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## Ilham Aliyev visited military unit of Defense Ministry`s Special Forces

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President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Ilham Aliyev, has visited a military unit of the Special Forces of the Defense Ministry as the Special Forces mark the 23rd anniversary of its establishment.

Minister of Defense, Colonel General Zakir Hasanov, reported to Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev.

The head of state first laid flowers at the bust of National Leader Heydar Aliyev and paid tribute to his memory.

Then the Commander-in-Chief put flowers at the monument to the martyred members of the Special Forces.

The Commander of the Special Forces, Lieutenant General Hikmat Mirzayev, briefed President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Ilham Aliyev on the conditions created in the military unit.

In 1999, by a decree of great leader Heydar Aliyev, one of the most agile and highly capable units of the Azerbaijani Army was established. Officers and ensigns who took part in the First Karabakh War took an active part in the Special Forces formation. These units of the Azerbaijani Army, united under a single command by National Leader Heydar Aliyev, were formed in close cooperation with the Turkish Armed Forces and Special Forces.

After the Commander of the Special Forces, Lieutenant General Hikmat Mirzayev, reported to Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev, the President addressed the personnel of the military unit.

### **Speech by the President and Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev**

- Twenty-three years ago, by a decree of National Leader Heydar Aliyev, Special Forces were established in Azerbaijan. By signing that decree, he once again showed great foresight. The establishment of Special Forces justified itself in our historic victory in the second Karabakh war.

In 1999, the situation was different. Hopes for a peaceful settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict had not yet been dashed. However, based on Heydar Aliyev's decision, a special military unit was established in Azerbaijan's Armed Forces. Since then, Special Forces have played a tremendous role in achieving our historic victory, covering a great and glorious path and showing unprecedented heroism in the Patriotic War.

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The reasons for our defeat in the First Karabakh War are clear. At that time, there was no regular army in Azerbaijan. No army building was carried out, and the country's leadership could not fulfill its duties. The occupation of Shusha and Lachin in May 1992 and the occupation of Kalbajar in April 1993 established a geographical link between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. Thus, the occupation of our lands, unfortunately, became a reality.

The Patriotic War is our glorious history. The people of Azerbaijan supported their army and backed it. All Azerbaijani citizens rallied around it, all Azerbaijanis of the world united. We united like a fist and inflicted such crushing blows on the enemy that they are still unable to recover. The Armenian army was utterly crushed in 44 days. The remains of the Armenian army are on display in the Military Trophy Park in the center of Baku. The Armenian leadership used to threaten us with a new war. They were saying that if Azerbaijan wanted to resolve this issue by military means, Armenian tanks would be on the streets of Baku. Indeed, Armenian tanks are on the streets of Baku. We have destroyed and brought them here. Now those tanks, as well as cannons and other equipment, are on display at the Military Trophy Park.

In a matter of 44 days, we liberated more than 300 cities and villages from the enemy. We won this victory on the battlefield – not through negotiations, not concessions, but by shedding blood and losing martyrs. What was driving us forward? Our patriotism, love of country and hatred for the enemy! We have brought up the young generation in this spirit, our army has grown up in this spirit, and Special Forces, the most combatant branch of our army, were advancing with this mission, and this idea in their minds, putting their chests forward.

The historic victory of Azerbaijan's Armed Forces will forever remain in our history. We will live forever as a victorious nation and as a victorious state. It was our sons, soldiers and officers who delivered us this joy. All the Armed Forces made a valuable contribution to this Victory, and this historic Victory was achieved in 44 days. The enemy was brought to its knees before us and was forced to sign an act of capitulation with its own hands. This is perhaps one of the most, if not the most memorable, the happiest and the proudest moments in our history and my life. The signing of the act of capitulation by Armenia is the proudest event in my life.

Special Forces have made an immense contribution to our victory in the Patriotic War. I know this as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, and I have told the Azerbaijani public about it. All the people of Azerbaijan know this, and the enemy knows it. The liberation of our villages from the first days of the war shook up the enemy. They did not believe that the Azerbaijani Army could achieve this historic victory by breaking through five or six lines of defense, shedding blood and sacrificing martyrs.

They were still hoping that someone would stop us, that someone would put pressure on us and that we would stop our Victory march under that pressure. I said that nothing and no one could stop us, that we would go to the end, that we would drive the enemy out of our lands until the end, and that the war could stop only after the enemy signed an act of capitulation, and this is precisely what happened. We proved our commitment to our word. From the first days, our army was moving forward and never took a step back. According to their confessions, there were more than 10,000 deserters in the Armenian army during the war. There was not a single deserter in the Azerbaijani Army. These are the moral qualities of the Azerbaijani people. These are our national spirit and love of the Motherland. It was the love of the homeland, but at the same time, training and professionalism that drove us forward.

In all our critical operations, Special Forces were at the forefront. I want to emphasize the role of the Special Forces, along with other military units, in liberating our cities and villages. After a series of successful operations, our path to Shusha was clear. By saying path, we understand there was no road. After the successful Hadrut operation, which drastically increased the number of deserters in Armenia, they did not believe we would go in that direction. They were expecting us in a different direction. But our lions and heroes paved the way forward with their bare hands, their own feet and with their own

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 chests. The objective was Shusha, and it passed through valleys and woods. I said during the war that our mission would be incomplete without Shusha. From the first day to the last day of the war, our goal was to liberate Shusha, our beloved city, the crown of Karabakh, from Armenian occupation, and we achieved that; you achieved that, the Special Forces did. Our tireless heroes spent a few days crossing through those valleys and woods with only light weapons in their hands. They liberated many villages along the way, shed blood, and gave martyrs, but did not stop and only marched forward. Everyone who comes to Shusha today is puzzled – how did the sons of Azerbaijan liberate this impregnable fortress? Every time one goes to Shusha via Victory Road, one keeps wondering about that. The number of people going to Shusha via Victory Road has significantly increased lately – both Azerbaijani and foreign citizens. During their subsequent contacts with me, people asked me how we could build this road in Azerbaijan in such a short time? And I reply that this is irrelevant – just imagine how our soldiers and officers passed through those forests, paving that road. By naming this road Victory Road, we have inscribed this glorious Victory in our history once again.

Every time I see those steep rocks as I approach Shusha via Victory Road, I always think of you, of how this impregnable fortress was captured – with light weapons, in city battles and hand-to-hand fights. Ahead of you, at the top of the mountain, Armenians armed from head to toe with heavy guns, cannons and tanks were helpless in front of you.

It was your strength, resolve, professionalism and love of country. You fought for your homeland and in your homeland. The occupying enemy could not stand in front of you on the territory of Azerbaijan. The liberation of Shusha is the brightest page of the war. Today, the Shusha operation, the Hadrut operation and other operations are being studied in the world's leading military schools.

A year and a half have passed since the Second Karabakh War. Military experts and people dealing with this issue still talk about Azerbaijan's victory. I have been asked many questions about this issue, about the war and our victory. What are the factors that preconditioned this Victory? The first among them is patriotism. In other words, it was the love of the Motherland that made you look death in the eye and say, "We will rather die than retreat." And we demonstrated precisely that. We have demonstrated to the whole world that we are a great nation, and we have fought the war with dignity. While the enemy was defeated on the battlefield, our cities and villages came under fire. More than a hundred civilians, including children and women, lost their lives under this cowardly fire. We fought a war with dignity, and I said during the war that we would take revenge on the battlefield. We have never fought and will never fight against civilians. The sublime qualities of the Azerbaijani people do not allow us, and it never happened. The whole world recognizes that the Azerbaijanis fought with dignity, fought like men, drove out the enemy, brought it to its knees and kept their word.

The situation in our region is entirely different now. We are multiplying our strength as a victorious nation and as a victorious country. All instructions on the future activities of Special Forces have been issued. I was in this military unit a year before the war when I met with Special Forces. It is a great honor for me to be with you today, on this holiday. I am proud of you. All the people of Azerbaijan are proud of you. Armenia, the Armenian armed forces begin to tremble on hearing of Azerbaijan's Special Forces. They have not gotten over it and never will get rid of this fear. We do not seek war. We have achieved what we wanted. We have restored historical justice. We have honorably fulfilled our duty to the people, to history and to future generations. But we must always be alert because revanchist forces are still raising their heads in Armenia. There are still those in Armenia who make territorial claims against Azerbaijan.

We must always keep it in the spotlight and must not be indifferent to that. Additional funds were allocated for army building after the Second Karabakh War. As it has been the case since 2004 to date this year, military expenditure is the number one provision, including increasing the number of Special Forces, which is already a reality. I do not want to say anything about the numbers now, but I can say that

after the Second Karabakh War, the number of Special Forces has doubled. The selection process is now even more rigorous, and the interest is more significant. There are many applicants. Moral and psychological qualities, physical training, professionalism and, most importantly, love of the homeland are the main conditions for being selected.

Reforms are underway in other armed forces as well. New military units capable of conducting special operations are being established, and the Azerbaijani Army is becoming even stronger. Today, our army is even more potent than during the war.

I once again sincerely congratulate you on the 23rd anniversary of the establishment of Special Forces. I wish you renewed success and many more victories. I want to conclude my speech with the slogan of the Second Karabakh War: Karabakh is Azerbaijan!

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