
Ilham Aliyev has spoilt relations with the USA

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Relations between the authorities and the West have reached a crisis point

President under pressure over Karabakh, democracy

We have already reported that the president of Azerbaijan has come under pressure over the Nagornyy Karabakh problem. The latest observations leave no doubts that the pressure has become permanent. Reports from sources in the authorities show openly that with the presidential election in the pipeline, the most of the pressure comes from the USA. (By the way, Ilham Aliyev himself has not denied this and is not about to do so). In this regard, the recent behind-the-scene meeting between US Assistant Secretary of State [for South and Central Asian Affairs] Richard Boucher and Aliyev in Baku is said to be a proof. If we believe in a source claiming the meeting was tense, the US representative laid down several specific conditions to the Azerbaijani president.

The most important of them is to do with Karabakh. But apart from this, it is said that Boucher reminded Aliyev about his pledges to the USA before the 2003 presidential election. It is said that the pledges were about democracy and Karabakh and that the White House regretted that they were not honoured and the president was told that Washington's limit of expectation was over. Moreover, his attention was drawn to the fact that it was problematic to rely on the US support to win another election at the expense of empty pledges.

The following cases also show that the meeting proceeded in a strained atmosphere. The source said that this time, the official of the White House first of all demanded that Ilham Aliyev make real compromises on the Karabakh issue to resolve the problem as soon as possible and he even resorted to threats: he was warned that if Baku continues to resist, then Azerbaijan may be excluded from international bodies as well as from the Council of Europe. The most intriguing is that the guest announced that bank accounts of odious figures in the West may be frozen.

President against compromises

This followed by the interesting aspect of the matter. The response of the Azerbaijan president to Boucher was unambiguous and curt: "I shall not honour any of them!" The source also adds: "Taking advantage of unbearable pressure on him over Nagornyy Karabakh, Ilham Aliyev resists exactly at this point by uniting pressure related to democratic [reforms] with this problem and is opposing both problems in question. Actually, by turning down proposals of the West with respect to Karabakh, he says no to democratic changes which may endanger his rule. Consequently, he sends an open message to the public that because of his refusal to hand Karabakh over to [Armenia], he is brought under pressure on democracy platform. This statement boils down to the fact that he is under pressure on democracy platform because of his refusal to yield Karabakh. It also means that the president of Azerbaijan says no to all the proposals of the West both about Nagornyy Karabakh and democracy... [ellipses as published]" Our newspaper learned this from diplomatic sources.

Azerbaijan urged to compromise

"Washington prefers to have the problem resolved at the expense of the losing party and actually gain Armenia and sympathy of Armenians through establishment of a second Armenian state. The USA thinks of tearing Armenia away from Russia by handing Nagornyy Karabakh over to

Armenians," a pro-government MP who agreed to speak to us said.

Regrettably, due to objective reasons Azerbaijan is a weak chain in this issue. Therefore, high expectations are placed on Ilham Aliyev and wanted to make big compromises. On the other hand, the resolution of the Karabakh issue in line with the desire of the USA, the recognition of the separate body following the liberation of one or two districts and the control of the border section with Iran by the US peace-keepers are very important for the USA.

Another aspect complicating the situation is that though esteemed Aliyev's verbal declaration of his adherence to democratic values, in fact, he is heading towards sabotaging the Western values in practice; he has further toughened his regime as he considers democratic reforms to be a danger to his rule under the current condition. In its turn, this removes both the lasting stability from the agenda and serves to the interests of neighbouring Iran and Russia.

It is not by chance that hawks as well as those pro-Moscow officials in power have recently become active. (The reactionary Electoral Code is undoubtedly their success first of all)

Washington wants Aliyev to share energy interests and common values

This also makes Washington anxious. America wants Ilham Aliyev to share both energy interests and common values with the West. This is seen as a possible way of distancing from Russia. Therefore, it is both logical and real that Aliyev was reminded of his 2003 promises ahead of the [October 2008] presidential election.

In our view, warnings of the White House will soon further become stricter. Another reason for this is that the geopolitical and geo-economic-energy interests of the USA and Russia in the South Caucasus have for the first time ever entered the point of clash and this knot cannot be undone without Azerbaijan's strategic choice in favour of the West.

Incidentally, the borders of NATO and the European Union have approached closer to the South Caucasus passing through Ukraine and Georgia (the stripe of GUAM). "In the middle" remains Azerbaijan and Armenia. Moscow also understands this. The growing pressure on Kiev, the dramatic processes unfolding around Georgia and unprecedented aggression of our northern neighbour against these countries have to be exactly explained by the last factor.

The election of Medvedev as president has proved that Putin's Russia does not have intention of easing the policy of threat in the near future. Moscow's policy is to retain regional countries under control through ethnic conflicts. Therefore, the White House is in a hurry to have at least certain clarity in the Karabakh issue which plays a dominant role for the region, and have Ilham Aliyev at least give verbal consent to the Madrid document which appeared due to patronage of the West and runs against Azerbaijan's fundamental interests.

According to information we received through other channels, at the meeting with Boucher Aliyev expressed vehement opposition to pressures related to Karabakh. No doubt, this fact has to be assessed positively. But as also

acknowledged by the president, if he is under growing pressure and threats, why he is not in a hurry to take steps towards the nation and the opposition to put into operation the public resistance mechanism and do not make any attempts towards dialogue and mass protest against foreign pressures?

Aliyev needs cooperation with opposition over Karabakh

On the contrary, he continues to exert pressure on the democratic forces who are against the capitulatory peace, wants to burn the last bridges with the political opposition, brought the Electoral Code to further ruined state, trying to have silenced the free media a serious informative institution which is against an ignominious peace? (It is intriguing that the West is not that critical of this repression)

Another motive for Washington's haste in the Karabakh issue might be associated with the PKK [Kurdistan Workers Party] threat. The matter is that as US military expert Prof Stephen J. Blank said the USA is cautious about the likelihood of a Turkish and Azerbaijani joint military intervention in the occupied territories under the pretext of a PKK danger. (We have covered this matter in depth in our latest issues)

The USA has recognized the PKK as a terrorist organization. That is to say, the opposition of the USA to such an operation is not high. The resolution of the Karabakh issue or any fundamental breakthrough in this matter would make such an intervention unnecessary and would retain the opportunities for the border section with Iran in the occupied territories to come under the control of the West.

To recap, we have to say that the USA has not fully obtained from the Azerbaijani leadership what it wanted with regard to its regional targets. (This is good for Karabakh but bad for democracy author). And the situation has reached the point (this is also proven by the president's last anti-US remarks) that the relations between Ilham Aliyev and the USA seem soured. What the current state of affairs promise for the regime's political fate, Azerbaijan and democracy will likely be obvious soon.

[translated from Azeri]
