

Transcript
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Remarks—As Delivered

South Caucasus Forum Panel:

“Shared Societies as a Tool for Conflict Resolution in Complex Situations”

Baku, Azerbaijan

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Ambassador Morningstar: Thank you very much.

Let me first say that it is an honor to be on a panel with a foreign minister, a prime minister, two presidents, and a Nobel Prize winner.

But to answer your question, I think the history of the United States offers a lot of lessons on conflict and resolution from which to choose. I will try to connect those to what is the most salient issue here in Azerbaijan, which is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

This is a delicate matter. Comparisons with conflicts in other places can create false parallels because it is true that every conflict has its own unique aspects. But I think we can agree that conflicts do have one thing in common; that they are made worse by demonization. Conflict leads societies to see their opponents as wrong, even evil, and certainly, in the case of war, dehumanized. But conflict springs often from a legitimate desire for security. Demonization forces conflict into a downward spiral.

As both sides move further down that path, their ability to understand one another and their willingness to compromise recedes. As emotion heightens, the process of reconciliation becomes exponentially harder, and political will to resolve the conflict recedes or becomes impossible.

The United States has had its own bloody conflicts over its 237 years of history, both internal and external, over land, race, politics, and ideology. Whether it was our wars with Native Americans, our Civil War, our wars with foreign powers, all these conflicts included some form of demonization. However they also eventually included a process of reconciliation that allowed us to normalize. Sometimes that normalization has taken years, decades, and even longer, continuing until the present day.

In each of these conflicts, one of the key aspects of conflict resolution has been to reduce the demonization of the other. This included, for example, efforts to reintegrate Southern states after the Civil War; to offer reconstruction aid to Germany and Japan after World War II; and to reopen diplomatic relations with Vietnam, including a friendly visit to Vietnam by a sitting American president. In each case, the process of reconciliation was lengthy and, more often than not, extremely controversial. And, in many cases, it still is, as I mentioned before, a work in progress.

So how does the U.S. experience have relevance to the reconciliation process in connection with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?

First, I want to emphasize that the United States acknowledges that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the occupation of Azerbaijani territories is the greatest hardship that Azerbaijan faces today. We appreciate how frustrating this problem is for all Azerbaijanis, and the status quo is unacceptable.

So how do we move the conflict resolution forward? How can the experience of the United States and other countries assist in this process?

In 1994, the United States took a leadership role as one of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group Process. Working with the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Minsk Group has been able to support dialogue to help prevent the outbreak of major hostilities, and I emphasize *major hostilities* because any deaths along the line of contact are too many. But refraining from large-scale hostilities is not enough. The Minsk Group knows that.

I believe that we need an even more vigorous commitment to the Minsk Group process—in -which serious negotiation begins to build trust and to develop a framework to restore peace for the peoples of both countries for the compromises that are necessary for a more prosperous future. This vision of the future will not become reality without the leadership of the governments and also, and I think just as important, the involvement of civil society in each country.

The Minsk Group co-chairs cannot do it on their own. The Minsk Group needs to be further assisted in its efforts to invigorate the peace process and develop confidence-building measures through what we call Track II diplomacy, which is people to people diplomacy at the grass roots level. We are working with individuals, mostly with young people, as well as women, from Azerbaijan and Armenia who want to stop this demonization process. They are doing this face to face and with on-line conflict resolution workshops and conflict resolution simulation exercises and follow-up activities that include creation of websites, Facebook groups, and videos on YouTube.

This kind of activity deserves support from the governments on both sides of the conflict. Faith and I attended panels in Ganja over the past few days that were devoted to women's role in a shared society. Women clearly have a critical role to play in conflict resolution such as in the Nagorno-Karabakh situation. Actually, as mothers, they have suffered the worst in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

As Queen Noor said this morning, women are the ultimate peacemakers. We see so many women active in civil society. We must all work together to fulfill their leadership potential and to ensure that women play a larger role in the political process including conflict resolution, and including here in Azerbaijan as well as in Armenia.

Women's voices in leadership positions better allow us to have a picture of the whole of society. As was stated yesterday in Ganja, there can be no democracy without full participation of women. The Minsk Group must strive to bring women into the process.

So it is our fervent hope that in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan is able to make use of this experience. We remain committed to this

process, understanding the difficulties and hopefully helping to work it through with all partners.

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