

**The Armenian-American Community & U.S. Foreign Assistance Policy
for Fiscal Year 2024**

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**For the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on
Appropriations, of the United States House of Representatives:**

Thank you, Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee, for your strong leadership of this Subcommittee and your strong support for the national and democratic aspirations of the Armenian nation.

In the wake of Azerbaijan's ethnic-cleansing of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), the occupation of Armenia's sovereign territory, and the ongoing humanitarian blockade of Artsakh, we ask this Subcommittee hold the Aliyev regime accountable by cutting off all U.S. military aid to its armed forces and help meet pressing humanitarian and recovery needs in Artsakh with a robust assistance package.

Since December 12th, Azerbaijan has blockaded the Lachin Corridor – the only road connecting the Armenians of Artsakh with the Republic of Armenia, and the sole means by which food, fuel, medicine and other essential goods are able to reach the region. Azerbaijan has also undermined the region's gas and electricity supply – cutting heat amid freezing temperatures. And interruptions to internet access have threatened to cut the region's capacity to communicate with the outside world. Prior to the blockade, Artsakh regularly received approximately 400 tons a day of supplies, and now only receives a few boxes a day via International Committee of the Red Cross vehicles.

Since early 2022, the ANCA has maintained a presence in the region in order to assess the needs of the local population. Our colleague, a U.S. citizen who is also living under the blockade, reports a dire humanitarian crisis with long-term implications. Vital medication including insulin is in short supply, baby formula and other sources of essential nutrition are inaccessible, and basic sanitary goods are running critically low. The impact the blockade has had on the region's livestock and agriculture has been profound, threatening the region's long-term food security.

Almost three years since the end of the 2020 Artsakh War, the region's indigenous Armenian inhabitants have found no respite. The blockade has compounded hardship for the region's vulnerable Armenian population still reeling from the impact of the war. As members of this panel know, to this day over 40,000 of Artsakh's civilians remain permanently displaced as a result of Azerbaijan's military conquest of 75% of the region's territory. Despite having characterized this as an "acute humanitarian crisis," USAID has so far failed to provide any direct U.S. humanitarian assistance programs within Artsakh. Unexploded ordnance from illegal cluster munitions used by Azerbaijan during the war have contaminated civilian areas. Schools and hospitals and other vital public infrastructure are still in a state of disrepair, after they were deliberately targeted during the war. Armenian cultural heritage and holy sites in areas under Azerbaijan's control have been systematically desecrated and destroyed. And Azerbaijan continues to hold over 100 Armenian prisoners of war hostage, who face torture and psychological abuse.

Despite the November 2020 ceasefire, Azerbaijan's policy of aggression has continued unabated – not only in its regular incursions along the line of contact in Artsakh, but in its violation of Armenian

sovereignty. The situation continues to deteriorate daily. On Sunday, March 5, 2023 Azerbaijani forces launched an attack on the region killing three Armenian police officers – while Azerbaijan’s President recently issued an ultimatum demanding the integration of Nagorno Karabakh into Azerbaijan, sparking concerns of renewed conflict.

These actions are in line with Azerbaijan’s pattern of aggression against the Christian Armenian population of Artsakh. Since May 2021, Azerbaijan has occupied and established checkpoints within Armenia’s internationally recognized territory. In September 2022, Azerbaijan engaged in a further escalation – shelling towns well within Armenia’s sovereign borders, including areas within 40 miles of the capital Yerevan. During this latest incursion, Azerbaijan perpetrated horrific human rights abuses – including the mutilation and desecration of female soldiers, and the point-blank execution of unarmed Armenian prisoners of war. The videos of these crimes, widely circulated by Azerbaijani soldiers on social media, have been independently verified by international human rights organizations.

Shockingly, Azerbaijan has yet to be held to account. Just the opposite, in fact: Azerbaijan’s oil-rich Aliyev regime continues to receive U.S. military aid under President Biden’s reckless waiver of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act.

Additionally, neither the Trump nor the Biden administration investigated Turkey’s role in Azerbaijan’s aggression, including Ankara’s recruitment of jihadist mercenaries from Syria and Libya to fight against Armenians. Nor has either administration investigated reports of Turkish F-16s having been used to support Azerbaijan’s attacks. Closer to home, we have yet to see either the Pentagon or Department of State look into potential violations of U.S. arms export laws related to the discovery of U.S. parts and technology in Turkish Bayraktar drones deployed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh.

Our specific requests related to the FY24 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill fall into four categories:

1) Aid to Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh):

Through the leadership of this Subcommittee, starting in Fiscal Year 1998, direct U.S. aid to Artsakh has been provided to its peaceful inhabitants in the form of maternal health care, clean drinking water, and life-saving demining by the HALO Trust. In the wake of Azerbaijan’s 2020 attack, and to address the crisis arising from Azerbaijan’s prolonged blockade of the region, this aid program must be meaningfully expanded to meet the humanitarian and recovery needs confronting the families of Artsakh – estimated at well over \$250,000,000 – helping them rebuild their lives and resettle in safety upon their indigenous Armenian homeland.

We were encouraged by language in the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act mandating the Department of State in consultation with USAID prepare a humanitarian assistance strategy to support those impacted by the Artsakh War. In this spirit we ask the Subcommittee to ensure this strategy is delivered and implemented in order to meet short-term humanitarian needs and support a long-term investment in Artsakh. In this spirit, we request the following language to be included in the body of this Act:

Of the funds appropriated under this heading, not less than \$75 million shall be made available for assistance programs the Armenian populated area of Nagorno Karabakh, used to provide humanitarian assistance, rebuilding and resettlement support to the Armenian victims of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict – as well as to address the long-term

humanitarian consequences of Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin Corridor. Such assistance will help to meet basic human needs, including maternity healthcare, drinking water programs, as well as food and energy security.

Refugee Relief: \$20,000,000
Food Security: \$15,000,000
Energy Security: \$10,000,000
Education: \$10,000,000
Healthcare: \$10,000,000
Water/Sanitation: \$5,000,000
Rehabilitation: \$3,000,000
Demining/UXO: \$2,000,000

2) Azerbaijan

We remain troubled that the Administration – even in the wake of Azerbaijan's attack on Artsakh, and assault on Armenia's sovereign territory – has chosen, recklessly and irresponsibly, to waive Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act. Compounding this misstep, the Administration has – according to the General Accountability Office – officially confirmed that it has demonstrably failed to meet its statutory reporting obligations under this law.

U.S. military aid to Baku – including Section 333 (Capacity Building), Foreign Military Financing, and International Military Education and Training – should not materially add to Baku's equipment stores, tactical abilities, and offensive capabilities, or free up its state resources for renewed cross-border action against both Artsakh and Armenia. We also remain concerned that in addition to the material impact the provision of military assistance has had on Azerbaijan's capacity to wage its war of aggression against the Armenian people, U.S. military assistance has been interpreted by the Azerbaijan as a signal that its unabated aggression against Armenia and Artsakh will not be met with any material consequences. The continuation of U.S. military aid will serve to embolden and enable the regime's misconduct.

In light of Azerbaijan's blockade of Artsakh and the humanitarian crisis it has created – which the Administration has noted undermines the prospects for peace in the region – the Administration should strictly enforce Section 907. Congress, for its part, should rescind the President's authority to waive this provision of U.S. law, and enact statutory prohibitions on any new U.S. military or security aid to Azerbaijan.

We request the following language to be included in the body of this Act:

No funds appropriated or otherwise made available under this Act may be provided to the Government of Azerbaijan for U.S. military or security programs.

3) Armenia

Armenia – an ancient Christian nation deeply rooted in Western democratic values – has, despite the crushing economic impact of Turkish and Azerbaijani aggression and blockades, stepped forward as an ally and partner for the United States on a broad array of complex regional challenges. Armenia is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace and the Armenian military has been among the highest per capita providers of peacekeepers to U.S.-led deployments, including those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Kosovo, and Mali.

The United States remains uniquely positioned to make important diplomatic advances in the South Caucasus. This is especially true in Armenia, which despite the constant threat of Azerbaijan and Turkey's authoritarian expansionism, has continued to make strides towards democratic reforms – more so than any other state in the region. At this point, the security of the region's Armenians, more than any other challenge facing the Armenian people, must be prioritized in our U.S. aid programs. As such, we request the following language to be included in the body of this Act:

Of the funds appropriated by this Act, not less than \$100,000,000 shall be made available for assistance for Armenia to support Armenia's security and sovereignty in the face of regional threats from Turkey and Azerbaijan.

4) Armenian Prisoners of War and Captured Civilians

As part of the November 2020 ceasefire agreement, all parties agreed that the “exchange of prisoners of war, hostages and other detainees as well as the remains of the fatalities shall be carried out.” However, the Government of Azerbaijan continues to detain over 100 Armenian prisoners of war, hostages, and detained persons, misrepresenting their status in an attempt to justify their continued captivity. We request that the following language be included in the final SFOPs bill:

The Committee remains concerned by Azerbaijan's failure to immediately return all Armenian prisoners of war and captured civilians and, thus, (2) urges the Secretary of State to engage at all levels with Azerbaijani authorities, including through the OSCE Minsk Group process, to make clear the importance of adhering to their obligations, under the November 9 statement and international law, to immediately release all prisoners of war and captured civilians.

In closing, we would like to underscore, once again, our urgent calls for robust aid to the Armenian population of Artsakh and a statutory prohibition on U.S. security or military aid to Azerbaijan.

The ANCA, as always, thanks you for your leadership and looks forward to working with the Subcommittee to help save Artsakh, defend Armenia's sovereignty, and strengthen the U.S.-Armenia alliance, and advance American interests and our shared democratic values.

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