 16, 1994, Heydar was in Moscow. Around the negotiating table were Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia, Ter-Petrosyan, and representatives of the Yerevan-sponsored Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh administration. They would sign a further document that brought about a cessation in hostilities.

Another from the President's inner circle recalls Heydar being happy but far from euphoric. He had very low expectations. The Armenian side, the aggressors, had shown little goodwill. Indeed, Ter-Petrosyan had gone out on a limb when many in his constituency had openly advocated continuing the conflict, some even a drive onward towards Baku.

The aforementioned OSCE Minsk Group had been created in 1992 by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the group's co-chairs — France, Russia and the United States — delegated the responsibility of encouraging a negotiated resolution. But the group was already floundering, despite the best of intentions.

The ceasefire, however, was a major victory for Heydar. Just 219 days had passed since his inauguration and sitting down to sign the agreement in Moscow, freezing the six-year war. Now he could turn his attention to attacking the other numerous issues that afflicted Azerbaijan.

Heydar's aircraft returned back from Moscow landing at Baku International on the early morning of May 17. Instead of returning home after a tense, strenuous trip, he drove straight to the office and was behind his desk 45 minutes after landing.

A continuation of the war averted, it was now time for concentration on the economy. He was faced with an economy in shreds, which the previous government had no idea how to solve. It was an economic maelstrom of botched schemes with many self-serving individuals more interested in their own bank accounts than looking after the state.

Official figures produced by International Monetary Fund at the time make dismal reading. There was a decline of 60 per cent from the pre-transition Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the deepest drop of all the former Soviet states. The budget deficit had reached 13 to 14 per cent of GDP. Rapid devaluation of the currency had occurred. There was high four-digit hyperinflation (unofficially, some placed inflation in excess of 1,000 per cent in 1993) and almost no foreign reserves. There was a scarcity of food and widespread poverty. Normal market mechanisms had broken down completely and there was, understandably, little sustained interest from local or foreign investors.

Peace or no peace, tackling economic stagnation and hyperinflation would define Heydar. It was a short-term project, but one of laying fundamentals that would start to steer the economy right. This could not happen overnight. In fact in the years between 1992 (he took over in 1993) and 1994 there was a 22 to 25 per cent annual decline in GDP.

"Heydar Aliyev did what was necessary and took the difficult decisions that had to be made at the time," says Elman Rustamov, who was appointed Governor of Azerbaijan Central Bank in 1995. "It was not easy. I was in the room when he agonised over the toughest decisions, when he was called upon to agree to measures that would hurt ordinary people, but simply had to be made in order for Azerbaijan to make the serious economic reforms that were vital."

The President shunned short term measures designed to prop up his own popularity. Working with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the new administration introduced



In order to stop the economic rot Heydar Aliyev forged partnerships with, among others, the International Monetary Fund.

a root and branch economic stabilisation programme aimed at both macroeconomic stability and structural reforms.

Perhaps the most dramatic and historic impact was to reduce prevailing four-digit inflation. This dropped to ‘only’ 512 per cent in 1995, 120 per cent in 1996 and less than three per cent over subsequent years. He introduced production sharing agreements and the first oil bonuses and investments, tightened fiscal and monetary policies, stabilised the exchange rate and started the accumulation of foreign exchange reserves, vital for the import of food stuffs and consumer goods.

When it came to structural reforms the government liberalised prices and trade, and there was a mass privatisation programme that included revolutionary land reforms. At the same time Azerbaijan consolidated and restructured the banking sector and focused on introducing reforms for managing public expenditure.

As a result of the government’s initiatives and the stabilisation programmes of the IMF, Azerbaijan emerged from the crisis quicker than anyone could imagine — remembering that during this period there was also the so-called ‘Asian Crisis’.



Pictured with Arzu (left) and Leyla Aliyeva, as a grandfather himself Heydar Aliyev understood how the poor economy hurt Azerbaijani people.

To understand the economic miracle this represented one should compare Azerbaijan with other countries. During the period 1996 to 2000 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) reached 16 per cent of GDP and from 2001 to 2004 (one year after Heydar Aliyev's passing) FDI had again surged to 28.1 per cent of GDP. This compares extremely well with only 3.6 per cent for other CIS countries.

To fully understand the 'Aliyev Effect', it has to be realised that in the first years of independence, Azerbaijan's economy was in free fall with the politicians unable to create cohesive programmes to halt the recessionary plunge. Monthly wages had dropped to 17 per cent below those of the Soviet era. By 1996, the economy was recording positive annual growth, an expansion that has continued to today.

"Heydar Aliyev made those calls on policy, the hard ones, in the knowledge that they were the right decisions," says Rustamov. "One must realise, however, that while international bodies may have recommended steps they thought should be taken, and where officials in Azerbaijan agreed or made their own policy recommendations, the direction that was taken was dictated by the President. These were his decisions. And, while considering them, he knew just how hard people were suffering."

The IMF and World Bank were correct in their assessments and advice. But they were safely ensconced in Washington and the cold term of “comprehensive stabilisation programme” in no way reflects the human cost of the process.

By 1993 there were one million displaced from a population of around 7.5 million, almost 13 per cent. The camps were tented and, especially in winter, conditions were terrible.



Heydar Aliyev prided himself on his relationship with the near one million Internally Displaced Persons dotted around Azerbaijan.



*Ilham Aliyev would continue to build upon his father's legacy
in the energy sector.*

Pacta sunt servanda

Of all that is good, sublimity is supreme. Succeeding is the coming together
of all that is beautiful. Furtherance is the agreement of all that is just.

Perseverance is the foundation of all actions.

— *Lao Tzu*

It was a slam dunk. Sign the new oil agreement and start the millions flowing into the country's empty coffers. With outside aggressors to contend with, as well as major domestic problems, this would have been the most convenient way for the new President to start his job. But Heydar had never chosen the easy way in his long career... he was an extremely experienced politician, who always checked the small print of an agreement. He told his team of experts to check the oil contract very carefully. He did not care how long it took, he was not going to sign anything unless he was satisfied it was beneficial to his embattled country. Azerbaijan's draft oil agreement he suspected was a document that would have harmed, even endangered, the future of the country.

Azerbaijan needed a Rolls Royce type of a contract. Not a Lada.

So began a process which would climax in the signing of a revolutionary oil agreement which would become known as the 'Contract of the Century'.

To understand the gravity of the situation, it should be remembered that not only was Heydar trying to re-negotiate an oil agreement with some of the most powerful companies in the world, but he was also tackling the corruption and incompetence of the last government. They had blundered in the Nagorno-



(above) Heydar Aliyev telephoned US President Bill Clinton to save the key oil deal. (left) The ACG oilfield and the Contract of the Century would shape Azerbaijan for generations.

Karabakh conflict and had been bereft of ideas to stop the country from free-falling into bankruptcy, seeming to put their own vested interests before Azerbaijan.

It was a time for strong nerves. Heydar knew it was the most important decision of his Presidency. He would send his son, Ilham, Vice-President of SOCAR, the state oil company, at the head of a delegation for the last leg of the protracted re-started talks in Houston, emphasising the importance and complexity of this deal. The contracts under discussion concerned a production sharing agreement on the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli (ACG) oilfields

— a 30-year agreement involving \$20 billion of investment.

Initially the members of the Baku team were happy and relieved when they completed negotiations. It was only the next day when they became despondent on being presented with a contract which included a time clause relating to a signing in the future, when political issues surrounding the Caspian had been settled. Leading the talks, Ilham realised this was a deal breaker and refused to agree the document.

Pacta sunt servanda is the Latin for ‘agreements must be kept’... in other words, once a deal was agreed it was set in concrete forever. Contract law is based on the principle expressed in this Latin phrase. The Azerbaijani side could not accept such an addition to what they considered had been a fair and just agreement.

These had been difficult and arduous negotiations and, in the end, it was Heydar in Baku who managed to unlock talks which become bogged down in this politically sensitive question of whether the Caspian should be called a Sea or a Lake, which some companies argued would change the overall allocation of sectors of Caspian waters. The Azerbaijani team left the talks in shock at their apparent collapse.

Heydar instructed his compatriots to travel to Washington to meet with US Secretary of Energy Hazel O’Leary and then return to the talks in Houston. In the meantime, he picked up his telephone to call President Bill Clinton. The chat paid dividends and the ‘wait for sea or lake decision’ clause was removed from the contract, enabling both parties to finalise an agreement.

On September 20, 1994, there was a signing ceremony of the Contract of the Century at Gulistan Palace, Baku, between Azerbaijan and a consortium of foreign oil companies. This brought full circle to Azerbaijan, the birthplace of the oil industry would again become a leading world supplier of light sweet crude petroleum.

The cliff-hanging negotiations had brought just rewards to the country. The agreement called for Azerbaijan to receive vast profits. The billions of cubic metres of gas to be extracted would all belong to Azerbaijan, while the remainder would be divided among the consortium members whose stakes were as follows: SOCAR (20 per cent), British Petroleum (17.127), Amoco



Heydar and Ilham Aliyev enjoy the old Azerbaijani oilmen's tradition of rubbing the first oil from a new deposit on their faces for luck.

(17.01), Lukoil (10), Pennzoil (9.82), Unocal (9.52), Statoil (8.563), McDermott International (2.45), Ramco (2.08), Turkish State Oil Company (1.75) and Delta-Nimir (1.68).

At the signing ceremony Heydar Aliyev pointed out that the economy of Azerbaijan was in a deep crisis with many difficulties emerging, not only in the oil industry, but throughout the state, which would require the cooperation of all citizens to solve the problems. He commented: "All of us must unite our efforts, work hand in hand to implement the Contract, sort out this crisis, develop Azerbaijan's economy and drive up people's living standards as far as possible."

The next major challenge for the country was how to transport the oil to the various markets of the world. It would require the finest, proven diplomatic skills and the ability of a world statesman to carry out this next vital stage resulting from the contract. The proposed oil pipeline routes available to the state at the time were — the Turkish route, the Russian, the Georgian, the Iranian or an Eastern route — while at the same time the Russian Foreign Ministry was stating 'these unilateral actions contradicted international law and risked damaging the environment...'

Again this was the time for a confident and strong hand at the rudder and in one of his finest hours, Heydar selected the most difficult of the potential routes — the Western one — in a decision which would resound around the world. He selected the most circuitous but tenable route — Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline would not only require negotiations with partners in the other two countries but there was a backdrop of geopolitical clamour. Such a route might weaken Moscow's influence in the Caucasus, which would constitute an important leg of the much touted East-West energy corridor and give Turkey greater geopolitical influence in the region.

While others contemplated the effects of such routes, the President, as usual, went ahead to choose the alternative which would be best for Azerbaijan. As with a number of major projects in Azerbaijan it would be developed and completed by Ilham Aliyev, with the first oil starting to flow from Baku in 2005. It was a global phenomenon, an engineering feat which went into the history books as one of the legendary pipe projects of all times. The pipeline would stretch some 1,768 kilometres from Baku to the

southeastern coast of Turkey crossing Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, including a number of mountain ranges up to an altitude of 2,830 metres. It would also have to cross 3,000 roads, railways and utility lines, above and below the ground.

Other obstacles to overcome included 1,500 rivers, brooks and streams and the Ceyhan River in Turkey. The strict specifications for the pipeline were that it should forge a corridor of eight metres wide, be buried for its entire length at least one metre below the surface and have a lifespan of 40 years. It would become the second longest in the world. The pipeline when completed would travel from the Sangachal terminal near Baku through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey to the Ceyhan Marine Terminal on the Turkish coast of the Mediterranean, from where Azerbaijani oil would be shipped to international markets.

The diameter of the pipeline is 42 inches throughout most of Azerbaijan and Turkey, but in Georgia the diameter is 46, inches while it reduces to 34 inches for the last downhill section to the Ceyhan Marine Terminal – subsequently named the Heydar Aliyev Terminal. In a length of 1,768 kilometres, the pipeline includes eight pumping stations, two intermediate ‘pigging’ stations, one pressure reduction station and 101 small block valves. It is now an incorporated joint venture made up of 11 shareholders and managed by BP, its largest shareholder.

To initiate what became ‘the greatest engineering endeavour of the new millennium’, was a mind-boggling undertaking with both Heydar and Ilham putting their respective careers on the line... for Heydar it would be the climax to a long brilliant career and for Ilham it would underpin his emergence as a strong political figure. But first and foremost, it had to succeed for the future generations of Azerbaijanis.

The BTC project became a reality with the Ankara Declaration, an agreement announced on October 29, 1998, between Heydar and the leaders of Georgia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, along with United States President Bill Clinton, the latter two countries joining in the agreement so that their own oil could use this new track to the west. In addition to this geographical and construction agreement, a finance consortium was being established to raise the \$4 billion which would be required to meet project costs.



(above) The BTC project was one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects ever conceived in the region. (right) Azerbaijan's Contract of the Century would define the present and future of the nation.



This comprised the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the export credit agencies of seven other countries and a syndicate of 15 commercial banks. The feat of bringing all these big hitters together underlined the leadership of both the Aliyevs, while drawing admiration from their allies and adversaries.

Sadly, Heydar never saw oil flowing through the pipeline for the first time in 2005, with the first exports of crude on June 4, 2006, but he was present on an oil platform when the first oil from the Contract of the Century was produced. Together with Ilham Aliyev, they enjoyed the old oilmen's tradition

of rubbing the black gold on their faces. This moment was probably one of the happiest and most fulfilling of his life.

Nineteen years after the signing of the Contract of the Century, the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli (ACG) oilfield continues to be the world's largest producing offshore oilfield with a production rate of approximately 900,000 bpd.

The BTC pipeline, which required 10 million barrels of oil to start it flowing, now processes approximately 25 to 27 million barrels per year.



Heydar Aliyev pictured while on a visit to a new rig. Exploiting the nation's mineral wealth would be key to Azerbaijan's social and economic revival.



Turkish President Suleyman Demirel called Baku to share information on an impending plot to assassinate his Azerbaijani counterpart.

A Call from a Friend

Friendship... is not something you learn in school. But if you haven't learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven't learned anything.
— *Muhammad Ali*

It was a typical spring weather in Baku, with a midday temperature of 15°C and 12 hours of daylight promised. Heydar had admired the red geraniums as he left home and took the brief car journey to the Presidential Administration. He was pleased to see the bunch of blue and yellow iris flowers, which his secretary had placed in his office.

The President of Azerbaijan was at his desk early in the morning, ahead of him a day that had the hallmarks of most others — a near 18-hour day punctuated by meetings, conferences and telephone calls. A visit to a local school was scheduled late-morning, brief, light respite in a day framed to tackle the scores of problems facing his country.

But March 10, 1995, was going to be a day like no other, as reported in *Hürriyet* on November 6, 1996.

At around 10.30am the telephone on his desk rang. His assistant had a call on hold from the office of Suleyman Demirel, President of Turkey. Perhaps as often as once a week, the two Presidents spoke. There was a strong relationship between them. Of all the world leaders, perhaps none was closer to Heydar. Demirel had been Prime Minister in Ankara when Heydar was thrust into power in Nakhchivan, and Turkey had stepped forward quickly to

provide food and other aid in a dire economic situation. Later, Demirel had been instrumental in persuading Heydar to return to Baku. The ties between the two states could hardly have been warmer.

Indeed, in 1999 Demirel would be awarded by Heydar with the Istiglal Order for his contributions to the development of Azerbaijan-Turkey relations, constructive position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and creation of unity among Turkic states. The two men now met often — officially and unofficially — and had built a friendship. So when Demirel telephoned, Heydar could have anticipated a warm, interesting interlude in an otherwise hard day. After a few seconds they were connected. For a moment, Heydar sat back to enjoy a convivial conversation, but Demirel's tone was immediately strained. He had news.

A few minutes later, having learned the scope of what he was facing, President Aliyev calmly replaced the receiver. This was not a time for histrionics. His intelligence people consistently advised him of activities involving some formerly very senior Azerbaijani officials. Now it appeared that these individuals had been at the heart of a plot that also included the crack OMON unit, a Special Forces detachment within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan. In 1998, Heydar commented on the plot in a public statement:

Within the Ministry of Internal Affairs there was a unit called OMON, organised for special assignments. It did not gain that position within a day, a month or a year. Doubtless it was established for special purposes. But eventually the unit gained its own autonomy. No one managed it. And those who headed the group were criminals.

OMON gradually turned into a large criminal organisation and, instead of protecting the interests of the country, the rights of people, or fighting against organised crime, they committed violence themselves, and crimes against the people. They robbed people, tortured them and killed... OMON gradually turned into a criminal organisation itself. Eventually they had so much money and had gathered an arsenal of arms, that they claimed power and were at the heart of a coup against the democratically elected government...

The plan revolved around killing the President, taking control of key



(above) Heydar Aliyev was the target of a coup that, as he observed, sought to unseat the democratically elected government of Azerbaijan. (right) Despite the personal dangers, he remained stoic.



installations in Baku and restoring Abulfaz Elchibey all in the name of securing a pan-Caucasus drug trade route.

Heydar moved quickly. A State of Emergency was declared. Security forces swiftly moved to round up the plotters including members of a rogue Turkish intelligence unit, a contract killer and Special Forces personnel. On March 17, security forces laid siege to and stormed the OMON headquarters in the outskirts of Baku. Javadov and more than 50 people were killed in furious gunfights.

For a time the events of March 1995 were thought to be a purely



Hitman Abdullah Çatlı (right) had been engaged for the assassination, part of a plot to secure drug routes from Afghanistan to Western markets.

Azerbaijani affair. It was not until a car accident in Susurluk, 100 miles southeast of Istanbul, in November 1996 that the true facts would be uncovered. The vehicle contained a veritable arsenal of firearms.

Over ensuing months, what emerged was a sinister and shady story of black ops, terrorism, drug smuggling and hundreds of murders. Two days after Susurluk, the daily Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* reported information that it said had been obtained from the National Intelligence Unit (MIT) which concluded there was a secret security and intelligence group which had hired criminals to do its work under the cover of anti-terrorist activities. On January 26, 1998, the *Wall Street Journal* noted:

Heydar Aliyev, a former member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was reputedly targeted by Çatlı (Contract killer Abdullah Çatlı) and his associates because he opposed a drug smuggling route through Baku to the West...

To appreciate the danger of the death squad sent to Baku and the seriousness of the group, it should be noted that it has been estimated that it was responsible for more than 200 assassinations. Piecing together information from the official and other sources, the picture that emerges is of Heydar and a newly-stable Azerbaijan standing in the way of major global drug trafficking.

Published information states that Turkish Prime Minister Çiller's chief counsellors, Acar Okan and Suleyman Kamil Yuceoral, were involved in the coup attempt. Fikri Saglar, a Commission member said that the purpose of the coup was to secure the narcotics route, which started in Afghanistan and would end on the streets of Western nations.

As the Afghan government began to lose control during Soviet occupation, local warlords flourished and with them did opium production. Crime syndicates searched for ways to generate money to purchase weapons. In the post-Soviet vacuum, drug cultivation flourished. Says the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention:

During the 1990s, Afghanistan firmly established itself as the largest source of illicit opium and its derivative, heroin, in the world. By the end of the 1990s, Afghanistan provided about 70 per cent of global illicit opium production, well ahead of Myanmar (about 22 per cent) and Lao PDR (about three per cent).

Primarily supplying countries in South West Asia, Central Asia, East and West Europe, as well as in South Asia, the Arabian Peninsula and Africa, illicit opiates of Afghan origin were consumed by an estimated nine million abusers, which is two-thirds of all opiate abusers in the world... Although these numbers are only approximate, UNODCCP also estimates that the overall turnover of illicit international trade in Afghan opiates can be roughly estimated at \$25 billion annually.

A weak, unstable, lawless and poorly secured Azerbaijan was ideally suited to serve as a staging point for the \$25 billion industry. A more robust Azerbaijan removed it from the equation. It was this that brought Heydar into the crosshairs of an assassination plot.

In the period leading up to this attempt on Heydar's life political assassinations were rife. Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira were shot out of the air in their plane. Presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake was murdered in Sri Lanka. Georgian opposition figure Giorgi Chanturia was murdered in Tbilisi. Yitzhak Rabin, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former Prime Minister of Israel, was gunned down. Just in 1994, there were three disclosed attempts on the life of US President Clinton.



Heydar Aliyev returned from New York, where he addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations, to discover a fresh coup plot.

Across the world, and across the political spectrum, the life of a political figure was played out to this backdrop. Azerbaijan, with its vast potential to produce petro-dollars, relative instability and strategic location, made it a tempting target. The man serving as President of such a nation was in an unenviable position. The OMON scandal was simply the crux of a difficult, dangerous 12 months for the President. Perhaps the job looked less enviable when one looked at the personal security aspect.

Five months before OMON, Heydar had been the subject of a plot emanating from the office of his own Prime Minister. Surat Huseynov had almost led an armed insurrection through his own capital city in order to unseat a sitting President. As a soldier he had won plaudits, but as a political figure he had not won any degree of confidence from either Heydar, or from the people of Azerbaijan in general. He had fought bitterly over the Contract of the Century, wishing to see Azerbaijan commit itself to Russia in an oil-exploration deal.

The Prime Minister's office had grown into an ineffective headache, a diversion when the idea had been unity. If Heydar had constructed a grand bargain, ending the 1993 coup by co-opting Huseynov into a government, the trade off would not end well.

Heydar Aliyev had just returned from New York where he had addressed the UN General Assembly and met with Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. On September 30, 1994 — ten days after the signing of the Contract of the Century — Shemsi Rahimov, head of Heydar's own Presidential Guard, was murdered. The same day the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Afiyeddin Jalilov, was gunned down. The President ordered urgent investigations, but it was already clear that something was bubbling under the surface.

By Monday, October 3, there were reports of shooting in the capital. Heavily armed riot squads, backed up by men drawn from Huseynov's Ganja forces, attempted a swift, decisive move. They fanned out across Baku, numbering some 8,000, according to some estimates. The government was partly ready, but wrong-footed. For a number of hours there was uncertainty. Heydar Aliyev made urgent attempts to contact Huseynov, but the latter was avoiding his calls and behind the plot that was afoot. Directing the government's response from his home, Heydar then made a dash for the television station.



Around half a million people flooded onto the streets of Baku after Heydar Aliyev (inset, addressing the crowd) appealed for a show of support against the coup plotters.



In his trademark dark blue suit, Heydar went live on national television to seek his people's support, telling them: "We must unite...as this will only serve to damage Azerbaijan's stability... This situation is the result of dirty forces, both inside and outside the country, who are enemies of our independence. They want it (Azerbaijan's independence) but we will not give up on Azerbaijan's independence." Looking strained, the President appealed to his people to come out onto the streets in support of stability, of independence and in defiance of the "dirty forces" he blamed for the crisis that was unfolding.

The population of Baku hovered at around 2 million, the population of Azerbaijan at almost eight million. What followed was a humongous display of patriotism. Within an hour people were flooding into the streets of the city, tens of thousands. Within three hours the authorities estimated that almost half a million people were there.

"It was not a political demonstration, although there were calls of support for the President. But the people were tired, sick of the instability, and fed up with the fighting. Their lives were hard enough without added instability," says Natiq Aliyev.

For decades under Communism the Azerbaijani people had been powerless, considered a proletariat to be ruled. Moscow had made the decisions. Self-determination was not part of the deal. Into the era of independence, the political class, most a hangover from Soviet Days, had dominated. The people remained largely on the margins. In October 1994, the promise and guarantee of democracy was fulfilled. The rebels were still on the streets in places, but a body of perhaps a third of the population of Baku assembled on the streets to oppose it.

"That demonstration was mind-blowing. As the President often said, democracy is organic, it grows," says Vafa Guluzade. "Yet this was an extraordinary event, people demonstrating their commitment to the rule of law, and indeed the Presidency. They had had enough."

The same day the coup crumbled. The government issued a State of Emergency. Life quickly returned relatively to normal. Britain's *Independent* reported:

... the long-suffering residents of the capital, Baku, greeted the state



Heydar with Ilham and Mehriban Aliyeva and his grandson, also named Heydar. For a time the family would face a constant security risk.

of emergency yesterday with indifference, although it meant another round of curfews, unexplained gunshots in the night and public buildings surrounded by nervous bands of soldiery. Fathers walked daughters to school past machine-guns, morning traffic careered around tanks on roundabouts and pedestrians sauntered in the autumn sunshine past the headquarters of a rebel group of Interior Ministry troops that has suddenly challenged the one year old administration of President Heydar Aliyev.

... but the British Embassy said the situation had improved since then. 'If it was a coup attempt, it went off at half cock. Aliyev knew something like this would happen. The worst is past. After the first punch, Azerbaijanis prefer to sit down and talk rather than fight it out,' said a Western diplomat.

For Heydar, the Huseynov coup would be the beginning of a trying year in which he would manage to avoid being the victim of a handful of assassination plots. Ironically, several would have tangible benefits to both himself and Azerbaijan. For example the ineffective and divisive Huseynov was replaced with the eminently capable Fuad Guliyev. A few months later, while there would be shock and reverberations, ultimately the relationship between Azerbaijan and Turkey would be strengthened. However, having survived the

attempts of a drug-addled conspiracy and then another emanating from his Prime Minister, Heydar's survival of 1995 would be down to blind luck rather than security, intelligence or the goodwill of a friend.

Then Leonid Kuchma, the new President of Ukraine, arrived in Baku on a state visit. Tension was high in Baku, given the recent security issues. Heydar went to the airport to meet his Ukrainian counterpart. They were on the tarmac at Baku International when a security check discovered a large amount of dynamite and an ignition device under the road where the Presidential motorcade was due to pass minutes later.

Heydar Aliyev refused to live in a security bubble, when he went out in public he was adamant that his security gave him the space to interact with people. This was a nightmare from a security point of view, but the President believed that there was no way he could hide himself away.

No matter how secure Heydar was, the bubble around him, the aforementioned deaths of President's Habyarimana and Ntaryamira, showed that it was impossible to guarantee complete safety. On April 6, 1994, the pair had been picked off easily on the approaches to Kigali International Airport by a surface-to-air missile.

In September 1995, the President of Azerbaijan was returning to Baku from a short visit to Turkmenistan and a meeting with President Saparmurat Niyazov. The Presidential flight was late, diplomatic talks had spilled over into an unplanned dinner. In the cool of night, the Azerbaijani summer's relative humidity had typically led to a light mist. It was patchy, and the approaches to the airport had a dense mist in places. Some 30 minutes out, the Control Tower at Baku International had ordered Heydar's plane to change course and land on Runway Two, where the mist was somewhat lighter and therefore a landing safer.

At the same time, a few hundred metres from the fence around Baku International, a householder had become alarmed. It is a remote area, away from the general hum of noise of Baku, and the arrival of a small truck and the shouting of a few men had gotten his attention. Through the darkness and mist he had observed them behaving strangely.

The man and his family had a small home not far from one end of Runway One. They had got used to the noise of the occasional aircraft, Baku was not

Ukraine President Leonid Kuchma's State Visit to Azerbaijan came to the backdrop of an assassination plot against Heydar Aliyev. Both Presidents would have died if the scheme was successful.



so busy that time. Flights were less frequent than today, and land was cheap. Aside from the noise of Boeings and Turpolevs it was rare that they were disturbed, especially late at night.

So the noise and general behaviour of the men won his attention. As he listened he picked up a few words of their discussions, hearing “Aliyev” “plane” “shoot” and “missile”. His interest had now become alarm. He called the police.

The men had readied themselves for the landing of the Presidential Flight. From the back of the truck, one was armed with a Strela-2M a portable air defence system, a shoulder-fired, low-altitude surface-to-air missile (SAM), armed with a high explosive warhead and passive infrared homing guidance. Their plan was to blow Heydar out of the sky. The SAM is able to destroy all aerial targets flying at low altitude such as combat helicopters and low-flying fighter aircraft.

It would be blind luck that saved Heydar on this occasion. For even while security forces raced to the scene of the call to which they would have been too late, but a bizarre configuration of circumstances had saved the President of Azerbaijan from going down alongside Habyarimana, Ntaryamira and perhaps even UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöl. Instead, a combination of Niyazov's hospitality, and the mist of an Azerbaijani summer's night, conspired against the conspirators. They were arrested even as Heydar Aliyev was in his car and en route to Baku.





In September 1985, the sheer luck of a late runway change prevented Heydar Aliyev and his plane being shot down with a shoulder held surface-to-air missile.

There would be other attempts on the life of the President of Azerbaijan in the future. In his 2008 book *The Ghost of Freedom*, author Charles King wrote of numerous coup attempts stating: ‘Actual or alleged coup d’etat’s became an almost annual occurrence — in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1998 — but in the aftermath of each one, Aliyev was able to augment his power over both rivals and past associates.’

But with elections looming and the new administration more entrenched, its agenda showing signs of working and the roots of economic recovery starting to show, the chapter of political instability was coming to an inexorable end.

Much later Barack Obama would comment that: “Politics has never been for the thin-skinned or the faint of heart, and if you enter the arena, you should expect to get roughed up.” Heydar had taken his share of knocks and lived with his fair share of dangers, especially in 1995. In holding his own, and pursuing an agenda for recovery, he had not only survived personally, but also looked likely to be there to see Azerbaijan enjoy that recovery.



Heydar Aliyev was stoic in the face of the repeated attempts on his life stating that dangers came with the job of being President in the unstable post-Soviet era.



Veteran statesman and former United States President Jimmy Carter. His Carter Center is one of the leading election monitoring organisations in the world.

A Life Defining Year

I am making a collection of the things my opponents have found me to be and, when this election is over, I am going to open a museum and put them on display.

— *Lyndon B. Johnson*

If the United States of America, or Britain, is having elections, they don't ask for observers from Africa, or from Asia. But when we have elections, they want observers," said Nelson Mandela. The idea of foreign monitors observing elections began with an 1875 plebiscite in Moldavia and Wallachia with international oversight by French, British, Prussian, Russian, Austrian and Turkish observers.

Election observers help to deter fraud and build confidence that election results will reflect the will of the people. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a concept that Western-style democracy is the best political system, almost regardless of the circumstances. Azerbaijan's was never going to be praised by Western governments as perfect, but the country's President pointed out that the General Election of 1995 was a record breaker among the former Soviet Republic with no less than 12 political parties taking part. Some 3.5 million voters would elect their representatives for 125 seats in the National Assembly of Azerbaijan, the Milli Majlis.

Of course, there would be irregularities — anomalies, genuine mistakes and outright fraud occur in established European and Asian countries — but a determination to follow a democratic route, away from the centralised Soviet system, was there for all to see. Observers from the International Foundation

for Election Systems arrived before the election, and subsequently produced a 50 plus page document. In this detailed report, which tended to be negative, there were some positive remarks:

One of the most prevalent problems encountered in the former Soviet Union has been the lack of information and training on the part of election officials at the district and polling stations level. During a meeting with district officials we were shown a series of documents developed by the Central Election Commission, we were also quite impressed with the clear understanding of the materials produced and the open attitude of members of the commission as we asked pointed questions regarding their roles prior to and during election day. There may be a general perception on the part of officials that moving too quickly on reforms could be detrimental to the long-term prosperity of the country. In addition, the current psychology of the population has not prepared the general population in its ability to move forward toward democracy in the immediate context.

But move forward they did. In fact, a report from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights gave a neutral assessment:

Azerbaijan's election was multi-party, with many independent candidates and opposition parties actively participating. All candidates and parties received free airtime on state television, which opposition parties used to criticise the government and put forward their own programmes. They also sought voter support through their own newspapers. The election law permitted observers and authorised representatives of political parties and candidates to monitor the voting and vote count.

In the 1995 General Election — the first in independent Azerbaijan — there was a voter turnout of 86.1 per cent. Winning 62.7 per cent of votes, the ruling party claimed 59 of the 125 seats. New Azerbaijan would dominate the body, but mixed first-past-the-post and proportional representation meant that alongside 52 'independents' there would be seats in the Milli Majlis for the Azerbaijan Popular Front, Azerbaijan National Independence, Azerbaijan Democratic Entrepreneurs, Motherland, Azerbaijan Democratic Independence, Musavat, the Social Justice Party and the United People's Party. At the same time as the parliamentary election, there was also a referendum on a new

The 1995 General Election in Azerbaijan transformed Azerbaijan's parliament, ushering in a new generation of politicians.



Constitution which was approved by 91.9 per cent of the voter, with 6.6 per cent against. This would strengthen the powers of the President. The Joint Electoral Observation Mission after the election noted:

President Aliyev, who had stressed his personal commitment to free and fair elections, acknowledged that observers' criticisms were justified. But he maintained that the elections, though flawed, were a step forward. Aliyev has also pledged to continue Azerbaijan's democratisation, and to carry out the provisions of the constitution guaranteeing human and civil rights.

The election took place against a political background that even by Post Soviet standards has been unusually unstable, characterised by ethnic territorial conflict, extra constitutional changes of government and frequent coup attempts. By inviting OSCE and the UN to observe the election, Azerbaijan's government also sought international recognition of its progress towards democracy.

Thanks to the overwhelming personal popularity of the President, the New Azerbaijan Party now had a majority in the Milli Majlis — and Azerbaijan had a new Constitution. Results were declared invalid due to fraud in 15 districts, with fresh elections held in these on February 4, 1996.

In the countries that are being assessed, normally those in the Developing and Third Worlds, mostly-Western foreign observers cannot be fully cognitive



The pregnant and hanging chads of America's Presidential Election in 2000 illustrates how difficult democracy can be to manage in practical terms.

of local circumstances related to history, culture and social norms. Monitors generally arrive shortly before the vote and usually lack language or cultural training to allow them to effectively evaluate the vote, while international monitors often forego working with domestic observers in order to avoid the appearance of bias. It can be said that, however noble, monitors cannot be entirely independent, as they are funded by an entity that has an institutional agenda. Monitoring missions organised by intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) necessarily come with that IGOs' character. IGOs are made up of states, which means that the interests of other nations — particularly larger and more powerful members — can have an effect on the perception of an election.

That is not to say there is bias in every case of electoral monitoring around the world. It is abundantly clear that monitoring has a key role to play. Neither was that to say Azerbaijan's General Election of 1995 was perfect. It was not, the President was on record stating that Azerbaijan would learn from mistakes, having only had a handful of national plebiscites since the end of a seven-decade drought of having none.

In the nations that champion democracy most — and are lauded for doing so — the probity and management of elections remains an evolution. The United States Presidential Election of 1876 was one of the most disputed and controversial Presidential Elections in American history. But a century and a quarter later we were introduced to hanging, dimpled or pregnant chads of the

2000 election and, even in 2012, in his victory speech President Barack Obama commented of election organisation in some districts that “we can do better”.

Even in Britain, the home of democracy, there were newspaper accusations and anecdotal claims of postal vote fraud in several constituencies as late as the 2001 and 2005 General Elections, while in 2011 the Canadian federal election, was affected by the so-called Robocall scandal. These are just three examples across the ‘First World’ of issues relating to elections. The point is not to stigmatise these three well-versed nations, but to note that even in the most evolved democracies, dirty tricks and genuine mistakes emerge.

One final note on the election, on the strands of society represented. New Azerbaijan Party and the President may have dominated in political terms, but so fresh was democracy and that the new system the concept of a ‘career politician’ was hardly represented. In Communist times there were party hacks, lots of them, but the Communist Party had been swept away and a new breed of Parliamentarians was now in evidence. The 1995 election was a fresh start in so many ways. New Azerbaijan’s members had some old faces, but we saw a seismic, generational shift. The Milli Majlis was infused with new blood, men and women who had not been political climbers. They had jobs and lives beyond the narrow confines of the Baku political scene.

Career politicians are often part of the system as it represents a gravy train to them, rather than through any great passion or love for politics, or a set of principles that they radically believe in. In the Western democracies there are too few conviction or issue politicians remaining. This is one of the main differences between politicians today and in the past. Decades ago men and women entered politics because they cared and wanted to make a real difference, and almost did it as an act of altruism.

There may have been criticism of the 1995 election abroad, but this poll ushered in a fresh era of passionate individuals who cared a great deal about Azerbaijan. The New Azerbaijan Party won a majority, but all sides of the new chamber would be dominated by conviction politicians and passionate, determined members.

Among the professions most represented in the new chamber after 1995 were engineers (17), historians (14), philologists (14), physicists (12),

economists (12), lawyers (10) and teachers (10). In the mould of Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger in the US, Joseph Estrada in the Philippines and Mahinda Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka, the Milli Majlis also boasted three actors-turned-politicians.

If 1995 would represent a seminal year politically for Azerbaijan, then it would be remembered for far darker and more tragic reasons.

Baku's Metro system was the pride of Azerbaijan. Although the final phases of the 34 kilometre, 23-station complex had yet to be completed, in the early 1990s, its dramatic decoration and national motifs on the walls had even become a tourist attraction. The military conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and subsequent financial problems had hindered progress on construction, yet the first stage of the transfer station Jafar Jabbarli had been inaugurated in 1993. But on October 28, 1995, a catastrophe would occur which would make the terrorist attacks the previous year pale in significance.

It was early evening. Passengers were pushing metal tokens into the turnstiles at the entrance to the Ulduz station, anxious to board. It was rush hour. Sports fans and shoppers returning home. Parents and children on their way to visit relatives. Young couples heading for the cinema. There was the usual chattering of passengers and the swish of metal wheels on the rails. Everything was normal until people in car Number 5 smelled smoke. Talk turned into screams as the passengers in car Number 4 saw white smoke turning into black plumes coming from the next carriage — and then flames.

The train stopped only 200 metres from Ulduz station, while the tunnel began to fill with deadly smoke. The driver called for the power to be cut off. No one could open the doors of car Number 4 as passengers rushed for any available exit. The ventilation system was mistakenly switched to exhaust mode, meaning that lethal carbon monoxide fumes were drawn towards the evacuation, suffocating many. Flames were now enveloping the carriage. They panicked and fought to leave the train as people stumbled into each other, many of the dead were crushed and trampled to death including 28 children. Some 40 passengers who left the train were found in the tunnel dead, suffocated or electrocuted by high voltage cables.

The President of the country was at his desk, just kilometres away from the incident as it unfolded. Think George W Bush in a Sarasota classroom



*Hundreds lay dead following
the horrific Baku Metro
disaster of 1995.*



when he was informed of an aircraft hitting the World Trade Centre. Bush was criticised for not ending the event, but while in shock he projected an air of calm. Heydar was in his office, out of the public gaze, and therefore able to take charge effectively and immediately.

For the next 36 hours he would remain in the Presidential Administration building, working the telephones from an impromptu command post. For security reasons, but mostly as his presence would interrupt disaster management efforts on site, Heydar did not visit Ulduz until the following morning. The smell of smoke permeated everything, mixed with the

unmistakable stench of charred flesh. It was already clear that the death toll was significant although the final death toll had not been reached.

He spoke with police, firemen and security forces on site, laid a wreath near the station entrance. Then his small motorcade moved on to local hospitals. Several hundred people had been admitted, with everything from smoke inhalation, burns and shock. In the burns unit of one hospital he encountered victims who were almost unrecognisable such was the extent of their injuries. Those responsible for Heydar's image wanted television cameras to be with him. He did not allow, preferring to sit with people privately, alone.

"He was emotional, but sat with people one by one, listening to their stories, promising to help with individual requests, ordering help for specific injuries after consulting with doctors," says İlham Aliyev.

Where Azerbaijan's medical services could not cope with the extent of people's injuries, he arranged medevac flights to Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and other friendly states who possessed world class burns units.

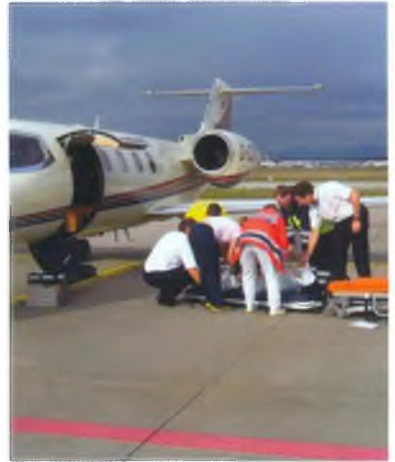
"The Government of Azerbaijan requested help with some burns cases resulting from the terrible metro disaster," says Dr Ezzedine Ibrahim, a close advisor to the then President of the UAE. "I believe there were several telephone conversations between President Sheikh Zayed and President Heydar Aliyev on the issue, and as a result of this I was asked to help coordinate the UAE's response."

Over ensuing months, Abu Dhabi treated a great many of the victims of the disaster. "Sheikh Zayed was fond of Heydar Aliyev," adds Dr Ezzedine. "In 1971 Sheikh Zayed had born the brunt of building a cohesive nation and was considered very much the father of the nation. Therefore there were strong parallels in Azerbaijan with Heydar Aliyev, common ground, and Sheikh Zayed respected that sort of progressive leadership. In my experience, when there is a bond between leaders, things get done a lot quicker."

In this case, the mutual respect of a Gulf leader meant that within 48 hours of the accident Azerbaijani aircraft were leaving for Abu Dhabi and Sheikh Zayed repeatedly dispatched special air ambulances to Baku. The UAE would care for many injured Azerbaijanis. President Süleyman Demirel also responded to a request for help and various institutions in Turkey hosted many of the victims of the tragedy. It took fully 72 hours for calm to be restored to



(above) United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan extended his nation's support to Azerbaijan in the aftermath of the disaster. (right) Many burns victims were sent abroad for treatment by air ambulance.



the situation. By then it was possible for authorities to post the horrific total of 289 people dead and 265 injured. Among those injured, 28 were children. Heydar met many of the parents of those who had died.

Meeting the parents of the children cut him further. It is the burden of every leader whose nation suffers a profound disaster, but does not make it any easier. Witness President Bush post-September 11, or Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri in the wake of the Asian Tsunami, or Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard following the Queensland Floods. The leader of the nation bears a strong image, but alone, hearing very personal, private stories



The horrors of the disaster affected Heydar Aliyev on a personal level, not least because Armenian terror attacks on the Metro led to questions on the cause of the 1995 tragedy.

of victims, it would be impossible to remain unaffected. Most leaders who have been through similar situations write later that such moments have a profound impact upon them.

Heydar had been through many tragedies. The *Admiral Nakhimov* sinking had been tough, he had been a War President for a time, but nothing prepared him for the ghastly, emotional, aftermath of the 1995 Metro fire. Others testify to how the disaster affected him.

Heydar was called a strongman, and politically he was, he needed to be as the situation in Azerbaijan demanded a strong leader. By contrast, he was a man who was sensitive and emotional. Sitting with burns victims in hospital, one-on-one, or spending time with the people who had lost a child in the disaster, it cut him deeply.

Baku had suffered what was the world's deadliest subway disaster, far worse than any other in the almost 100-year history of underground rail. The nearest comparison happened in 1903 in Paris when 83 were killed in a fire. On the London Underground, 43 died in the Moorgate crash in 1975, and 31 in the King's Cross fire of 1987. And added into the mix was the fact that Azerbaijan had suffered two deadly Armenia-inspired terrorist attacks on the

metro a year earlier. Circumstantial evidence, therefore, pointed towards Yerevan.

Had there been an electrical malfunction, or was it sabotage? The answer was yes, and perhaps.

Heydar would report that it was a technical fault that caused the accident, but added the important rider that it 'was possibly an organised act of sabotage.' Two unexplained, large holes had been discovered in the side of one of the wrecked carriages. Azerbaijani national television quoted experts who said the holes indicated the use of an explosive incendiary device.

In the 15 years since the disaster, circumstantial evidence has continued to point to the real possibility of outside interference. If true, the 1995 Baku Metro would rank, in human cost, as worse than the nightmares of the Mumbai attacks of 1993, Lockerbie, the East African US Embassy bombings, the Bali bombings and Madrid bombing. Heydar never gained peace in his mind over the ultimate cause of the disaster. Worse, the images of the dead, the injured, and the memories of those deeply affected by the calamity, were impossible for him to forget.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a severe anxiety condition that can develop after exposure to any event that results in psychological trauma. Too often we ignore the leaders who meet head on these national disasters, not reflecting that they too can feel the effect of PTSD. If 1995 would be recalled by many as the year he and his party swept Azerbaijan in political terms, for him personally it was a year that affected him profoundly.



Having stabilised the situation in Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev turned his attention to the economy and efforts to forge a lasting peace.

A Chance at Peace

If all economists were laid end to end, they
would not reach a conclusion.
— *George Bernard Shaw*

From the first years of independence, all countries of the former Soviet bloc, including Azerbaijan, encountered the problem of recession and macroeconomic instability. The main objective of their reforms and policy programmes was directed towards achievement of macroeconomic stabilisation.

The post-Soviet states reached 2013 in various fiscal positions, some strong, some weak, but the variant of results and methodologies belies an inherent problem. George Bernard Shaw's quotation above is amusing, but not untrue. John Kenneth Galbraith added that 'Economics is extremely useful as a form of employment for economists.' While Laurence J Peter added, with tongue perhaps only slightly in cheek, that; 'An economist is an expert who will know tomorrow why the things he predicted yesterday didn't happen today.'

The point being that economics is not a definite science. The post-Soviet states were in flux and hovering near the precipice of collapse. Some did indeed collapse. One thing that all the former Soviet Republics had in common was that their leaders, whether it be Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation, Emomali Rahmon in Tajikistan, Leonid Kravchuk in Ukraine or Stanislav Shushkevich in Belarus, knew that there was no template. In addition, all faced



Times had changed from the days when the shelves of food stores in Baku were bereft of stock (above), to the beginnings of renewal in Baku and Azerbaijan as a whole (left).

the crisis having been born, educated and worked within a planned, Communist-style economy. None had experienced a free market economy. Similar to the aforementioned leaders, Heydar faced not only a political transition, but one where his mind would be tested with concepts and ideas of a free market that were alien to his lifetime of experiences. It was almost as demanding as asking him to grasp Mandarin overnight.

“Heydar Aliyev learned on the job,” says Elman Rustamov, governor of Azerbaijan Central Bank. “He got the best advice he could, worked out the options available, and then did what he felt was right for Azerbaijan, while

attempting to mitigate his people from as many of the effects of hard decisions, as far as possible. And, in most cases, he would ultimately be proven to have taken the right course.”

Unfortunately, the transition of the Azerbaijan economy to a market economy had resulted in it going into free-fall in the early 1990s. It was a situation mirrored in most of the former Soviet countries as they sought to run their countries like their European counterparts. Rising unemployment and inflation led to a sharp decrease in the cost of production, a mass loss of jobs and closure of many factories as traditional markets disappeared and could not be replaced in the west.

The failings in the economy had been exacerbated by the feeble and superficial efforts of the Mutallibov and Elchibey presidencies which proved counter productive, so by the time Heydar Aliyev looked at the books he discovered a dire situation. It was like a house of cards — one false move and the whole would fall down. Azerbaijan was heading down the road towards a failed state; one of several indicators being a sharp economic decline.

This was certainly the case with hyperinflation at more than 1,500 per cent, and 68 per cent of the population living below the absolute poverty line. GDP fell 13 to 20 per cent annually from 1991 to 1995. The average cash income for the population had been decreased by 3.6 times. The recession had caused much misery for the many workers who had lost their jobs and, for those still in work, salaries had dropped in real terms by 800 per cent compared to the pre-independence days.

Once again it was a time for strong nerves and a common sense approach to solve a complex situation. Rather than going it alone, Heydar brought in expert technical and financial support from international organisations which enabled him to create a number of projects to establish some stability in the macroeconomy and implement a number of structural reforms. Slowly but surely, the Aliyev government introduced measures which restrained inflation (inflation did not exceed 2.3 per cent in Azerbaijan from 1996), reduced the budget deficit to 1.2 per cent of the GDP within a very short time and eliminated deficit financing by the National Bank. From a paralysed economy, the citizens at last could see signs of improvement reflected in more jobs and higher salaries while internationally the state was moving into a higher loan rating as the growth became dynamic from 1996 onwards.

If the second half of Heydar's first term as President was to be defined by anything, however, this would come on March 24, 1998. On that day the first tanker loaded with 80,000 tonnes of Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC) oil was lifted at Novorossiysk, a port city on Russia's Black Sea coast. After this initial shipment, it was expected that some 1.5 million tonnes of crude would be shipped per month.

The Contract of the Century had promised much for Azerbaijan. This would be the beginning of delivery of that promise — and give the President and his programme fresh impetus. The AIOC consortium had already made significant investment contributing to the construction of a landmark South Caucasus Pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline. Oil was first produced from the Chirag-1 platform in the Caspian on November 7, 1997, part of the vast Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oilfields.

In 1996, Heydar was 73 years old. "He worked quite extraordinary hours," says Vafa Guluzade, advisor to the President on foreign policy. "When he travelled, he took dozens of boxes of work. While flying anywhere, he used the opportunity to read, work on documents, not a moment was wasted."

To a newly independent nation, one that had enjoyed no direct foreign relations with other states for seven decades, that assimilation with the international community was arguably not just of strategic importance. To Azerbaijanis this was perhaps a psychological progress, a reaffirmation of nationhood and independence. As such, the country actively pursued its place in a broad range of international and pan-regional groupings, starting with the United Nations in March 1992. It had also joined the Council of Europe (March 2001), Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (January 1992), Commonwealth of Independent States (September 1993), Organisation of Islamic Conference (1992), Organisation of Economic Cooperation (1992), Organisation of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (1992), European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (1992) and World Bank (1992).

On May 4, 1994, Heydar Aliyev saw Azerbaijan join NATO's Partnership for Peace programme of practical bilateral cooperation between individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries and NATO. Heydar would also oversee accession to the Council of Europe (June 1996 as Special Observer) and the signing of a partnership and cooperation agreement with the European Union in 1996.



Heydar Aliyev worked to project Azerbaijan onto a world stage. Here he is pictured with (clockwise from top left) Jacques Chirac, Kofi Annan, George W Bush and Pope John Paul II.

“Heydar Aliyev was a committed internationalist,” says Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary General of the United Nations. “He strongly advocated greater economic and political cooperation among nations. I met him on numerous occasions and found him committed to the idea that people have more in common than they do differences. He believed that nations should treat each other as equals. He sought consensus and constructive cooperation.”

Guluzade states that the President’s foreign policy aimed to preserve and strengthen national independence and territorial integrity, develop mutually beneficial relations with like-minded countries and establish strong links with all countries of the world. Priority was Eurasian neighbours, traditional trade partners as well as leading world states. The Permanent members of the United Nations Security Council were focused upon, as were Non-Permanent and countries of the Islamic and Turkic world.

Among his official visits were trips to UK, France, Germany, Belgium, Russia, Turkey, China, Pakistan, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Lunching with Queen Elizabeth in London may seem, to the uninitiated, as an excuse for wearing a tuxedo and hobnobbing, but in diplomatic circles there is a certainty that set-piece State Visits have a positive effect.

“One cannot underestimate the value of official visits in transforming and enhancing relationships between nations,” says Amr Moussa, who was Foreign Minister of Egypt when Heydar Aliyev visited Cairo. “Diplomats and ambassadors are one thing, but when there are strong ties and a personal relationship, however strong, between two leaders it crystallises the bonds between nations. Brief meetings on the sidelines of pan-national conferences and events do help, but a State Visit gives the opportunity for the building of a relationship. In international diplomacy this is very important. Heydar Aliyev was a warm, amiable man. When he visited Egypt this forged ties that weren’t there before. He was a leader who built international hegemony.”

Azerbaijan had joined the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the world’s largest security-oriented intergovernmental organisation, on January 30, 1992, and after assuming the Presidency of his country Heydar had overseen Azerbaijan signing the OSCE’s Charter of Paris on December 20, 1993.

The OSCE’s mandate includes conflict prevention, crisis management and



Heydar Aliyev with Amr Moosa, the long standing Egyptian Foreign Minister and then Secretary General of the Arab League.

post-conflict rehabilitation, and today encompasses 57 states from Europe, the former Soviet Union, Asia and North America.

The OSCE Minsk Group aims to encourage a peaceful, negotiated resolution over Nagorno-Karabakh based on and beyond the four United Nations Security Council resolutions (822, 853, 874 and 884), which repeatedly called the Nagorno-Karabakh ‘occupied’. But the Minsk Group was floundering.

The year 1996, however, did provide a fillip for Azerbaijan. Attending the OSCE Lisbon Summit, Heydar Aliyev forcefully argued for the inclusion of a resolution on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in the final summit communiqué and summit documentation. As a result of this, the OSCE debated the issue at length, reaching a consensus that would allow OSCE Chairman Flavio Cotti to oversee a special declaration that fell in line with international law and the four existing United Nations Security Council resolutions.

The OSCE Lisbon Summit confirmed the legal validity of the principles reflected in the position of the OSCE Minsk Group, fully endorsed the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and suggested a legal framework for Nagorno-Karabakh which would give “the highest degree of self-government

within Azerbaijan”. This was unanimously adopted by every member state of the OSCE, barring Armenia. This statement was added to the final Declaration of the OSCE summit.

“Heydar Aliyev was consistent and methodical in his approach to Nagorno-Karabakh,” says Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister, Elmar Mammadyarov. “He eschewed aggression, although under his leadership, the Azerbaijani armed forces grew by every measure. Instead he sought a diplomatic solution, even when Azerbaijan was provoked. He always, always viewed diplomacy as the key, to Nagorno-Karabakh, and indeed to global peace in general.”

That aforementioned “international hegemony” extended to Azerbaijan taking the lead in building new pan-regional bodies. In 1997 Heydar was a prime mover in the creation of the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC). The former encompassed Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, with Turkey and Latvia as observer nations.

“Heydar Aliyev was one of the prime movers in forging GUAM,” says Valeri Chechelashvili, Secretary General of the organisation. “We promote democratic values, stable development, enhancing international and regional security and work with member states to boost European integration. GUAM had groups covering power, engineering, transport, trade and economics, information, science and telecommunications, culture, science and education, tourism, terrorism, crime and drugs.

“These principles converged with the policies and wishes of our members, especially the President of Azerbaijan, and GUAM was an extension of his desire to take the region forward, not just Azerbaijan.”

CAREC was an ambitious project, an eight-member grouping including Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. An Asian Development Bank (ADB) supported initiative it was established in 1997 to encourage economic cooperation among countries in the Central Asian region. Chechelashvili also gives Heydar Aliyev credit as one of the leading movers in the creation of CAREC.

So much of the President’s time was expended on diplomacy, on building bridges around the world. Arguably none of the post-Soviet states, bar Russia for her sheer size and importance, extended its diplomatic reach as far. Yet the

Levon Ter-Petrosyan allowed his Armenian side to come close to peace during negotiations with Azerbaijan, but ultimately extremists on his side torpedoed the deal.



most important relationship he nurtured was with a Syria-born rabid Armenian nationalist.

Levon Ter-Petrosyan was the first President of Armenia from 1991 and had presided over some of the bloodiest parts of what the United Nations, OSCE and others had called an occupation. His nation and its supporters held a fifth of the territory of Azerbaijan and had created one million refugees.

Despite the enmity of the situation, the President of Azerbaijan and his Armenian counterpart had proven able to sometimes find something that resembled common ground. They had forged temporary peace agreements when Heydar was Chairman in Nakhchivan. When Heydar had come to power in Baku, it was the same two leaders who had agreed to find the slightest of common ground and reach a ceasefire. Against the odds this remained, despite frequent and, mercifully brief, flashpoints.

“Peace needs statesmanship,” says Boutros Boutros-Ghali, while Eduard Shevardnadze, then President of Georgia, adds: “Perhaps 1997 was as close as we got. It took a lot of pragmatism from both sides. I spoke with Heydar Aliyev regularly during this period. Given the death and destruction, there were some hard choices to be made. But in the final analysis we felt he was the only one who had the moral authority in Azerbaijan at that time to make those concessions, and then to convince the people to accept the deal.”

In early 1997, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia embarked on one of the most extraordinary and most decisive moments in the protracted

Nagorno-Karabakh problem. The OSCE Minsk Group, for so long ineffective in its efforts, saw a change in atmosphere in Baku and Yerevan and began to make startling progress.

In May 1997 a document was circulated, one painstakingly negotiated between the two Presidents. Yet when the Armenia-puppet administration in Nagorno-Karabakh put pressure on Yerevan — the tail wagging the dog — Armenia rejected it. Yet the agreement did not fall apart. Heydar was ready to press for mutual concessions from both sides. His team were stretched. Some were unable to grasp the extent of the President's vision and, as Heydar continued to work with the OSCE-led negotiations, were troubled. Others had been keen on the deal, but could not see beyond the adjustments made on the May document.

Heydar was finding himself more and more out on a limb in pursuing peace.

"He was bold. I can say that," says Shevardnadze. "I wondered at the time that if an agreement was reached, if he could even bring the rest of Azerbaijan along with him. We spoke a lot, and I can say that he was in determined mood. He wanted peace."

By July, another round of high-stakes negotiations was completed and an amended proposal again floated by the OSCE. Again Stepanakert quickly rejected the Aliyev-Ter-Petrosyan document.

"At that point, I believed that the mission would fail, and that the notion of peace could be shelved for maybe a generation. In the absence of compromise, we worried that conflict would follow and of deep ramifications for the region as a whole," says Shevardnadze.

By September, after an extraordinary six months in which Heydar had crossed several of his own red line negotiating positions in the search for peace, the OSCE tabled a third comprehensive proposal. Gerard Libaridian, an adviser to Ter-Petrosyan, stated that the proposal was based on a "phased" rather than "package" approach and was more acceptable to Yerevan and Xankhendi (Stepanakert). The document provided security guarantees to both sides.

Under the plan the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh would be decided



*Heydar Aliyev addresses a press conference during the OSCE Summit in Lisbon, in 1996.
With OSCE cooperation, the Azerbaijani President made a bold move for peace.*

after agreement is reached on interim measures. In a joint statement, released during a Council of Europe Summit in Strasbourg, Aliyev and Ter-Petrosyan called the draft “encouraging”.

In Azerbaijan, the shock that met the release of the text was palpable. Over ensuing weeks Heydar slowly explained the deal to his people through speeches and in media interviews. His message was clear. Settling the Nagorno-Karabakh issue would come with painful concessions for both sides, if it was to be achieved. If both sides chose war, then this would be measured in human cost. If a negotiated settlement, then this would be measured through concessions that had to be made. Achieving peace would not be especially palatable, but the peace itself would be. Heydar, though, said that he had seen enough death. He saw it as his duty to, at the very least, try.

Azerbaijan formally signed the draft in October 1997. Soon after Armenia agreed to it ‘in principle’ but ‘with reservations’. Throughout October and November the OSCE and Yerevan sought to convince the separatist administration in Stepanakert to come to terms with the need for peace and acquiesce.

“The sides were very close,” says Boutros Boutros-Ghali sadly, while Shevardnadze rued the failure saying; “There were moments when we

believed that a deal was done, it ebbed and flowed for weeks. And then... suddenly... everything fell apart.”

Xankhendi (Stepanakert) rejected the deal. Naira Melkumyan, Nagorno-Karabakh’s representative in Yerevan had informed Ter-Petrosyan that they wanted no part in the process. In Baku, Heydar had invested significant political capital in the deal. Ter-Petrosyan had done likewise. The OSCE and both leaders persevered with talks beyond September 1997, although hope for a historic peace deal were fading.

Xankhendi (Stepanakert) began to push back against the Armenian President, which emboldened those with personal ambition within Ter-Petrosyan’s inner circle.

Armenia’s Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan, who had previously served as ‘President’ of Nagorno-Karabakh, would take the role of Gaius Cassius Longinus, the conspirator who dispatched Julius Caesar. An opponent of the peace deal, he led the ousting of Armenia’s President in early 1998 and would become the second President of Armenia in April 1998.

Peace always comes at a price. For the world’s most notorious enemies, the Palestinians and Israel, the process was painful and remains so. In his Nobel address, Yitzhak Rabin, who reached the Oslo Accords in September 1993 with Yasser Arafat, would comment: “Military cemeteries in every corner of the world are silent testimony to the failure of national leaders to sanctify human life.” The Oslo Accords would ultimately cost his life. He was assassinated in 1995 by an opponent of peace. Arafat would call their reconciliation “the peace of the brave”.

A measure of bravery had been called for in ending the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Armenia jettisoned its President and replaced him with a coward. A coward opposed to peace.



Heydar Aliyev believed that it was incumbent upon his generation not to hand the prospect of war over Nagorno-Karabakh to future generations.



After a landslide electoral success, Heydar Aliyev is sworn in as President of Azerbaijan for a second term.

Affairs of the Heart

In the end, that's what this election is about.
Do we participate in a politics of
cynicism or a politics of hope?
— Barack Obama

On October 11, 1998, Heydar Aliyev went to the country for the second time in a Presidential Election. Polls consistently showed him way ahead of his rivals. Indeed, so secure was the sitting President that he skipped several live television debates with his rivals in the campaign. Amid the usual round of noisy opposition boycotts, six candidates would go on the ballot, including Etibar Mammadov (Azerbaijan National Independence Party), Nizami Suleymanov (Independent Azerbaijan Party), Firudin Hasanov (Azerbaijan Communist Party), Ashraf Mehdiyev (Endeavour Party) and Hanhuseyn Kazimli (Azerbaijan Social Prosperity Party). This, therefore, was the most pluralistic Presidential Election in Azerbaijan's history.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) joined the mission to follow election-day procedures. According to the mission's final report:

Clear political will was demonstrated by the authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan to significantly improve on the election practice of the country. The efforts in this direction were initiated in the late spring of 1998 by a review of the election legislation to put it in line with OSCE commitments, by the formal abolishment of censorship in August 1998 and by the final approval of the new Citizenship Law in



On the stump Heydar Aliyev continued to be greeted warmly by ordinary people.

late September 1998. In this way, the authorities responded positively to concerns raised by the international community and indicated their willingness to meet international standards in the conduct of the election process.

PACE was one of those international monitoring bodies that provided criticisms and an ultimately positive critique of the direction in which Azerbaijani democracy was going. Free airtime was provided on state television and radio and funding from the state budget was allocated equally to all six presidential candidates. More than 300 international observers were expected to come to Azerbaijan to watch the election proceedings. The OSCE (Organisation for the Security and Cooperation of Europe) and the Council of Europe had dispatched teams of observers to monitor the situation in the country prior to Election Day.

The incumbent was widely considered the saviour of Azerbaijan, the economy was showing strong recovery, he had brokered a ceasefire and come close to ending the frozen state of war. Add into the mix the overwhelming pro-Aliyev leaning of those in the media, in line with the electorate, then no matter how many media laws are passed the President and his administration would always have an incumbent's advantage. Strategist Bruce McCain writes:

We might think that voters prefer sitting presidents because they are a known quantity or already seem “presidential”. Yet that would not explain why the incumbent party has won the next election more often than the party out of power. Perhaps voters simply prefer to avoid change, just as people resist significant changes in other areas of life. A general resistance to change might not help men who seem ineffective, but could provide at least some advantage in most other elections.

Sendhil Mullainathan and Andrei Shleifer of Harvard University constructed a behavioural model for the *American Economic Review* which stated that readers and viewers held political views that they would like to see confirmed by news providers. When consumers have a widely accepted political belief, then media outlets select or frame stories in order to project that. By contrast, when an election is heterogeneous, that is to say a more even split in political opinion among the electorate, news providers tend to produce output that reflects the wider spread of opinion.

Among those boycotting the election were former President Abulfaz Elchibey, Chairman of the People’s Front of Azerbaijan Party, and Isa Gambar, Chairman of the Musavat Party, who was briefly Acting President in 1992. They roundly objected to most aspects of the election, but even they understood that the result was never in doubt. On October 11, Heydar claimed 2,556,059 votes, or 77.6 per cent. Mammadov and his Azerbaijan National Independence Party won 11.8 per cent of the vote to claim second spot in the race.

Pre-polling data always suggested much the same. A smooth election night success was predicted and, indeed, this is what materialised. His attention had quickly turned from election campaign and to the task at hand — governing. As he had promised during the campaign, he had a lot of work still to do, and would make a determined start..

So great had been his lead in the polls that Heydar had been reluctant to give time to campaigning, leaving much of that to surrogates. He had missed just a couple of days in the office while the campaign raged. In its aftermath he considered it business as usual — and expected his team to do likewise.

“On October 12, I called the President on some matter,” says Natiq Aliyev,

Minister of Industry and Energy. "I congratulated him, of course. He thanked me almost in passing, and enquired what I needed from him. He was remarkably nonchalant about the election and wanted to get on with business."

Says Ilham Aliyev: "My father had a governing agenda, and having achieved re-election he got on with that agenda. He saw no reason for celebration, although that was not to say he was not grateful for the two and a half million people who had placed their confidence in him."

The victory may not have been in doubt, but the margin was. In 1993 Heydar had been virtually unassailable in political terms when elected with 98.8 per cent of the vote. By 1998 Azerbaijan's democratic roots, new parties and forces had emerged, all of which would crate a pluralistic landscape. Because of this, 77.6 per cent was a significant endorsement.

Slightly over three quarters of the electorate had endorsed Heydar and New Azerbaijan Party, a result not out of synch with results around the world in even the most pluralist nations. In the French Presidential election run of 2002, for example, Jacques Chirac was re-elected in a run off election with more than 82 per cent of all votes. In 1990 Poland Lech Wałęsa won 74.25 per cent of the Presidential vote, while in 2000 Romania Ion Iliescu, won 66.8 per cent. In the United States, four Presidential election victors have topped 60 per cent of the vote: Warren G Harding (1920), Franklin D Roosevelt (1936), Lyndon B Johnson (1964) and Richard Nixon (1972).

On October 18, 1998, Heydar made his second and final inaugural address to the nation. He touched on the ceasefire, Azerbaijan's socio-political situation and the fight against crime, building a democratic, legal and secular system, FDI and development of the armed forces. He noted of the economy:

...Azerbaijan began its economic reforms considerably later than other countries among the Commonwealth of Independent States, because of the conflict with Armenia and internal unrest. However, in spite of this, within a short period of time, we have rolled-out economic reforms and already seen positive results... yet we shall pay a special attention to low-income families and those struggling. This will be one of our primary objectives...

According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on

*Minister of Industry and Energy
Natiq Aliyev found Heydar Aliyev
less interested in his electoral
success than the prospect of getting
on with the challenges he faced.*



Human Rights, there is no single and exhaustive definition of ‘good governance’, but it is agreed that the concept encompasses the likes of respect of human rights, rule of law, government accountability and an efficient and effective public sector, among others. Institutional processes are deemed necessary to achieve development, covering transparency, responsibility and accountability. Among the young democracies of the former Soviet Union, there remained much to do. Heydar used his inaugural speech to comment:

Unfortunately, there are people in the government who hamper the progress in the country. Lawlessness, shortcomings in local executive bodies and some ministries, and mistakes in law enforcement, present obstacles to our progress... Today, I declare that we shall take serious measures for the elimination of any shortcomings and improve...

Using the inauguration to make a spring of promises and pledges, the 75 year old returned to work energised. Ilham Aliyev says: “Far younger men around him felt the strain of his working hours. He was very focused. He got up in the morning energised by the challenges that were his every day and never lost that sense of enthusiasm for the job.”

Among those remained a frozen conflict. Heydar knew that such matters only remained refrigerated so long. Georgia and Russia’s cold war over South Ossetia and Abkhazia erupted in 2008, an example of when what can go wrong when the international community gets too comfortable with the status quo.



*(above) The South Ossetia conflict was a warning how frozen conflicts can suddenly erupt.
(left) United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright worked hard on Nagorno-Karabakh.*

The close call with peace of 1997 had disappointed, but served to energise some in the process. Even with Armenian's Ter-Pervion sidelined for daring to hope, efforts continued. The Minsk Group struggled and a series of Paris negotiations floundered.

When United States President Bill Clinton and his team chose to intercede during the latter part of 1998, Heydar had welcomed fresh impetus and the involvement of an administration with the moral rectitude to serve as an honest broker. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and her Deputies Strobe Talbott and the excellent Richard Armitage would prove adept.

“Heydar Aliyev had been knocked back, and knocked back, time after time, yet he got back up, dusted himself off, and got back to peace efforts,” says Elmar Mammadyarov. “Those in the President’s circle were called upon for ideas and concepts that may help consensus and the negotiating process.”

Yet even while this refreshed process was underway, and just three months on from that triumphant election success, a personal crisis hit the President.

Winter in Baku is cold, a time when viruses tend to spread among the people. In mid-January Heydar caught a cold. It was not unusual, the President met dozens of people each day, inevitably that interaction saw him exposed to germs and viruses.

Considering that Heydar Aliyev was 75 years old, he was in robust health. He received a check up from his official doctor once a week, had periodic visits to a clinic for a battery of tests, and a full physical four times each year. The extent of long term complications after a heart attack depend on how much of the heart muscle was damaged when blood supply was interrupted. Heydar’s mysterious 1987 attack had left a patch of scar tissue, quite normal, and his heart function was considered strong, despite the stress of the Presidency and the long-hours he chose to keep. His medical regime monitored constantly for signs of aneurysms, pericarditis, angina and a build up of plaque from coronary artery disease, among other issues, related both to the heart and to the general health issues that afflict a man of his advancing age.

Just after New Year of 1999, Heydar had caught a virus that stubbornly refused to go away. Only Ilham Aliyev and those closest to him knew of its debilitating effects. Each day he dosed himself up with medicines, but the illness proved unbending and over the course of just a few days, he physically weakened. On January 18, the *New York Times* reported:

One of the key figures in the multi-billion-dollar Caspian energy boom, President Heydar A Aliyev of Azerbaijan, fell ill and was flown today to a hospital in Turkey for treatment. A spokesman for the Health Ministry in Azerbaijan said Mr Aliyev, 75, was suffering from bronchitis and a viral infection. Reuters quoted an unidentified aide to Mr Aliyev as saying he had “a problem with his heart.”... Mr Aliyev arrived in Ankara aboard a private jet sent to Baku by President Suleyman

Demirel of Turkey, a close ally. Mr Demirel met him at the Ankara airport and joined the convoy that took him to a military hospital.

"There was a bout of influenza going around in Azerbaijan, and I caught it and became pretty ill on the sixth day," Mr Aliyev said at the hospital, looking pale but standing unaided. "My son called my dear friend Suleyman Demirel, and he sent two teams of doctors, but thanks to God, by the time they came I was not in a serious condition anymore."

For someone young and healthy, the appropriate treatment for a virus, such as antibiotics for bacterial pneumonia, results in a uncomplicated recovery. Yet some organisms that cause pneumonia are so virulent that they overwhelm the defence mechanisms, even in otherwise healthy people. For the next two days, Heydar was treated in the Gülhane Military Medical Academy (GMMA) in Ankara as a guest of Demirel. Established in 1773, the facility was among the top medical facilities in Turkey. Doctors treated the virus successfully, but there was a shock in store. Tests suggested the presence of coronary artery disease.

On February 1, Heydar returned home to Baku. He looked outwardly fit, but arrangements were already being made for major surgery. Officially the diagnosis was bronchitis, but rumours inevitably swept Azerbaijan. Some were true. Yet the President wished to avoid instability — jostling for power at home and abroad would shake Azerbaijan's hard won political stability. Just a couple of months into his Second Term, appearing weak, or worse, would have reanimated the opposition. Gambar, Elchibey and Mammadov were alerted. *Hürriyet*, one of the highest-circulating Turkish newspapers, reported that there were already meetings among opposition figures aimed at agreeing a united, joint candidacy to run against a New Azerbaijan candidate should Heydar be forced to stand aside.

While Heydar threw himself back into a Presidential schedule, behind the scenes arrangements were quietly made for his care. One name stood out. Dr Michael DeBakey was considered by the medical profession a "magician of the heart..." Much later, in 2006, *The New York Times* wrote that:

Over the past 60 years, Dr DeBakey has changed the way heart surgery is performed. He was one of the first to perform coronary bypass operations. He trained generations of surgeons at the Baylor



*(above) From Washington, Heydar Aliyev would head for the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio.
(right) Dr Michael DeBakey is considered one of the world's foremost heart surgeons.*



College of Medicine, operated on more than 60,000 patients, and in 1996 was summoned to Moscow by Boris Yeltsin, then the President of Russia, to aid in his quintuple heart bypass operation.

On his diary had been NATO's 50th Anniversary Summit in Washington between April 23 and 25, including a scheduled speech at Harvard University. The latter would be cancelled, but the set piece US visit would offer diplomatic cover for a very personal trip to North America. In mid-April, Heydar arrived in Washington accompanied, among others, by his daughter Sevil. He undertook the usual, rigorous round of meetings, both central to the event and bilaterals with foreign leaders.



Heydar Aliyev with United States President Bill Clinton. A balanced East-West relationship underpins Azerbaijani foreign policy.

Among those at the event was old colleague and friend President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia. "I knew of the impending operation," says Shevardnadze. "In himself, Heydar looked well and was full of life. At the various meetings of leaders he played his usual pro-active role." Adds President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine; "If Heydar was a little thin he remained humorous and warm."

Only a handful of people knew that from Washington, Heydar was to fly to Ohio for a rendezvous with Dr DeBakey at the world famous Cleveland Clinic. The coronary artery bypass graft Heydar was about to have would offer him symptomatic relief, improve his quality of life and give him increased life expectancy. Yet for someone of his advancing years, any operation, let alone one on his heart, came with inherent risks.

Dr DeBakey, himself 91 years old, had pioneered the procedure and practiced medicine until the day he died, at nearly 100 years of age in 2008. His contributions to the field of medicine spanned the better part of 75 years, during which time he operated on more than 60,000 patients, including many heads of state and senior figures of many nations. Heydar's surgery took five hours.

There is no set recovery time in the wake of a heart bypass. Everyone heals at a different pace. It took Heydar roughly a month before his medical team cleared him to fly. He spent a week of recuperation time in Antalya, a Turkish city on the Mediterranean coast. By the time of his arrival in Antalya, he was straining to get back to work, taking meetings, on the telephone to his ministers in Baku, writing memos and speaking with international leaders. One of the first to speak with his Azerbaijani counterpart was his old friend Shevardnadze.

"If his body was not as robust, Heydar Aliyev's mind was just as sharp," says Shevardnadze. "And pretty quickly, after what was a serious operation, he was fully focused."

After flying back to Baku, within days he was back at the Presidential Administration, against medical advice. The Azerbaijani President had been set a rehabilitation programme. Quickly this collapsed and by the end of the month, Heydar was back at work full time. "My father cooperated with his

medical team, but after more than a month away, he was frustrated and anxious to get back to work,” says Ilham Aliyev.

Seven months had passed since the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony. One of the key moments of his speech, Heydar perceived, was his reference to the near one million refugees and IDPs in Azerbaijan. He had stated that:

...we shall keep focus on their position, their living conditions, the people who have been forcibly driven from their homes and become refugees as a result of the occupation of their lands by the armed forces of Armenia. Today, I have to admit that, despite our efforts so far, our countrymen live in tent-camps, often in difficult and unbearable conditions.

The economy was improving and government revenues were rising. Ali Hasanov, the Chairman of the State Committee for Refugees and IDPs, was just beginning to see his budget rising enough to contemplate beyond stabilising the IDPs situation and to begin to plan medium-term measures that would sweep away the tent villages. As the dispossessed awaited what they believed would be an inevitable return home, their conditions would improve markedly. Says Hasanov: “Heydar Aliyev promised improvement and delivered it. No one contemplated having to create permanent settlements at the time. Under international law, the United Nations, PACE, everyone understood and recognised that the occupied territories was home to these dispossessed people. On that basis, everyone believed they would return home.”

A peace deal had been on the cusp of being achieved under OSCE mediation in 1998, but in pursuing it Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan had been unseated in a political coup led by his nationalist Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan. His attitude to peace was never in question. For example, as an internationally recognised President, he wrote several open letters to the President and people of an illegal and unrecognised seperatist entity, recognised by international law as being part of Azerbaijan.

Kocharyan’s ousting of the conciliatory Ter-Petrosyan had, it seemed, ended any hopes for peace and a comprehensive settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh. He would take Armenia to the right, and increase the jingoistic



Soon after his return to Baku, Heydar Aliyev dismissed medical advice and returned to a full time diary of meetings and public appearances.

rhetoric from Yerevan at a time when Baku was attempting to make conciliatory noises.

“It was hard to maintain a peaceful stance,” says Hasanov. “Azerbaijan was the party with a fifth of our nation occupied, and with a million refugees and IDPs. Yet we were being the conciliatory party, while Yerevan was cheering on and offering encouragement to an illegal administration in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

Yet, against the odds, another major figure had emerged in Yerevan who was ready to do business, and wanted to contemplate peace.

In 1999, Karen Demirchyan was speaker of the Armenian parliament. Yet he had enjoyed a long career and had served as First Secretary of the Armenian Communist Party between 1974 and 1988. There was significant overlap when Heydar was First Secretary in Azerbaijan. The two men knew each other relatively well.

When the Soviet Union collapsed Demirchyan had gone willingly into political retirement, but was prompted back into the arena by Kocharyan’s usurping of Ter-Petrosyan. He challenged Kocharyan in the subsequent Presidential Election and, despite being an independent candidate without party apparatus behind him, won a healthy 40 per cent in a second-round run-off.

By the time of the May 1999 Parliamentary Elections in Yerevan, Demirchyan was leader of the People’s Party, and had caucused with Defence Minister Vazgen Sargsyan to form the Miatsum (Unification). Running on a relatively dovish platform, Miatsum had swept to a majority in Parliament. Demirchyan was overwhelmingly elected speaker in June and had a radical course of action in mind — peace.

While the President of Armenia was considered a rabid nationalist, a rival power-base now operated from Parliament. Demirchyan and his majority were disposed towards finding an accommodation. A dialogue began.

“In Karen Demirchyan, there was a character in place who wanted to end the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, and more importantly someone who would work with the President of Azerbaijan to achieve this,” says Shevardnadze. “In my view, this was the closest we came to peace.”



*The 1999 Armenian Parliamentary
Elections swept the dovish
Karen Demirchyan into the Speaker's
Chair. With it the prospect of a
peace deal grew.*



Yet where it was possible to oust Ter-Petrosyan by political means, the Speaker of Armenia's Parliament was surrounded by a like-minded majority. Getting rid of him would be significantly more troublesome.

Or would it?



Months of diplomatic efforts has seen Heydar Aliyev go closer to reaching a lasting peace over Nagorno-Karabakh than ever before.

Contrasting Statesmanship

Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past.
Let us accept our own responsibility for the future.
— *John F Kennedy*

It was October 27, 1999, and Question Time in the Armenian parliament. Some members were yawning. Others were whispering in boredom to their colleagues. Not much was happening in the Chamber, a sporadic debate on a minor issue. In the chair for the session was Speaker Karen Demirchyan. He attempted to keep events ticking along, yet the trivial but necessary procedures of Parliament seemed to pale into insignificance given what was going on behind the scenes. The Speaker, like many in his circle, had other things on his mind. The Speaker and his political ally, Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan had gone out on a limb — they had decided to make a bold attempt at making peace with Armenia's neighbour. Over a period of months, via intermediaries and directly, Sargsyan and Demirchyan had forged contacts with the President of Azerbaijan.

That morning US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, had been in Yerevan for meetings with Kocharyan, Sargsyan and Demirchyan. Talbott had arrived from Baku where he held talks with Heydar Aliyev, and had with him a renewed set of proposals. Some believed that this was it... that Talbott had brokered a set of conditions that would underpin a genuine peace process.

Kocharyan and Sargsyan's decision to pursue peace may not have been statesmanship, but it was certainly pragmatic, as the cold war over Nagorno-



(above) Heydar Aliyev, Eduard Shevardnadze and Karen Demirchyan. (left) This screen grab shows a gunman standing in the chamber during the incident.

Karabakh deeply affected Armenia and its people. The US Department of State notes in 2012:

Although a ceasefire has held since 1994, the 20 year old conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh has not been resolved. While intensive efforts by the OSCE Minsk Group are on going in pursuit of a settlement, the closure of both the Azerbaijani and Turkish borders has prevented Armenia from realising its economic potential. Armenia's economy depends heavily on outside supplies of energy and most raw materials. While land routes to Turkey are closed, regular and charter

air connections operate between Yerevan and Istanbul and Antalya; land routes through Georgia and Iran raise the risk and cost of transport.

The economic dividend of peace, therefore, would be enormous for Armenia. Already depressed during the era of Soviet collapse, the occupation had cost Armenia heavily, weakening the economy. Peace would have significantly benefited every Armenian.

“Karen Demirchyan was brave,” says Shevardnadze. “He knew the dangers of what he was doing politically, but not in personal cost. It was a terrible sacrifice for wishing to make peace.”

October 27, 1999 would be a day like no other in Parliament. Five protestors rushed into the chamber, shouting and gesticulating. Everyone there was now alert. For a few brief seconds people assumed that these were demonstrators who had managed to push their way past security to shout a few slogans. Then the men produced automatic rifles which they had hidden beneath their overcoats. Deputies dived under their desks, others dashed madly for the exits. But it was too late for Sargsyan, Demirchyan, the deputy speakers and defence minister. All were gunned down in cold blood. The assailants sprayed bullets indiscriminately towards the front benches, one of them slamming the butt of his rifle on to the head of an already-bloodied and dying minister.

The gunmen quickly announced they were taking prisoners and staging a coup d'état. Parliament was surrounded by armed security forces and eventually — after being allowed to speak on television, where they denounced peace efforts — they freed the hostages and were taken into custody.

More than a decade later, this act of political terrorism still remains a mystery — for the drawn-out trial of the gunmen failed to shed light on the crucial questions of how they managed to obtain accreditation to enter Parliament and how they passed through security without their weapons being revealed. International observers still believe the shooting derailed the peace process and served to strengthen the hand of Kocharyan.

Once again nationalists in Yerevan had swept away the prospect of a peace

settlement and the benefits that came with statesmanship. In 2012, *Transformation Index* commented:

The Armenian government continues to struggle to overcome a daunting set of challenges, including a pronounced lack of legitimacy, a deeply polarised population, and general mistrust and unpopularity among the majority of the population. The past two years were also marked by a serious economic crisis, as declining remittances and reduced investment triggered new fiscal and budgetary pressure... From the onset of independence, Armenia faced additional challenges, ranging from an on going war with neighbouring Azerbaijan that led to a blockade of the country's eastern and western energy, trade and transport links...

Yet the same year that Prime Minister Sargsyan and Speaker Demirchyan were murdered in Yerevan for daring to discuss peace, amid the economic doldrums that afflicted Armenia, Azerbaijan was building steadily. Considerable energy resources brightened its long-term prospects and the economy was making strides. The Regression of the economy seen between 1992 and 1995, had given way to the revival period between 1996 and 1998. By 1999 Azerbaijan had a positive foreign trade balance, was seeing year-on-year growth of GDP, inflation was down to single digits and the budget deficit was at normal levels.

“This was the result of sound, long-term financial planning,” says Elman Rustamov. “Throughout his career, Heydar Aliyev showed himself to be someone who strategised, and it was this that allowed him after 1993 to put in place the fundamentals that shaped our economy.”

Rustamov recalls being in meetings with him in the early years, when decision-making was almost day-to-day: from where to get wheat, how to find the funds for electricity generation. The post-Soviet nations were all in various states of economic collapse.

“No matter how difficult things were at any given moment, Heydar Aliyev had a long term view and he did not lose sight of that in his decision-making,” says Natiq Aliyev. Natiq Aliyev would observe Heyder’s visionary initiative in 1999, one which would have a particularly long-term view, looking to generations not even born.



Heydar Aliyev primed the State Oil Fund for Azerbaijan as an institution aimed at saving and investing for future generations.

The term sovereign wealth fund (SWF) was first used by Andrew Rozanov in an article entitled, *Who holds the wealth of nations?* in a 2005 issue of *Central Banking Journal*. The first SWF was the Kuwait Investment Authority, formed in 1953, like others which followed its state-owned investment fund composed of financial assets which are invested globally. Recognising the necessity of establishing an independent welfare fund, Heydar made a decision at the end of 1999 to establish The State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ).

“SOFAZ is a symbol of fiscal prudence and openness. Azerbaijan has demonstrated to the world that it has been very prudent from the very beginning,” says SOFAZ Executive Director Shahmar Movsumov. “SOFAZ began as a rainy day fund designed to cater for future generations turned into a provider of funds for projects judged to be of strategic importance. Our mandate is to ensure that my great-grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren, feel the benefit of today’s oil revenues.”

Today, SOFAZ spends money on key projects such as power and water supply, social infrastructure, health care and education, including providing accommodation and basic facilities to IDPs from Nagorno-Karabakh. SOFAZ won a prestigious United Nations Public Service Award in 2007 for ‘Improving transparency, accountability and responsiveness in the Public Service’. Its assets totalled \$34.129 billion on January 1, 2013.

“The State Oil Fund for Azerbaijan was an example of the foresight that Heydar Aliyev possessed, a trait and style that is also shown prominently in Ilham Aliyev’s record,” says Ashraf El Motei, a prominent lawyer based in Dubai who works extensively in Azerbaijan. “It is so easy for leaders to take a short-term view, plough money into today with no thought for the long-term. What we see in Azerbaijan is a strategy of investment today, which is paying handsome dividends, and through SOFAZ the government has prudently kept an eye on the future.”

It was the same, long-term thinking which saw Heydar learn more about pipes than he had ever imagined, or indeed wished. On April 17, 1999, Heydar and his Georgian counterpart took part in an inauguration ceremony for the Baku–Supsa Pipeline, a \$556 million, 833-kilometre pipeline and terminal project that would use a refurbished Soviet era pipeline with several newly built sections to send Azerbaijani oil to the Black Sea. Yet this mammoth pipeline, capable of transporting some 145,000 barrels oil per day, was the little brother of Heydar’s two projects.

Suleyman Demirel, arguably the Azerbaijan President’s closest ally abroad, had proposed an oil pipeline run through Turkey as early as 1992. The West, seeking alternatives to a volatile Middle East and looking to circumvent Russia, applauded the idea. But it took the arrival of Heydar in power for the concept to gain traction. The Ankara Declaration of 1998 set the project in motion and not until an inter-governmental agreement was signed by Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey in 1999 that the project got underway.

With Ilham Aliyev installed as a Vice-President in SOCAR, Heydar had a close ally alongside him and a reliable point-man working within the industry, an industry that would underpin Azerbaijan’s future. Yet he was a man who was never comfortable if he was not on top of his brief. Once again, in order not to be left on the sidelines, he was forced to learn something akin to a foreign language. In his late 70s by now, he suddenly became cognizant on the issues such as ‘magnetic flux’, the ‘electrochemical root of corrosion’ and the benefits of ‘mechanical cleaning by pigs’.

“Heydar Aliyev was always very much on top of his brief,” says Lord George Robertson, former Secretary General of NATO. “I learned that he prepared himself for every meeting, so that he had an excellent grasp on any topics being discussed.”



(above) The Ankara Declaration of 1998 set in motion a project that would create the world's second longest pipeline. (right) BTC transported Azerbaijani oil to Turkey's Mediterranean coast.



By the time oil from the Caspian finally reached Turkey's Mediterranean coast, along a \$3.2 billion, 1,768 kilometre Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, Heydar would not be alive to see the result of his work. But future generations of Azerbaijanis will.

"The future of Azerbaijan belongs to our youth. We are preparing firm foundations and the basics of a stable future," said Heydar Aliyev. "... We want Azerbaijan to enter the 21st century as a powerful and independent state. We wish to create strong foundations for future generations, using the opportunities and assets that Azerbaijan enjoys today..."



Despite his brush with the medical profession, Heydar Aliyev returned to work and was quickly taking on a packed and eclectic schedule.

Negotiating with an Empty Shirt

Opportunities multiply as they are seized.

— Sun Tzu

One of the earliest proponents of international diplomacy was Sun Tzu, the 6th century Chinese strategist, who wrote the seminal book *The Art of War*. Sun Tzu lived in a time of upheaval in which warlords, monarchs and tribal chiefs vied for power through war and conquest. Sun Tzu was one of those but was perhaps the first to grasp that diplomacy — in the form of establishing alliances, bartering land and firm peace treaties — was just as important a tool as conflict. Diplomacy became a language of civilisation. As city-states formed in ancient Greece they sent envoys to others, albeit for specific tasks, not as permanent representatives. One of the first instances of permanent representation came when Shah Abbas I appointed an Ambassador to Europe between 1599 and 1602. Shah Abbas I headed the Safavid Empire.

Four hundred years later, diplomacy was almost considered an art form as mankind sought to build itself into a civilisation. Indeed, the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo reports that:

The number of on-going conflicts has declined since shortly after the end of the Cold War and the severity of armed conflict has generally declined since World War Two. This fact sharply contradicts many pessimistic perspectives...

Archaeologists have shown that in prehistoric times as many as a quarter of the male population died in localised conflicts. The Thirty Years' War destroyed a third of the population of Germany. Throughout mankind's dubious history, war defined our species. And although we had developed new and more efficient ways to kill each other, post-World War Two both the number of wars and the number of dead were dropping.

The days of Sun Tzu were over, the warlord replaced by the diplomat at the apex of the political spectrum. Pragmatic Third Way politicians like American President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were considered the vanguard of a new generation of leaders. In Baku, Heydar could never have been considered Third Way, or indeed part of that new generation, as the Americans termed it, The Baby Boomers, but his instincts for relationship building were indeed similar. Azerbaijan's foreign policy was entrenched in pragmatic relationship building

If the younger generation of leaders were in need of the counsel of a wise, worldly and pragmatic gentlemen of the old school they spoke to him. He knew where the levers of power were. Just as importantly, he knew when and how hard to pull them.

That knowledge came with a lifetime of experience, but the downside of gaining that experience was old age. Heydar found age deeply frustrating. He recovered well from his brush with the surgeon's scalpel in 1999, but time was catching him up. Victor Hugo wrote that; 'When grace is joined with wrinkles, it is adorable. There is an unspeakable dawn in happy old age.' This was not the experience of the Azerbaijani President. French author Jules Renard observed that: "It's not how old you are, it's how you are old." To the age of 76, Heydar may have agreed with Renard. Even at three quarters of a century, he almost joyfully worked 16-hour days, travelled happily around Azerbaijan to undertake official duties and took on the stresses of the Presidency with ease. "To me — old age is always 10 years older than I am," said American essayist John Burroughs and this, perhaps, summed up his view on life perfectly.

Yet in the wake of his operation, Heydar was physically less capable. By the millennium, his well-built frame was now noticeably thinner. His handsome features had become craggy. He maintained his liking for smart suits and looked the part of an elder statesman, but the physical parameters of



After his illness Heydar Aliyev would come to rely more heavily on his inner circle.

what he could now do, or not do, meant that he could not perform his duties as well as he wished.

“Mentally, Heydar Aliyev was as sharp as a needle and remained so until the last day I saw him, in 2003,” says Natig Aliyev. “His ministers and those who worked with him would give him information. A few weeks, or months later, if that information changed they needed to be ready to explain why, as he retained everything. His was a photographic memory.”

In 1993, on returning to power, Heydar had been called an ‘Old Warhorse’ by the *Chicago Tribune*. The *Sunday Times* had dubbed him Baku’s ‘ageing patriarch’ at the time. Close to a decade had passed since he was encapsulated for foreign readers in those terms. A dozen assassination attempts later, among other travails, his body was seeing the effects of advancing years, coupled with a difficult Presidential lifestyle. Looking back on Heydar’s Presidency, the stress points are as obvious as they are almost constant.

The office of the Surgeon General of the United States estimates that 43 per cent of all adults in America suffer adverse health effects from stress and that between 75 and 90 per cent of all doctor’s office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints. Not to belittle the problems of ordinary



Heydar Aliyev with Russian President Vladimir Putin (above) and United States President George Bush (left).

people, but they do not have one million refugees relying on them, the strain of a frozen conflict and a peace process and the traumas of a nation that was on the verge of collapse, among others. These strains, added to a mysterious, massive heart attack in 1987, his heart bypass and treatment at various times for a prostate condition and a hernia, added to a picture of physical decline.

“Heydar Aliyev resisted any attempt that was made to reduce his workload,” says Ramiz Mehdiyev. “He believed that there was much, much more to do, and he believed that it was his destiny to continue to shape and mould a modern Azerbaijan, for as long as the electorate agreed he should.”

This meant that while 16-hour days were increasingly impossible to maintain physically, Heydar would be in his office for 14 hours a day, six days a week, and a few hours on a Sunday. Beyond that 90-hour working week, he would work from home, taking calls late into the night to speak to leaders and diplomats in other time zones around the world.

While he was restricted physically, in the footsteps of Sun Tzu and Shah Abbas I, Heydar continued to be his nation's arch-diplomat. In January 2001 he hosted Russian President Vladimir Putin in Baku, a few weeks later Alexei II, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. In between these was a vital visit to the United States, where the George Bush administration and OSCE Minsk Group had arranged keynote talks between the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia and other key stakeholders. The Key West talks, chaired by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, were laudable and considered vital. And if anyone wished to reason why Heydar continued to push himself then, an April 3 US State Department transcript of his speech gives every indication. Heydar stated:

During the conflict 30,000 Azerbaijani citizens perished, over 200,000 were wounded and maimed; thousands were taken prisoners, became hostages and are missing. About a million Azerbaijanis, one out of every eight citizens of the country, have been forced out from their land and have been living in tents under unbearable hardships for already nine years. A new generation has grown up in tents.

It is hard to find any other parallel situation in the world, when one state has occupied other states' territories, carried ethnic cleansing there in a massive scale, and the world community silently observes this tragedy. Azerbaijan's justified demands to curb the aggressor are not given support.

...There is no need to prove that Azerbaijan, with 20 per cent of its territory under occupation, hundreds of thousands of citizens living in tents, is most interested in ending the conflict and achieving peace...

The warm sunshine of Florida in April was a welcome backdrop to talks, and provided some memorable photographs of the Azerbaijani President at the wheel of a sailing boat. Yet another continuation of direct dialogue –

following on from an unspectacular meeting in Paris a month earlier brokered by President Jacques Chirac — achieved no tangible progress.

Both sides were perhaps hamstrung by the need to negotiate, but also appeal to their respective domestic base. Indeed, Armenian President and former head of an illegal Nagorno-Karabakh administration, Robert Kocharyan, had unseated a President who attempted, and had subsequently been aided in his stance by an entirely suspect attack on Parliament which had seen the dovish Prime Minister and Speaker murdered. If his Azerbaijani counterpart had proven willing to reach out and find mutually agreeable solutions in search of a settlement, Kocharyan had proven willing to sideline those in Armenia who were similarly disposed.

“Peace meant having to persuade people whose lives have been torn apart by war to accept the painful compromise,” says Ilham Aliyev, who would inherit the problematic task of finding common ground with an empty shirt across the negotiating table. “By the time of the Key West talks, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was a 13 year old conflict. Right-minded people understand that the conflict had hurt economic development and political stability.”

Perhaps at no other time were circumstances aligned. Without a competing international crisis, Nagorno-Karabakh was a priority for the international community. With the global economy on an upward curve making it easier to secure funds from international donors for a post-conflict settlement. On September 11 that would change. The War on Terror, Afghanistan and Iraq, and a struggling global economy, would contrive to push Nagorno-Karabakh off the diplomatic agenda.

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, in his office, Heydar was already watching the terrible aftermath of an aircraft hitting the North Tower of the World Trade Centre in New York when, at three minutes past six in the evening Baku time, United Airlines Flight 175 slammed into the South Tower. September 11 would, of course, present a seminal moment in international affairs. As Richard Morningstar, then Ambassador-Designate to Azerbaijan, would state before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June 2012:

The United States has long recognised Azerbaijan as a stalwart partner on international security. We remember that following the attacks of September 11, 2001, then-Azerbaijani President Heydar



(above) Heydar Aliyev reads a statement during United States brokered talks at Key West in Florida. (right) Skippering a sailing boat during a lighter moment in the Sunshine State.



Aliyev was among the first to extend a hand of support in our time of need and to offer his country's close cooperation in our efforts to combat terrorism. That cooperation continues to this day.

“Although he had long been represented in the leadership of an atheist country, he always kept in his heart the love of God,” says Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh, Grand Mufti of the Caucasus. “Heydar Aliyev was a religious man, a good and faithful Muslim.”

Heydar resented Al Qaeda's use of Islam as a propaganda tool to attack the



Heydar Aliyev shared a platform with the influential Grand Mufti of the Caucasus Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh.

United States, and indeed any use of a peaceful, tolerant religion to underscore terrorism. He was President of a nation that had been deeply affected by terrorist acts on its soil. It was anathema to him that anyone could use religion to justify such acts — let alone using the religion he practices and knew to intrinsically be the opposite of what was claimed by Osama bin Laden.

Azerbaijan's alignment with the global response to September 11 would see the United States reassess the only major sticking point in its relationship with the nation, namely Section 907 of the United States Freedom Support Act. This banned any kind of direct United States aid to Azerbaijani government, the only country of the former Soviet Union not to receive direct aid from America under the *Freedom Support Act*, created to facilitate economic and political stability. This had represented a huge victory for the scurrilous Armenian-American lobby in the United States, regarded as one of the three most effective ethnic lobbies alongside the Israeli lobby and the Cuban lobby.

Back in 1992 when Section 907 was introduced, the American administration's interest in the region was limited, especially when contrasted with Washington's role in conflicts in Iraq, Somalia, or even the former Yugoslavia. Over time, however, American interaction increased but even as late as the Bush Administration there was limited effort to influence



On Capitol Hill the Armenian lobby had been able to heavily influence United States' policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh.

Congressional thinking or direction, or to indicate that Washington was actively seeking an impartial role in the solution to Nagorno-Karabakh.

In the absence of direction from the White House, Congress was left to run with the issue — with Armenian lobbyists effectively shaping the debate. As a result Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, banning direct aid to the Azerbaijan government, was passed, assuming that Azerbaijan played an offensive role in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Section 907 was, and is, grossly unfair, prompting the US, a nation which has a long tradition of trying to prevent or resolve distant conflicts and assist the victims of such conflicts to be biased. There are no “good victims” and “bad victims” — there are just victims. Section 907 contradicts this tradition by taking sides in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict — by saying, in effect, that Azerbaijani victims are somehow less deserving. Beyond this, Section 907 was patently ridiculous when, under international law, it was Azerbaijan that was the injured party in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

“The problem with Section 907 is that it was framed without an understanding of the truths of the situation,” says Hafiz Pashayev. “Gradually, as we pointed out the deficiencies in the Armenian argument, support for Section 907 dried up and Senators and Congressmen began to view Section

907 as punishing the victim, at the behest of the aggressor.”

Some remain obtuse and possess an opaque view of the facts, a haziness perhaps helped by the payments they receive. For example, the feckless Congressmen Frank Pallone and Mark Kirk continue to write letters to the fictitious Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. If effective lobbying and cheque writing are the mark of the Armenian lobby’s misrepresentation in United States — and this is a methodology replicated in most major capitals around the world — then Baku was remiss in not organising this valuable asset in the same manner as Yerevan.

It is estimated that there are upwards of seven million Armenian diaspora, with the largest populations in Russia, the United States, France, Argentina, Lebanon, Syria and Iran. By contrast, today there are far fewer Azerbaijani diaspora around the world. Non-census estimates hint at 400,000 in the US, centred around Houston, Los Angeles, New York, compared to 1.5 million Armenian-Americans. Section 907 was indicative of their organisation in the 1980s, and this continues today, witness the US Senate’s failure to confirm the excellent Mathew Bryza as the US Ambassador to Azerbaijan in March 2012.

Armenia’s strong record in Public Diplomacy was tragically contrasted with Azerbaijan’s lack of organisation in this regard. In 1999, while on a visit to the United States, Heydar had met with representatives of Azerbaijani-American groups. He had learned more of the potential that existed, in the US and across the world, if this asset could be harnessed, especially in cooperation with Turkish-American groups and others.

It took more than a year to patch together a likely coalition and achieve what had become one of Heydar’s main strategic goals for Azerbaijan. The first World Azerbaijani Congress was held in Baku between November 9 and 10, attended by some 400 representatives from more than 200 diaspora organisations based in 36 countries. The conference was also attended by some 844 observers from 130 state and public organisations in Azerbaijan, plus delegates of 25 political parties.

Shortly afterwards, a decree signed by Heydar formed the State Committee on Work with Azerbaijanis Living Abroad (later renamed the State Committee on Work with Diaspora) intended to foster stronger ties with ethnic Azerbaijanis around the world, help preserve their national identity and



Heydar Aliyev lays a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier, while behind the scenes he sought to prevent any more deaths over Azerbaijan's occupied territories.

establish a network of Azerbaijani organisations to ensure cooperation and coordination.

If an empty shirt routinely sat across from Heydar in peace negotiations representing Armenia and its intentions, the first and subsequent meetings of the World Azerbaijani Congress would begin a process of interacting with the rest of the world by new means. Public Diplomacy had, for too long, been the purview of just one side of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In a post-September 11 environment there was a complete global realignment underway. Communication, consensus-building and global cooperation had suddenly become the new norm.

‘There has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited,’ wrote Sun Tzu. Tired and considerably older than when he had called a ceasefire in 1993, eight years on the President of Azerbaijan was only too aware of his mortality. Despite the empty-shirt in Yerevan, he continued to believe that he could achieve a lasting peace in his lifetime.



Despite rallying following his heart bypass operation Heydar Aliyev came to accept that he was in declining health.

Country Before Self

Age is an issue of mind over matter.
If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

— Mark Twain

The early months of 2003 had been seminal: TS-107, the final mission of the Space Shuttle Columbia, saw the vehicle disintegrating during re-entry over Texas. At the UN, US Secretary of State Colin Powell addresses the UN Security Council on Iraq, which was a final precursor to the war. In Africa the genocidal war in Darfur began. Closer to Azerbaijan, deadly conflict continued in Chechnya.

On April 9, US forces seized control of Baghdad, ending the regime of Saddam Hussein. Iraq imploded while Hussein absconded to a hole near the town of ad-Dawr near Tikrit. His whereabouts, and the state of collapse in Iraq would fill media headlines for weeks and months.

Some 900 kilometres from Baghdad, Baku was amid its own drama. It was typical of Heydar Aliyev that despite his advancing years, he would push himself to maintain an incredible work rate which had many of his assistants gasping to keep up with him. He was the president of a country which needed modernising rapidly — and he had no time to worry about his health. Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan was in his thoughts more than 16 hours a day even when he was in his 70s. He suffered a heart attack in 1987 and had undergone a heart bypass operation in the Cleveland Clinic in US in 1999 when he had been told to slowdown, but he ignored the advice despite

subsequent operations. He was a bull of a man, powerful and strong not only in body, but also in mind.

Therefore it should not have come as a shock, but it did, when he collapsed twice during a nationally televised speech to an audience of mainly military cadets in Baku in April 2003. He had just started his speech, watched by millions on prime time television, when he clutched his chest complaining of pain and fell, his bodyguards rushing over to support him. In the audience, the cadets rose on their feet as one, in shock, several among them almost throwing themselves forward toward him to prevent him falling. But his security were already there, running on to the stage to assist, getting him to a nearby saferoom in moments.

The television transmission was interrupted only to be started again when the President insisted on continuing his speech. His face was pale but he waved defiantly to his audience.

"I have apparently been bewitched by the evil eye. But I'm fine as you can see," he told the clapping and cheering audience. But he was not and a few minutes later collapsed again, hitting his head on the podium. It was a quiet but thoughtful audience who waited but they knew their president was a very stubborn man and sure enough he again insisted on returning to the stage to finish his speech at the podium amidst thunderous applause. The cadets and millions of viewers had seen the indomitable spirit which had made Heydar Aliyev a unique courageous leader. On April 22, the *New York Times* reported:

The 79 year old President of Azerbaijan, Heydar A Aliyev, collapsed twice during a nationally televised speech today, prompting fresh questions about the health of a leader considered integral to the stability of his oil-producing country. Mr Aliyev, who has a history of heart and other health problems, was addressing a military audience in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, when he gasped, clutched his heart, complained of pain and fell.

More than 10 minutes later, the broadcast resumed, and Mr Aliyev continued his remarks, making light of the incident.

The ramifications of that ordinary Tuesday went beyond the health of a single man. For more than a decade, Heydar had been the guarantor of stability

On national television, while speaking to an audience of army cadets, Heydar Aliyev would suffer a minor heart attack.



in the Caucasus. Whether they supported his policies and New Azerbaijan, or not, most people considered him the father of the nation. Much of the political opposition in Baku, even sometimes begrudgingly, lauded him for his achievements.

“There was no doubting what Heydar Aliyev had achieved,” says Sardar Jalaloglu, Chairman of the opposition Democratic Party of Azerbaijan. “Azerbaijan was in a terrible position in 1993. I don’t know anyone who would begrudge him credit for pulling the nation from that morass, and indeed many of the achievements of the nation in the years after this.”

The Presidential Administration had attempted to head off a political crisis and the resulting instability by blaming a ‘sudden fall in blood pressure’ for events that day. But an apparent heart problem of some kind, played out on national television, had served to open a ‘Pandora’s Box’ of frenzied rumour and counter-rumour. Given oxygen by this, the opposition in Baku would burst into life.

For a decade the opposition and its main characters had failed to unseat Heydar Aliyev via the ballot box, nor come anywhere near that. But they were only too willing to crow when he showed illness. This was a gift to them. They were only too willing to exploit any opportunity that presented itself.

Imperceptibly, perhaps, but inexorably, a shift had begun. April 22, 2003 was a day when everything would begin to change. Says Mamed Kazimov,

an auto-mechanic in Baku: "I was too young to really remember the times before Heydar Aliyev, but my friends and I knew of a period after independence when food was scarce, when money somehow was worth less in the afternoon than it was in the morning, and when the shops were just empty. People were fearful that everything would fall apart. We were fearful of instability. We were fearful for Heydar Aliyev."

Kazimov and a whole generation of Azerbaijani youth had known nothing but Aliyev. Yet those of voting age clearly recalled having five Heads of State and Acting Heads of State during a period between 1991 and 1993. They remembered their politicians wrangling in Parliament, on national television, while first Armenia rolled through Nagorno-Karabakh and then Surat Huseynov almost rolled into Baku to stage an armed coup. And many clearly remembered that several of those who were ready to vie for Heydar's position in 2003 were a prominent part of that crisis-filled melodrama a decade earlier.

The opposition blamed vote rigging, ballot stuffing, so many things for Heydar's electoral success. Ironically, many of those involved in the finger pointing had been part of those times.

Heydar turned 80 on May 10. His closest family gathered around him. Ilham and Mehriban, his grandchildren, Leyla, Arzu and Heydar. But any thought of celebration was muted. Doctors in Baku were worried. Heydar was clearly unwell, and not responding to treatment.

Adding to the situation, the nation was becoming enveloped in crisis. Opposition figures were actively opining that the country's President was professionally impaired. The Constitution states that if a President is unable to fulfill his mandate, then powers shift to the Prime Minister. In that position was the widely respected technocrat Artur Rasizade.

Although unwell, Heydar was alert, taking decisions and speaking to those in government as required. He was also shoring up the stability of his government and nation as effectively as possible, as ever concerned with the economy. As the January 2011 IMF working paper *How Does Political Instability Affect Economic Growth?* states:

(Economists have) produced ample literature documenting the



(above) Until 2003, Heydar Aliyev kept to his busy schedule, here photographed with US Secretary of State Colin Powell and (right) US Secretary of Defence William Cohen.



negative effects of political instability on a wide range of macroeconomic variables including, among others, GDP growth, private investment, and inflation. Alesina et al. (1996) use data on 113 countries from 1950 to 1982 to show that GDP growth is significantly lower in countries and time periods with a high propensity of government collapse.

As required, however, as per the norms of government, and Azerbaijan's Constitution, Rasizade was managing day-to-day affairs of government. Although this fits within the law, the opposition did not like that either and



*Heydar and Ilham Aliyev with French President
Jacques Chirac.*

organised several angry, combative protests designed to create unrest.

Considering how Heydar was perceived, and the support he had among ordinary people, this was a mistake. Scenting blood in the water, the opposition went into an unedifying frenzy. Therein lay their mistake. During this period leading figures in opposition showed no degree of statesmanship, or projected themselves like potential Presidents. With a Presidential Election just months away, irrespective of Heydar's current well-being, attacking him when he was perceived as 'down' or announcing that he was dead, appealed only to their existing base. That base had been proven, across several elections, to be well short of an election-winning level.

Heydar, himself, was stoic and ready for a battle. By now he was receiving treatment for an ailing heart and the beginnings of kidney failure, complications were setting in. Interviewed for this book, several of those in his inner circle stated that he had already resolved himself to the situation.

Across his near decade long Presidency, Heydar had cultivated stability. This he saw as the key to everything. In May 1994, he had called his son from Turkey and asked him to return to Baku, give up a burgeoning private sector business and enter public service. As confidante of the President, and a safe

pair of hands, Ilham had served as Vice-President of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) and been a key negotiator on the game-changing Contract of the Century. He had served as a Member of Parliament, as President of the National Olympic Committee and was head of the Azerbaijan delegation to the Council of Europe. Beyond this, Ilham had been a dependable ally and a default extension of the President, while being close enough to his father to morph into an ideological match.

On July 4, Heydar nominated Ilham as Prime Minister. Parliament concurred. A few days later, Heydar flew to Turkey for the specialist treatment offered at the specialist Gülhane Military Medical Academy (GMMA) in Ankara. His situation stabilised somewhat, but overall Heydar was beginning to weaken.

On July 30, Heydar signed a decree that would appoint Ilham Aliyev as Prime Minister. Three days later Rasizadeh was appointed Deputy Prime Minister. On August 4, Ilham was officially appointed as Prime Minister. The same day, speaking in the Milli Majlis, Ilham addressed people's concerns over Heydar's illness.

"The Azerbaijani economy is on the rise and I will do everything to continue this course. I expect no serious changes in the government. As for the President's health, it is good. He planned to return a couple of days ago, but the doctors wanted to provide him with some additional treatment. However, I believe he will return to Azerbaijan soon," said the new Prime Minister.

As this was unfolding in Baku, in the Turkish capital there was increasingly little that the GMMA could do. They were losing the battle to save him. It was highly unlikely that in a weakened state he would survive an operation. They recommended that he did not travel.

Yet August 5, Heydar was transferred to the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio aboard a specialist Russian Emergency Situations Ministry jet. His only hope was to rally under specialist treatment and, somehow, become strong enough to survive heart surgery. In that, there was already a lack of positivity. At home in Azerbaijan, just as he feared, the cloud over his health and Presidency had become an excuse for political machinations. Already this was causing instability, both economic and political. The same IMF working paper adds:

Political instability is regarded by economists as a serious malaise harmful to economic performance. Political instability is likely to shorten policymakers' horizons leading to sub-optimal short-term macroeconomic policies. It may also lead to a more frequent switch of policies, creating volatility and thus, negatively affecting macroeconomic performance.

For several weeks uncertainty swirled in Baku. Heydar became increasingly aware that, having viewed himself as the guarantor of stability for over a decade, his role had transformed. The best-case scenario, for a recovery, was unlikely. Yet even if he managed a return to Baku, and on to the ballot for the Presidential Election in October, the issue of his health would continue to dog both him and Azerbaijan. At the beginning of October he issued a short statement withdrawing himself from candidacy for the Presidential Election and offering a ringing endorsement of Ilham as the New Azerbaijan Party's nominee.

"It was quite emotional," says Natiq Aliyev (no relation). "Heydar Aliyev had been such an integral part of our national life, of my life, that reading that statement was a shocking event."

Ilham would serve as Prime Minister of Azerbaijan for only 93 days. He entered the election as candidate of the biggest party in parliament, the biggest and most evolved political machine backing him, enormous name recognition, and the personal endorsement of a man who had won the last election with 73 per cent of the vote.

On October 15, 2003, Azerbaijan went to the polls. Voting ended at 6pm and live coverage of the count and result tabulation was carried on Azerbaijan Television. It was early morning in Ohio. Heydar watched events unfold from his hospital bed. Ilham Aliyev scooped almost 2.5 million votes, some 76.8 per cent. His nearest rival, Isa Gambar of Mūsavat, attracted some 14 per cent of support.

"There are many similarities between Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev, without doubt," says former Ukraine President Leonid Kuchma. "In Ilham there was a strong leader who has proven capable of building on his father's social, economic and political legacy."

By now, Heydar had come to terms with the knowledge that he was passing

*Ilham Aliyev won
Azerbaijan's Presidential
Election on October 15, 2003.*



away. He knew he did not have long. Says one of those with the ailing President at the Cleveland Clinic: “The Presidential Election was the moment that Heydar Aliyev accepted his fate. He was content that, in Ilham Aliyev, there was a leader in place who would continue his project.”



May 10, 2012, and Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev, his spouse, members of the Aliyev family, relatives and close friends assemble at the Alley of Honor in Baku to pay tribute to the national leader on his anniversary. Attended by a full honour guard and with national dignitaries also present, President Aliyev laid a wreath at the tomb of his father while the national anthem of Azerbaijan was played:





The Longfellow Axiom

Patriotism is an inner feeling of a person.
If he is missing that, he is immoral.
— Heydar Aliyev

Longfellow told us to meet it with a “manly heart”. Malcolm X said that it belongs to those who prepare today. John F Kennedy stated that those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss it. Many great thinkers opine as to how we should approach the future, but few have the opportunity to really shape it.

In 1993, Heydar Aliyev inherited a broken, divided and dispirited nation. He was 70 years old. Time was not on his side. Nor that of Azerbaijan. But if his new career as President of Azerbaijan was to hold true to one maxim it was perhaps Thomas Jefferson’s assertion that: “I like dreams of the future better than the history of the past.” Heydar’s immediate concern in 1993 was the present. Of hauling Azerbaijan from the cusp of darkness and into the light. Yet he had dreams of a better future.

Soon the audacious Contract of the Century, a high stakes economic structural reform programme, Heydar’s Third Way approach to foreign affairs and raft of social initiatives began to take a hold on the Caucasus nation. By the time of the Presidential Election campaign of 1998, that would give him a sweeping mandate, Azerbaijan’s latent potential had awakened.

One obvious example of strategic thinking was the State Oil Fund for

Azerbaijan, today with assets of some \$34 billion. This remains a very public statement of the future, a guarantee of inter-generational equality when it comes to the natural assets that are being exploited by the nation today. SOFAZ represents a guarantee that Heydar's audacious Contract of the Century — signed last century and fulfilled this century — will have a fundamental impact on Azerbaijan and its people over future centuries.

Heydar knew his own moirai, but believed that Azerbaijan's was not yet written, that the fate of his nation was still being authored. In that sense, the future was his to influence. On the eve of a new millennium his attention turned beyond the immediate requirements of nation and to blue-sky thinking, the future.

The year 2013 marks several milestones. Heydar would have turned 90 years old. It is exactly a decade since he passed following a decennial long Presidency. It is 20 years since he effectively saved Azerbaijan. As well as a biography of his life, this represents a pertinent juncture to examine his legacy — what the *Oxford Dictionary* defines as 'something left or handed down by a predecessor' — his lasting impact upon Azerbaijan's nine million people of today, and those who will follow them in the future.

Primary among these must be Azerbaijan's integrity. From former United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to former Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk, and domestic commentators such as Dr Hafiz Pashayev, Dr Ramiz Mehdiyev, Elmar Mammadyarov and Sheikh Ul Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh, I posed that 'what if' question. What if Heydar Aliyev had not returned to Baku? There is overwhelming consensus that without him Azerbaijan would have collapsed into a rump state, a spasticised central government holding limited authority over competing regions, challenged further by emboldened, expansionist neighbours taking advantage of the chaos.

Today's unitary Azerbaijan remains arguably his most enduring legacy.

The post-Soviet transition that dominated Heydar's Presidency required Longfellow's "manly heart", a high-stakes period of macroeconomic stabilisation and economic reform. Failure of that key retrenchment would have mired Azerbaijan in the prevailing post-Gorbachev ruin. And paralysed the economy until today.

But the evolution was painful. Elman Rustamov, Governor of the Central Bank of Azerbaijan, recalls a defining meeting, called to discuss Soviet era subsidies on basic foodstuffs. Removing these would hit the already embattled people. Keeping them in place would result in the World Bank and others withholding desperately needed help. Heydar adjourned the meeting and withdrew to an adjacent room, alone, to ponder the wretched decision before him.

A few hours later he himself announced his decision to remove subsidies, personally taking responsibility and using his political-capital in order to sell a burdensome decision to his people. The mid-1990s would be tough for ordinary people to weather, but the hard choices were accepted, largely as the nation's President looked his people in the eye and explained what had to be done. His popularity may have suffered as a result, but his standing did not.

If Ilham Aliyev has built on the foundations laid by his father, it is nevertheless a success that reflects on both leaders when one absorbs the achievements of recent times. Azerbaijan's GDP represents some 80 per cent of the combined GDP of the South Caucasus. Between 2003 and 2012 the nation attracted \$130 billion of FDI. The nation continues to invest in global energy security, for example through the strategic Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP). These and others represent a sustained and strong upward trend that has seen Azerbaijan surge. Those agonising decisions of the mid-1990s underpin everything, and continue to be moulded into a cohesive future, especially through *Azerbaijan 2020: The vision of the Future*, a development blueprint.

And finally there is a ceasefire. After successfully freezing the war with Armenia in 1993, giving his embattled nation a pause to establish its independent foundations, he engaged in protracted and repeated negotiations with a series of often obliquitous counterparts from Yerevan. Despite international law and four United Nations resolutions, the ardent nationalism and equivocal intentions of Armenia meant that unlocking real peace would be a predicament that the international community — scandalously — allowed to be passed between generations, to Ilham.

Heydar could not manage to unlock the door for Azerbaijan's one million refugees and Internally Displaced Persons to return to their homes. Yet he could look them in the eye. The emergency camps dotted around the country

became housed communities, and the economy and stability he created allowed them the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of Azerbaijan's increased prosperity as they waited their right-of-return.

In April this year more than 200 global and regional business leaders, heads of government and civil society representatives travelled to Baku to participate in a World Economic Forum meeting. This would feature 'strategic dialogue on the future of the South Caucasus and Central Asia' and 'provide an opportunity for investment and development of the region'.

Those attending passed through a world class international airport and headed towards the Azerbaijani capital along modern highways that weaved through prosperous, new residential areas, industrial parks and along cultured boulevards. During two days of the forum participants discussed topics like entrepreneurship and human capital, a vision of the future of the South Caucasus and Central Asia and finances and long-term investment. In between sessions they stayed in plush five-star hotels, ate in world class restaurants and shopped in modern malls. Throughout this, they encountered Azerbaijan's educated, young, dynamic population.

On the agenda at the World Economic Forum was a special session titled *The Vision of Azerbaijan*. Few people there may have recognised the significance of this: international delegates of a global entity in Baku, debating a vision and the future. This is, in itself, a potent example of Heydar's legacy. As he stepped from an aircraft at Baku International Airport on June 9, 1993, Azerbaijan was at the crux of an abyss from which few could see any future at all.

'Look not mournfully into the past, it comes not back again,' wrote Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. 'Wisely improve the present, it is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear and with a manly heart.'

Longfellow's axiom rings true. Heydar met the darkness of that period head on, toiled on the present and worked with an eye on the future. A decade on from his passing it is a legacy that, as Boutros-Ghali observes: "Places him at the pantheon of leaders in post-Soviet space."



ABC	American Broadcasting Company
ACG	Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADR	Azerbaijan Democratic Republic
AIOC	Azerbaijan International Operating Company
AMOCO	Amoco Corporation, originally Standard Oil Company
APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier
APF	Azerbaijan Popular Front
APFI	Azerbaijan Photo Film Institution
ASALA	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
BTC	Baku-Tiblisi-Ceyhan
bpd	Barrels per day
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CC	Central Committee
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE	Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FDR	Franklin D Roosevelt
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMMA	Gulhane Military Medical Academy
GNP	Gross National Product
GPU	State Political Directorate
GRU	Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye (State Intelligence Directorate)
GUAM	Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IGOs	Intergovernmental Organisations
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITN	Independent Television News
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)

MGB	Ministry of State Security
MGIMO	Moscow State Institute of International Relations
MI5	British Agency for Internal Security and Intelligence
MI6	British Agency for Overseas Security and Intelligence
MIT	Milli Istihbarat Teshkilati (National Intelligence Unit)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NKGB	People's Commissariat of State Security
NKVD	Narodny Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs)
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation
OMON	Otryad Mobilniy Osobovo Naznacheniya (Special Purpose Police Unit)
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PDR	Peoples Democratic Republic
PR	Public Relations
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SFSR	Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SOCAR	State Oil Company of Azerbaijan
SOFAZ	State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
SWF	Sovereign Wealth Fund
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNODCCP	United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention
USA/US	United States of America/United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VE	Victory in Europe
VIP	Very Important Person

acolyte	assistant or follower
acquiesce	accept something reluctantly but without protest
acreage	area of land measured in acres
affray	fight in a public place
agitator	someone taking part in protests seeking argument/conflict
agrarian	place or country with economy based on farming
assimilation	process of becoming of a group, country, society, etc
breviloquent	given to concise, or brief, speaking
buffered	to provide protection against harm
cognisant	fully informed, conscious
diaspora	dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland
disarray	state of disorganisation or untidiness
dissemination	spreading information, circulation
dissidence	protest against official policy
dogmatic	forcibly asserted as if authoritative and unchallengeable
doldrums	depressed economy
dowry	money or asset brought by a woman to her husband on marriage
ebbing	flow back or recede
echelon	higher level or group of people within an organisation
emboldened	to make someone brave
emphysema	lung condition causing breathing difficulties and heart problems
encyclopaedic	large range of knowledge, often in great detail
ensconced	positioned safely or comfortably somewhere
ephebiphobia	fear of teenagers
eponymous	dominant character
eschewed	avoid something intentionally, or to give something up
esoteric	understood by few people, especially those with knowledge
essayist	person who writes essays
ethos	distinctive character, spirit, and attitudes of a people, culture, era
eulogy	formal speech or piece of writing praising a person or thing
exacerbate	make a problem, bad situation, or negative feeling worse
exalted	raised or elevated, as in rank or character
exoteric	suitable for communication to the general public
famine	extreme and general scarcity of food
fascism	governmental system led by a dictator
flux	the action or process of flowing
fop	man concerned with appearance in an affected and excessive way
foray	sudden attack or incursion into enemy territory
gaggle	disorderly group of people

glasnost	policy of more open government (<i>Russian</i>)
gouged	make a rough hole or indentation
grandiose	impressive or magnificent in appearance or style
gregarious	fond of company or sociable
grievous	causing pain, grief or great sorrow
hamstrung	severely restricted efficiency or effectiveness
heinous	someone or something horrible, hideous or terrible
helotry	class or serfs or slaves
heterogeneous	composed of parts of different kinds
hobnobbing	mix socially, especially with perceived higher social status
humongous	huge, enormous
ignominious	deserving or causing public disgrace or shame
imbued	inspired or permeated
impunity	exemption from punishment
inauguration	formal beginning or introduction
incursion	hostile entrance into or invasion of a place
indomitable	cannot be subdued or overcome
inept	without skill or aptitude for a particular task or assignment
inextricable	incapable of being disentangled or undone
insidious	intended to entrap or beguile
intelligentsia	intellectuals considered as a group
jettisoned	abandoned or discarded
jingoistic	someone who believes that their own country is always best
kolkhoz	collective farm (<i>Russian</i>)
kulaks	prosperous landowners seen as exploiters (<i>Russian</i>)
leftist	member of the political left
machiavellian	cunning, scheming and unscrupulous
maelstrom	situation or state of confused movement or violent turmoil
malaise	general feeling of discomfort, illness or unease
maloobespechennost	low income/unofficial poverty line (<i>Russian</i>)
medevac	transport to hospital in a helicopter or airplane
megalomania	obsession with the exercise of power
melee	confused hand-to-hand fight or struggle among several people
meritorious	deserving reward or praise
metallurgy	science of procedures used in extracting metals from their ores
metastasise	spreading of a disease from one body part to another
microcosm	something that is regarded as a world in miniature
minutiae	precise details on small or trifling matters
mitigate	lessen in force or intensity

modus operandi	mode of operating or working (<i>latin</i>)
monolithic	consisting of one piece, solid or unbroken
moribund	not progressing or advancing; in a dying state
myopia	narrow-mindedness
nemesis	opponent or rival whom a person cannot best or overcome
nonchalant	unconcerned, indifferent or unexcited
nondescript	person or thing of no particular or notable type or kind
nostalgia	sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place or time
nuance	very slight difference or variation
obstinacy	quality or state of being obstinate, stubbornness
obtuse	not sensitive or observant, dull
octogenarian	person who is between 80 and 89 years old
oglu	descendant (<i>Azerbaijani</i>)
oligarch	very rich businessman with political influence
ominously	worrying impression that something bad is going to happen
omnipresent	widely or constantly encountered, widespread
omnivorous	indiscriminate in taking in or using whatever is available
opaque	not able to be seen through, not transparent
ophthalmology	branch of medicine concerned with diseases of the eye
opiate	drug derived from or related to opium
opined	held and stated as one's opinion
ostentatiousness	pretentiousness or showy display, designed to impress
overt	done or shown openly
palpable	able to be touched or felt
palliative	relieving pain without dealing with the cause of the condition
paraldehyde	liquid used medicinally as a sedative, hypnotic and anticonvulsant
pariah	outcast
pedagogy	science and art of education
perestroika	political movement concerned with reformation (<i>Russian</i>)
pericarditis	medical term for inflammation surrounding the heart
phlegmatic	having an unemotional and stolidly calm disposition
phraseology	mode of expression
pique	provoke, arouse
plausible	having an appearance of truth or reason
plebiscite	direct vote of all the members of an electorate
plethora	superabundance, an excess
plummeting	fall or drop straight down at high speed.
poignancy	state of deeply felt distress or sorrow
pompous	ostentatious display of dignity or importance
populicide	slaughter of the people or population

posthumously	arising, occurring or continuing after someone's death
pragmatism	practical, matter-of-fact way of assessing situations
prism	solid object that has two identical ends and all flat sides
proletariat	working-class people, regarded collectively
prudence	caution with regard to practical matters
quagmire	awkward, complex or hazardous situation
rambunctious	uncontrollably exuberant, boisterous
rebuked	express sharp disapproval or criticism of someone
refurbished	renovate and redecorate
rendezvous	place used for a meeting
rhetoric	art of using language effectively and persuasively
rigorous	extremely thorough, exhaustive or accurate
salubrious	conducive or favorable to health or well-being
scopolamine	tropane alkaloid drug with muscarinic antagonist effects
secession	act of withdrawing from an organization, union, or political entity
septuagenarian	person who is from 70 to 79 years old
sexagenarian	person who is from 60 to 69 years old
Shah	title given to the kings and lords of Iran and India
skewed	suddenly change direction or position
skirmish	minor or preliminary conflict or dispute
Slavic	of the Slavs or their languages
soliloquy	act of speaking to oneself
sovkhoz	Soviet state owned farm (<i>Russian</i>)
sporadic	occurring at irregular intervals
squandered	waste in a reckless and foolish manner
stagflation	sluggish growth coupled with a high inflation/unemployment
stalwart	loyal, reliable and hardworking
suffrage	right to vote in political elections
sycophantic	acts to win favour by flattering influential people
topography	detailed, precise description of a place or region
totalitarianism	political system where the state holds total authority over society
travesty	false, absurd, or distorted representation of something
ubiquitous	being or seeming to be everywhere at the same time
uskoreniye	acceleration (<i>Russian</i>)
vehemently	marked by or full of vigour or energy
virulent	extremely infectious, malignant or poisonous
vociferous	making an outcry or loud noise
zealously	filled with or motivated by zeal
zenith	highest point above the observer's horizon

Chapter 0

- 1 AzerTAC
- 6/7 NASA
- 8 AzerTAC

Chapter 1

- 10 Georges DeKeerle
- 13 Media Prima
- 14 Presidential Administration
- 15 Vasil Talibov
- 17 Media Prima

Chapter 2

- 18 Media Prima
- 21 AzerTAC
- 22 AzerTAC
- 23 US World War One Museum
- 25 AzerTAC
- 27 both AzerTAC
- 28 Media Prima
- 30/31 both Media Prima

Chapter 3

- 32 Media Prima
- 35 AzerTAC
- 36 family archive
- 39 both Presidential Administration
- 40 (both) ITAR-TASS

Chapter 4

- 42 Hürriyet, Downing Street,
Getty Images, ITAR-TASS
- 45 Russian Railways
- 47 Heritage Images
- 48 Geoff Pusey
- 49 Geoff Pusey
- 51 both ITAR-TASS
- 52 (above) AzerTAC
(left) ITAR-TASS

Chapter 5

- 54 ITAR-TASS
- 56/57 AzerTAC
- 58 both Media Prima
- 61 both Moscow Museum
of Cinema
- 62 Moscow Museum of Cinema
- 64 (above) ITAR-TASS
(left) British Museum

Chapter 6

- 66 Charles Hewitt
- 69 family archive
- 71 Reuters
- 73 both Ministry of Education and
Science, Russian Federation
- 75 family archive

Chapter 7

- 76 all Ministry of Education and
Science, Russian Federation
- 78 Faik Bagirov
- 81 Perm-36 Museum
- 82 Presidential Archive
- 84 Metropolitan Museum of Art

Chapter 8

- 86 Nakhchivan Museum
- 88 Margaret Burke-White
- 91 Museum of World War Two,
Minsk
- 92 Museum of World War Two,
Minsk
- 94 family archive

Chapter 9

- 96 family archive
- 98 (above) Vasif Talibov
(left) Manchester Museum

101	British Museum	148	(above) Republican Information
103	Kremlin		Agency (left) family archive
104	(above) National Archives		
	(left) AzerTAC		
Chapter 10		Chapter 14	
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	of Architecture	159	AzerTAC
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Chapter 11		Chapter 15	
116	RAF Museum	166	Universal Images Group
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122	both Turkish General	Chapter 16	
	Directorate of State Archives	172	United States Press Agency,
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127	Blockade Museum, Petersburg		Presidential Administration
129	AzerTAC	174	AzerTAC
Chapter 12		177	KGB Museum, Prague
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	Occupation, Tbilisi	181	family archive
135	both ITAR-TASS	Chapter 17	
136	both Museum of World	182	Media Prima
	War Two, Minsk	185	Museum of Soviet
139	Media Prima		Occupation, Tbilisi
Chapter 13		187	both Presidential Administration
140	Plaza Spa Hotel, Kislovodsk	188	KGB Museum, Prague
143	British National Archives		family archive
145	both KGB Museum, Prague	191	AzerTAC
147	family archive		

Chapter 18

192	Science Photo Library
195	New York Times
196	Reuters
199	AzerTAC
200	AzerTAC

Chapter 19

202	EurasiaNet
205	ITAR-TASS
206	AzerTAC
208	123RF
211	AzerTAC
213	SOFAZ

Chapter 20

214	Dean Conger
217	Meat & Livestock Australia
219	Heydar Aliyev Foundation
220	EurasiaNet
223	Presidential Administration
225	Foundation News
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	(left) Media Prima
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Chapter 21

230	Presidential Administration
233	both Bloomberg
234	both ITAR-TASS
237	Sahm Doherty
239	Pravda

Chapter 22

240	Pravda
243	UAE Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
244	both International Cotton Association

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Chapter 23

250	DEUTCH Jean-Claud
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Chapter 24

262	Museum of Soviet Occupation, Tbilisi
264	AzerTAC
266/267	Keystone France
269	both Pravda
270	TIME
271	family archive
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274	both ITAR-TASS

Chapter 25

276	AzerTAC
279	MGIMO
281	The Independent
283	ITAR-TASS
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Chapter 26

286	Heydar Aliyev Foundation
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Chapter 27

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Chapter 28

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Chapter 29

321 Presidential Administration

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Chapter 30

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Chapter 31

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Chapter 32

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363 Presidential Administration

Chapter 33

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Chapter 34

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380 both Media Prima

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Chapter 35

392 AzerTAC

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Chapter 36

400	AzerTAC
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Chapter 37

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Chapter 38

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426	Presidential Administration
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Chapter 39

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439	ARKA News Agency
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Chapter 40

448	AzerTAC
451	AzerTAC
452	both AzerTAC
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455	Kyrgyz National News Agency
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Chapter 41

462	AzerTAC
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Chapter 42

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Chapter 43

- 490 Carter Centre
- 493 AzerTAC
- 494 Reuters
- 497 both Anadolu Agency
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Chapter 44

- 502 Downing Street
- 504 (above) Chris Niedenthal
(left) Wouter Kingma
- 507 Reuters, United Nations,
White House, AzerTAC
- 509 AzerTAC
- 511 ARKA News Agency
- 513 OSCE
- 515 AzerTAC

Chapter 45

- 516 AzerTAC
- 518 AzerTAC
- 521 Press Association
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- 525 both Cleveland Clinic
- 526 NATO
- 529 AzerTAC
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Chapter 46

- 532 Presidential Administration
- 534 (above) Eduard Shevardnadze
(left) Mikhail Starosin
- 537 both SOCAR
- 539 (above) BP
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Chapter 47

- 540 Azerbaijan Olympic Committee
- 543 AzerTAC
- 544 (above) ITAR-TASS
(left) AzerTAC
- 547 (above) Reuters
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- 548 Baku Municipality
- 549 Bloomberg
- 551 AzerTAC

Chapter 48

- 552 William Stevens
- 555 Presidential Administration
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Chapter 49

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A

- Abadan 120, 121
 Abbasova, Leyla 175
 Abdullah, Çatlı 476
 Abdullazade, Fatma 268
 Abkhazia 425, 522
 Absheron Peninsula 22, 24, 40, 212
 Afandiyev, Sultan Majid 80
 Afghanistan 280, 281, 316, 317, 476,
 477, 510, 546
 Afshar, Nadir Shah 34
 Agdam 308, 406, 409, 450
 Afshar, Nadir Shah 34
 Akayev, Askar 382
 Akhundov, Vali 185, 187, 201, 204, 221
 Al Nahyan, Zayed bin Sultan 499
 Al Ragabani, Saeed bin Mohammed
 242
 Ala-Too 455
 Alat Station 40
 Albright, Madeleine 522, 523
 Alcibiades 231
 Aleksandrovsky Palace 154
 Alesina 557
 Alexander II 118
 Alexander, Gurnov 279
 Alexandrovich, Vladimir 345
 Alexei 246, 265, 272, 299, 331, 545
 Alikhanov, Anvar 194
 Aliyev, Abdulfaz 414
 Aliyev, Aziz 147, 148, 149, 161, 162,
 171, 175, 288
 Aliyev, Hasan 141, 142, 146
 Aliyev, Ilham 16, 21, 24, 59, 82, 111,
 139, 144, 154, 176, 209, 219,
 243, 261, 272, 278, 279, 289,
 302, 318, 323, 324, 325, 332,
 346, 348, 358, 368, 379, 381,
 382, 390, 397, 416, 462, 466,
 467, 469, 498, 520, 521, 523,
 528, 538, 546, 558, 559, 560,
 561, 567
 Aliyev, Jalal 169
 Aliyev, Natiq 109, 210, 221, 222, 451,
 482, 520, 521, 536, 560
 Aliyev, Tamerlan 159, 161
 Aliyeva, Izzet 24, 36, 175, 181
 Aliyeva, Leyla 459
 Aliyeva, Mehriban 483
 Aliyeva, Shafıga 36, 37
 Aliyeva, Zarifa 147, 149, 159, 165,
 173, 286, 287, 289, 294
 All-Union Fund 217, 242, 244, 245,
 246, 268
 Alliluyeva, Svetlana 279
 Amoco 465
 Andropov, Yuri 190, 205, 231, 250,
 265, 269, 270, 283, 285, 336
 Ankara 43, 397, 473, 524, 538, 539,
 559
 Ankara Declaration 444, 468, 538, 539
 Annan, Kofi 507
 Antalya 527, 535
 Anthropology 289
 Anti-Comintern Pact 90
 Absheron Peninsula 212
 Arabist 426
 Aral Sea 245
 Ararat 33, 202
 Ararksyan, Babken 455
 Araz River 45, 46, 120
 Arbatskaya 317, 318
 Archaeology 542
 Argentina 550
 Aristotle 231
 Arkhangelsk 120
 Arkhipov, Ivan 274

- Armenia 12, 28, 30, 37, 41, 45, 105,
186, 202, 203, 204, 248, 278,
342, 346, 355, 356, 357, 362,
372, 373, 374, 381, 390, 396,
398, 399, 401, 404, 410, 411,
413, 416, 420, 421, 422, 440,
453, 500, 510, 511, 512, 513,
514, 520, 528, 530, 531, 533,
534, 535, 536, 545, 546, 550,
556, 567
- Armenian Herald 26
- Armistice of Mudros 34
- Armitage, Richard 523
- Arnot, Bob 198
- Arutyunyan, Suren 373
- Aslanov, Azi 136, 147
- Aslanov, Hazi 128
- Aspirantura 78, 79
- Atabegs 34
- Ataturk, Mustafa Kemal 19, 42, 43
- Avanesian, A 381
- Axis Pact 102
- Azerbaijan Communist Party 105, 173,
176, 178, 183, 184, 186, 190,
205, 209, 210, 224, 231, 278,
342, 362, 370, 396, 517
- Azerbaijan Democratic Republic 37,
38, 61, 194, 203, 382, 421
- Azerbaijan Industrial Institute 106,
107, 108, 109, 110, 112, 113,
119, 143
- Azerbaijan Oil Ministry 183
- Azerbaijan Photo Film Institution 62
- Azerbaijani National Council 37
- B**
- Baden-Powell, Robert 60
- Baghdad 553
- Baghirov, Mir Jafar 104, 105, 159, 161,
162, 164, 169, 170, 173, 184
- Bagirov, Kamran 278
- Baikonur Cosmodrome 180
- Bakatin, Vadim 357
- Baku Polytechnical Institute 107
- Baku Polytechnicum 107
- Baku State University 107, 108, 414
- Baladjar 45
- Balbas 416
- Bali 501
- Baltic 336, 416
- Barannikov, Yuri 432
- Barghoorn, Frederick 194
- Baruch, Bernard 142
- Barvikha Sanatorium 113
- Battle of Kursk 137
- Battle of Stalingrad 137
- Battleship Potemkin 61
- Baylor College 525
- Bek-Nazarov, Amo Ivanovich 62
- Bektashi, Tofiq 79
- Belarus 128, 304, 307, 503
- Belgium 508
- Benn, David Wedgwood 336
- Beria, Lavrentiy 119, 144, 176, 272
- Berlin 100, 101, 103, 144, 364, 365,
402
- Bibi-Heybat Bay 22
- Bible 32, 33
- Bishkek 455
- Black Sea 114, 195, 308, 309, 506, 507,
538
- Blair, Tony 542
- Blitzkrieg 114
- Boettke, Peter 354
- Boldin, Valery 393
- Bonn 410
- Borisovo 137

Boutros-Ghali, Boutros 292, 411, 454,
511, 513, 566
 Branobel Oil Company 40
 Brezhnev, Leonid 195, 196, 205, 215,
224, 231, 247, 250, 251, 262,
264, 267, 269, 279
 Brockhaus encyclopedia 453
 Brzezinski, Zbigniew 365
 Bubnov, Andrei 73
 Buguruslan 125
 Bulbuloglu, Polad 91
 Bulganin, Nikolai 272
 Burma 341
 Burroughs, John 542
 Burundi 477
 Bushbury 47
 Buynaksk 148

C

Caesar, Julius 514
 Cairo 508
 Cambridge 108
 Capriccio 194
 Carlyle, Thomas 272, 341, 386
 Caspian 21, 39, 105, 120, 126, 127,
161, 213, 217, 241, 351, 380,
394, 465, 506, 539
 Castro, Fidel 178
 Caucasus 12, 20, 21, 28, 29, 34, 35,
108, 114, 124, 126, 127, 141,
148, 151, 159, 203, 248, 297,
298, 418, 428, 451, 467, 475,
506, 547, 548, 555, 565, 567,
568
 Central Banking Journal 537
 Ceyhan 467, 468, 506, 539
 Chaikas 224
 Chamberlain, Neville 93, 100, 101

Chanturia, Giorgi 477
 Charybdis 302
 Chazov, Yevgeniy 259
 Chechelashvili, Valeri 510
 Cheka 118, 146
 Chernenko, Konstantin 283, 285
 Chernobyl 306, 307, 308, 311, 312
 Chicago 216, 451, 543
 China 232, 233, 282, 355, 508, 510
 Chirac, Jacques 507, 520, 546, 558
 Chopin 283
 Christmas 194, 301, 402
 Chudnovsky, Alexander 308
 Chuikov, Vasily 144
 Churchill, Winston 42, 43, 131, 142,
143
 Cleveland 525, 527, 553, 559, 561
 Clinton, Bill 444, 464, 465, 468, 523,
526, 542
 Clinton, Hillary Rodham 44
 Coddington, Edwin 434
 Columbia 553
 Comecon 232, 236
 Commonwealth 419, 425, 506, 520
 Communist Party 12, 58, 60, 69, 80,
82, 90, 105, 132, 133, 135,
136, 139, 147, 158, 159, 162,
167, 168, 170, 173, 176, 178,
183, 184, 186, 190, 194, 196,
201, 203, 204, 205, 209, 210,
215, 218, 224, 231, 233, 234,
235, 236, 238, 251, 252, 253,
263, 264, 265, 267, 269, 278,
282, 284, 298, 311, 333, 336,
339, 342, 343, 345, 346, 354,
355, 362, 363, 367, 368, 370,
371, 373, 383, 384, 385, 386,
396, 432, 476, 495, 517, 530
 Connery, Sean 187

Conquest, Robert 65
 Constantinople 43
 Constitution 38, 70, 89, 173, 441, 493
 Cornell, Svante E 217
 Cosmodrome 180
 Cotti, Flavio 509
 Courier International 123
 Crozier, Brian 343
 Curtis, Glenn E 419
 Czechoslovakia 93, 100, 260, 261

D

Da Vinci, Leonardo 84
 Dagestan 39, 45, 147, 148, 149, 159,
 161, 248
 Daniels, Robert Vincent 282
 Danzig 100
 Darfur 553
 Dashnaks 24, 26
 Day, Alan 415
 DeBakey, Michael 525, 527
 de la Mothe, Jean-Baptiste Vallin 154
 Delta-Nimir 467
 Demirchyan, Karen 530, 531, 533, 534,
 535
 Demirel, Suleyman 397, 426, 438, 439,
 445, 472, 473, 498, 524, 538
 Demokratizatsiya 301, 302
 Denmark 38
 Derbent 45, 161
 Dissanayake, Gamini 477
 Dnepropetrovsk 126
 Dobrynin, Anatoly 258
 Dole, Bob 44
 Doveg 204
 Dubcek, Alexander 260, 261
 Dulles 189
 Dzerzhinsky, Felix 118

E

East, Roger 415
 Egypt 508
 Einstein, Albert 220
 Eisenhower, Dwight D 172, 173, 193
 Eisenstein, Sergei 61
 El Motei, Ashraf 538
 Elchibey, Abulfaz 414, 426, 447, 475,
 519
 Eliot, George 203
 Emirates 498, 499
 Estonia 102
 Estrada, Joseph 496
 Europe 19, 20, 95, 100, 101, 102, 103,
 113, 117, 128, 137, 142, 143,
 153, 364, 371, 456, 477, 506,
 508, 509, 513, 517, 518, 541,
 559

F

Faradjev, Assad 406
 Figaro 123
 Fikrat, Amirov 193
 Finland 102, 114, 308
 Five-Year Plan 46, 64, 218, 219, 221,
 274, 282, 291, 299
 Fizuli 58, 450
 Fleming, Ian 187
 Florida 545, 547
 Ford, Gerald 253
 France 100, 114, 121, 456, 508, 550
 Freud, Sigmund 138
 Frost, Meryll 287

G

Gagarin, Yuri 192, 193

Galbraith, John Kenneth 215, 503
 Galileo 340, 341, 348
 Gambar, Isa 154, 441, 519, 560
 Ganja 13, 62, 99, 216, 420, 430, 441, 442, 446, 479
 Ganjavi, Nizami 58
 Gasimli, Musa 108, 220
 Geidere 87
 Georgia 37, 41, 45, 168, 207, 237, 248, 258, 399, 418, 419, 468, 510, 511, 522, 527, 535, 538
 Georgievsky Hall 265
 Germany 71, 90, 91, 93, 94, 100, 102, 113, 115, 117, 121, 123, 124, 126, 131, 137, 153, 193, 371, 382, 508, 542
 Gershenson, Dmitriy 132
 Gettysburg 425, 427, 429, 431, 433, 434, 435
 Gillard, Julia 499
 Glasnost 301, 302, 303, 306, 307, 308, 311, 312, 319, 322, 336, 346, 367, 384, 387
 Goebbels, Joseph 114, 144
 Golden Mountains 63
 Goltz, Thomas 426, 431
 Gooderham, Peter 92
 Gorbachev, Mikhail 205, 235, 269, 285, 293, 296, 297, 302, 307, 321, 334, 335, 342, 343, 352, 358, 365, 366, 387
 Gossypium 244, 246
 Graham, James 388
 Great Britain 38, 89, 93, 100, 102, 108, 120, 121, 125, 131, 189, 253, 283, 402, 405, 482, 491, 495
 Great Patriotic War 100, 104
 Great Purge 80, 81, 83, 90, 132, 144, 146

Great War 20
 Greater Armenia 28, 372
 Greece 100, 541
 Gregorian, Eduard 356
 Gromyko, Andrei 274, 275, 339
 Grossman, Herschel 132
 Gulag 81, 120
 Gulistan Palace 453, 465
 Guliyeve, Fuad 483
 Guluzade, Vafa 277, 441, 482, 506
 Gurnov, Alexander 279

H

Habyarimana, Juvenal 477
 Hague 405
 Hajj 183
 Hamilton, Alexander 343
 Hamlet 77, 124
 Hammarskjöl, Dag 485
 Hamzayev, Ibrahim 67
 Harding, Warren G 520
 Harvard 519, 527
 Hasanov, Firudin 517
 Heinrich, Himmler 102
 Hitler, Adolf 42, 43, 71, 90, 94, 100, 113, 114
 Hollywood 61, 132
 Holocaust 65
 Holodomor 64, 65
 Holy Koran 32, 450
 Hoover, Herbert 117
 Hough, Jerry 133
 Houston 464, 465, 550
 Hugo, Victor 542
 Hungary 178
 Huseynov, Surat 430, 432, 442, 479, 556
 Hussein, Saddam 553

Hylton, Raymond 143, 402

I

Ibrahim, Ezzedine 498

Igbo 44

Iliescu, Ion 520

Indonesian 499

Inonu, Mustafa Ismet 121, 499

Iofan, Boris 113

Iran 120, 121, 125, 126, 134, 138, 241,
357, 415, 416, 508, 535, 550

Isaxanli, Hamlet 77

Islam 183, 194, 374, 415, 428, 429,
451, 547, 548, 566

Israel 44, 477, 514

Istanbul 382, 416, 476, 535

Italy 38, 90, 113

Ivanov, Aleksandr 225, 311, 314, 325,
329, 332

Ivanovich, Yuri 188

Izvestia 194

J

Jabbarli, Jafar 496

Jabrail 450

Jalilov, Afiyeddin 455, 479

Janos 237

Japan 90

Javid, Huseyn 224

Jefferson, Thomas 343, 344, 565

Jomardli 18, 20, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 35

Julfa 45, 46

K

Kabul 280

Kalashnikov, Mikhail 264

Kalbadjar 450

Karabakhians 357

Karachayevo-Cherkesk 305

Kaspiysk 148

Katzva, Leonid 252

Kazakhstan 65, 180, 394, 468, 510

Kazimirov, Vladimir 455

Kazimli, Hanhuseyn 517

Kelbecer 372

Kennedy, John F 193, 224, 533, 565

Khabarovsk 304, 322

Khagani 59

Khalkhin Gol 316

Khan, Genghis 19

Khankendi 62, 402

Khanlar 382

Kharkov 132

Khazri 351

Khojaly 400, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406,
407, 409, 410

Khokhlov 325, 326

Khoyski, Fatali 39

Khrushchev, Nikita 167, 169, 172, 173,
187, 193, 195, 340, 341

Kiev 63, 193, 307, 317

Kigali 484

King, Charles 488

Kirilenko, Andrei 269, 271

Kirillov, Igor 269

Kirk, Mark 550

Kirov, Sergei 80

Kislovodsk 140, 141, 142, 146, 147,
149, 151, 156, 159, 161

Kissinger, Henry 44

Klinghoffer, Arthur Jay 124

Kocharyan, Robert 514, 546

Kohan, John 145

Komsomol 90, 91, 92, 93, 117, 118,
119, 133, 134, 196

Konya 397
Korean War 188
Koroglu 34
Kosygin, Alexei 246, 265, 272, 299, 331
Kravchuk, Leonid 233, 291, 399, 445, 503, 566
Krebs, Hans 144
Kremlin 170, 200, 207, 215, 230, 231, 255, 256, 259, 263, 265, 271, 272, 273, 281, 284, 288, 291, 293, 304, 314, 315, 325, 329, 330, 332, 333, 338, 348, 357, 359, 363, 367, 369, 445
Kryshtanovskaya, Olga 282
Kuchma, Leonid 238, 323, 334, 367, 484, 485, 527, 560
Kurdamir 39
Kurenivka 193
Kuril Islands 70
Kursk 131, 137
Kuwait 537
Kuwait Investment Authority 537
Kyi, Aung San Suu 321, 341, 348
Kyrgyzstan 382, 455, 510

L

Le Carre, John 123
Le Figaro 123
Lachin 411, 450
Laden, Osama bin 548
Laika 180
Lambridge, Wayne 154, 177, 187
Lankaran 241, 444
Latvia 102, 371, 510
Lebanon 550
Lebensraum 90, 101
Lee, Robert E 434

Lenin, Vladimir 38, 40, 42, 43, 51, 55, 150, 215, 233
Leningrad 63, 80, 126, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 161, 187, 242, 253, 278, 281, 317, 368, 393
Lenkoran 26
Leonard, Thomas 74, 83
Leontiyevskiy Row 359, 360, 361
Lezgin 352
Libaridian, Gerard 512
Ligachev, Yegor 284, 339
Likbez 220
Lincoln, Abraham 55, 173, 307, 316, 344, 345
Lippmann, Walter 142
Lisbon 509, 513
Lithuania 100, 102
London 304, 410, 500, 508
Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth 111, 568
Longinus, Gaius Cassius 514
Los Angeles 394, 396, 550
Lubyanka Square 197
Luftwaffe 115
Lukoil 467
Luther, Martin 87, 204, 263, 393, 437

M

Machiavellian 186
Madrid 501
Maiden Tower 62, 110, 111
Maikop 124
Major, John 406
Makarenko, Anton Semenovich 59
Makhachkala 147, 148, 161
Malcolm X 185, 565
Malenkov, Georgy 255
Mamedbeyova, Leyla 128

- Mammadov, Dovlat 78, 87, 97, 108, 118, 132
- Mammadov, Elman 403, 405
- Mammadov, Etibar 517
- Mammadov, Yagub 410
- Mammadyarov, Elmar 510, 523, 566
- Mandarin 504
- Mandela, Nelson 340, 341, 454, 491
- March Days 24, 27, 34, 35, 38, 159
- Mardakyany 259
- McCain, Bruce 519
- McCarthy, Joseph 172, 173
- Meade, George Gordon 434
- Mecca 183
- Mehdiyev, Ashraf 517
- Mehdiyev, Ramiz 123, 185, 204, 335, 429, 544, 566
- Mein Kampf 113
- Melkonian, Monte 401
- Melkumyan, Naira 514
- Melkumyan 514
- Memel 100
- Meritorious 128
- Messi, Lionel 113
- Mexico 146
- Michon, Alexandre 61
- Mingachevir 62
- Mingevan 46
- Minsk 63, 137, 455, 456, 509, 512, 522, 534, 545
- Mirishli, Mir Jafar 67
- Missouri 142
- Moldavia 491
- Moldova 510
- Molotov, Vyacheslav 101, 115, 144, 255, 272
- Mongol 19
- Mongolia 510
- Moorgate 500
- Morrish, Ivor 58
- Moscow 11, 12, 13, 16, 37, 41, 45, 50, 52, 53, 63, 67, 70, 72, 76, 77, 80, 89, 91, 92, 93, 101, 102, 104, 110, 113, 114, 119, 120, 123, 125, 126, 137, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 157, 158, 161, 171, 175, 177, 178, 179, 183, 184, 186, 188, 190, 195, 197, 198, 199, 201, 204, 205, 207, 212, 215, 216, 219, 221, 224, 231, 232, 233, 235, 236, 237, 238, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 249, 252, 256, 257, 259, 265, 269, 270, 271, 273, 277, 278, 279, 281, 282, 288, 289, 290, 291, 294, 297, 298, 299, 300, 304, 308, 314, 317, 318, 323, 324, 325, 327, 332, 333, 334, 336, 337, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 352, 355, 357, 358, 359, 361, 366, 367, 368, 369, 371, 373, 374, 375, 377, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 385, 386, 387, 388, 393, 394, 399, 410, 427, 428, 432, 454, 456, 457, 467, 482, 525, 545
- Moscow River 113
- Mount Agridag 33, 202
- Moussa, Amr 508
- Movsisyan, Vladimir 373
- Movsumov, Shahmar 537
- Mudd, Samuel 341, 343, 344, 345, 347, 349
- Mudros Armistice 34
- Mujahideen 280, 281
- Mullainathan, Sendhil 519
- Mumbai 501

Munich 43, 93
 Munich Pact 93
 Murmansk 72
 Musabayov, Rasim 374, 428
 Musavat 492, 519
 Mustafayev, Imam 172, 173, 178, 182, 183
 Mushfig, Mikayil 99
 Mussolini, Benito 90
 Mustafayev, Chingiz 406
 Mutallibov, Ayaz 366, 367, 370, 395, 432, 444
 Myanmar 477

N

Nagorno-Karabakh 12, 38, 105, 170, 186, 203, 204, 205, 278, 292, 342, 345, 346, 347, 349, 355, 356, 357, 362, 372, 374, 385, 396, 401, 402, 404, 406, 411, 414, 420, 421, 426, 428, 430, 446, 450, 453, 454, 455, 456, 474, 496, 509, 510, 512, 513, 514, 515, 522, 530, 531, 532, 534, 537, 546, 549, 550, 551, 556
 Nakhchivan 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49, 50, 52, 53, 58, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 86, 87, 89, 90, 91, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 108, 109, 112, 113, 115, 117, 118, 119, 120, 123, 125, 132, 133, 134, 135, 137, 138, 139, 143, 144, 146, 147, 151, 152, 155, 158, 180, 181,

203, 277, 281, 342, 346, 348, 368, 369, 371, 374, 375, 376, 380, 381, 382, 386, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 395, 396, 397, 399, 401, 414, 415, 416, 418, 419, 420, 424, 426, 427, 428, 429, 431, 433, 438, 439, 441, 442, 443, 453, 473, 511
 Nakhchivan Pedagogical School 78, 79, 80, 82, 83, 87, 89, 91, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99, 102, 105, 134, 135

Narimanov, Nariman 41, 61
 Narzan 141, 142
 Natavan, Khurshidbanu 58, 59, 99
 National Security Act 188
 Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact 101
 Netherlands 405
 New York Times 282, 333, 403, 523, 525, 554
 Nicholas II 154
 Nixon, Richard 520
 Niyazov, Saparmurat 484
 Noah 32, 33
 Nobel Peace Prize 40, 44, 477
 Nomenklatura 134
 Norway 308
 Nosenko, Yuri 188
 Novorossiysk 308, 310, 311, 312, 313, 506
 Ntaryamira, Cyprien 477
 Nuremberg 71

O

O'Leary, Hazel 465
 Obama, Barack 241, 277, 488, 495, 517
 Odessa 72, 113, 312
 Ohanyan, Seyran 403, 404

Ohio 525, 527, 559, 560
 Okan, Acar 477
 Okhrana 118
 Operation Barbarossa 113, 114, 115,
 120, 121, 123, 126
 Operation Braunschweig 126
 Operation Uranus 131
 Ophthalmology 288, 289
 Order of Lenin 149, 263, 264
 Oslo 514, 541
 Ottoman 34, 43
 Oxford 108, 231, 566
 Ozal, Turgut 397

P

Pakistan 508
 Palace of the Soviets 110, 112, 113
 Pallone, Frank 550
 Paris 136, 166, 410, 500, 508, 522, 546
 Pashayev, Atakan 363
 Pashayev, Hafiz 549, 566
 Pashazadeh, Allahshukur 265, 374,
 428, 429, 547, 548, 566
 Pasternadjan, Karekin 26
 Pelshe, Arvid 271
 Pennsylvania 21
 Pennzoil 467
 Peres, Shimon 44
 Perestroika 303, 304, 306, 307, 314,
 319, 321, 322, 343, 355, 367,
 384, 386, 387, 388
 Persia 45, 46, 453
 Peter, Laurence J 503
 Peter the Great 153
 Peterhof Palace Polokhalo, Vladimir
 368154
 Petrograd 153
 Petrovsk 39, 45

Philippines 496
 Piriyeu, Azim 344, 345
 Plato 231
 Poland 100, 102, 114, 520
 Politburo 12, 195, 252, 253, 254, 255,
 256, 257, 258, 260, 261, 263,
 264, 265, 268, 269, 270, 271,
 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282,
 283, 284, 285, 291, 296, 298,
 299, 300, 302, 303, 304, 308,
 311, 313, 314, 317, 319, 321,
 323, 325, 329, 331, 332, 333,
 334, 337, 343, 358, 360, 367,
 374, 377, 383, 386, 445, 476

Popov, Gavriil 368
 Port Arthur News 287
 Potomac 434
 Pototsky, Pavel 22
 Powell, Colin 545, 553, 557
 Prague 261
 Prague Spring 261
 Primakov, Yevgeny 258, 259
 Pugo, Boris 339
 Pusey, Geoff 48
 Pushkin 154
 Pushkin Street 83, 380, 389
 Puskas, Ferenc 113
 Putin, Vladimir 544, 545
 Pyatigorsk 297
 Pyotr 308, 309, 312
 Pythagoras 231

Q

Qakh 178
 Quarenghi, Giacomo 154
 Queen Elizabeth 315
 Queensland 499

R

Rabin, Yitzhak 477, 514
 Rahimov, Shemsi 479
 Rahmon, Emomalii 503
 Rajapaksa, Mahinda 496
 Ramco 467
 Raskolnikov 40
 Razumovsky, Georgi 337
 Reagan, Ronald 292, 496
 Red Army 39, 40, 41, 63, 80, 120, 131,
 159, 232, 349
 Red Square 12, 170, 179, 283, 332,
 333, 359
 Regio Istituto Superiore di Belle Arti
 113
 Renard, Jules 542
 Republican People's Party 43
 Reuters 524
 Rinaldi, Antonio 154
 Robertson, George 137, 538
 Romania 100, 102, 520
 Romanov, Grigory 253, 298
 Rome 288
 Roosevelt, Eleanor 175
 Roosevelt, Franklin D 142, 143, 209,
 419, 520
 Roosevelt, Theodore 236
 Rosenberg, Ethel 177
 Rostov 124, 125, 137
 Rotunda 113
 Rozanov, Andrew 537
 Russian Empire 37, 45, 394
 Russian Revolution 20, 80, 146
 Russo-Persian War 34
 Rustamov, Elman 221, 457, 504, 536,
 567
 Ryzhkov, Nikolai 272, 284, 298
 Rzaev, Anar 59, 63, 99, 198, 386

S

Sadikov 405
 Safavid Empire 34, 541
 Saglar, Fikri 477
 Saint Petersburg 45, 147, 153, 453
 Sakharov, Andrei 336, 337
 Sandle, Mark 218, 247
 Sangachal terminal 468
 Sargsyan, Vazgen 530, 533
 Saudi Arabia 508
 Schultz, Theodore 220
 Seljuk 34
 Semichastny, Vladimir 190, 194, 195
 Shah 34, 120, 541, 545
 Shakespeare, William 69, 124
 Shakhtakhty 147
 Shaki 62
 Shaw, George Bernard 503
 Shehidler, Khiyabani 352
 Shelepin, Alexander 190
 Sheremetyevo Airport
 Shevardnadze, Eduard 207, 236, 237,
 257, 258, 260, 304, 322, 325,
 334, 393, 418, 419, 439, 511,
 527, 534
 Sheykhulislamov, Akbar 194
 Shliefer, Andrei 519
 Shirinov, Ikhtiyar 430
 Shirvan 62
 Shirvanshahs 110
 Shkolin, Vladimir 345
 Shleifer, Andrei 519
 Shusha 204, 411, 450
 Shushkevich, Stanislav 503
 Siberia 43, 151, 170
 Silk Road 33
 Simon, Mike 255
 Singapore 44

Smith, Hendrick 215
 Smolensk 126
 Sobchak, Anatoly 368
 Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr 81
 Somalia 413, 548
 Sovnarkom Decree 50, 51
 Sputnik 180
 Stalin, Joseph 54, 55, 61, 142, 143,
 166, 194
 Stalingrad 126, 127, 131, 136, 137
 Stanley, Thomas 231
 Stavropol 297, 298
 Stepanakert 402, 403, 512, 513, 514
 Strasbourg 513
 Sudetenland 93
 Sukarnoputri, Megawati 499
 Suleymanov, Nizami 517
 Sumgait 216, 337, 355, 356
 Sumqayit 62
 Sweden 38, 308
 Swietochowski, Tadeusz 186
 Syria 511, 550

T

Taganrog 137
 Tajikistan 425, 503, 510
 Talbot, Strobe 523, 533
 Talibov, Vasif 37, 44, 63, 68, 381, 390,
 415, 427, 438
 Tallin 72
 Talybly, Kazym 79
 Tamerlane 19
 Tanahat 28, 30
 Tashkent 317
 Tbilisi 45, 168, 207, 467, 477, 506,
 539
 Tehran 415
 Ter-Petrosyan, Levon 396, 401, 453,

511, 528
 Texas 287, 553
 Thatcher, Margaret 274
 Thomas, Richard 415
 Tiberda 298
 Tikhonov, Nikolai 274, 282
 Tkachenko, Viktor 308
 Tokyo 43
 Tompson, William 170
 Totten, Michael 303
 Tovmasyan, Sureh 204
 Trans-Iranian Railway 120
 Trans-Siberian 47
 Transcaucasia 151
 Transnistria 425
 Treaty of Versailles 71
 Truman, Harry S 156, 413
 Tsar Bomba 193
 Tsvigun, Semyon 197
 Tudeh Party 126
 Tikhachevsky, Mikhail 39
 Tunisia 136
 Tupolev 375
 Turkey 33, 38, 43, 105, 121, 122, 123,
 124, 125, 127, 134, 136, 137,
 397, 398, 415, 416, 426, 438,
 445, 453, 467, 468, 473, 474,
 483, 498, 508, 510, 524, 534,
 538, 539, 558, 559
 Turkmenistan 124, 403, 468, 484
 Tutayug, Murad 67

U

Ukraine 64, 70, 113, 126, 143, 158,
 196, 233, 238, 268, 291, 304,
 307, 399, 444, 445, 484, 485,
 503, 510, 527, 560
 Ulduz 496, 497

Ushinsky, Konstantin 58
Ustinov, Dmitriy 253, 291
Uzbekistan 245, 510

V

van Goethe, Johann Wolfgang 33, 377
Vazeh, Mirza-Shafi 99
Vazirov, Abdurrahman 342, 355, 366
Versailles 71, 90
Vienna 193
Vietnam 173, 178, 280
Villa, Pancho 43
Vilnius 137
Virginia 434
Vitruvian Man 84
Vladivostok 72, 322
Vnutrennikh 80
Volga 39, 63, 103, 126, 127
Voronikhin, Andrey 154
Voslensky, Michael 134
Vostok 1 192, 193
Vremya 269

W

Wallachia 491
Walt, Stephen 413
Warfarin 326
Warsaw Pact 178, 261

Weaver, Kitty 50
Wehrmacht 127
White House 209, 236, 393, 444, 455,
549
Wilde, Oscar 251
Wilkes Booth, John 344
Willerton, John 207
Wilson, Harold 251, 253

Wolverhampton Railway Gazette 47
Wren, Christopher 108

X

Xiaoping, Deng 355

Y

Yakovlev, Alexander 205
Yale University 194
Yalta 142, 143, 156
Yekaterinoslav 196
Yeltsin, Boris 282, 367, 393, 439, 440,
444, 456, 503, 525
Yelyutin, Viacheslav 55
Yemelyanov, Stepan 162, 163, 164, 170
Yerevan 186, 202, 203, 204, 355, 372,
373, 374, 399, 453, 501, 512,
513, 514, 530, 533, 535, 536,
550, 551, 567
Yesenin, Sergei 108
Yew, Lee Kuan 44
Yilmaz, Mesut 397
Young Pioneer 60, 90
Yuceoral, Suleyman Kamil 477
Yugoslavia 548
Yusifzadeh, Ziya 343
Yusifzadeh, Khoshbakht 212, 218

Z

Zangezur 18, 19, 20, 24, 27, 28, 34, 36,
203
Zarobyan, Yakov 186
Zarvigorov, Yuri 403
Zedong, Mao 233
Zil 271, 441
Zykina, Lyudmila 264

When one tackles subject material as strong as the life of Heydar Aliyev one does not need the obsequiousness that has defined much work on the late President of Azerbaijan. Certainly, he himself was averse to fawning sycophancy, which makes the time and contribution of the many people interviewed for this title all the more important — to provide a clear and concise view of his life.

This project began with Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan, who proffered us valuable insight into a previously unseen, private side of Heydar Aliyev, his father.

A host of other statesmen also took the time to offer their views and recollections, including Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, former United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former British Prime Minister John Major, former Ukrainian Presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, former Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, former Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan and former NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson.

A title such as this would have been impossible without the support of the Presidential Administration, headed by the knowledgeable Ramiz Mehdiyev, who was most obliging to our effort. In the Presidential Administration we were aided by a number of Heads of Department and officials, none more so than Elnur Aslanov, Fatma Abdullazade and Reshad Karimov, along with Farhad Mammadov of the Centre for Strategic Studies.

My close collaborators on this tome were Faik Bagirov and Rahman Hajiyeu. I thank both for their sterling efforts.

We have tried to illustrate Heydar Aliyev, the man behind the headlines, and it was invaluable to meet the men and women who worked with, or observed, Heydar Aliyev at close quarters and through his work. One of these was the hugely influential Vasif Talibov (Chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic).

Generous with their time were Ali Hasanov (Deputy Prime Minister, Chairman of State Committee for Refugees and IDPs), Elchin Efendiyev (Deputy Prime Minister), Natiq Aliyev (Minister for Industry and Energy), Elmar Mammadyarov (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Hafiz Pashayev (Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan), Sheikh Ul Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh (Head of Caucasian Muslims), Khoshbakht Yusifzade (Vice-President of SOCAR), Ali Abbasov (Minister of Communications and Information Technology), Elman Rustamov (Governor of Azerbaijan Central Bank) and Shahmar Movsumov (Executive Director of the State Oil Fund).

Rasim Musabayov (member of the Milli Majlis), Dr Eynulla Madatli (Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Ukraine), Sardar Jalaloglu (Chairman of the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan) and Etibar Mammadov (leader of the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan) made vital contributions.

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