

Deputy Secretary of State William Burns
Ambassador Matthew Bryza
Press Conference
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Deputy Secretary Burns: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. I'm delighted to back in Baku. I was honored to visit last year and I'm especially pleased that one of my first foreign trips in my new job as Deputy Secretary of State is to return to Baku.

I hope this trip helps reinforce what Secretary Clinton said during her own visit here last year, that "the bonds between the United States and Azerbaijan are deep, important, and durable." That is as true now as it was then.

Today President Aliyev and I discussed ways in which we can further deepen our strong bilateral relationship. I emphasize the importance that President Obama and Secretary Clinton attach to partnership between our two countries. The priorities of the United States in Azerbaijan continue to lie in security, energy, and democratic and economic reform.

We are working together on global challenges such as combatting violent extremism and diversifying energy supplies. I thanked President Aliyev once again for Azerbaijan's important contributions to international security efforts, including in Afghanistan. We also spoke about the importance of civil society and I stressed again the importance of democratic and economic reform, which are so deeply in the interests of the people of Azerbaijan and their long-term success and prosperity.

I also met with a dynamic group of civil society leaders and had the opportunity to hear their ideas and express support for their efforts.

Azerbaijan is a country of enormous potential. The United States is committed to help realize that potential and to build mutually beneficial, mutually respectful relations. It's a simple fact, as Secretary Clinton said last year, that our closest relationships around the world are with democratic states that respect the rule of law and the universal human rights of their citizens.

Finally, I also reaffirmed the strong commitment at the highest levels of the U.S. government to helping the sides achieve a lasting peaceful settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. We will remain a very active and a very determined partner, including in our role as co-chair of the Minsk Group.

So thank you very much for your time today and I'd be glad to try to respond to your questions.

Question: [Through Interpreter]: You mentioned that last year the Secretary of State paid a visit a year ago during which democracy and human rights were the main issues of the discussions. Recently the Department of State expressed its regrets regarding the imprisonment of oppositional activists. So in light of these statements how do you evaluate the past period, I mean the year? Were there any changes in any direction regarding the status of the democracy and human rights in the country?

Deputy Secretary Burns: We've continued to express our concern about all of the issues that you mentioned. We continue to believe that it's deeply in the interest of the people of Azerbaijan to strengthen the rule of law, to respect universal rights, and to build strong democratic institutions. There's clearly a lot of work to be done. The United States will continue, as we have in the past, to express our support for democratic as well as economic reforms.

Question: Some states are opposed to the realization of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline. President Medvedev said the realization of the project should wait until the legal status of the Caspian Sea is determined by all five states. I welcome your comment on that. And do you think that these countries' position will constrain the development of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline?

Deputy Secretary Burns: First I would say that the United States continues to support the development of a strong vibrant competitive energy sector in Azerbaijan. We continue to support diversification of export routes. We believe that's in the interest of Azerbaijan and it's also in the interest of the global economy. So our attitude is that we believe the emergence of multiple export routes and pipelines is a very good thing.

Question: [Through Interpreter]: As the Ambassador mentioned, you, Mr. Burns, are quite good, you have great experience in the resolution of conflicts as a very experienced diplomat, and we know the last year one of the topics of discussion with the government was the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. My

question would be whether this year again the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh was a topic of discussions, and if the U.S. or any other Minsk Group Co-Chair country has put forward any version, any suggestions regarding the solution of the conflict.

Deputy Secretary Burns: It certainly was, again, an important subject of discussion. The United States approaches the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh with a strong commitment to our role as Co-Chair of the Minsk Group. We approach it with a strong conviction that there's no military solution to that conflict. We approach it with the conviction that the status quo is not sustainable. And we approach it with a real sense of urgency. The co-Chair envoys are going to be traveling to the region again next week and the United States is committed at the very highest levels of our government to doing everything that we can to renew and strengthen the Minsk Group process. We take very seriously our responsibilities as a Co-Chair.

Thank you all very much.