

National Security Advisor John Bolton
Press Conference at the U.S. Embassy
Baku, Azerbaijan
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Ambassador Bolton: Thanks very much. Thanks to all of you for coming today. It's a great pleasure to be here. It's my first trip to Azerbaijan. I'm told I'm the first U.S. National Security Advisor to visit since independence, so it's a great honor as well as being a privilege.

I had the opportunity today to meet with the Foreign Minister and then with President Aliyev for extensive discussions about major issues in the region. Obviously we talked about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We talked about our efforts to stop Iran's malign behavior throughout the region including its support for terrorism and its pursuit of nuclear weapons. We discussed economics and business issues quite a bit, including the Southern Gas Corridor, and ways that Azerbaijan can continue to participate and supply oil and gas in the European and other markets to provide both economic competition and strategic alternatives to potential purchasers.

We covered a range of issues involving the cooperation between our two governments and our desire to have that cooperation draw closer in issues like counterterrorism and counter-narcotics and human trafficking. And we covered a range of other issues as well including my discussions on Monday and Tuesday of this week in Moscow on arms control and other issues.

So I'll just stop there and be happy to answer your questions.

***Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty:** Our office was raided in 2014 and sealed. Since then, arrests have been imposed on our bank accounts and our office is closed. Did you discuss this issue as well as the recent year's crackdown on independent media and NGOs in Azerbaijan? And also the Trump Administration secured release of Pastor Andrew Brunson in Turkey. Can we also expect such a happy end?*

Ambassador Bolton: I did discuss human rights with President Aliyev. I don't think there's any ambiguity where the United States stands on those questions. I also pointed out what President Trump said at the UN General Assembly on our desire not to lecture other countries. I did not raise the Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty question because I wasn't aware of it, but if I had been aware of it I would have raised it since early in her career my wife used to work for Radio Free Europe.

On Pastor Brunson, you know, the recent decision by the Turkish government to release him, to allow him to return to America was very important. Very important to the United States since he was an American citizen who was engaged in purely innocent missionary work in Turkey. And I thank the President for his help in speaking with President Erdogan to get Pastor Brunson released.

***Voice of America:** Again, thank you very much. Basically you already answered one of the questions that's been preceded by the one that I'm going to ask. My colleague has already asked that question, so let me just go straight to my second question, which is President Erdogan yesterday talked to media, and he spoke at length, about Saudi journalist Khashoggi assassination. And basically what President Erdogan said is that the authorities should not simply limit themselves by prosecuting the assassins, but also should follow up the case. And speaking about this particular case, I would like you to clarify the United States position on this.*

Ambassador Bolton: I think since I've been in Moscow and then here in Baku today, I'm certainly aware of President Erdogan's speech but I didn't have a chance to hear the whole thing or read it. And I think the statements that have been made by the President and the Vice President on the Khashoggi affair really are the most up to date authoritative statements by the United States, and I'd rather not add to it from this distance.

Of course I mean distance from Washington, not distance from Turkey.

***Bloomberg:** Mr. Ambassador, your President said last night the Saudi handling of the journalist Khashoggi was a total fiasco. Do you think that Mohammed bin Salman can still remain as Crown Prince after all this came out? A second*

question, do you expect any further sanctions on Russia before mid-term elections? And if any, what kind of sanctions do you expect? Thank you.

Ambassador Bolton: As I said before, the President speaks definitively for the United States. There's not much I can add to that on the Khashoggi matter.

On the potential for additional sanctions on Russia, we are still considering what we may be obligated to do under a statute related to chemical weapons attacks. One set of sanctions was imposed about, a little bit over four months ago in response to the chemical weapons attack on the Skripals in Salisbury, England. The statute requires after six months that we look again to see whether the country that used the chemical weapons has corrected its behavior, and those are the requirements that we're looking at now. No decision has been made at this point, and I wouldn't predict timing, whether it might be before the election or after the election. The decision-making is ongoing as we speak.

***Space-TV:** Ambassador Bolton, actually your visit to Azerbaijan and to the region raises a great deal of expectations including a really very high expectation in terms of achieving a breakthrough in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and in kind of boosting the sides' efforts in terms of pursuing a negotiated settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. So are you generally bringing any kind of a new option or any new proposals on the NK conflict?*

Ambassador Bolton: I didn't come to change American policy on the subject, but I did come to learn more about it because the United States does believe that the resolution, the successful resolution of the issue is important. Obviously both for Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also for, it has strategic implications internationally as well.

So the President and I spoke at considerable length about it, and I was very gratified to hear of his desire to reach a successful conclusion and to hear his perspectives on it, and I'll be in Armenia later tonight to hear their perspectives tomorrow.

The U.S. takes its role as one of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group very seriously, and as I say, we see it as in the interest of both parties and in the interest of the United States to get this issue resolved.

***Meydan TV:** Actually you've just been sharing a little bit of the insights of your meeting with the President of Azerbaijan and speaking about the important value that human rights and democracy basically is for the United States of America. However, on the other side of the line we've been reading a lot of recent reports including the one from Amnesty International actually urging the United States of America to try to push the human rights and democracy related issues through your meetings with Azerbaijani authorities because what we can see, we can basically see an unrelenting crackdown on civil society and independent media in Azerbaijan. The Bar, the Azerbaijan National Bar Association is fully controlled by the Government of Azerbaijan. So what we can see is kind of a total control over the civil society and human rights in the country by the authorities. Did you have at least any opportunity to raise one of those issues during your official meetings with Azerbaijan or any way?*

Ambassador Bolton: I wasn't aware that Amnesty International had an agenda for me. They didn't bother to contact me before I arrived. So I'm sure they're free to raise their issues any time they want.

And I think I answered the question before, that we don't make any secret about what our values are. I think President Aliyev knows it as well as Vladimir Putin.

We had a very productive conversation with the President and I think there are a lot of areas where Azerbaijan and the United States can cooperate, and I think we will learn from Azerbaijan and perhaps they'll learn from us.

Thank you all very much. I appreciate it.