

The Armenian American Community and  
U.S. Policy Priorities in the Caucasus

presented by

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“Assessing U.S. Policy in the Caucasus”

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Thank you, Chairman Menendez and Ranking Member Risch. We are grateful for this Committee’s strong leadership on constructive U.S. engagement in the Caucasus and its enduring support for the national security and democratic aspirations of the Armenian nation.

In the wake of Azerbaijan’s 2020 ethnic-cleansing of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh), and amid Baku’s ongoing occupation of sovereign Armenian territory, we ask the Committee to press the Biden Administration to abandon its reckless policy of false-parity, and, instead, forthrightly condemn Azerbaijan’s aggression.

The oil-rich Aliyev regime must be held accountable, through the immediate cessation of U.S. military aid and the investigation of its invasions, atrocities, and war crimes. These actions must be matched with a robust aid package to meet pressing humanitarian and developmental needs in Artsakh. In terms of U.S.-Armenia bilateral ties, we seek a paradigm shift in relations that prioritizes the security and viability of Armenia and Artsakh in the face of existential regional threats.

We respectfully submit the following policy recommendations to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the hopes that they will help inform and guide the panel’s constructive discourse on U.S. interests in this region.

First and foremost, we call upon the Committee to end U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan (including, but not limited to, Section 333 (Capacity Building), Foreign Military Financing, and International Military Education and Training), via statutory prohibitions, reversal of Presidential waiver authority, and the full enforcement of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act. In addition, the Departments of State and Defense must meet their statutory reporting requirements – as per the recommendations of the General Accountability Office’s recent report – in connection with the Biden Administration’s decisions to waive this law, despite Azerbaijan ethnically cleansing Artsakh, occupying Armenia, illegally detaining and abusing of Armenian POWs, and desecrating Christian Armenian holy sites.

We also ask that the Committee conduct oversight of the Administration’s decision not to provide desperately needed, direct U.S. humanitarian assistance to Artsakh, where the at-risk Armenian population is facing continued aggression and chronic water, energy, healthcare, and food insecurity. The United States should never enforce an Azerbaijani veto against American humanitarian aid to vulnerable Armenians in Artsakh. Congress should appropriate no less than \$50 million for programs within Artsakh.

As a follow up to questions asked by Chairman Menendez, but not answered by Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, during a July 21, 2021 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, we seek clarity on two key points: 1) Has the Administration undertaken any investigation into the discovery of as many as ten U.S. components in the Turkish Bayraktar UAVs used by Azerbaijan to attack civilians in Artsakh as potential violations of U.S. arms export control restrictions and other U.S. and international laws, and; 2) Has the Administration investigated reports that Azerbaijan used prohibited munitions (white phosphorus, cluster bombs) and deployed Turkish-recruited mercenaries from Syria against Artsakh?

With regard to cultural preservation and religious freedom, we encourage the Committee to ask the Biden Administration if it has provided funding, access to satellite imagery, or other assistance to academic, civil society, and other groups monitoring, preserving and protecting the rich Armenian Christian

heritage across Artsakh, including areas currently under the control of the Azerbaijani military?

In the wake of U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide, we ask this Committee to determine how Congressional and White House affirmation has actually been reflected in Biden Administration policy, with a special focus on American diplomatic efforts to end Ankara's denials and obstruction of justice for this crime.

We encourage this Committee to support key legislative initiatives, among them S.Res.797, condemning Azerbaijan's aggression and calling for an end to U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan. In terms of the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, conferees should include 1) the Cardenas-Schiff-Sherman Amendment (introduced in the Senate as #SA 6441), requiring an investigation of Azerbaijani war crimes (U.S. parts in Turkish drones, foreign mercenaries, prohibited munitions, abuse of prisoners of war), and; 2) the Pappas-Pallone Amendment (Senate versions: #SA 5754 and #SA 6345) placing restrictions on F-16 sales to Turkey.

As the Committee considers President Biden's nominees for U.S. Ambassador to Armenia and Azerbaijan, we strongly recommend a focus, during the confirmation process, on strengthening Armenia's security and holding Azerbaijan accountable. U.S. policy toward Armenia must align with the security and viability of Armenia and Artsakh in the face of existential regional threats, while U.S. policy on Azerbaijan should prioritize accountability for its past and ongoing crimes. Our current flawed U.S. policy in the Caucasus offers lectures on democracy to democratic Armenia, ships U.S. tax-payer funded military aid to dictatorial Azerbaijan, and provides no assistance at all to at-risk Artsakh. That has to change.

Thank you for your kind consideration of our testimony. We stand ready, as always, to support the work of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to strengthen the long and enduring friendship of the American and Armenian peoples.

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