

Outside Witness Testimony for FY2016 for the Record
by Bedir Memmedli, CPA
Co-founder and board director, U.S. Azeris Network (USAN), Washington, D.C.
Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

I am grateful for the opportunity to submit a testimony on behalf of the Azerbaijani-American community and our grassroots organization, which wants and promotes fair and needs-driven foreign assistance, based on three important criteria:

- 1) Allied relationship of the recipient state with the U.S;
- 2) The recipient nation must have a demonstrated and certified necessity and need to be able to absorb the aid;
- 3) Legality of the aid and compliance with the U.S. and international laws.

We are of opinion that there is a great imbalance in the U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan vs. Armenia. Azerbaijan, a victim of Armenian armed aggression and occupation, always gets much less than the smaller, but very aggressive Armenia. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), since 1992, Azerbaijan has got a total of \$1 billion in U.S. aid, while Armenia got over \$2.2 billion. This is despite the fact that Azerbaijan is more than twice the size and population, and has several times the size of refugee/IDPs who were expelled from their homes as a result of Armenia's ethnic cleansing.

Furthermore, in the light of the ongoing occupation of the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan which runs against the fundamental principles of international law, we believe the US Congress should make sure that there is no direct military aid to Armenia. The direct military assistance to Armenia not only helps it maintain the occupation of the Azerbaijani territories, but also misuses the US tax payers' money to boost Russian-led military alliance – Collective Security Treaty Organization, to which Armenia is a full-fledged member. In this context, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Armenia is the only country in the South Caucasus which hosts the Russian military base with a lease up to 2044.

The other issue that Azerbaijani Americans has been very vocal about over years is the US humanitarian assistance to the victims of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict. Regrettably, the US assistance has been solely directed to Armenia-occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region under this heading. In previous years, this issue has spurred much controversy and resentment among Azerbaijani community of the occupied territories and Azerbaijanis all over the world since it unfairly favored one side over the other one. But for the last two years, the Congress established a compromise solution by omitting a specific language on the US humanitarian assistance to the victims of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. This compromise is in line with the US's neutrality as an honest broker in the ongoing peace negotiations. We believe that this compromise solution should be maintained in the FY 2016 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs bill, too.

Unfortunately, despite this fact the U.S. Administration continues to allocate aid directly to the occupied region of Azerbaijan bypassing central authorities. U.S. does not give any direct aid to similar post-Soviet conflict zones such as Crimea (Ukraine), Abkhazia (Georgia), South Ossetia (Georgia) and Transdnistria (Moldova), not to mention many other similar regions around the world. Then why to provide any direct aid to the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region? Direct aid to the Armenia-occupied Nagorno Karabakh region of Azerbaijan obviously causes irritation and protests

on the part of both Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani-Americans, and spoils the relations between allies significantly. It is our firm belief that the US must stop providing assistance to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan to be consistent and credible in its policy of upholding the principle of territorial integrity. The current developments in Ukraine also speak to the importance of a principled position on the importance of the territorial integrity of countries.

Furthermore, the US's direct assistance to the occupied Nagorno Karabakh region helps Armenia consolidate its occupation of 16% of Azerbaijani territories which serve as a black hole for drug trade, arms smuggling, proliferation of radioactive and nuclear materials and other illicit activities. 82 miles of Azerbaijani-Iranian border, which fall in the occupied territories, are used by Armenia for various illegal transfers. It's not a secret that Armenia enjoys very strong ties with Iran. In late 2008, the government of Armenia illegally supplied Iran with rockets and machine guns that ended up in the hands of insurgents and later were used to kill the US soldiers in Iraq. These factors necessitate ending the US assistance to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, too.

It is well-known fact that Armenia has been supportive of Russia's annexation of Crimea and voted against Ukraine's territorial integrity in the UN General Assembly along with handful countries last year. Moreover, in March, 2014 Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan called Russian President Vladimir Putin to personally and officially endorse Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. According to Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2015 none of the funds appropriated may be made available for assistance for a country that has taken affirmative steps intended to support Russia's annexation of Crimea. As the Armenian Government has been clearly supporting Russian actions in Ukraine, manifested in a number of cases, it undoubtedly falls within the scope of this provision. We think that a further congressional message requesting for concrete and targeted actions by Secretary of State on this issue will decidedly send a clear and strong message to the outside world and stave off other countries which might potentially want to back Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Thank you.