
JOHN BOLTON GOES TO AZERBAIJAN

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By S. Rob Sobhani

When U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton tweeted that he will be visiting Azerbaijan on October 20 it could not have come sooner. This secular Muslim country of 9 million is one of Americas most reliable yet underappreciated allies on the world stage. Mr. Bolton should use his visit to this geopolitically significant country sandwiched between a dangerous Russia and adventurous Iran to reiterate Washingtons unwavering, strong and unabashed support for Americas ally of over 26 years.

In 1992, as I stood next to Robert Finn (Americas top diplomat in Azerbaijan) to witness the opening of our embassy in Baku (on the 2nd floor of the Old Intourist Hotel) I could never have imagined that 26 years later Azerbaijan would prove to be one of Americas strongest and reliable partners.

When Mr. Bolton sits down with President İlham Aliyev later this month he will not only meet an American ally who has succeeded in realizing his vision to make Azerbaijan stable, independent, prosperous, religiously tolerant and modern but also one that shares many of Americas foreign policy goals and cultural values.

Immediately after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 on our homeland by Muslim fanatics, former President Heydar Aliyev, offered Azerbaijanis full and unconditional support to fight this global menace. Today Washington cannot ask for anyone more reliable than President İlham Aliyev as it continues to address the challenge of international terrorism. For example, Azerbaijanis special-forces fight along-side their American counterparts in Iraq and Afghanistan. No doubt Mr. Bolton will thank Azerbaijan for its unwavering support.

Despite direct and indirect pressure from Russia and Iran (in 2000, Tehran used force to stop Azerbaijan from drilling one of the worlds largest offshore oil structures Alov), Azerbaijan shares Americas goal of uninterrupted exploration, development and transportation of Caspian Sea energy resources to customers around the world. Under Mr. Aliyev, Azerbaijan has assumed its role as the regions most reliable export corridor and as such, has become the linchpin of diversifying oil and gas exports away from Russia. Mr. Bolton should applaud Azerbaijanis contributions to enhancing Western energy security.

Mr. Bolton, a Baltimore native, may not know but Azerbaijanis philanthropy has touched the lives of those facing the scourge of hunger in his home state. Each year the Maryland Food Bank receives

a donation from the ambassador of Azerbaijan in honor of the late President Heydar Aliyev. In fact, President Ilham Aliyev and his wife, Mehriban Aliyeva, (some call her the First Lady of Charity) share the American ethos of generosity. Mrs. Aliyeva's charitable giving to such organizations in the United States like Save A Child's Heart, the Urban Alliance and Longview School for the Disabled has touched the lives of those less fortunate in our country. In the interest of this shared value, Mr. Bolton should encourage these generous acts of kindness to expand between our two countries.

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