
with

Fuad Aliyev
Fulbright Scholar at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University

Iranian religious influence in Azerbaijan has recently become a ‘hot’ topic. However, there is little insider knowledge, or data-based analysis of the situation on the ground. Is Iran indeed capable of using religious activists as its fifth column in the Republic of Azerbaijan? How are Iran-backed groups organized and funded? What are Iran’s real threats to various Azerbaijani strategic projects?

Azerbaijan has been the subject of Iranian political interests and religious influence since the first days of its independence. Due to the contemporary interpretations of the Shi’i principles and the way it is intertwined with the political system of post-revolutionary Iran, the relationship between the two countries is indeed a matter of concern for Azerbaijan.

Although the Azerbaijani government has always feared Iran’s possible aspirations and capacities to influence its domestic affairs using the Shi’i believers as the key channel through which to exert pressure, Iranian official and semi-official organizations have been allowed to spread their version of Islam throughout Azerbaijan. However, recent developments, public statements, “spy” and “terror” plots, mass protests, arrests in both countries, and the revival of tensions around the Iranian nuclear weapons program show that the previously set lines in the relations between two countries have been crossed. Understanding the roots, forms and security implications of Iranian religious influence in Azerbaijan may prove to be helpful in forecasting possible outcomes of this relationship.

Fuad Aliyev is a Fulbright Scholar at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies’ Central Asia – Caucasus Institute. Dr. Aliyev has a Master of Arts degree in Political Science from the Central European University (Budapest, Hungary) and PhD in Economics from Azerbaijan State Economic University. Dr. Aliyev previously worked as Department Head at the Financial Monitoring Service under the Central Bank of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He authored several publications on Islamic economics and finance, and Islamic activism in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

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