



THE ESTABLISHMENT AND HISTORY OF AZERBAIJAN'S MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

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Introduction:

For more than twenty years, the world experiences constant changes in the political/diplomatic, social and economic domains. With the fall of communism in the early 1990s and the expansion of the U.S. driven capitalism, the western transatlantic world created a ground for peace and prosperity to flourish. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, KGB stopped being the sole player in intelligence gathering and a know-how provider for its member states. At the dawn

of 1990s, it became imperative for the newly independent states to establish new intelligence agencies and to comply with international standards of intelligence gathering and analysis. However, there were still lessons to be learned.

Located in the South Caucasus region of Eurasia and with a population of a little more than nine million, Azerbaijan, a former USSR member state, is a country experiencing economic growth due to its oil and gas exports. Its politics are dominated by diplomatic conflicts with Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, the cold post-independence relations with Russia and diplomatic conflicts with Iran. Its location, bordering with Armenia, Iran, Georgia, Russia and Turkey, makes Azerbaijan a valuable player in the region in terms of intelligence gathering. It should come as no surprise that the country's intelligence agency is an actual ministry, the Ministry of National Security.

This paper will analyze the history and the establishment of Azerbaijan's Ministry of National Security and its connections with the political history of the country, as well as some operational milestones during the Third Republic of Azerbaijan. Despite its short history, one thing is for certain, Azerbaijan's intelligence agency stands strong in protecting its national interests and in shaping strong bilateral relations with key players of the global chessboard.

The Soviet Azerbaijan

During the Soviet rule over Azerbaijan and following the country's independence, the Aliyevs rose as a prominent political family within the country, from the Third President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, to today's President and son of the

aforementioned, Ilham Aliyev, the Aliyevs have marked the recent history of the nation of Azerbaijan. It is because of Heydar Aliyev, that the politics of Azerbaijan are closely linked with the intelligence community and the fact that great government attention was given to the establishment and modernization of an intelligence agency after the independence.

During the Soviet rule in 1960s over Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev was appointed as the director of Azerbaijan's KGB division. His early years in the agency point out that he worked at the Eastern Division of the KGB, with a primary focus on Middle East and Iran (Cornell, 2011). As a promising politician, in 1969, Heydar Aliyev became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and in 1982 the First Deputy-Prime Minister of the Soviet Union (Kasimli, 2011). With the appointment of Aliyev as First Deputy-Prime Minister of the Soviet Union, the need for the Soviets to secure their influence over the Muslim world became obvious.

Scholars argue that the Soviet Union had already started to sense that Azerbaijan was considering the option of declaring independence under the indirect/direct guidance of political and spiritual leaders of the country. For this reason, Moscow decided to distance Aliyev from Baku as an act of preventing independence movements from gaining power (Kasimli, 2011). During his time in Moscow, Aliyev paid close attention in the activities of Azerbaijan's special services (Ministry of National Security - History, n.d), even if they were still under the rule of the Soviet Union. It is difficult however to understand clearly if the interests of Azerbaijan

were safeguarded by Aliyev. Three years after his tenure as Deputy-Prime Minister of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan was attacked by Russia.

It was January 20, 1990, when Kremlin decided to launch a surprise attack in Baku, the capital city of Azerbaijan. During the preceding days of the attack, the tensions between Russia and Azerbaijan were high. As a member of the Soviet Union, Armenia decided to include Nagorno-Karabakh to its state budget and to provide Nagorno-Karabakh residents with voting rights for the Armenian elections. The people of Azerbaijan decided to protest against the Soviet Union and to demand separation, since Armenia's action over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh clearly undermined the position of the fellow Soviet state of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan America Alliance, n.d.).

Dissolving the unrested independence movements within Azerbaijan rose of the top of Moscow's agenda. Having failed to create an effective blockade to the evolving independence movements in the years preceding 1990, the attack can be considered as the ultimate attempt of the Soviet Union to secure the communist rule over the country. For days, Soviet troops stormed into the capital of the country, killing more than 200 innocent civilians and injuring hundreds more (Aliyev, 2010). That day will be forever remembered as Black January and as the day that marked the unofficial/official beginning of the deteriorating relations between Azerbaijan and Russia.

The Ministry of National Security

The need to establish an independent intelligence agency after the Azerbaijan's independence on October 18, 1991, more than a year after the Soviet surprise attacks was obvious. Less than fifteen days after Azerbaijan's independence, on November 1, 1991, the Ministry of National Security was established (Ministry of National Security - History, n.d.). It should come as no surprise that the Ministry was based on the know-how of the Soviet KGB. The primary focus of the KGB-Satellite intelligence agencies during the Soviet Era was to protect the Cold War interests of the Soviet Union. In the case of the newly formed Ministry of National Security, their intelligence gathering had to become immediately focused on activities that threatened the newly independent state of Azerbaijan.

Serving an independent state, the Ministry had to be reshaped, from recruiting and staffing the agency with solely Azeri nationals, to adapting to the new competitive intelligence environment. Luckily, the election of Heydar Aliyev as the third President of Azerbaijan, a former head of the Azerbaijan's KGB, secured high level governmental support and guidance for this transformation. More particularly, Aliyev initiated necessary reforms that aimed in shaping the Ministry of National Security to a modern intelligence agency (Ministry of National Security - History, n.d.). Based on Azerbaijan's legislation, some of the most important tasks of the Ministry of National Security are the following:

- Takes actions for creating favorable conditions for realization of the state policy aiming at the ensuring the national security of the Republic of Azerbaijan

- For the purpose of ensuring national security, organizes and carries out intelligence, counter-intelligence and operatively-search activity, conducts inquiry and preliminary investigations in connection with criminal cases within its competencies
- Obtains and analyzes information on intentions, plans and activities of foreign special services, organizations and individuals targeting the national interests of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and forecasts real and potential threats against the national security
- Fights international terrorism and other forms of transnational organized crime
- Informs the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and under the order of the President appropriate state bodies on threats against national security, also provides with necessary intelligence in connection with ensuring national security in political, economic, military, scientific-technical, ecological and other connected spheres
- Takes comprehensive actions in the field of protection of informational technologies and programs that have an importance in view of national security
- Carries out mutual activity with other subjects of intelligence and counter-intelligence activity (GlobalSecurity.org, n.d.)

Post 9/11

Ten years after the independence of Azerbaijan, on September 11th, 2001 America and the world changed. A terrorist Muslim extremist group known as Al-Qaeda operating within the United States hijacked four passenger airplanes. Few hours

later, two of the airplanes crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York City. Another plane crashed into the Pentagon building in Virginia, while the last one never reached its target and crashed in rural Pennsylvania (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2004).

The crashes killed hundreds of individuals instantly, including employees in the buildings, passengers of the planes and bystanders. A couple of hours later, both Twin Towers and some of the surrounding buildings collapsed, with some of them not fully evacuated. This day will be forever remembered as the terrorist attack that took almost 3,000 innocent lives in the heart of the United States (The 9/11 Commission Report, 2004).

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks the world has changed. That day, the terrorists succeeded in creating a world-wide fear, as the media broadcasted individuals jumping off buildings, the second plane hitting one of the WTC towers, and the collapse of the buildings themselves. Undeniably, the 9/11 attacks changed the intelligence agenda. The new intelligence era required intelligence co-operation in fighting the common enemy known as terrorism. Azerbaijan's Ministry of National Security was not the exception; it instantly became an active player in sharing intelligence with the allied intelligence agencies concerning the War on Terror.

It is interesting to take a closer look in the relations between the United States and Azerbaijan and how the War on Terror influenced them. During 1992, the U.S. Congress adopted Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which prohibited U.S. aid towards the government of Azerbaijan. Section 907 made the Azeri population the only post-Soviet republic not to receive aid from the United States. A month

after 9/11, the U.S. government decided to waive Section 907 (Ganji, 2002-2003). With Azerbaijan offering assistance to the United States and allied troops in the light of the preparations for the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. Government decided to offer Azerbaijan a helping hand in return of Azerbaijan's "good-will" towards the international community's effort to eliminate terrorism.

Undeniably, 9/11 transformed the intelligence community. The aftermath of 9/11 can help us draw important conclusions on the strategic role of the Ministry of National Security. Labeled as an intelligence failure, it is not only the intelligence agencies of the United States to blame; it is also the Cold-War mentality of the international intelligence community of denying to share intelligence in fear of losing important decision advantages. The Pre-9/11 intelligence culture was based on the notion that threats were coming mainly from other states; however they failed to recognize that individual groups were also able to carry out large scale terrorist attacks (Clapper, 2011).

Having suffered from the attack in Baku back in 1990, it is easy to understand that Azerbaijan continued to have a cold attitude towards Russia. However, the relations with the other important neighbor, Iran, a country with close ties with Russia are not positive either. In January, 2012, Azerbaijan's Ministry of National Security detained three men who allegedly planned to assassinate Israeli nationals in Baku as an act of Iran's retaliation against Israel (Shvidler, 2012). It soon became a major intelligence achievement for Azerbaijan and also a proof that the Ministry of National Security had allied with the western intelligence community, even if that meant that cultural and religious bonds with the Muslim world were betrayed.

The cost of allying with the United States and Israel is high. On May 2012, the Ministry of National Security announced that a plot to kill civilians with explosives at the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku and to kill the President of the country, Ilham Aliyev was uncovered. Several members of an Islamic armed group with ties to Syria and Pakistan were killed or arrested (Sultanova, 2012). Clearly, the threat against Azerbaijan increases as the relations with neighboring Muslim countries deteriorate and as the country comes gradually closer to the United States and Israel.

It is not difficult to understand that the Ministry of National Security is a key player for intelligence gathering in the region and also a tool for Azerbaijan to promote its newly westernized influence in the region. Having common interests and fighting a common enemy with the United States and Israel, one can conclude that the intelligence sharing between Azerbaijan, the United States and Israel is at its all-time high. However, one thing is for certain, sharing intelligence not only prevents future attacks but also promotes the security and general interests between the aforementioned states.

Conclusion:

The fall of communism brought tremendous changes in the global intelligence community. The global bipolarity had collapsed and new players started to arise. Having left its bloody Soviet background behind, Azerbaijan, a key player in the Eurasia region was able to develop a modern intelligence agency that the new era of globalization demanded.

One can easily conclude that the transitional period of becoming a sovereign republic is not easy, especially, in terms of changing government structures and agencies. It is interesting however to mention that Azerbaijan focused on establishing an intelligence agency independent from foreign influences and threats. However, a decade after the establishment of the Ministry of National Security, 9/11 happened and the focus of the intelligence agencies around the world, together with Cold-War mentalities had to adapt to the new challenges emanating from international terrorism.

A new era for the global intelligence had been born and together, new opportunities were created for Azerbaijan to ally with key players of the western world, namely the United States and Israel in combating terrorism. Sharing intelligence became a vital part of the War on Terror and Azerbaijan was able to cooperate, a strategic move by the government of Azerbaijan that managed to lift the sanctions imposed by Section 907. The price to pay however is big, since Azerbaijan started becoming a target for terrorist activities. By managing to eliminate recent threats however, the Ministry of National Security had proven its quality on protecting its sovereignty and territory.

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