



CARNEGIE
ENDOWMENT FOR
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Congressional Testimony

**“Supporting Armenia’s Democracy and
Western Future”**

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Co-chairs, members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me to testify today. Foreign policy can be afflicted by complacency—attention focuses on the crisis or crises du jour; when crises retreat from headlines, people try for a while to support a better outcome, but then, over time, we accept the imperfect status quo as immovable. Meanwhile, years and decades pass, lives are lived less freely and fully than they might have been. I never liked the term “frozen conflict” for precisely this reason: it implicitly accepts the impossibility of progress; it ignores the human costs of that acceptance.

If you had told me when I was serving as U.S. ambassador to the OSCE that in less than a decade Georgian democracy would be backsliding as Tbilisi drifted dangerously closer to Putin’s embrace while Armenia would have a democratic awakening and be bravely trying to expand ties with Europe and the West, I would have thought you got your Caucasus countries mixed up.

The human toll of the “unfreezing” of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan—the hostilities in 2020 and again last year—has been significant and heartbreaking: not only those killed but also the more than 100,000 who have been displaced from the homes in which they grew up and made their lives, and from the place where their ancestors had made their homes for many centuries. There are no “silver linings” to war. But the political and security situation in the region is different today, and it would be a mistake to not ask ourselves, in a dynamic moment like this, whether there are any new opportunities to build a more promising future in the wake of a tragic past.

Russia’s pivot from its longstanding role as Armenia’s ally and protector to being a partner to Azerbaijan has stunned many Armenians. Azerbaijani President Aliyev has cannily leveraged petrochemicals to bargain with the West and his authoritarian fraternity with Putin to forge closer ties to Moscow. He may not ever regret this dictators’-mutual-assistance-arrangement, but in time I feel confident that most Azerbaijanis living under his regime will.

Despite the disappointment of Georgia's backsliding and Azerbaijan's ongoing authoritarianism, we should not overlook the hopeful signs in Armenia, and we should ask ourselves: What can the United States and Europe do to support Armenia's democracy, future prosperity, and long-term security?

First, support peace and normalization with Armenia's neighbors. Although it will be politically painful (and Moscow may well try to sabotage it), normalization of relations between Yerevan and Ankara, and a lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, would benefit all three countries. If President Erdogan and Prime Minister Pashinyan can demonstrate vision and courage, Armenia-Türkiye normalization could precede (and maybe even lubricate) a final peace deal with Azerbaijan. In addition to the security dividends, Armenia would be able to diversify its economic partners and reduce its dependence on Russia. Opening the Türkiye-Armenia border would be a game changer in this regard. And regional trade between Türkiye, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan could support economic growth and jobs in each country, and help diversify transit routes for trade for others in the region, too. The United States, working with the EU and other partners, should offer political, diplomatic, and economic support to advance normalization and peace talks.

Second, build technical skills, including those essential to trade and good governance. I'll highlight just two of several important areas for targeted assistance. One, the agricultural sector, where investment in modernization and storage can help both reduce dependence on Russia for exports and also make Armenia less vulnerable to price shocks on key imports like flour. Two, customs and border security professionalization, where training and modernization of processes and equipment will be essential to implementing peace and normalization agreements, and can help Armenia take advantage of regional trade while curbing corruption threats.

Third, the United States should explore partnering with the EU and other friends of Armenia to develop long-term comprehensive security and defense partnerships, along the model of the bilateral assistance agreements that several countries have developed with Ukraine

in the last two years. These security assistance arrangements could give confidence to Armenians as their leaders take difficult steps to reduce dependence on Moscow and carve an independent future.

There will be some who will caution that a warmer embrace by the West could make Armenia less safe, not more. Just look at Ukraine, they will say. We must reject this “dictator’s proxy veto” of our support for the aspirations of the people of Armenia or any other country. And we should be clear: the motivation behind U.S. and partners’ policy is to support the free future of the people of Armenia, not to score points against Moscow.

Now is also a time to set realistic expectations: the road ahead will be long. Casting off the burdens of cultivated dependency demands long-term structural reforms and investments. It is the work of a generation, and will extend beyond the term of a single leader. Political choices have been made; implementing them will take building skills, infrastructure, and a new political culture. Moscow will likely try to retard progress. Armenians must be prepared to endure some cold winters. We must be prepared to sustain our support for the long term.

Many of you on the dais today have been outspoken, consistent, principled supporters of Ukraine over the last two and a half years. Nowhere is the philosophical truth of the indivisibility of freedom and justice more practically demonstrable than in the fight against Russian imperialist tyranny that Ukraine is currently undertaking on behalf of its own people and indeed of all of us. And make no mistake: what happens in Ukraine has an impact on the freedom and future of people of Armenia, the people of Georgia, the people of Azerbaijan, of Moldova, of Belarus, and on the stability and prosperity of Europe, including Türkiye, for the decades to come. If Putin is allowed to win, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova, and all Europeans, all those who stand in defense of human dignity, will lose alongside Ukraine. Russia must be defeated, Ukraine must prevail—there is no alternate outcome that is acceptable.

Thank you again, and I look forward to your questions.