

Ambassador Matthew J. Bryza
Commemoration of September 11 Tragedy
September 12, 2011
Baku, Azerbaijan
AS DELIVERED

Mr. Minister, General, Rabbi Segal, Father Vladimir, Ambassadors Colonels, friends, and colleagues, thank you for joining us today to honor the victims of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, and to celebrate the solidarity and sacrifice and resilience that has followed.

We here today are a diverse, but unified group of people, representing Coalition partners fighting in and rebuilding Afghanistan, and we also represent other countries whose assistance on counterterrorism and transportation are essential to our joint efforts in Afghanistan.

We are especially grateful to our Azerbaijani friends who are here with us today, including Deputy Foreign Minister Pashayev, General Najafov of the Ministry of Defense, Colonel Tamrazov of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Major Sabuhi of Azerbaijan's Peacekeeping Battalion. And I'm also pleased I see our friends from Sheikh Pashazade's Caucasus Muslim Board. Deputy Seyidov, our neighbor in the University of Languages, who has been one of our closest friends in Parliament and who has hosted us in our American Center for all these years, thank you. And we're always happy when we are near Krasnaya Sloboda.

Azerbaijan has stood with us since September 12, 2001, just as it was with us in Kosovo and was one of only three Muslim majority countries – along with Kazakhstan and Albania -- to send troops to Iraq.

Azerbaijan's partnership in ensuring access to Afghanistan by air, land, and sea is critical, and has been so from the first hours following the 9/11 attacks. We are deeply grateful.

We welcome other partners, as well, who extended their support to us in the immediate aftermath of September 11, including Russia, as well as Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as well as Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, whose

Ambassadors I believe are all here today, in addition to other friends from Central Asia.

We are also, of course, grateful for our partnership with Pakistan, which is absolutely critical in so many ways.

And, of course, we are grateful to President Aliyev, who is represented here our dear friend Mr. Mammadova, the President's foreign affairs advisor.

And, of course, we offer such deep gratitude to our NATO Allies, who, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, invoked Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty for the first and only time in the Alliance's history when they came to the defense of the United States.

Troops from several NATO Allies' troops remain with us in Afghanistan, along with 90 soldiers from Azerbaijan at this very moment.

And as well, Latvia and Lithuania are also providing crucial cooperation on transit to Afghanistan.

In the media frenzy of the past decade, the brutality of the attacks on thousands of innocent people in the air and on the ground in Virginia, New York, and Pennsylvania has sometimes been forgotten.

Personally, I cannot get out of my mind the images of people jumping from hundreds of meters to their deaths to escape the inferno, some of them tumbling through the air hand-in-hand.

But, as we remember those who died and their friends and families, we also highlight the solidarity that emerged from these tragedies, which has brought us together.

All of our countries have forged solidarity in the sacrifices we've shared.

The terrorists who struck on September 11, 2001 murdered innocent people from approximately 90 countries.

They hijacked not only aircraft, but one of the world's great religions, one that is at the center of many of our families – including my own. The terrorists manipulated a religion based on love of God and humanity into a hateful political ideology denying respect for universal human rights and for humanity itself.

Those who share this intolerant political ideology, and who remain so few in number, spread their violent hatred well beyond the United States to Madrid, Casablanca, Riyadh, Istanbul, London, Bali, Beslan, Islamabad, and Bombay.

Some of our countries have shared the sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice, of the lives of soldiers and civilians who perished on or on the way to the battlefield.

And I ask us to pause for a moment in deep sorrow and gratitude to remember the five Azerbaijani crew members, along with their four colleagues from Uzbekistan, who perished on Silk Way Airlines Flight 4412, which crashed on approach to Bagram Airbase this past July 6th. [Silence observed.] Thank you.

Our solidarity, though, is evident, not only in the shared sacrifice, but also in our shared resilience in defeating violent extremism.

We have worked to prevent many attacks around the world and, together, we have emerged safer.

We now know of several attacks on the U.S. homeland that our global solidarity around the world prevented.

And, closer to home, I am deeply grateful to our Azerbaijani friends and partners, who prevented a potentially horrific attack a few years ago on this very ground.

As part of a broad coalition, we have driven al Qaeda from its training camps in Afghanistan, toppled the Taliban, and given the Afghan people a chance to live free from terror and trampling of basic human rights.

President Obama has worked with leaders of your countries to develop a new era of partnerships with nations and peoples based on mutual interest and mutual respect.

As an international community, we have shown that terrorists and the ideological extremists who drive them are no match for the strength and resilience of our citizens.

As I turn to our very dear friend, Deputy Minister Hafiz Pashayev, I can't help but remember my own experiences in the White House on September 11, 2001.

Seared into my memory is the television image of the second airliner striking the second World Trade Center tower just after 9:00 a.m.

We all remember that moment wherever we were, I know.

For me, I just emerged from a staff meeting and I looked at my colleague and said, "Everything is now different."

Approximately 15 minutes later, a Secret Service Officer knocked on my door and directed me to run – not walk – to the nearest exit, without pausing even to secure my classified information or turn off my computer. He said another plane might be headed for the White House.

We now know that that plane wound up hitting the Pentagon.

In the hours that followed, as the immensity of the tragedy sank in, many Americans felt an urge to contribute somehow to our national response in a precursor of the sense of solidarity I just mentioned.

Fortunately for me, I had responsibility at the White House for our relations with Azerbaijan, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

I had barely made it to back to my desk, less than 24 hours after the attacks, when I received word that President Heydar Aliyev had offered the United States unlimited over flight permission for non-military aircraft, and, as you put it, Mr. Ambassador, "Anything else we might need."

That immediate expression of solidarity meant a great deal to all of us in the White House that day, and I know for a fact, including our President. Thanks to that important step by Azerbaijan, we knew we would not stand alone, but in solidarity with friends among all of your countries who then did reach out to us at our greatest moment of need.

And our key Azerbaijani partners on that day, and many others were the Azerbaijani Embassy's bright and humble and collaborative Deputy Chief of Mission, Elmar Mammadyarov, and our wise and tough and friendly partner, Hafiz Pashayev.

So, Mr. Ambassador, Mr. Minister, Mr. Rector, thank you for all these years of friendship, of partnership in some terrible times, and in what you made some really wonderful times.

And if you permit, I would like to ask you to come up here and share some of your recollections from that day.

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