

On the goals of NAR's actual abolition ARVAK Center comment, June 27, 2025¹

1. Changes in the Constitution of the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic (NAR)

On June 20, 2025, it became known that the Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan adopted in the first reading a bill according to which the Cabinet of Ministers of the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic (NAR) will determine its work procedure *“in agreement with the President of [Azerbaijan](#)”*. According to the NAR constitution of 1995, the executive power (Cabinet) is subordinate to the legislative power (Majlis) of the Autonomy. However, in accordance with the new bill *“On approval of amendments to the Constitution of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic”*, the Cabinet of Ministers of the NAR will be directly subordinate to the President of Azerbaijan, and the *“Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of Azerbaijan”* will be considered as a *“part”* of the NAR executive power and, in fact, its supreme body.

2. Dynamics of centralization of power over Nakhijevan

These changes confirm Azerbaijani experts' predictions about I. Aliyev's desire to abolish the Nakhijevan autonomy. This process, which began almost a decade ago, has significantly intensified after the Karabakh War of 2020.

- **November 2022:** By decree of the President of Azerbaijan, the State Security Service (SSS) of the NAR and the State Customs Service of the Autonomy were directly subordinated to the central authorities in Baku. At the same time, arrests of a number of current and former NAR ministers [began](#).
- **December 2022:** Under pressure from I. Aliyev, Vasif Talibov, the head of the NAR Mejlis and one of the main associates of H. Aliyev, in the past, resigned.
- **December 22, 2022:** I. Aliyev established the *“Plenipotentiary Representation of the President of Azerbaijan in the NAR”*, transferring to him broad powers of control over the state bodies of the Autonomous [Republic](#).

The current step of the Azerbaijani president effectively transfers all power in the autonomy to his *“Plenipotentiary Representative”*, thereby completely and directly subordinating the state bodies of Nakhijevan to Baku at the constitutional level.

3. Deprivation of Autonomy of Independence

The changes proposed by the new bill in practice deprive the local authorities of any tangible self-rule, placing their powers on a par with those of any other administrative-territorial unit in the “mainland” Azerbaijan. The only remaining differences are some

¹ The original (in Rus.) was posted on our website on 26.06.2025.

formal attributes of autonomy in the NAR (constitution, Majlis, etc.), but their liquidation, judging by the dynamics of events, may also be a matter of time.

4. Exclusion of the Moscow and Kars treaties from the NAR constitution

In the context of these reforms, the provision of the new bill on the removal of references to the Moscow (March 16, 1921) and Kars (October 13, 1921) treaties from the preamble of the NAR constitution deserves special [attention](#). These treaties recognized the Nakhijevan autonomy under the protection (or protectorate) of Azerbaijan, with clarification of its [territorial boundaries](#).

The exclusion of references to these agreements, on the basis of which the Nakhijevan autonomy was created, indicates that I. Aliyev is not satisfied with the political and legal link between the existence of the autonomy and the fundamental agreements between Bolshevik Russia and Kemalist Turkey.

It is still difficult to give a clear answer regarding the true motives of the central authorities in Baku.

5. Ilham Aliyev's motives: 4 main versions

Along with the actual squeezing out of the political and legal grounds for Russia's presence in regional politics and the final annexation (from a legal point of view) of Nakhijevan, it is necessary to consider the four main versions of I. Aliyev's motives, which can be credible both individually and collectively, given their close interconnection against the backdrop of the impending global transformations in the region, such as an actual military confrontation between Russia and the West and a large-scale Iran–Israel war).

5.1. Creating grounds for compulsion to the so called “Zangezur corridor” and territorial claims

The reduction of the formal legal subjectivity of the Nakhijevan autonomy may be necessary for I. Aliyev to create “more legitimate foundations” for violently separating it from Armenia or forcing Yerevan to transfer to Baku the trans-territorial “Zangezur corridor”. A fully unified Azerbaijan, deprived of land connections with its exclave, according to Baku's plan, will be able to lay claims to Syunik. This is based on the assumption that after the actual non-recognition of the provisions of the Moscow and Kars treaties, Turkey and Russia will not automatically remain guarantors of the existence and security of the “isolated” Nakhijevan. Moreover, by ignoring the legal force of these treaties, Azerbaijan can call into question the borders of the NAR fixed in them, laying claims to the annexation of the Syunik, and possibly the Ararat Region of Armenia. Baku expects that the transformation of Nakhijevan from an intra-Azerbaijani and regional matter into a political and legal extension of the Azerbaijani metropolis will facilitate a more assertive policy toward Armenia. This escalation would likely materialize if the volatile geopolitical climate in the region and globally provides an opportune moment for further military action against Yerevan.

5.2. Strengthening of the I. Aliyev regime and weakening of regional elites

The dismantling of the NAR autonomy in legal and political terms may be caused by I. Aliyev's concern for the future of his regime and family. Due to a number of objective and subjective reasons, Nakhijevan has always been considered the most isolated part of Azerbaijan with strong traditions of cohesion of local elites and their effective influence on the central government. The concept of the “*Nakhijevan clan*”, as opposed to more amorphous “*Apsheeron*” or “*Ganja*” clans, has always indicated the clear contours of the unity of people from this autonomy based on regional affiliation, blood relationship and consolidated interests.

Historically, the Nakhijevan elites were more organized and self-sufficient within the pan-Azerbaijani system. This allowed them to maintain their life activities and even control them. It is no coincidence that the so-called “*Nakhijevan clan*” led by Heydar Aliyev, effectively ruled Azerbaijan from the mid-1960s until the collapse of the USSR, and then again enjoyed full power again in independent Azerbaijan from the early 1990s until the 2020s.

Even with full control over the central government, the people from Nakhijevan maintained the maximum possible independence for their fiefdom and sought to strengthen its subjectivity in the regional and intra-Azerbaijani system. For example, during the presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey (1992–1993), also a native of the NAR, Heydar Aliyev, who held the post of head of the Nakhijevan Majlis (1991–1993), pursued a policy in the Autonomy that was absolutely independent from the republican center and, by his own admission, entered into separate negotiations with Armenia with the aim of removing Nakhijevan from participation in the First [Karabakh War](#). Moreover, H. Aliyev achieved maximum distancing of the NAR not only from the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, but also from the entire state system of Azerbaijan as a whole, effectively transferring relations with the metropolis from a vertical to a horizontal [model](#). This dynamic was also facilitated by the almost complete isolation of Nakhijevan from “mainland” Azerbaijan during the Karabakh War, a period marked by significant economic and social costs. In response, H. Aliyev compensated for by expanding partnerships with neighboring Iran and Turkey. These countries provided support for the autonomy, including the provision of electricity and food, and also tacitly guaranteed its security against the backdrop of complex Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. In this regard, it was expected that the support of Turkey and Iran would be monetized into the political capital of Ankara and Tehran and the growth of their influence on the Nakhijevan autonomy. This is precisely why the Aliyev clan, which came to power in the metropolis for the second time in 1993, began the process of dismantling the essentially independent system in Nakhijevan, which it had built at one time.

If H. Aliyev adopted a policy of extreme caution, and his son sharply intensified the process, taking into account the new geopolitical challenges facing Azerbaijan and the ruling regime. In anticipation of global changes in the region and against the backdrop of the increasingly complex socio-economic situation in the republic, I. Aliyev strives to finally unify the country and establish a rigid vertical within the system, excluding the possibility of a threat or limitation of his personal power by fellow countrymen clans and regional elites.

5.3. Removing Nakhijevan from the Russian-Turkish political and legal agenda

Given the nature of global geopolitical transformations in the world, the prospect of a new confrontation between the RF and Turkey cannot be ruled out. In this case, the South Caucasus will potentially become the main arena for the clash of these powers. Regardless of the outcome of this confrontation, the treaty framework between them, which has regulated the status quo and legal borders of Turkey with the republics of the South Caucasus for more than a century, may be revised and reorganized. In this scenario, the status of the NAR and its form of existence will inevitably change in accordance with the new realities in the region. Presumably, Ilham Aliyev seeks to remove Nakhijevan from the Russian-Turkish political and legal agenda on the basis of internal Azerbaijani legal acts and constitutional changes in order to minimize the possibility of losing sovereignty over this region.

5.4. Containing Turkish supremacy and influencing Armenian-Turkish rapprochement

Given Turkey's traditionally strong economic influence in Nakhijevan and the Autonomy's strategically important location in the context of Turkey's expansionist plans, Azerbaijan may be wary of the dynamic process of strengthening Turkish influence and is trying to stop the growing threat with legal and political reforms. Experts began to talk about Baku's concerns on this issue back in the early 2010s, when Ankara had almost completely established economic and energy links with Nakhijevan to Turkey in terms of, as well as significantly changing the demographic composition of the Autonomy. It was from this period that Turkey began to publish political maps that included the NAR as part of the [Turkish Republic](#).

Perhaps the NAR issue has always been one of the sharp corners in the relations between Baku and Ankara, which, however, the parties tried to avoid in every possible way, bearing in mind the existence of the Karabakh problem and the common interest in weakening the Armenian factor in the region. Based on this, it is also possible that I. Aliyev used the issue of the actual abolition of the autonomy to interfere with Turkey's plans to normalize relations with Armenia after the Karabakh War of 2020. In this matter, Ankara has always experienced pressure from Baku, and I. Aliyev's intentions to devalue the Turkish factor in Nakhijevan could be one of the blackmail tools holding Ankara back from stabilizing relations with Yerevan.

In light of this, it can be assumed that the coincidence of Nikol Pashinyan's working visit to Istanbul on June 20, 2025 and the draft law *"On Approval of Amendments to the Constitution of the NAR"* submitted to the Milli Majlis for consideration on the same day is not accidental. It is obvious that the draft law was developed in advance by the Azerbaijani authorities and was waiting for its first reading in the Azerbaijani parliament when necessary. It should also be noted that the day before the meeting with N. Pashinyan, R. Erdogan received I. Aliyev, whose formal reason for arriving in Turkey was the joint opening of a residential area in Kahramanmaraş sponsored by [Baku](#). Meanwhile, Azerbaijani

and Turkish sources have reported practically nothing about the agenda of the negotiations between the presidents. However, given the political orientation of the Azerbaijan Republic, it can be assumed that I. Aliyev tried to dissuade R. Erdogan from taking radical steps to normalize relations with the Republic of Armenia and, perhaps, not finding understanding, sanctioned the adoption of the above-mentioned bill the next day. At first glance, this version may seem unrealistic, given the coordination of actions by Ankara and Baku, as well as mutual support in all areas of the interstate and international agenda. However, it should be taken into account that serious contradictions in the relations of these allies have always existed, but were not brought to the surface by the parties.

6. Conclusion

Thus, it should be noted that I. Aliyev's initiative to eliminate the last practical elements of Nakhichevan's autonomy, as well as unilateral denunciation of the legal framework regulating the status and borders of the NAR is an application for increasing weight in regional processes. From Ilham Aliyev's point of view, these measures are also a necessary condition for completing the unification of the country, minimizing risks associated with external factors and tightening the vertical of power throughout the country on the eve of the impending trials for the ruling regime in Azerbaijan.