

The Armenian American Community Priorities and
U.S. Humanitarian and Security Assistance Policy

presented by

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In light of the unfolding refugee crisis in Armenia as a result of Azerbaijan’s ethnic cleansing of Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh), and the imminent threat to Armenia’s security at the hands of Azerbaijan’s authoritarian regime, the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) urges the allocation of security assistance to Armenia and the provision of additional humanitarian assistance commensurate with the acute needs of those forcibly displaced by Azerbaijan in the upcoming supplemental funding bill.

On September 19th, Azerbaijan launched an unprovoked military offensive against Nagorno Karabakh, 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 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, and the ruling of the International Court of Justice.¹

As a result, Armenia now faces an urgent humanitarian crisis as it seeks to resettle those forcibly displaced as a result of Azerbaijan’s genocide of Artsakh. Furthermore, Azerbaijan – emboldened by the international community’s failure to impose any material consequences on its aggression – now threatens sovereign Armenian territory.²

This is a crisis the United States had every opportunity to prevent – but instead chose to embolden by recklessly re-authorizing military assistance to Azerbaijan and legitimizing its use of starvation and blockade as a negotiating tactic. This appeasement of Azerbaijan’s tyrannical regime came despite well-documented human rights abuses and war crimes against Nagorno Karabakh’s Armenian population – including the torture and execution of prisoners of war,³ and the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure⁴ – as well as Azerbaijan’s invasion and occupation of Armenia’s sovereign territory in September 2022.

¹ *International Court of Justice*, Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 22 February 2023: <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20230222-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>

² *POLITICO*, Blinken warned lawmakers Azerbaijan may invade Armenia in coming weeks, October 13, 2023: <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/10/13/blinken-warned-lawmakers-azerbaijan-may-invade-armenia-in-coming-weeks-00121500>

³ *Human Rights Watch*, Azerbaijan: Armenian POWs Abused in Custody, March 19, 2021: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/19/azerbaijan-armenian-pows-abused-custody>

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

Immediately prior to Azerbaijan’s assault on Nagorno Karabakh, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Ambassador Yuri Kim testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, stating that “the United States will not countenance any action or effort—short-term or long-term—to ethnically cleanse or commit other atrocities against the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh.”⁵ Four days later, Azerbaijan did just that.

During the White House address in which he announced this supplemental funding request, President Biden noted, “when dictators don’t pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and death and more destruction.”⁶ Today, Azerbaijan – having not been held accountable for its horrific crimes against Nagorno Karabakh’s Armenians, or its breach of the clear red-line set by Ambassador Yuri Kim – threatens Armenia’s sovereign territory. Unabated and unrepentant in his aggression, Azerbaijan’s dictator Ilham Aliyev has vowed to establish a contiguous land bridge connecting Azerbaijan to Turkey through Armenia – known as the “Zangezur Corridor” – “whether Armenia wants it or not.”⁷

The stated goal of this supplemental funding request is to support our democratic partners in the face of growing authoritarian threats. Armenia – as one of the few remaining democracies in a region dominated by authoritarian regimes in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Russia – is particularly vulnerable.

In the face of Azerbaijan’s constant aggression, Armenia has historically been forced to rely exclusively on Russia to meet its security needs. Russia has long been the only power capable of exerting influence in the region – but its failure to prevent or deter Azerbaijan’s occupation of Armenian territory in September 2022, or its ethnic cleansing of Nagorno Karabakh’s Armenians last month, has left Armenia looking for more reliable partners.

Last month, amid joint military exercises between Turkey and Azerbaijan, France announced the sale of defense equipment to Armenia in recognition of the urgent security threat Armenia faces.⁸ There is a historic opportunity for the United States to follow the lead of its NATO ally in ensuring Armenia has the means to defend itself against further aggression by expansionist authoritarian regimes. The ANCA urges the provision of no less than \$10,000,000 in foreign military financing (FMF) assistance to Armenia to meet the country’s immediate security needs and deter impending aggression by Azerbaijan’s authoritarian regime.

The ANCA welcomes the commitment by Secretary of State Antony Blinken in his testimony to the Senate Appropriations Committee to use this supplemental funding to support the needs of those in Armenia impacted by conflict.⁹ In late September, USAID Administrator Samantha Power visited

⁵ Statement of Yuri Kim Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, September 14, 2023: https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/6667fb89-a975-4fab-d8b8-e8875312e37e/091423_Kim_Testimony.pdf

⁶ Remarks by President Biden on the United States’ Response to Hamas’s Terrorist Attacks Against Israel and Russia’s Ongoing Brutal War Against Ukraine, October 20, 2023:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/20/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-united-states-response-to-hamass-terrorist-attacks-against-israel-and-russias-ongoing-brutal-war-against-ukraine/>

⁷ *Washington Post*, After Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan eyes a strategic strip of Armenia, October 11, 2023:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/11/azerbaijan-armenia-karabakh-nakhchivan-corridor/>

⁸ *Le Monde*, France announces sale of weapons to Armenia, October 23, 2023:

https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/23/france-announces-sale-of-defensive-weapons-to-armenia_6197013_4.html

⁹ Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken Senate Appropriations Committee FY 2024 National Security Supplemental Opening Statement October 31, 2023: https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/download_testimony9.pdf

Armenia and announced the provision of \$11,500,000 in humanitarian assistance to those displaced as a result of Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing of Nagorno Karabakh – amounting to approximately \$95 per person.¹⁰ This amount is wholly insufficient to meet the dire needs of a population displaced due to the international community's abject failure to constrain Azerbaijan's aggression. As such, the ANCA requests that additional humanitarian assistance to Armenia allocated through this supplemental funding bill go well beyond what has already been allocated – and be commensurate with the acute needs of those forced from their homes by Azerbaijan.

Furthermore, any humanitarian assistance should also support the long-term goal of ensuring the right to return for the 150,000 Armenians displaced since the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War, with their safety and security guaranteed through a permanent international monitoring mechanism.

Allocating humanitarian and security assistance to Armenia in this supplemental funding request can help rectify the policy of appeasement that has come to characterize the U.S. relationship with Azerbaijan – one that has treated the Armenian people as the collateral damage of misguided geopolitical priorities and undermined the security and stability of one of the region's only democracies. The failure to do so will not only risk condemning Armenia to the whims of Azerbaijan's tyranny – but signal to autocrats that our commitment to defending human rights and democracy will not be upheld universally, but only when politically convenient.

We thank the Senate Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on this issue of urgent concern to Armenian Americans, our community allies, and coalition partners.

¹⁰ USAID, United States Announces More Than \$11.5 Million in Humanitarian Assistance for South Caucasus Region, September 26, 2023: <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/sep-26-2023-united-states-announces-more-115-million-humanitarian-assistance-south-caucasus-region>