

The Armenian American Community Priorities and  
U.S. Policy Towards Israel and Azerbaijan

presented by

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Armenian National Committee of America  
U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing  
Nomination of the Hon. Jacob J. Lew as U.S. Ambassador to Israel  
Wednesday, October 18, 2023 – 10:30 AM

The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) calls on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to ensure that Ambassador-designate Jacob J. Lew, if confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to Israel, engages constructively with the Government of Israel on three pressing matters of standing U.S. policy.

**Opposing Genocide Denial**

Consistent with the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by President Biden and both houses of Congress,<sup>1</sup> our U.S. Ambassador should impress upon the leadership of Israel, a nation of genocide survivors, the moral imperative of ending its denial of the Armenian Genocide and joining with the American people in honest recognition and remembrance of this crime.<sup>2</sup> Having rejected Turkey's longstanding gag-rule against U.S. genocide recognition, we bear a moral duty – consistent with H.Res.296 and S.Res.150 – to consistently confront the denial of the Armenian Genocide or any other genocide.

**Promoting Regional Peace**

Consistent with U.S. policy of promoting the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts – including in the South Caucasus – our U.S. Ambassador should call upon Israel to cease any and all arms sales or transfers to Azerbaijan, a belligerent state guilty of genocide against Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), that continues to occupy sovereign Armenian territory. Reliable reports indicate that up to 70% of Azerbaijan's arsenal is sourced in Israel,<sup>3</sup> and that these weapons – among them illegal cluster munitions, missile systems and unmanned aerial vehicles – played a central role in Azerbaijan's subjugation and ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the perpetration of war crimes against Artsakh's population, including targeting civilian infrastructure, churches, schools, and medical facilities.<sup>4</sup> Engaging with Israel to ensure the

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<sup>1</sup> H.Res. 296, 116th Congress: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-116hres296ih/pdf/BILLS-116hres296ih.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Times of Israel*, After Biden acknowledges Armenian genocide, Israel stops short of doing the same, 04/25/21  
<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-recognizes-terrible-suffering-of-armenians-doesnt-use-term-genocide>

<sup>3</sup> *Haaretz*, 92 Flights From Israeli Base Reveal Arms Exports to Azerbaijan, 03/06/2023

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/security-aviation/2023-03-06/ty-article-magazine/.premium/92-flights-from-israeli-base-reveal-arms-exports-to-azerbaijan/00000185-fd3d-d96e-adeff3dc38e0000>

<sup>4</sup> *Human Rights Watch*, "Azerbaijan: Unlawful Strikes on Nagorno-Karabakh", 11/12/2021  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/11/azerbaijan-unlawful-strikes-nagorno-karabakh>

immediate suspension of arms transfers to Azerbaijan is all the more urgent given President Aliyev's threats to invade and occupy southern Armenia.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. has both a moral and legal duty to ensure that the recipients of U.S. military assistance comply with international humanitarian law, particularly when it comes to the sale and transfer of arms. As a party to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict resolution process, the United States has a responsibility to ensure that our military partners are not undermining long-term prospects for peace by pouring fuel on raging regional fires.<sup>6</sup> The United States must also ensure any Israeli military technology that is jointly developed with or subsidized by the U.S. is not used in a way that further undermines U.S. interests, promotes regional instability, or violates international law.

### **Protecting Faith-Based Minorities**

Consistent with our core American commitment to international religious freedom and minority rights, our U.S. Ambassador should raise with the Israeli government the growing number of violations of the rights of Armenian and other faith-based and ethnic groups in Jerusalem. According to the U.S. Department of State's Report on Human Rights Practices<sup>7</sup> and International Religious Freedom Report on Israel,<sup>8</sup> there have been numerous cases of extremists spitting on and physically assaulting Christian clergy and pilgrims – including Armenians.<sup>9</sup> Such hate crimes need to be confronted wherever they take place. Furthermore, consistent with the U.S. commitment to protecting religious freedoms, all faith-based groups must be granted the right to practice their religion in the Old City without fear of harassment, intimidation and persecution.

In light of Azerbaijan's genocide of Artsakh's 120,000 indigenous Christian Armenians, amid Baku's occupation of Armenian soil, and given President Aliyev's threats against sovereign Armenian territory,<sup>10</sup> starting with Syunik, we call upon this Committee to engage constructively with Israeli leaders to prevent further violence against the Armenian people.

We thank the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on these issues of urgent concern to Armenian Americans, our community allies, and coalition partners.

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<sup>5</sup> *POLITICO*, Blinken warned lawmakers Azerbaijan may invade Armenia in coming weeks, 10/13/2023  
<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/10/13/blinken-warned-lawmakers-azerbaijan-may-invade-armenia-in-coming-weeks-00121500>

<sup>6</sup> *Times of Israel*, Israeli Weapons Quietly Helped Azerbaijan Retake Nagorno-Karabakh, 10/05/2023  
<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-weapons-quietly-helped-azerbaijan-retake-nagorno-karabakh-sources-data/>

<sup>7</sup> 2022 U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Israel, West Bank and Gaza:  
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/israel-west-bank-and-gaza/>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom Report: Israel, West Bank:  
<https://www.state.gov/report/custom/7dccc5dc7b/>

<sup>9</sup> *The Jerusalem Post*, Armenians in Jerusalem live in the crosshairs of hate, 02/17/23  
<https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-731773>

<sup>10</sup> *The Guardian*, 'Azerbaijan is hungry for land': Armenians fear country will seek to grab more territory,  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/30/azerbaijan-is-hungry-for-land-armenians-fear-country-will-seek-to-grab-more-territory>