

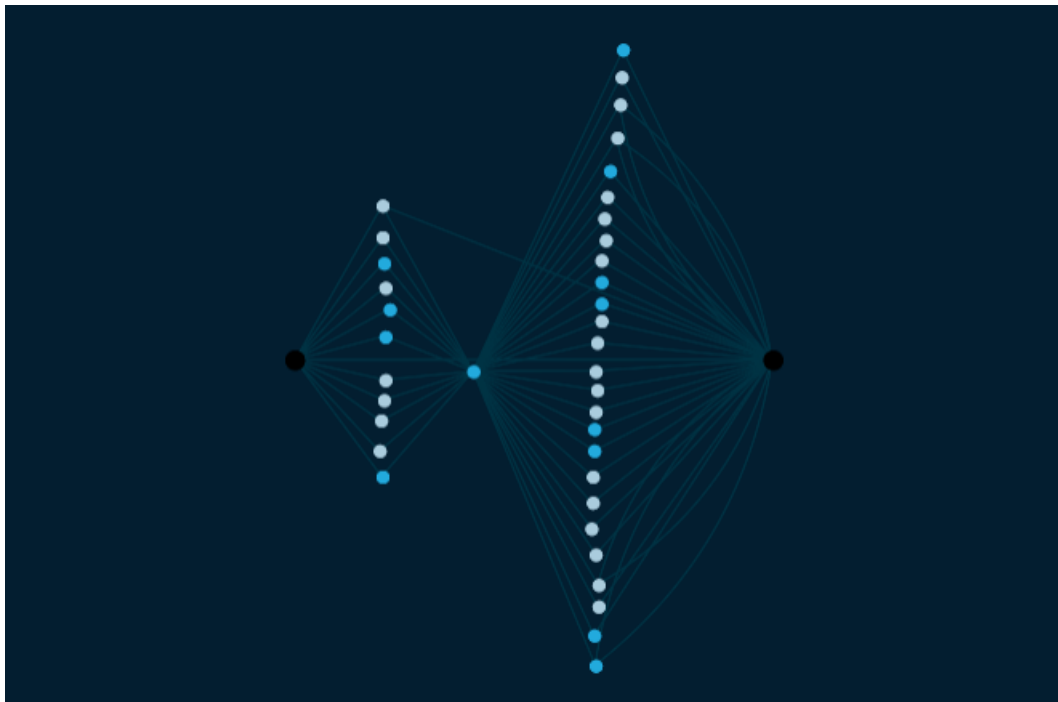
Network Insight: BVI Companies

The activities of the sisters' companies in the BVI, as exposed by the Pandora Papers leak

The British Virgin Islands (BVI) is among the major hubs for Leyla and Arzu Aliyeva's network of shell companies, and the release of damaging data through leaks has proven a potent tool for exposing the hidden assets of Azerbaijan's first family and the international network of enablers they depend on.

In 2021, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists' (ICIJ) Pandora Papers exposed a new network of companies in the BVI linked to the sisters. The BVI does not have a publicly accessible register of the beneficial owners of companies,^[1049] so the only way to find these out is via a leak. In this case, the details were contained in the files of the Trident Trust, a BVI-headquartered corporate services provider that administered many of the companies.^[755] According to the ICIJ, the Trident Trust did not record in its files that the sisters were politically exposed persons (PEPs),^[755] as required under BVI law; doing so would have prompted in-depth financial checks.^[1289]

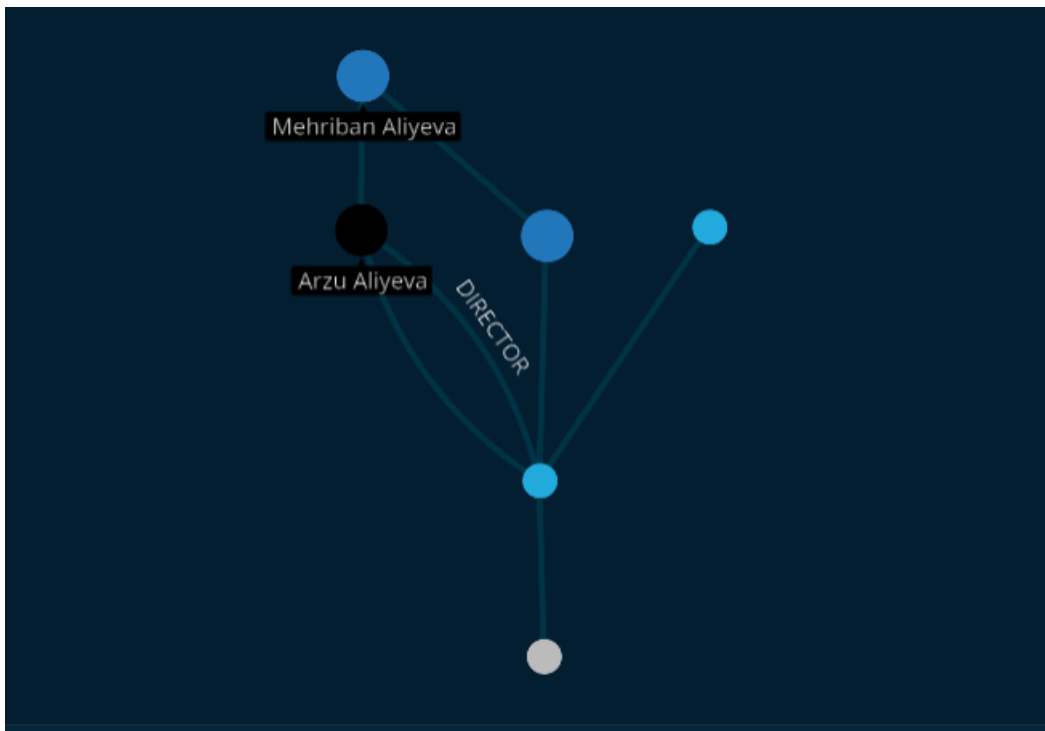
Trident Trust told The Sentry that it is "subject to stringent client confidentiality and data protection obligations. Each of Trident's businesses is regulated in the jurisdiction in which it operates and is fully committed to



compliance with all applicable regulations. Trident does not discuss with the media its clients, or whether any individual or entity is a client, but cooperates fully with any competent authority which requests information.”^[1401]

Data in the leak cast light on the ownership of several offshore companies used by Azerbaijan’s first family to acquire a portfolio of properties in London worth almost \$700 million.^[521] Among the BVI companies was Strahan Holding & Finance Corp. In 2006, the company purchased three apartments in The Knightsbridge, a luxury housing development in West London, worth 5.1 million GBP (\$9.7 million). Arzu Aliyeva, who was 19 at the time, became a shareholder of the company just prior to the purchase.^{[519] [520] [521] [731] [1371]}

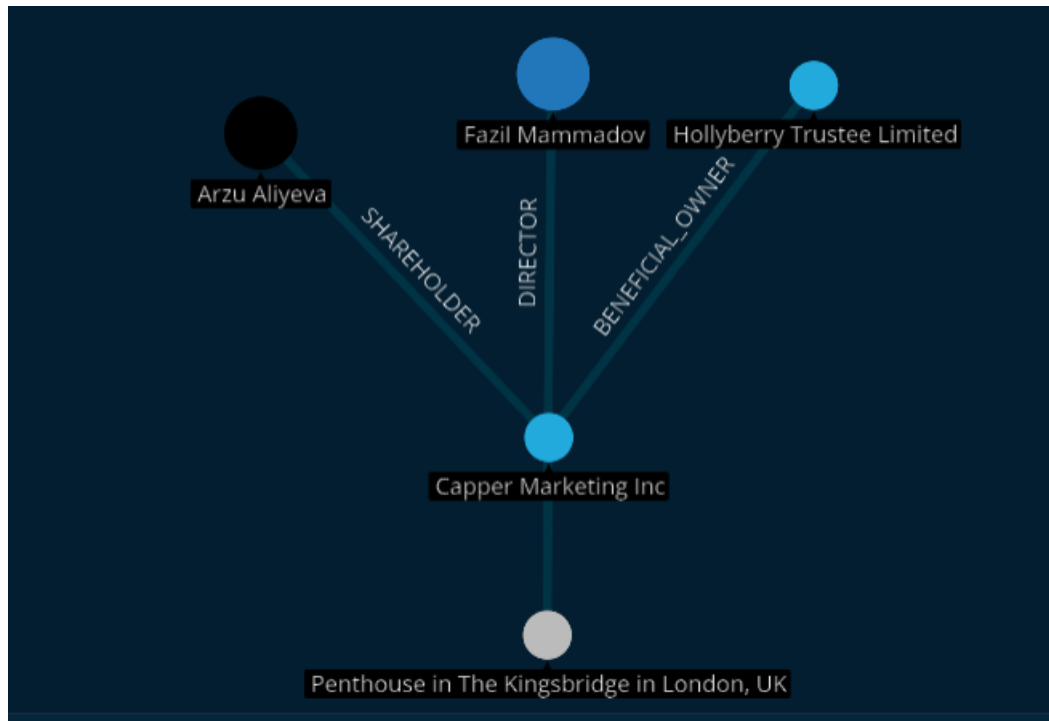
Strahan Holding & Finance held a Swiss bank account,^[521] and in 2021, its beneficial owners included Hollyberry Trustee Limited, an Isle of Man trust company that owned more than 25%.^[633] As of 2014, Mir Jamal Pashayev,^[730] a cousin of Azerbaijan’s first lady, Vice President Mehriban Aliyeva, was also a beneficial owner.^[595]



In 2006, another BVI company, Capper Marketing Inc., acquired a 101-square-meter penthouse in The Knightsbridge. At the time of the purchase, Capper Marketing was controlled by Fazil Mammadov,^{[521] [519] [1075]} a former Azerbaijani tax ministry official.^[520] Shares in the company were then transferred to Arzu Aliyeva before being transferred to Hollyberry Trustee in 2021.^{[519] [520] [521] [731] [632]}

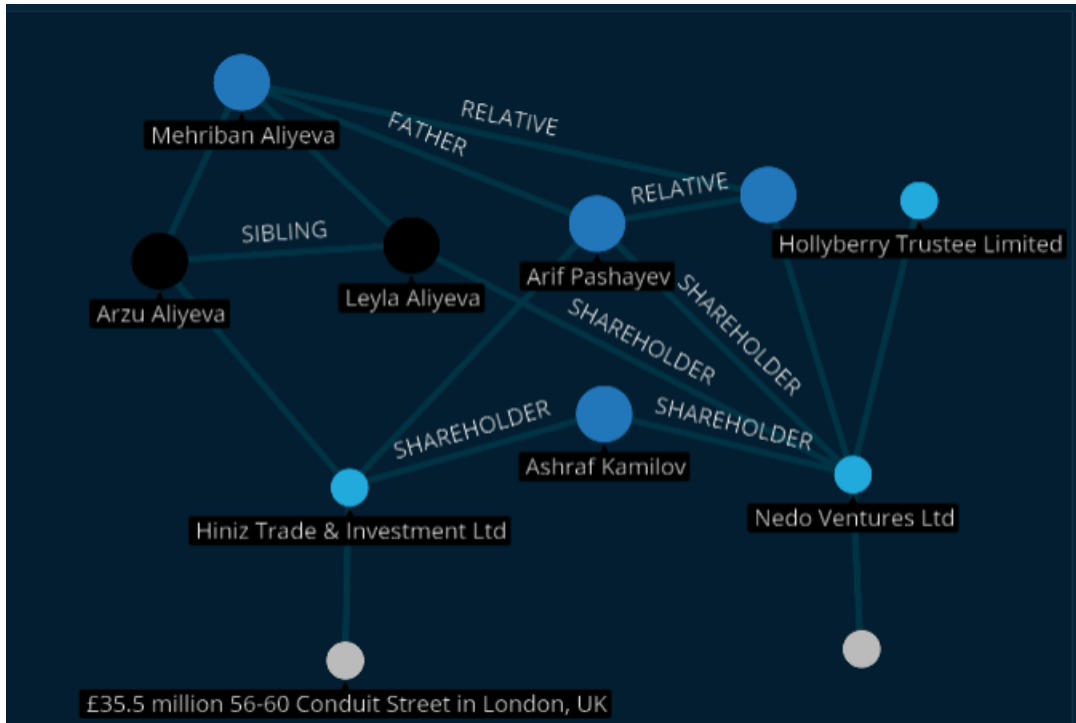
In August 2022, long-awaited rules came into force that require all overseas companies that own real estate in the UK to declare their ultimate beneficial owners on a public register, but trusts were excluded, so the

transfer of the sisters' real estate to an Isle of Man trust may have been an attempt to avoid these rules.^[1189]

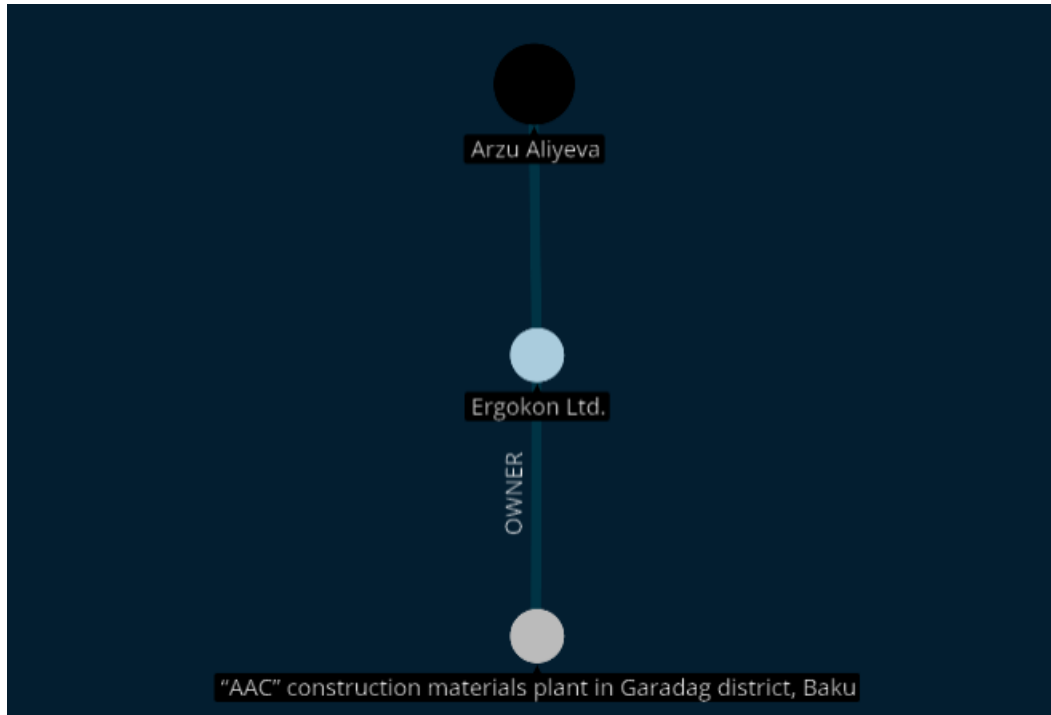


Several other BVI companies in the Pandora Papers were linked to Leyla and Arzu Aliyeva and were used to acquire commercial properties in London. In February 2009, Nedo Ventures Ltd acquired 8 Cavendish Square in West London for 9.5 million GBP (\$13.8 million).^{[519] [520] [521] [536]} At the time of the property purchase, Nedo Ventures was reportedly controlled by Ashraf Kamilov, an Aliyev family business associate.^[519] Ownership was transferred to Leyla Aliyeva, then on to her grandfather Arif Pashayev, and then to a family trust in the Isle of Man.^{[275] [519]} In February 2023, the beneficial owners of Nedo Ventures included Hollyberry Trustee Limited, which owned more than 25%,^[634] and Mir Jamal Pashayev.^{[730] [595]}

Similarly, in 2009, Hiniz Trade & Investment Ltd acquired 56-60 Conduit Street in London's Mayfair district for 35.5 million GBP (\$57.4 million).^{[732] [508]} Hiniz Trade & Investment was initially owned by Kamilov.^[732] Ownership passed to Arzu Aliyeva, then on to her grandfather Arif Pashayev, and then to an Aliyev family trust.^[732]



Not all of the sisters' BVI companies were used to acquire property. Some were used to acquire stakes in businesses and open bank accounts. One of them, Ergokon Ltd., was an owner of AAC, a construction materials plant in the Garadag district of Baku.^{[531] [805]} The plant's other owners included Kamilov, via his Synergy Group conglomerate, and Azerbaijani construction magnate Emin Nasibov.^[531] The plant was funded in part by a 10 million manat (\$12.8 million) loan from the Azerbaijani government,^[531] and it went on to become a lead supplier of building materials to major Azerbaijani construction projects, including some owned by the state.^[531] The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project found that the plant had benefitted from a massive currency devaluation by the central bank in 2015.^[531] In 2016, Arzu Aliyeva was a shareholder of Ergokon;^{[363] [364]} it was dissolved in 2019.^[796]



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