



Armenian National Committee of America

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Azerbaijan's Territorial Demands Against Armenia: The "Zangezur Corridor"

Background

Since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, Azerbaijan has demanded the establishment of what it refers to as the "Zangezur Corridor" – a contiguous land route linking Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhichevan, and Turkey. While a ceasefire agreement at the conclusion of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war called for the unblocking of regional transportation routes between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it did not contain any provision for the creation of an extraterritorial corridor under Azerbaijani control – something Azerbaijan has since pressed for through the threat and use of force.

In May 2021, Azerbaijan launched a series of unprovoked military incursions into Armenia's sovereign territory – where it now militarily occupies almost 100 square miles of Armenia's southern province of Syunik. In addition to its use of military force to impose its demands on Armenia, Azerbaijan has repeatedly leveled maximalist territorial claims against Armenia – referring to southern Armenia as "Western Azerbaijan", in an effort to legitimize its unabated military aggression.

For Armenia, conceding to a "Zangezur Corridor" under Azerbaijani terms would pose a severe threat to its sovereignty and security. If Azerbaijan were to gain a land corridor with extraterritorial rights—such as control over security or customs—it would effectively cut through Armenian territory and compromise the country's territorial integrity. This would not only undermine Armenia's control over its borders but could also invite future coercion or aggression by strengthening Azerbaijan and Turkey's leverage. As such, Azerbaijan's "Zangezur Corridor" demands do not represent a genuine effort toward regional peace – but rather, an attempt to strengthen Azerbaijan's strategic positioning in the region.

The U.S. Proposal

In recent weeks, U.S. officials – including Ambassador to Turkey Tom Barrack – revealed a proposal for a 100-year lease of approximately 32 km of road through Armenia's Syunik region, which would be managed by an U.S.-based third-party contractor. The aim, according to Washington, was to create a neutral transit link between Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan exclave to break the deadlock in peace talks. Armenian officials have emphatically rejected the plan, citing that Armenian law does not permit leasing sovereign land except for agricultural use, and arguing such an arrangement would undermine Armenia's legal jurisdiction, sovereignty, and control over its territory – core constitutional and legal principles.

In addition to the U.S. lease proposal, Senator Steven Daines (R-MT) – chair of the Europe Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee – recently floated the concept of a broader regional mineral deal tied to the peace initiative. Daines stressed the U.S. interest in enabling a peace deal that would ensure access to Central Asia through overland routes via the South Caucasus – while unlocking Armenia's mineral reserves. For Armenia, this approach not only detracts from efforts to address unresolved humanitarian issues – including the release of Armenian prisoners, and the return of Armenians to their homes in Nagorno-Karabakh – but undermines Armenia's sovereignty over its borders, transportation routes, and strategic mineral reserves, diminishing Armenia's role as an equal stakeholder in peace talks by turning its recognized sovereign territory into a bargaining chip.

Implications for Regional Peace

The Armenian National Committee of America categorically rejects any initiative that undermines or erodes Armenian sovereignty over its internationally recognized territory. The proposed 100-year lease of Syunik's strategic transportation networks and the linked mineral deal raise serious concerns for Armenia's national security – while failing to lay the foundation of a just, durable and dignified peace.

Ceding long-term control over Armenia's critical infrastructure and transport routes to any foreign entity – particularly as a geopolitical concession to Azerbaijan – would only serve to legitimize Azerbaijan's aggression, while failing to establish meaningful guarantees for Armenia's security. Such an arrangement would make Armenia increasingly dependent on external guarantors for its security, while emboldening Azerbaijan to pursue further extraterritorial demands over Armenia's internationally recognized territory.

Furthermore, in light of Azerbaijan's military occupation of sovereign Armenian territory, its continued torture and abuse of Armenian prisoners of war and civilian captives, its destruction of Christian Armenian cultural heritage and civilian property in Nagorno-Karabakh, and its violation of the fundamental right of forcibly displaced Armenians to return to their homes – any agreement that fails to address these unresolved humanitarian issues and eschews justice and accountability would undermine the prospects of a sustainable regional peace, while ensuring Azerbaijan retains the leverage to impose and coerce Armenia into accepting new and escalating demands – as it has consistently done throughout this inequitable peace process.

True and lasting peace in the region must be predicated on justice, accountability and a respect for the fundamental human rights of the 150,000 Armenians forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan. That must begin by ensuring the immediate and unconditional release of Armenian hostages, imposing Global Magnitsky Sanctions against Azerbaijani officials responsible for the unlawful detention and abuse of Armenian detainees, robust guarantees for the protection and preservation of Armenian cultural heritage and civilian property, and a pathway to the safe and secure return of Armenians to Nagorno-Karabakh as guaranteed under international law, and mandated by an order of the International Court of Justice.

