

The Armenian American Community and
The President's FY 25 Budget Request for the Department of State

presented by

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U.S. Senate Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
"A Review of the President's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for the U.S. Department of State"

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Thank you, Chairman Coons and Ranking Member Graham. We are grateful for this Committee's strong leadership on constructive U.S. engagement in the Caucasus and its enduring support for the national and democratic aspirations of the Armenian nation.

The Armenian National Committee of America, on behalf of the Armenian American community and our coalition partners, remains concerned by the lack of a meaningful U.S. response to Azerbaijan's genocidal actions toward the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).

On September 19th of last year, Azerbaijan launched yet another unprovoked military assault against Artsakh, forcibly displacing over 120,000 indigenous Armenians from their ancestral homeland and subjugating a region that had enjoyed three decades of democratic self-rule. This genocidal assault was the culmination of a humanitarian blockade that had deprived the region's Armenian population of food, medicine, fuel, electricity, and other essential goods for nearly 10 months – in brazen defiance of international law.

Since Azerbaijan initiated a 44-day war on Nagorno-Karabakh 2020, 150,000 indigenous Armenians from Artsakh have been ethnically cleansed from their sovereign Armenian territory. We ask the Committee to press the Biden Administration to abandon its reckless policy of false-parity, and, instead, forthrightly condemn Azerbaijan's aggression by taking actions that demonstrate a willingness to hold Baku accountable for its criminal behavior.

This is a crisis the United States had every opportunity to prevent – but instead chose to enable, by recklessly re-authorizing military assistance to Azerbaijan and legitimizing its use of starvation and blockade as a negotiation tactic. This appeasement of Azerbaijan's tyrannical regime came despite well-documented human rights abuses and war crimes against Artsakh's Armenian population – including the torture and execution of prisoners of war, the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, and the systematic destruction of Armenian heritage – as well as Azerbaijan's invasion and occupation of Armenia's sovereign territory.

The oil-rich Aliyev regime must be held accountable, through enforcing statutory prohibitions on security assistance to Azerbaijan and formally investigating its war crimes and human rights violations. These actions must be matched with a robust aid package to meet the pressing humanitarian and developmental needs of Artsakh refugees. In terms of U.S.-Armenia bilateral ties, we seek a fundamental reset in relations that prioritizes the security and viability of Armenia in the face of existential regional threats.

We respectfully submit the following policy recommendations to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the hopes that they will help inform and guide the panel's constructive discourse on U.S. interests in this region.

First and foremost, we call upon the Committee to end U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan (including, but not limited to, Section 333 (Capacity Building), Foreign Military Financing, and International Military Education and Training), via statutory prohibitions, reversal of Presidential waiver authority, and continue full enforcement of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act. In addition, the Departments of State and Defense must meet their statutory reporting requirements – as per the recommendations of the United States Government Accountability Office's (USGAO) recent report – in connection with the Biden Administration's decisions to waive this law - amid Azerbaijan's genocide in Artsakh, occupation of sovereign Armenian territory, illegal detention and abuse of Armenian POWs, and desecration of Christian Armenian holy sites.

We also encourage this Committee to support key legislative initiatives, among them S.Res.540, requesting a report on Azerbaijan's human rights practices pursuant to Section 502B(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act – which prohibits the provision of U.S. security assistance to governments engaged in a consistent pattern of human rights violations. The findings of this report will strengthen the case to cut all military assistance to Azerbaijan and hold other allies, like Turkey, accountable for selling or transferring U.S. arms to Azerbaijan for use against innocent Armenian civilians.

The President's FY25 budget request outlines \$700,000 in IMET assistance to Armenia, which is the exact same level of IMET funding Azerbaijan is set to receive. This continued act of parity needs to end as it continues to give legitimacy to the genocidal actions of Azerbaijan's petro-regime.

We also ask that the Committee conduct oversight of the Administration's low levels of humanitarian assistance to Artsakh's 150,000 refugees. Since the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Artsakh, USAID has reported that it has deployed approximately \$20 million in assistance; however, it remains unclear what level of aid has actually reached families in need. In addition, USAID did not seek guidance or coordinate the disbursement of this aid with government officials from Artsakh, the Human Rights Defender's Office, or other reputable NGOs on the ground who have been serving the Armenian population of Artsakh for decades and are intimately familiar with their needs.

In this regard, the President's FY25 budget states the following: "U.S. assistance will support democratic reforms, strengthen Armenia's independence and energy sovereignty, enhance the rule of law, promote political competition, and combat corruption. U.S.-funded efforts will foster sustainable economic resilience and good governance, beneficiaries of which will include displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh." Refugee assistance is yet again an afterthought. Furthermore, we are concerned about the State Department's inconsistent statements regarding the right of return for the 150,000 Armenian refugees from Artsakh. We're extremely concerned that in statements offered by Secretary Blinken, where he references assistance to support displaced Armenians, he notes that this would be to support the "integration" of the population in Armenia. This is inconsistent with past statements from the Administration supporting the right of Armenians to return to their homes in Artsakh under safe and secure conditions. Supporting the permanent resettlement of refugees in Armenia is an attempt to close the book on the issue of return. As such, any proposed language should explicitly call for support to ensure safe conditions of return.

Therefore, we ask for the following language to be considered for the FY25 budget allocations for Armenia:

Of the funds appropriated by this Act, not less than \$200,000,000 shall be made available under the heading "Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia" to support victims from Artsakh currently residing in the Republic of Armenia, who were forced to flee their ancestral homeland by Azerbaijan's genocidal campaign in 2023 and have the right to return to their homes under international guarantees.

Our current failed U.S. policy in the Caucasus features lectures on democracy to democratic Armenia, ships U.S. tax-payer funded military aid to dictatorial Azerbaijan, and provides almost no assistance at all to at-risk Artsakh refugees. That must change.

As a follow-up to questions asked by Chairman Cardin to Secretary of State Blinken in his November 29, 2023 letter, we seek clarity on two key points: 1) What has been done to support efforts to substantiate and collect evidence regarding the Aliyev regime's war crimes and other atrocities; 2) What steps has the Administration taken to hold Azerbaijani officials accountable for any war crimes, including the application of Global Magnitsky Act sanctions and visa restrictions?

Earlier this month, the Armenian Legal Center filed seven Global Magnitsky Act sanction cases against Azerbaijani officials with the United States Department of State and Treasury. Each case details evidence against more than 40 senior Azerbaijani officials documenting their war crimes and human rights abuses committed during the recent Nagorno Karabakh war. We ask that this committee follow up with the Department of State and impress upon them the importance of investigating these cases and imposing Magnitsky sanctions.

A few weeks ago, the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Mark Libby, visited territories ethnically cleansed and occupied by Azerbaijan, including the city of Shushi – where it was recently revealed that Azerbaijan had destroyed yet another Armenian church and cemetery. The visit came just days after the ambassador, when pressed on whether he would visit the city, state he would "not play part in a propaganda show" – underscoring Washington's inability and unwillingness to hold Azerbaijan accountable for ethnic cleansing, and undermining trust in U.S. diplomacy in the region. This visit also comes after an expressed policy of suspending high level meetings between the U.S. and Azerbaijan while they continue to illegally detain hold Armenian POWs, including at least eight political leaders, invade and occupy Armenian territory, and use coercion and force to impose unilateral territorial concessions on Armenia in the an asymmetric and inequitable "peace" process.

Azerbaijan has little incentive to make peace when it continues to face no accountability for its acts of war. As long as Azerbaijan believes there is more to gain through coercion than through negotiations, Armenia will face a threat to its very existence. A durable, just and equitable peace is not possible in the absence of accountability for war crimes, human rights abuses, and ethnic cleansing. As such, in the interest of deterring war and securing a lasting peace – one that doesn't reward Azerbaijan's genocidal aggression – we implore you to take immediate steps to ensure Azerbaijan faces meaningful consequences for its ethnic cleansing of Artsakh.

Thank you for your kind consideration of our testimony. We stand ready, as always, to support the work of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in strengthening the long and enduring friendship of the American and Armenian peoples.