

Statement of Karen Donfried
Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished

Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me here to discuss the Administration's priorities and engagement efforts in the South Caucasus. I appreciate and welcome your advice as we work collaboratively to advance U.S. interests across the region.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have a historic opportunity to secure a lasting peace to a conflict that was triggered during the fall of the Soviet Union and has lasted for more than thirty years. There have been setbacks, such as the fighting that broke out September 13-14. When hostilities erupted, we immediately engaged to halt the fighting. This setback reminded all of us of the fragility of the situation and the importance of securing a comprehensive, sustainable peace agreement.

Secretary Blinken's leadership has been instrumental in promoting dialogue. He hosted joint meetings of the foreign ministers on September 19 and November 7 along with a telephone call on October 4 with the two ministers. 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. Thanks in part to our engagement, on October 4, Azerbaijan released 17 Armenian POWs detained during the September fighting. Actions like this help build needed trust between the two sides, and we take every opportunity to urge Azerbaijan to release the remaining detainees in its custody. We continue to encourage Azerbaijan and Armenia to maintain momentum for negotiations, and we are doing so in close coordination with the EU and other partners.

In this vein, we assess the Turkish-Armenian normalization dialogue positively, and have let both sides know that we want to play a helpful role. It has the potential to increase regional stability, deter malign

influence, and lead to greater economic development. This is even more important now given Russia's unprovoked, brutal war in Ukraine.

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

Our bilateral relations with Armenia have never been stronger. We continue to seek ways 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 format for this partnership. We held the dialogue's capstone event in Washington in May 2022, including a very positive meeting between Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Mirzoyan. At that time, we signed a Nuclear Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding

that can advance Armenia's energy sovereignty and build stronger U.S.-Armenian cooperation on nuclear energy, including through the potential provision of U.S.-origin Small Modular Reactors. Other working groups on security and defense, justice reform, and democracy discussed additional ways the United States can help bolster Armenia's democratic development. I look forward to participating in the upcoming dialogue in Yerevan next year.

In Azerbaijan, we remain committed to advancing our bilateral priorities: security, economic growth, and democracy and human rights. After 9/11, Azerbaijan stepped up early with financial and troop support to Afghanistan and helped protect Kabul International Airport until the final days of the 2021 withdrawal. 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. We welcome Azerbaijan's growing support for European energy security. The human rights situation in Azerbaijan remains a challenge. This Administration

regularly urges Azerbaijan's government to respect human rights and the fundamental freedoms necessary to realize the full potential of Azerbaijan's people.

In Georgia, 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. The United States has allocated more than \$6 billion in 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 outside its borders as well. U.S. assistance supports democratic governance, the rule of law, a vibrant civil society, and economic growth, and we continue to urge the Georgian government to implement the necessary reforms to acquire EU candidate status.

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. I look forward to your questions.

