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I. **Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan sign Treaty on Allied Relations**

On August 23, in a significant development for regional cooperation, Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, signed the "Treaty on Allied Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Uzbekistan," a landmark event that deepens the strategic partnership between the two nations. The signing took place after the inaugural meeting of the Azerbaijan-Uzbekistan High Intergovernmental Council, attended by the presidents alongside their respective ministers. The primary focus of the discussions was on strengthening the strategic partnership and enhancing multifaceted cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. A key outcome of the meeting was the development of detailed roadmaps aimed at fostering collaboration in industrial, infrastructural, and interregional development.

During a joint press conference, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev expressed his satisfaction with President Ilham Aliyev's state visit, describing it as a "historic milestone" in the deep-rooted friendship between the two nations. President Ilham Aliyev echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of the treaty on allied relations. "Today in Tashkent, we are actually writing a new book of our relations, not just a chapter. I think that the souls of all our ancestors, who, I am sure, hover above us and bless us for this, are rejoicing. Today, two brotherly peoples, two independent powerful, sovereign, and distinguished states have become official allies. This is the most important foreign policy step that will determine our relations and, in many ways, regional policy for all coming years," President Ilham Aliyev underscored.

In addition to the treaty, 13 other key agreements were signed by ministers and representatives from both countries. These documents cover a wide range of sectors, including economic, educational, and cultural cooperation, further strengthening the ties between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The

signing of the treaty and accompanying agreements marks a pivotal moment in the partnership between the two countries, setting the stage for deeper cooperation and shared development in the years ahead.

President Mirziyoyev noted the rapid pace of progress in bilateral relations, underscoring that Uzbekistan had never before established such a strong alliance in such a short period. President Mirziyoyev announced that 20 new directions for collaboration had been agreed upon, building on the success of previous agreements. He praised the close cooperation between the two countries, noting that every prior agreement had been implemented with tangible results. President Mirziyoyev congratulated Azerbaijan on its successful restoration of territorial integrity and praised Ilham Aliyev's efforts in reconstructing Karabakh following the resolution of the conflict. He pledged Uzbekistan's continued support, offering Uzbekistan's construction companies to participate in the rebuilding efforts in Karabakh, an initiative that President Ilham Aliyev welcomed.

Among the new initiatives is the decision to declare 2025 the Year of Economic Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, with a comprehensive 20-point program. This program will focus on expanding joint investment, enhancing trade, and developing infrastructure projects. A business forum held in conjunction with the visit resulted in numerous contracts and agreements, further bolstering economic ties.

The presidents also discussed plans for deepening cultural exchange. A joint concert featuring prominent artists from both countries will be held, reflecting the shared cultural heritage of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. In addition, plans are underway to strengthen interregional ties, develop tourism complexes, and hold cultural and educational events in both countries.

President Mirziyoyev expressed his satisfaction with the productive and trust-based nature of the negotiations, noting that the two countries share similar positions on a range of international,

regional, and bilateral issues. He expressed confidence that the visit would provide a "powerful impetus" to the further development of relations between Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.

Following the signing of the treaty, President Ilham Aliyev delivered a statement underscoring the historic significance of the agreement between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. President Ilham Aliyev expressed his gratitude for the invitation and praised the rapid development of Uzbekistan under President Mirziyoyev's leadership. President Ilham Aliyev, who has frequently visited Uzbekistan in recent years, highlighted the country's transformation, noting improvements in cities, industry, and social infrastructure. He attributed this progress to Uzbekistan's wise policies, successful attraction of foreign investments, and a favorable business environment. He also commended Uzbekistan's growing international influence, as demonstrated by its athletes' outstanding performance at the Paris Olympics.

President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that the alliance would shape regional policy for years to come and foster even closer ties between the two brotherly nations. President Ilham Aliyev reflected on the remarkable speed with which Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan achieved this level of cooperation, noting that their relationship has deepened rapidly over just a few years. Frequent meetings between the two presidents, both bilateral and during international events, have paved the way for a wide range of successful initiatives.

One of the key outcomes of the discussions was the creation of a new light industry enterprise in Khankendi, a city in Karabakh recently liberated from occupation. President Ilham Aliyev viewed this project as a symbol of the deep friendship between the Azerbaijani and Uzbek peoples, recalling Uzbekistan's early and steadfast support during the Second Karabakh War. President Ilham Aliyev praised Uzbekistan's contribution to the reconstruction of Karabakh, referencing the Mirzo Ulugbek School, a project spearheaded by Uzbekistan that opened in Fuzuli last year. He acknowledged the significant impact of

Uzbekistan's support and welcomed ongoing efforts to assist in the region's rebuilding process.

President Ilham Aliyev expressed confidence in the future of Azerbaijan-Uzbekistan economic ties, mentioning ongoing discussions with business leaders and potential joint projects. The presidents are committed to increasing trade and expanding the scope of their economic relationship. They are also looking to further boost their joint investment fund, which currently stands at \$500 million, to support new ventures both bilaterally and in third countries. President Ilham Aliyev concluded his remarks by affirming Azerbaijan's strong alliance with Uzbekistan. "We, as brothers and allies, continue to move forward with confidence and dignity, shoulder to shoulder," the President said, thanking President Mirziyoyev for his hospitality and partnership.

The signing of the treaty on allied relations between Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan and accompanying agreements marks a pivotal moment in the partnership between the two countries, setting the stage for deeper cooperation and shared development in the years ahead.

II. Armenia's territorial claims and militarization undermine peace process

The recent statements made by the Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during a press conference on August 31 raise serious questions about Armenia's intentions regarding the normalization process and efforts to secure long-term peace in the region. The remarks, which include accusations of territorial claims in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan are categorically false and misleading. Contrary to the Prime Minister's claims and unlike the Constitution of Armenia, Azerbaijan's Constitutional Act on State Independence (1991) and its Declaration of Independence (1918) do not contain any territorial demands against Armenia. While historical records indicate that some territories were part of Azerbaijan during its First Republic and later

integrated into Armenia, these facts do not translate into any current territorial claims. Azerbaijan's legal framework contains no provisions that challenge Armenia's borders today, and suggestions otherwise are unfounded.

The Armenian Prime Minister's reference to a draft peace agreement, which states that "neither party may invoke its domestic legislation for not implementing its obligations under the peace agreement", is also not valid. No international agreement can override a nation's Constitution, and Armenia's ongoing territorial claims against Azerbaijan in the Constitution of Armenia remain a key obstacle to peace. The Declaration of Independence of Armenia, which calls for the "reunion of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh," highlights these unresolved territorial ambitions and must be addressed before any lasting peace agreement can be achieved.

Additionally, Armenia's attempts to justify its militarization efforts, especially in light of the region's history, are also concerning. For nearly three decades, Armenian forces occupied internationally recognized Azerbaijani territories, in violation of international law and key agreements such as the UN Charter and the Alma-Ata Declaration. Given this background, Armenia's current military buildup and continued territorial claims are destabilizing factors that threaten regional security.

Armenia's allegations that Azerbaijan spends 14-15% of its GDP on defense are exaggerated, with international data providing no support for such figures. In contrast, Armenia itself has increased its military expenditures by 46% over the past year, signaling a significant focus on militarization, contrary to its narrative of promoting peace.

In recent months, Armenia has secured several significant military deals. Notably, in June 2024, France and Armenia signed a contract for the supply of Caesar self-propelled howitzers, which are expected to bolster Armenia's artillery capabilities significantly. This deal, which includes 36 howitzers over the next 15 months, is a

continuation of France's military support to Armenia that began in October 2023. The acquisition also includes Bastion armored personnel carriers, Mistral short-range air defense systems, and GM200 radars. The European Union has also contributed to Armenia's ongoing militarization. On July 22, 2024, the EU Council approved a 10-million-euro aid package under the European Peace Facility. India has become another key partner in Armenia's continuing militarization. Since the end of the Second Karabakh War, India has become a major arms supplier to Armenia, with deals including Pinaka multiple-launch rocket systems and Akash anti-aircraft systems. By early 2024, Armenia was reported to have imported approximately \$600 million worth of military equipment from India.

Furthermore, Armenia's efforts to revive the OSCE Minsk Group, a diplomatic initiative established to address the now-resolved conflict, are a step backward. The push to restore this mechanism suggests that Armenia may have ulterior motives and is not fully committed to moving beyond the conflict. This approach undermines the possibility of sustainable peace in the region.

For the peace process to succeed, Armenia must take real, actionable steps toward de-escalation. This includes refraining from contradictory and provocative statements and respecting the norms of international law. Only through genuine dialogue, free from territorial claims and militarization, can lasting peace and stability be secured between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Without such commitments, the normalization process risks being derailed, prolonging instability in the South Caucasus.

Azerbaijan remains committed to achieving peace based on mutual respect, international law, and the recognition of each other's territorial integrity. However, the path to sustainable peace requires Armenia to abandon its divisive rhetoric and engage constructively in the peace process.

Despite the ongoing military and political provocations by Armenia, a significant milestone

was achieved in the border delimitation process between Azerbaijan and Armenia on August 30, 2024. The Regulation concerning the joint activities of the State Commission on the Delimitation of the State Border between the two countries was signed. This follows the protocol established during the 8th meeting of the respective commissions on April 19, 2024. It marks a pivotal step in the ongoing efforts to resolve long-standing border issues.

III. Armenia must address the issue of missing Azerbaijani citizens

August 30th is recognized globally as the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. This day serves as a solemn reminder of the countless individuals who have disappeared during armed conflicts, highlighting the unresolved anguish of families left behind. Globally, enforced disappearances remain an alarming issue. Data from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) shows that approximately 239,700 individuals are currently missing due to armed conflicts worldwide. These figures represent not just numbers but the personal grief of families longing for answers. The initiative to commemorate missing persons emerged in 2007, when families of the missing in the Philippines proposed the observance of this day. Gaining international support, the UN General Assembly formally designated August 30th as the day to honor the victims of enforced disappearances through a resolution passed in 2010. Armed conflicts, historically, are a primary cause of enforced disappearances.

Azerbaijan's experience is a tragic example, as the country has faced significant losses due to Armenia's military aggression over the last three decades. The massacre of innocent people in Khojaly on February 26, 1992, carried out by Armenian forces, is one of the most harrowing incidents where Azerbaijani civilians went missing. Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan and occupation of territories resulted in a severe

humanitarian crisis. The Armenian forces' actions during this period, including ethnic cleansing, massacres, and inhumane treatment of prisoners, have contributed to the disappearance of many Azerbaijani citizens. The fate of these individuals remains unknown, causing enduring sorrow for their families.

As of August 1, 2024, the State Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Prisoners of War, Hostages, and Missing Persons reported that 3,968 Azerbaijanis remain missing due to Armenia's military aggression. Among them, 3,202 were military personnel, and 766 were civilians, including children, women, and the elderly. Armenia has consistently concealed information regarding these missing individuals, further prolonging the agony of their families.

Notably, in 1998 and 2001, the ICRC submitted lists to Azerbaijan's State Commission that documented the detention of 54 Azerbaijani citizens by Armenian forces during the First Karabakh War. Despite initial visits and registration by ICRC representatives, only 17 bodies were returned. The whereabouts of the remaining individuals remain unknown, and no further information has been provided by Armenia.

Addressing the fate of missing persons has been a priority for Azerbaijan's leadership. President Ilham Aliyev has consistently raised the issue on international platforms, including the UN General Assembly. In his 2021 speech, he called on Armenia to disclose the fate of the missing Azerbaijanis, noting that Armenia violated international humanitarian law by torturing and killing detainees during the First Karabakh War and burying them in mass graves. Several such graves have been uncovered since Azerbaijan regained control of its territories after the Patriotic War in 2020, with the remains of 169 individuals found.

Excavations in areas liberated from Armenian occupation have uncovered 18 mass graves to date. The remains of 259 individuals have been discovered, with the identities of 59 missing persons confirmed. Despite Armenia's public

claims of knowing the burial sites of missing Azerbaijanis, no actionable information has been shared with Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan has also made significant strides in DNA identification, with over 11,200 biological samples collected from family members of missing persons. The remains of 149 individuals missing from the First Karabakh War have been identified through forensic analyses.

Despite some public statements by Armenia about possessing information on the burial sites of missing Azerbaijanis, concrete steps have yet to be taken by the Armenian government to assist in locating and identifying these individuals. This lack of action continues to hinder progress on what remains a critical humanitarian issue. Armenia's failure to provide relevant information to Azerbaijan, even after the end of hostilities, raises serious concerns about its commitment to reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts.

Azerbaijan has repeatedly called on Armenia to take more decisive action, especially in sharing details about mass graves. Without this transparency and cooperation, efforts to bring closure to the families of the disappeared remain stalled. Armenia has a legal and moral obligation under international humanitarian law to disclose the fate of missing persons and ensure accountability for those responsible for enforced disappearances. However, Armenia's reluctance to fully engage with these efforts and share key information only adds to the suffering of families awaiting answers.

Additionally, Armenia has not yet acknowledged the full scale of enforced disappearances committed during the First Karabakh War, nor has it shown willingness to confront its past actions. This refusal to address historical injustices and comply with international humanitarian norms risks undermining ongoing peace negotiations and reconciliation initiatives. If Armenia is sincere in its calls for peace, it must prioritize resolving the fate of the nearly 4,000 Azerbaijanis who remain unaccounted for.

Moreover, international pressure should increase to compel Armenia to uphold its humanitarian responsibilities. Many global organizations, including the United Nations and the European Union, have underscored the importance of transparency in post-conflict resolution and transitional justice. Ensuring that Armenia complies with these expectations is essential for building trust between the two nations and fostering lasting peace.

Armenia's provision of accurate information about the whereabouts of missing persons and active participation in excavation and identification efforts would not only facilitate the healing process for the victims' families but would also contribute significantly to improving regional relations. Such steps could serve as tangible indicators of Armenia's commitment to moving beyond the bitter legacy of the conflict.

As part of the broader peacebuilding process, Armenia needs to align its actions with international norms and provide Azerbaijan with access to critical information regarding missing persons. The resolution of this humanitarian issue is not only a legal requirement but also a moral imperative. By addressing this deeply painful chapter, Armenia can demonstrate its readiness to engage in genuine reconciliation and contribute to a stable and peaceful future for both countries.

IV. Azerbaijan applies to join BRICS

Azerbaijan has formally applied to join BRICS. It was announced by Aykhan Hajizada, Spokesperson for Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on August 20. This move marks a significant step in Azerbaijan's bid to strengthen its geopolitical and economic ties with the BRICS bloc, which currently includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Established in 2006, BRICS has evolved into a prominent geopolitical entity, holding annual summits since 2009 that underscore its increasing

influence on the global stage. The organization's focus on fostering economic cooperation and political dialogue among its member states has made it a significant player in international relations.

A key moment in this development was the Joint Declaration between Azerbaijan and China on establishing a strategic partnership, which was adopted during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in Astana. This declaration includes a provision (4.5) that reflects Azerbaijan's interest in joining BRICS, with China expressing support for Azerbaijan's inclusion.

The timing of Azerbaijan's application aligns with a notable increase in trade relations between Azerbaijan and BRICS countries. According to the State Customs Committee, trade turnover between Azerbaijan and the BRICS nations surged by 9.2 percent in the first seven months of 2024, exceeding \$5.8 billion. This increase has elevated BRICS countries' share in Azerbaijan's total trade turnover to 21.65 percent, up by 4.08 percentage points from the previous year. This growth highlights the strengthening economic partnership between Azerbaijan and the BRICS bloc.

Azerbaijan's application to join BRICS comes as part of its broader strategy to enhance its international economic and political footprint. By seeking membership in BRICS, Azerbaijan aims to further expand its regional outreach and capitalize on the expanding trade and strategic opportunities that such membership could offer.

V. Azerbaijan's engagement with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Azerbaijan's growing interest in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) marks an important milestone in Baku's approach to Eurasian geopolitics. Since gaining dialogue partner status in 2015, Azerbaijan has consistently signaled its intent to deepen involvement with the

SCO, most recently by seeking observer status. This move reflects a calculated strategy to enhance Azerbaijan's regional influence and economic prospects while navigating the complex dynamics of great power politics in Eurasia.

The SCO, founded in 2001 by China, Russia, and four Central Asian states, has evolved into a significant player in Eurasian affairs. For Azerbaijan, closer engagement with the SCO offers several strategic advantages. Firstly, it provides a platform for economic diversification and integration. Azerbaijan's economy, traditionally reliant on oil and gas exports, faces the challenge of diversification. The SCO's focus on economic cooperation and infrastructure development aligns well with Azerbaijan's ambitions to become a key transportation and logistics hub connecting Europe and Asia. Projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway position Azerbaijan as a crucial link in the broader Eurasian connectivity vision championed by the SCO. Moreover, enhanced SCO engagement will open new markets for Azerbaijani goods and services, particularly in Central and South Asia. It also presents opportunities for increased foreign direct investment from SCO member states, catalyzing growth in non-oil sectors of the Azerbaijani economy.

From a geopolitical perspective, Azerbaijan's SCO strategy reflects a careful balancing act. By strengthening ties with this Eastern-oriented organization, Azerbaijan aims to diversify its foreign policy portfolio without alienating its Western partners. This multi-vector approach allows Baku to maintain strategic autonomy and leverage its position as a bridge between East and West. The SCO also offers Azerbaijan a platform to amplify its voice on regional issues. Observer status would grant Azerbaijan greater access to SCO forums, enabling it to shape discussions on matters crucial to the South Caucasus.

Azerbaijan places significant emphasis on geo-economic priorities, actively supporting international transport corridors. By utilizing the SCO platform, Azerbaijan can continue advancing its economic development and regional

cooperation goals, contributing to a stable and prosperous Eurasian region through pragmatic and forward-looking policies.

The SCO's growing focus on environmental issues and sustainable development presents significant opportunities for Azerbaijan. As the host of COP29, Azerbaijan has positioned itself as a leader in regional environmental initiatives. Aligning these efforts with the SCO's green agenda could enhance Azerbaijan's standing within the organization and attract investment in sustainable projects. Azerbaijan's pursuit of closer ties with the SCO represents a strategic move to enhance its regional influence, diversify its economy, and navigate the dynamic geopolitics of Eurasia.

VI. Russian President Vladimir Putin visits Azerbaijan

On August 19, President Ilham Aliyev and President Putin held a joint press conference during Putin's state visit to Azerbaijan. The visit is expected to enhance cooperation across various sectors, reinforce regional stability, and support long-term development in both countries. President Ilham Aliyev opened the press conference by noting the high level of friendly relations between Azerbaijan and Russia, emphasizing the economic and humanitarian aspects of bilateral relations and pointing to growing trade, which exceeded \$4 billion in 2022, and the significant number of joint ventures, especially in energy and transport. President Ilham Aliyev also emphasized the importance of Russian-language education in Azerbaijan, with over 800,000 students learning Russian and numerous academic institutions maintaining mutually beneficial relations with Russian universities.

President Ilham Aliyev also noted the importance of the North-South transport corridor. President Ilham Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan has fully developed its railway and automobile segments of

the corridor and is modernizing its infrastructure to handle greater cargo volumes, expressing optimism that this project will strengthen regional and interregional cooperation.

In his remarks, President Vladimir Putin praised the dynamic partnership between Russia and Azerbaijan, emphasizing the mutual benefits of their economic cooperation. He highlighted the growth in trade between the two countries and the Russian investments in the Azerbaijani economy, particularly in sectors like oil, gas, and machinery. President Putin also spoke about the strategic importance of the North-South corridor, which will facilitate greater access to global markets for both countries. Additionally, he stressed the importance of deepening humanitarian ties, noting Russia's cultural and educational connections with Azerbaijan. Putin proposed the establishment of a Russian-Azerbaijani university in Baku, with support from St. Petersburg State University.

Putin touched on broader regional issues, particularly the ongoing efforts to normalize relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. He reaffirmed Russia's commitment to facilitating the peace process and supporting the delimitation and demarcation of borders between the two countries. The Russian President also praised Azerbaijan's role in international diplomacy, particularly within multilateral organizations like the United Nations and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). He invited President Ilham Aliyev to attend upcoming CIS and BRICS meetings in Moscow and Kazan, respectively, later this year.

President Ilham Aliyev also raised concerns about the environmental degradation of the Caspian Sea, which is experiencing a sharp drop in water levels. President Ilham Aliyev stressed the importance of addressing this issue collectively to prevent an ecological disaster in the region.