



The Azerbaijan Energy Trap

If asked to identify Azerbaijan, most Americans, unfortunately, would be clueless. Is it a newly discovered planet? A mountain in India? An exotic virus? None of the above. Azerbaijan is a key chess piece in a global power play to reorient strategic geopolitical influence. One part of this important reorientation involves transferring U.S. and Western Europe's energy dependency from OPEC to Russia and the former Soviet republics of the Caspian region. This energy realignment is already well along the way toward completion.

Thanks to grants and loans from Western governments, the World Bank, the European Development Bank, and the IMF, Western oil companies have been developing the rich oil and gas fields of the region and building pipelines and transport facilities. Thus, Russia and other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are seeing their oil and gas production rise dramatically. This is providing them with enormous wealth and new strategic political and economic leverage, as the U.S. and Europe become increasingly vulnerable to Russian energy extortion.

A second part of this strategic reorientation involves a simultaneous effort to subvert and radicalize the OPEC nations of the Middle East and draw them into an anti-American, Moscow-directed front headed by Russia's terror partner Iran. This is being done largely through the 10-member Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), headquartered in Tehran. Iran, as a member of OPEC and ECO, is working to bring the vast energy reserves of both groups under the firm control of the Russian-Caspian energy bloc. Alarm bells should be sounding: America is putting its neck inside an energy noose controlled by folks who are not our friends — even though they smile at us and call us “ally” and “partner.”

Azerbaijan is the crucial piece in this grand strategy. Or, as Zbigniew Brzezinski has aptly described the country, it is “the cork in the bottle containing the riches of the Caspian Basin and Central Asia.” Controlling this cork is a ruthless regime ruled by lifelong Communists.

Stalin's Henchman

Like virtually all of the other so-called independent regimes of the region, Azerbaijan is run by the same Soviet thugs who ran things before Communism's supposed demise, and is still under Moscow's control. Except for the brief presidencies of Ayaz Mutalibov and Abulfaz Elchibey, Azerbaijan has suffered under the iron grip of Geidar Aliev (also spelled Heydar Aliyev) since 1993. Aliev, an octogenarian KGB general, has served every Soviet dictator from Stalin to Gorbachev. He has now passed the baton but will still hold a place in the ruling hierarchy.

On October 2, the ailing Aliev announced that he was withdrawing his candidacy for re-election as president in favor of his son, Ilham Aliev. “Unfortunately, the state of my health does not allow me to realize my plans,” the elder Aliev said in a released statement. “I declare that I am withdrawing my name in favor of Ilham Aliev. I trust him as I trust myself and pin great hopes on him in what concerns the future of Azerbaijan.”

This move is eerily similar to the 1994 nepotistic succession in Communist North Korea, where Stalinist dictator Kim Il-sung arranged for his son, Kim Jong-Il, to take command at his death. When the younger Kim succeeded the old dragon, many North Korea watchers predicted that the son would not last long. Infamous as a flamboyant playboy of dubious psychological stability, it was expected that more experienced Communist Party regulars would soon replace him. That has not happened. The same



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predictions are now being made about Ilham Aliev, also notorious as a gambling, free-spending playboy. Ilham, however, appears to be even better positioned than Kim Jong-Il was to retain the reins of power.

Over the past decade, Ilham has been groomed by his father to take over the New Azerbaijan Party (NAP), staffed top to bottom with Aliev's Soviet-era Communist Party stalwarts. Here's the big difference between Azerbaijan and North Korea: Under the Kims, the Communist Party has ruled openly, while under the Alievs the Communists rule covertly.

The difference is understandable. Azerbaijan, like Russia and the other supposedly former Soviet states, desperately needs Western cash and technology. To keep both flowing, it has to maintain an elaborate fiction that it has made a definite break with its Communist past. Thus, Azerbaijan maintains a façade of political pluralism with a showcase of a couple dozen political parties, most of which front for Aliev's NAP Communists. One of the controlled "opposition" parties is officially named the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (CAP). The CAP, a tiny minority of hard-line Marxists, exists to criticize the NAP, thereby contributing to the illusion of Azerbaijan's "break with the past." In truth, NAP and CAP are run by the same veteran Communists handpicked by Geidar Aliev during his decades in power.

Depending on which biographical profile one relies on, Geidar Aliev entered service in the KGB somewhere between 1941 and 1944. It is uncertain which of the branches of the Soviet secret police he served in his early days — NKVD, NKGB, SMERSH — but each played a major role in some of the bloodiest atrocities and mass murders in human history.

In January 2001, Russian President Vladimir Putin presented Aliev with a copy of his long-lost KGB diploma from the Ministry of State Security Academy in Leningrad. This was a telling move. Putin, a KGB-GRU chief, has been rehabilitating the image of the dreaded Soviet secret police. He has helped restore the giant statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Cheka (as the NKVD-KGB was originally known), to its place of honor in Moscow's Lubyanka Square. He also made the birth date of that infamous agency, December 20, a day of national celebration as "Security Organs Day."

These security organs, which Aliev served for over half a century, carried out horrendous crimes against humanity throughout the Transcaucasus region, including Azerbaijan. Millions of people were imprisoned, tortured, murdered and/or sent to the gulags. Betraying his own people, Aliev joined the Soviet conquerors and began his long, ruthless climb through the Communist ranks. He served, in succession, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, and Gorbachev. Aliev achieved the rank of KGB general in 1960 and became chief of the Azeri KGB soon thereafter. From 1968 to 1983 he was the head of the Communist Party and de facto ruler of Azerbaijan.

No mere provincial underling, Aliev became a top member of the Soviet Politburo in Moscow, attaining the post of Soviet premier under Yuri Andropov (formerly the head of the KGB). To achieve these heights of Soviet power, Aliev had to claw his way over mountains of corpses of his fellow Communists and their victims. He was ever so willing to do so. Of Iranian stock, Aliev was a key operative, along with Yevgeniy Primakov (later to become prime minister), in training and arming Middle East terrorist groups, especially in Iran and Syria. During the early 1980s, Aliev was repeatedly dispatched to Damascus to assist Syrian dictator (and top Soviet client) Hafez al-Assad in brutally subjugating Lebanon and transforming that country into a premier terrorist base. Aliev's role in the Soviet international terror strategy was further revealed with the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdish Revolutionary Workers Party (PKK), a Communist terrorist outfit that has carried out numerous attacks against Turkey. Ocalan revealed that since the 1970s he and the PKK had been receiving aid directly from Aliev, as well as through the Kremlin-Aliev intermediaries Iran and Syria.



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When Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* required a new moderate image for the Soviets, Aliev was sent back home from Moscow. Whether that was purely a cosmetic shuffle or reflected genuine rivalry within the top Party ranks is a matter of debate. But it is indisputable that Aliev was openly restored to power in 1993. Even if it were possible for such an old Stalinist fossil to transform into a so-called liberal, Aliev has shown no evidence of doing so. It has been business as usual, according to the "rules" he learned at the feet of infamous NKVD chief Lavrentiy Beria. Despite claims by both the Clinton and Bush administrations and oil company executives that Azerbaijan is "democratizing," it has remained an ironclad police state. Typical of Communist elections, Aliev, the "Butcher of Baku," has repeatedly won virtually unanimous support from his supposedly adoring countrymen. In some districts, he has even won more than 100 percent of the vote!

The Red Son Also Rises

Like Kim Jong-Il, Ilham Aliev can be expected to carry forth the totalitarian rule of his father. Ilham was appointed head of the state oil company, SOCAR, in 1994, and later was named to head the country's Olympic committee. He also represented his regime on the Council of Europe, was deputy party chairman of the NAP, and has accompanied his father on state visits abroad. On August 4 of this year, the 41-year-old Aliev was proclaimed prime minister by Azerbaijan's parliament, which largely serves as a rubber stamp for the Aliev dictatorship.

The appointment drew immediate protests from opposition groups, who denounced it as unconstitutional and accurately predicted that it was a prelude to dynastic succession. Ilham made it clear that he would follow his father's footsteps. "In Azerbaijan, there is a single team — the team of Geidar Aliev — and we are members of this team," the son told cabinet members. "I do not have my own team and never will. So I want everyone to know that they should continue their activities in the usual way, as before. There can be no talk of any changes." That way is the KGB way, of course.

In Washington, U.S. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker appeared to welcome the appointment, noting that the selection was made according to constitutional processes. "We hope and expect that he will work for economic and democratic reform, including creating an atmosphere for an improved election process this fall," Mr. Reeker said. Political observers worldwide took this as a signal of approval from the Bush administration, noting that the constitutional changes allowing for the appointment had been rammed through in a recent referendum that was far from fair and open.

Besides controlling the enormous new Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey, Ilham Aliev's Red Guard will also play a pivotal role in Moscow's control of the increasingly important energy cartel known as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Headquartered in the Russian client state of Iran, ECO is being built — with Western money, including tax dollars — into the new global energy power. Its current members are: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. Middle East OPEC nations are being wooed for ECO membership. Assisting this developing Moscow-Baku-Tehran oil axis is suicidal for the West.



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