

Statement of Karen Donfried
Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs
Before the House Foreign Affairs Europe, Energy, the Environment and
Cyber Subcommittee
December 14, 2022

Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me here to discuss the Administration's priorities and engagement efforts in the South Caucasus. We aim to keep our colleagues in Congress informed and welcome your partnership as we work to advance U.S. interests across the region.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have a historic opportunity to secure an enduring peace to a conflict that has lasted for more than thirty years. Following intensified fighting in September, Armenia and Azerbaijan have renewed their focus on the peace process, including historic direct negotiations over the text of a peace agreement.

U.S. engagement is playing a key role. Secretary Blinken's leadership has been instrumental. He has spoken multiple times with the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia and hosted the foreign ministers for bilateral peace treaty negotiations.

Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl engaged both defense ministers

on September 15 and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with his counterparts in Washington on September 27, demonstrating the Administration's 'whole of government' commitment to securing peace. We continue to press Azerbaijan and Armenia to maintain momentum for negotiations, and we are doing so bilaterally, trilaterally, and in close coordination with the EU and other partners. The Department's Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations, Ambassador Philip Reeker, just returned from the region, working to sustain focus by all parties on the peace process. We continue to advocate that the rights and security of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh be a key part of those discussions.

Our assistance to those most impacted by the conflict also remains front and center. Since September 2020, the United States has provided over \$21 million in humanitarian assistance, directly and indirectly, and we continue to seek ways to address critical regional needs.

Supporting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan is the right thing to do and is in our national security interest. Should Azerbaijan and Armenia secure a peace deal, our cooperation will become even more critical as we build the confidence and capacity of each country to freely exercise sovereignty in a manner that maintains peace with their neighbors.

In this vein, Turkey-Armenia normalization discussions also have the potential to increase regional stability, deter malign influence, and lead to greater economic development. This effort is even more critical now given Russia's unprovoked, brutal war in Ukraine.

Our bilateral relations with Armenia have never been stronger. We continue to broaden our security partnership, deepen people-to-people ties, and grow our cooperation on democratic and economic development. The U.S.-Armenia Strategic Dialogue is the flagship platform for this partnership. We held the dialogue's capstone event in Washington in May 2022. This included a positive meeting between Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Mirzoyan and the signing of a Nuclear Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding that can advance Armenia's energy sovereignty and build stronger cooperation on civilian nuclear energy. The security and defense working group under the Strategic Dialogue met again December 7 in Yerevan and discussed opportunities to deepen cooperation on security-related issues. I look forward to continuing the dialogue in the new year.

In Azerbaijan, we are committed to advancing our bilateral priorities: security, economic growth, democracy, and human rights. Security cooperation with Azerbaijan supports our national security priorities, including counterterrorism objectives, interdiction of drugs and illicit material, and increased security of critical Caspian energy infrastructure. Azerbaijan plays an important role in diversity and security of energy supply in the region, something we have partnered closely on over the years. We continue to advocate with the government of Azerbaijan to promote human rights and hold individuals accountable for human rights abuses. This Administration publicly designated an Azerbaijani official for significant human rights violations on December 9.

The American people have long stood in solidarity with Georgians' desire to be a free, democratic, and sovereign country within its internationally recognized borders. Over the last 30 years, we have become strategic partners, working toward our shared vision of a Georgia fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic family of nations. And, as Georgia's neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan take steps towards peace, our partners in Tbilisi have been helpful in providing a forum to bring the sides together. Over the course of our partnership, the United States has allocated significant assistance funds to Georgia, sending thousands of Georgians to the United States for cultural and education exchanges, and training tens of

thousands of Georgian soldiers to defend Georgia's territory and promote peace and stability. U.S. assistance supports Georgian security, democratic governance, the rule of law, a vibrant civil society, economic growth, and environmental and health protections. We continue to urge the Georgian government to implement necessary reforms to acquire EU candidate status; reforms which will also further Georgia's democratic development, security, and prosperity.

People across the South Caucasus deserve to live in peace, which will unlock prosperity for the entire region. This Administration is fully committed to supporting this worthy goal. Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss our priorities and efforts in the South Caucasus and I look forward to your questions.

