

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

presented by  
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For the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe  
Hearing: The Future of Nagorno-Karabakh  
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Following Azerbaijan’s 10-month humanitarian blockade of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and expulsion of the region’s 120,000 indigenous Armenian inhabitants, the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) urges immediate action be taken to hold Azerbaijan accountable for its brazen act of ethnic cleansing, allocate humanitarian assistance to address the dire refugee crisis Armenia is facing, provide security assistance to Armenia to deter further aggression by Azerbaijan, and support the internationally guaranteed right to return for the Armenians of Artsakh.

**Holding Azerbaijan Accountable for Ethnic Cleansing**

On September 19th, Azerbaijan launched an 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 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 rulings of the International Court of Justice.<sup>1</sup>

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 negotiating 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,<sup>2</sup> and the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure<sup>3</sup> – as well as Azerbaijan’s invasion and occupation of Armenia’s sovereign territory in September 2022.

Immediately prior to Azerbaijan’s assault on Artsakh, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Ambassador Yuri Kim testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,<sup>4</sup> 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.” The failure to hold Azerbaijan accountable for breaching this clear red line will not only embolden further aggression against Armenia, but undermine the credibility of Washington’s commitment to confronting authoritarianism.

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<sup>1</sup> *International Court of Justice*, February 22, 2023: <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20230222-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Human Rights Watch*, Armenian POWs Abused in Custody, March 19, 2021:  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/19/azerbaijan-armenian-pows-abused-custody>

<sup>3</sup> *Human Rights Watch*, Azerbaijan: Unlawful Strikes in Nagorno Karabakh, November 12, 2020  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/11/azerbaijan-unlawful-strikes-nagorno-karabakh>

<sup>4</sup> 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](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/6667fb89-a975-4fab-d8b8-e8875312e37e/091423_Kim_Testimony.pdf)

**ANCA Recommendation:** Following the U.S. Senate’s passage of S.3000 – which prohibits the President from waiving Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act for the next two years – the House Foreign Affairs Committee should proceed with ensuring the swift passage of a companion bill to cut military assistance to Azerbaijan.<sup>5</sup> The ANCA also urges the Biden Administration to immediately, unconditionally, permanently and publicly enforce restrictions on military assistance to Azerbaijan pursuant to Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act, and impose Global Magnitsky Sanctions against Azerbaijani officials complicit in human rights abuses.

### **Humanitarian Assistance to Armenia**

In late September, USAID Administrator Samantha Power visited Armenia and announced the provision of \$11,500,000 in humanitarian assistance to those displaced as a result of Azerbaijan’s ethnic cleansing of Artsakh – amounting to approximately \$95 per person.<sup>6</sup> 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. While the ANCA welcomes the commitment by this Administration to ensure humanitarian assistance is allocated to Armenia to address the acute refugee crisis resulting from Azerbaijan's aggression in the upcoming national security supplemental,<sup>7</sup> the amount provided must be considerably more than what has already been announced.<sup>8</sup>

**ANCA Recommendation:** The U.S. must extend additional humanitarian assistance to Armenia, aligning with the urgent needs of those displaced from their homes by Azerbaijan. We encourage this support to be allocated in future supplemental funding bills. The immediate requirements of the Armenian population of Artsakh, seeking refuge in Armenia, encompass various essential services including psychosocial support, trauma therapy, medical assistance for individuals with disabilities, permanent shelter for families ahead of the impending winter, maternity care, and consistent access to basic human necessities.

Any assistance provided should also support programs that will enhance the long-term economic security of Armenian refugees as they work towards rebuilding their lives. This should include ensuring fair employment practices, access to education and vocational training, as well as the development of regional infrastructure and promoting long-term sustainable development goals.

### **Securing Armenia From Further Aggression by Azerbaijan**

While the Biden Administration continues to express optimism in the prospects of peace in the South Caucasus, Azerbaijani officials – far from satiated by their territorial expansionism – continue to make inflammatory territorial claims against sovereign Armenian territory.

Azerbaijani forces already occupy over 215 square kilometers of Armenian territory since their military incursion into the southern provinces of the country in September 2022. Azerbaijani leaders now refer to

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<sup>5</sup> S.3000 - Armenian Protection Act of 202: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/3000/text>

<sup>6</sup> 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>

<sup>7</sup> 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](https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/download_testimony9.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Statement of Administration Policy, Israel Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024, October 31, 2023: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Israel-Security-Supplemental-Appropriations-Act-SAP.pdf>

Armenia's sovereign territory as "western Azerbaijan",<sup>9</sup> and have vowed to establish what it refers to as the "Zangezur Corridor" – a contiguous land connection through Armenia to Turkey – "whether Armenia likes it or not".<sup>10</sup> Just recently, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry released a statement demanding Armenia cede to Azerbaijan eight villages within the sovereign territory of Armenia that had been nominally administered by Azerbaijan during Soviet occupation.<sup>11</sup>

Azerbaijan's aggressive posturing against Armenia and threats of further military action are supported by Turkey, which continues to play a destabilizing role in the region.

Turkey is one of Azerbaijan's major weapons suppliers, arming Azerbaijan with Bayraktar TB-2 UAVs used to target civilian populations during both the 2020 and 2023 assaults on Artsakh. These drones deployed dual-use technology manufactured in the U.S.<sup>12</sup> Turkey also deployed mercenaries from Syria and Libya – including those with known ties to the Islamic State – to Azerbaijan during the 2020 Artsakh War, in violation of international conventions against the use of mercenaries and terror financing.<sup>13</sup>

Earlier this month, Turkey deployed NATO F-16 fighter aircraft in Azerbaijan as part of ongoing training exercises with Azerbaijan.<sup>14</sup> The last time Turkey deployed F-16s to the region, it immediately preceded the 2020 Artsakh War – where the jets were used in a reconnaissance capacity during Azerbaijan's assault, in what may amount to a violation of end-use agreements.<sup>15</sup>

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.<sup>16</sup> While Armenia has historically been forced to rely exclusively on Russia to meet its security needs, Russia's failure to prevent or deter Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing of Artsakh last month or its ongoing occupation of sovereign Armenian territory has left Armenia looking for more reliable partners. There is a historic opportunity for the United States to follow the lead of its NATO ally France in ensuring Armenia has the means to defend itself against further aggression by expansionist authoritarian regimes.

**ANCA Recommendation:** The U.S. must allocate 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 also urges the United States to engage proactively in deterring further Azerbaijani aggression by following NATO ally Canada's recent decision to join the European Union's Monitoring Mission in Armenia (EUMA), which patrols the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Furthermore, the United States should

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<sup>9</sup> *The Guardian*, "Azerbaijan is hungry for land": Armenians fear country will seek to grab more territory", September 30, 2023: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/30/azerbaijan-is-hungry-for-land-armenians-fear-country-will-look-to-grab-more-territory>

<sup>10</sup> *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/>

<sup>11</sup> No:631/23, Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the occasion of 8 November – Victory Day: <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/no63123>

<sup>12</sup> *ProPublica*, "The Drone Problem": How the U.S. Has Struggled to Curb Turkey, a Key Exporter of Armed Drones", July 12, 2022: <https://www.propublica.org/article/bayraktar-tb2-drone-turkey-exports>

<sup>13</sup> Mercenaries in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone must be withdrawn – UN experts: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/11/mercenaries-and-around-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-zone-must-be-withdrawn-un>

<sup>14</sup> Anadolu, "Turkish, Azerbaijani forces hit 'enemy targets' during Mustafa Kemal Atatürk-2023 drills", October 24, 2023: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/turkish-azerbaijani-forces-hit-enemy-targets-during-mustafa-kemal-ataturk-2023-drills/3030789>

<sup>15</sup> *The Drive*, "Satellite Images Confirm Turkish F-16 Fighters Secretly Deployed To Azerbaijan", October 7, 2020: <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/36955/satellite-images-confirm-turkish-f-16-fighters-secretly-deployed-to-azerbaijan>

<sup>16</sup> *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](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/23/france-announces-sale-of-defensive-weapons-to-armenia_6197013_4.html)

look to establish a diplomatic presence in the southern Armenian province of Syunik, as France did by opening a consulate in the region as a tangible demonstration of its commitment to Armenia's security.<sup>17</sup>

The U.S. should also ensure NATO ally Turkey does not destabilize the region further by investigating potential violations of arms export law and end-use agreements related to Turkey's participation in the 2020 Artsakh War, and suspending the sale and transfer of F-16s to Ankara.

### **Supporting an Internationally Guaranteed Right to Return**

Under international law, refugees are guaranteed a legal right to return to the country from which they were displaced. Following the forced displacement of over 150,000 Armenians from Artsakh since Azerbaijan's assault on the region in 2020, it is imperative that the United States proactively support the right of Armenians to return to Artsakh with robust security guarantees under the auspices of an international mission.

Azerbaijan has consistently demonstrated that it cannot be trusted with the wellbeing of Artsakh's Armenian population. The first Artsakh War in the 1990s began after organized anti-Armenian pogroms resulted in the forced displacement of half a million Armenians from Azerbaijan. Since then, the Azerbaijani government has engaged in the state-sponsored dehumanization of Armenians, the systematic destruction, desecration and appropriation of Armenian cultural heritage, and promulgation of racist and degrading rhetoric about Armenians at the highest levels of government.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Azerbaijan's humanitarian blockade of Artsakh and weaponization of hunger to impose its demands on the Armenian people by force – followed by the expulsion of the region's entire population – makes it abundantly clear that Azerbaijan has no interest in peaceful coexistence.

**ANCA Recommendation:** In line with recommendations by organizations including Human Rights Watch,<sup>19</sup> the ANCA urges the United States to engage with international partners to establish an international monitoring mechanism – through the passage of a United Nations Security Council Resolution – that ensures the safety and security of the Armenian people who seek to return to their homes, as guaranteed under international law.

### **Investigating Human Rights Abuses**

Azerbaijan has engaged in a pattern of human rights abuses against the Armenians of Artsakh during and since the 2020 Artsakh War. These include the ongoing illegal detention and torture of Armenian prisoners of war (POWs), civilians and political leaders, the summary execution of prisoners and hostages, the deliberate targeting of schools, medical facilities, homes and churches, and the use of prohibited weapons including cluster munitions and white phosphorous. Furthermore, international legal experts have noted that by imposing conditions calculated to bring about the destruction of Artsakh's Armenian population through deprivation of access to food, fuel, medicine, electricity and other essential

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<sup>17</sup> *Interfax*, France to appoint military attache in Yerevan, plans to open consulate in Syunik region, September 27, 2023: <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/94949/>

<sup>18</sup> 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/azerbaijan/>

<sup>19</sup> *Human Rights Watch*, Guarantee Right to Return to Nagorno Karabakh, October 5, 2023: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/05/guarantee-right-return-nagorno-karabakh>

goods – Azerbaijan’s humanitarian blockade of Artsakh constituted an act of genocide under the United Nations Genocide Convention.<sup>20</sup>

**ANCA Recommendation:** The House Foreign Affairs Committee should immediately mark up House Resolution 735 calling for an investigation into Azerbaijan’s human rights practices pursuant to Section 502B(c) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and assert its oversight role over U.S. military assistance to Azerbaijan.<sup>21</sup> The U.S. must also work to secure the immediate release of Armenian POWs unlawfully held by Azerbaijan, and amnesty for the illegally detained members of Artsakh’s political leadership.

## **Conclusions**

During his recent address from the Oval Office, President Biden reaffirmed Washington’s commitment to confronting authoritarian expansionism – asserting that “when dictators don’t pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and death and destruction.”<sup>22</sup> Yet in the wake of Azerbaijan’s ethnic cleansing of Artsakh’s 120,000 Armenians, not only has the U.S. refused to make Azerbaijan pay a price for its aggression – it has rewarded Azerbaijan’s behavior with impunity and the continued provision of military assistance. In doing so, the United States 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.

In an era where the principles of democracy, human rights and rules-based order are under threat by authoritarian regimes across the world, the U.S. cannot afford to allow Azerbaijan to escape responsibility for its crimes against humanity. The failure to hold Azerbaijan accountable would not only embolden Baku amid its threats toward sovereign Armenia – it would undermine any confidence in Washington’s supposed commitment to human rights and democracy as a tenet of its foreign policy, and demonstrate that confronting the threat of authoritarianism is only a priority when geopolitically expedient.

It is imperative the United States hold Azerbaijan accountable for its ethnic cleansing of Artsakh, provide humanitarian support to aid the victims of the genocidal aggression a misguided U.S. foreign policy has enabled, secure Armenia against the threats this Administration has emboldened, and ensure the right to return of Artsakh’s Armenians backed by robust international guarantees that have long been denied to this vulnerable population.

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

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<sup>20</sup> Expert Opinion on Genocide Against Armenians by Former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Luis Moreno Ocampo, August 7, 2023: [https://luismorenoocampo.com/lmo\\_en/report-armenia/](https://luismorenoocampo.com/lmo_en/report-armenia/)

<sup>21</sup> House Resolution 735: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-resolution/735/text>

<sup>22</sup> 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-hamas-terrorist-attacks-against-israel-and-russia-ongoing-brutal-war-against-ukraine/>