

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2019

Hon. Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Hon. Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretaries Pompeo and Esper:

Thank you for your response to our letter dated September 27, 2019 regarding security assistance to Azerbaijan and the subsequent staff-level meeting that took place on November 13. We have several outstanding concerns relating to the issue of parity in financial and military assistance between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

We agree that the United States must continue to counter international terrorism and support operational readiness of U.S. forces in the Middle East and South Asia. However, we disagree with your assertion that the \$102 million in security aid to Azerbaijan “will neither undermine efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, nor be used for offensive purposes against Armenia.”

Our concern is that the size and scope of this aid package will allow Azerbaijan to increase its defense spending in other areas, including those that add to their capacity to project force against Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh. And indeed, Azerbaijan’s military spending has continued to increase rapidly, up 3.7 percent in 2018 compared to the previous year. Its 2019 military budget appears to have increased by an additional 4.6 percent.

Without question, the increase of security assistance to Azerbaijan creates an imbalance in the region and ignores a twenty-year precedent in U.S. foreign policy. We are concerned that rewarding Armenia’s autocratic neighbor with this windfall at such a time of historic change in Armenia sends negative signals about the importance we place on democratic values. Returning to parity in military assistance is the only way the U.S. will be able to retain its credibility as a regional power capable of bringing Azerbaijan and Armenia together.

We request the Department of State and Department of Defense provide Armenia with training and equipment to build partner capacity that will help secure its borders and create military parity in funding with Azerbaijan. This funding would increase Armenia’s capacity for counterterrorism, counter-illicit drug trafficking, and weapons of mass destruction interdiction operations – especially on its southern border with Iran. We also ask for robust funding of confidence building measures on each side of the border between Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh, and Armenia – including those that would implement the 2015 Royce-Engel Peace Proposal – to establish a clearer pathway to peace for all parties in this conflict.

Additionally, we request a meeting between Members of Congress and the appropriate State and Defense Department officials to discuss these issues in full. We look forward to your prompt reply to this request.

Sincerely,


FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress


JACKIE SPEIER
Member of Congress


ADAM B. SCHIFF
Member of Congress