

Op-Ed by U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Robert F. Cekuta: Reflecting on the Anniversary of September 11, 2001

Today marks the 14th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the United States, which took the lives of nearly 3,000 men, women, and children. Victims included Americans and people from countries around the globe. People of all ages, ethnicities, and religious beliefs died in the attacks. They perished while innocently going about their daily business or heroically trying to rescue others. As we continue to remember those losses on this day each year, it is also important to remember the resolve that followed -- not just in the United States, but in countries around the world -- that we must take steps to prevent such tragedies in the future.

Our understanding of how to prevent these sorts of attacks has evolved over time. From enhancing physical security, to encouraging intelligence sharing, to fighting the ideologies that lead to violent extremism, we understand there is no one single solution, and that no country can successfully address these challenges alone.

As time passes, it is important to remember that despite the horror of that day, we also saw an amazing outpouring of support and solidarity around the world. Azerbaijan was among the first countries to express support for the United States following the attacks of September 11, 2001. We remember the reports and images showing Azerbaijani people lighting candles and holding vigils to express their condolences. That heart-felt support is still treasured by Americans today. Since then, Azerbaijan's support has gone far beyond those initial expressions of unity. It has been a key partner in U.S. and NATO-led efforts to root out extremism in Afghanistan.

Azerbaijan has contributed to peacekeeping operations with Azerbaijani troops working side by side with U.S. and NATO forces to give Afghans the chance to develop a peaceful, stable democracy. Azerbaijan has also facilitated the transport of logistical supplies in support of these NATO operations in Afghanistan. Azerbaijan has cooperated closely with the United States as well to cut off financing for extremist organizations. In turn, the United States has provided assistance to the Azerbaijani government to enable it to protect better its borders and stem the flow of extremists transiting through the country.

Just as importantly, Azerbaijan's living history of religious tolerance, with different sects and religions living side by side under a secular government, remains a model for countries around the world. It is an example that shows us that religious strife is not a foregone conclusion and that there is hope for a future where religious violence is a thing of the past.

Achieving that future will require continued work and commitment from all sides. We are learning that extremism struggles in the face of hope, shared prosperity, and inclusive societies. The ideology of hate falters when confronted with reason and open discussion. That is one of the many reasons we support Azerbaijan's self-stated goals of economic diversification, combatting corruption, and enhancing government accountability. We are committed to partnering with Azerbaijan to achieve those goals. Doing so is one of the best ways to ensure the future of a stable and prosperous Azerbaijan, one that will never be home to the kind of extremist ideology that has claimed the lives of so many.

So while September 11 remains a day to pay tribute to the victims of the attacks of 2001, it is increasingly becoming a day to recommit to our shared ideals and partnerships. I want to thank all Azerbaijanis for their continued support and to reconfirm our partnership in combatting the scourge of violent extremism.