

Statement of Earle D. Litzenberger
Ambassadorial Nominee to Azerbaijan
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 4, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Murphy, and distinguished Members of the Committee: I come before you today, both honored and humbled, to testify as President Trump's nominee to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Pompeo for the confidence they have placed in me. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee and all Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests in Azerbaijan.

I would like to thank my family for supporting, and sharing, my 34-year career in the Foreign Service across much of the globe. My wife, Marianne, and daughter, Ashley, have joined me here today. Our son, Andrew, and daughter-in-law, Tara, unfortunately are unable to be here.

Over the course of my career, I have dedicated myself to advancing U.S. foreign policy interests, promoting U.S. values, and safeguarding our national security. As the Deputy Chief of Mission and – prior to the arrival of Ambassador Kay Bailey Hutchison – Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Mission to NATO, I worked closely with our Allies during the largest reinforcement of NATO's collective defense since the end of the Cold War while promoting more equitable burden sharing in the Alliance.

In my current role as Senior Advisor in the State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, I have worked closely with the Defense Department and the broader U.S. interagency to support Allied and partner nations, and promote security in regions of vital importance to U.S. national security.

Situated astride a millennia-old geographic and cultural crossroads, the South Caucasus is one of these key regions. Azerbaijan – the only country to border both Iran and Russia – is an important U.S. partner. Our relationship is important not just to our two countries, but to Azerbaijan's neighbors and the wider region. We stand only to gain from a stable, democratic, peaceful, and prosperous Azerbaijan strategically linked to the United States and our European friends and Allies.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, our cooperation with Azerbaijan has centered on three interrelated and equally important areas:

security; energy and economic growth; and democracy and governance. If confirmed, I will invigorate America's principled efforts in each of these areas and work energetically with all of our partners to resolve the challenges that the South Caucasus region continues to face.

Azerbaijan has long been a stalwart partner on international security. After the attacks of September 11, then-Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev was among the first to extend support and to offer close cooperation to combat terrorism. That cooperation continues today. I saw firsthand Azerbaijan's contributions to peace and security in Afghanistan while serving as NATO's Deputy Senior Civilian Representative in Kabul from 2013 to 2014. Earlier this year, Azerbaijan stepped up its commitment to NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, where it now has 120 service members deployed shoulder-to-shoulder with U.S. and Allied personnel. Azerbaijan also supports the international community's commitment to Afghanistan as part of the Northern Distribution Network for supporting U.S. and NATO operations. If confirmed, I will sustain these crucial aspects of our security relationship and work to enhance cooperation in areas such as border security, counter-proliferation, and countering human trafficking.

The United States and Azerbaijan also have enjoyed more than twenty years of cooperation on energy security that has produced real wins for the longstanding U.S. policy of diversifying energy routes and sources for European and global markets. At the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan in the late 1990s, I was directly involved in our effort to support the establishment of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, an early success for energy diplomacy that brought Azerbaijani and Central Asian oil to Western markets. Today, the soon-to-be-realized Southern Gas Corridor, stretching from Azerbaijan to Italy, is more important than ever in advancing European energy security. If confirmed, I will continue to work with Azerbaijan to realize the full potential of its energy resources, expand the Southern Gas Corridor, and bolster critical energy infrastructure protection.

At the same time, if confirmed, I will support Azerbaijan's efforts to diversify its economy away from oil and gas. Azerbaijan is already a significant export market for U.S. airplanes, farm equipment, machinery, and other goods and services, but we can create even more opportunities for U.S. companies. If confirmed, I will promote a level playing field and transparent business environment to – in the words of Secretary Pompeo – “foster good, productive capitalism” so that American firms can succeed, “local communities can flourish, and bilateral partnerships can grow.”

Azerbaijan's integration with the West can and must go beyond energy pipelines, exports, and security cooperation. The United States must also continue to work closely with Azerbaijan on advancing democratic and open economic principles through strong rule of law, transparency, and the protection of human rights and dignity. It is in Azerbaijan's interest to undertake these reforms, both to ensure long-term stability and to unleash the full potential of its people and economy. Democracies thrive only when bolstered by an independent judiciary, respect for the rule of law, a free media, a vibrant civil society, pluralism, democratic electoral processes, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As affirmed in the President's National Security Strategy, these principles form the foundation of our most enduring partnerships. As Azerbaijan advances along this path, our bilateral relationship will grow even stronger. As Deputy Chief of Mission in Kyrgyzstan and Serbia, and throughout my career, I have worked to promote these core U.S. values by helping countries progress in their transition to democratic governance. If confirmed, I will bring all of these experiences to bear in developing a robust dialogue on these issues with Azerbaijan based on mutual respect and confidence. I will also seek to meet with a wide range of Azerbaijani society, in order to share American values and learn more about Azerbaijan's rich history and culture.

Finally, but no less importantly, Azerbaijan is a key player in the region's peace and stability. There is no higher priority for achieving a more secure and prosperous future for the South Caucasus than the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States continues to work with all sides to achieve a peaceful, lasting negotiated settlement of the conflict based on the principles of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, including the non-use of force or threat of force, territorial integrity, and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples. If confirmed, I will support the Administration's commitment to achieving this goal.

On the recent centennial anniversary of the founding of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, Secretary Pompeo looked forward to deepening America's cooperation with Azerbaijan on "security, energy, and democratic governance" with the aim of "further [strengthening] ties between our countries." If confirmed, I will have the great honor of advancing these objectives while safeguarding American citizens and ensuring responsible stewardship of U.S. taxpayer dollars. Thank you for considering my nomination, and I look forward to your questions.