

Ambassador Morningstar
Welcome Reception Remarks
September 13, 2012

Ambassador Morningstar: -- Yesterday was a hard day for us. It was a very, very sad day. But I want to thank all of you who have offered condolences. I know that we have received tremendous support from Azerbaijan as well as many, many other countries, and we appreciate that. We appreciate that very much. I would ask that we have one moment of silence in their memory. If we could have a moment of silence.

[Pause].

Thank you very much.

I see a lot of familiar faces here. As many of you know, I've been visiting Azerbaijan and working with the Azerbaijani people and the Azerbaijani government since the mid-1990s. I've actually been at the ambassador's residence several times over the years as a guest. In fact, Faith and I were here in 2002 the night that the residence was dedicated in the presence of both former President Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev. We never thought that we would have the honor and the opportunity to live right here.

Our bilateral relationship is both strong and complex. Americans and Azerbaijanis work together every day to address the three pillars of our bilateral relationship—security, energy, and internal reform. We need to work together, continue to work together, to promote stability and security not only in the region, but also in the rest of the world. The United States deeply appreciates the role that Azerbaijan is playing on the United Nations Security Council.

Azerbaijani troops have stood shoulder to shoulder with United States troops in Iraq, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. Azerbaijan continues to play a key role on transportation of troops and non-lethal supplies in support of the international effort in Afghanistan.

We also need to work together to once and for all resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh situation. It's in the interest of all concerned to resolve that very difficult problem.

Our work together on energy issues has also contributed to regional stability. The United States continues to be a strong supporter of the development of Azerbaijan's energy sector and the provision of those energy resources to Europe and to world markets. As most of you know, this is something that I've been working on for many years, and today my government continues to support and help Azerbaijan develop and deliver its substantial natural gas resources to Europe—not only to strengthen European energy security but also to secure the future prosperity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan.

We also need to work hard to develop non-energy sectors of Azerbaijan's economy because only through a diverse economy will Azerbaijan ultimately be successful.

We continue to believe that the best guarantee of stability and prosperity for Azerbaijan is ultimately through continued political and economic reform. As Secretary Clinton said during her 2012 visit just a couple of months ago to Baku, our closest relationships are with democratic states that respect the full range of human rights of their citizens.

So we look forward to continuing our work together in promoting rule of law, fundamental freedoms, a vibrant civil society and private sector, entrepreneurship, and other reforms essential to the full realization of Azerbaijan's extraordinary potential. This is in Azerbaijan's interest.

As you can see, our relationship is strong, and it takes a lot of work to move things forward. We've invited you here tonight because we need your help. I know that the American embassy alone cannot ensure the continued success of our bilateral cooperation. We need to work together with Azerbaijan and with all the countries that are represented here. So working together, we can take U.S.-Azerbaijani relations to the next level, we can guarantee our nations' continued prosperity and success.

I can say we are both very proud to be here, and we thank you very much for coming tonight.

There's plenty left to eat and drink. Thank you.

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