

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 12, 2020

The Honorable Joe Biden
President Elect of the United States

Dear President Elect Biden:

Congratulations on your election as the 46th President of the United States. We look forward to working with you and your Administration on behalf of the American people.

We write today to bring to your immediate attention the urgent crisis occurring in Nagorno Karabakh, also known as Artsakh, where a war launched by Azerbaijan, with support from Turkey and foreign mercenaries, has caused a mass humanitarian disaster and disorder that could worsen in the months and years ahead.

Since Azerbaijan launched a massive offensive against Nagorno Karabakh on September 27, the situation has rapidly devolved. Three ceasefires negotiated by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs were breached almost immediately. Azerbaijan's forces, aided by Turkish-funded foreign mercenaries, have pressed forward, backed by drones and other weapons. This week, Azerbaijan overran the strategically important city of Shushi just ten miles from the Capitol, Stepanakert.

With the risk of a mass atrocity against thousands of Armenian civilians rising, Armenia agreed to a peace agreement brokered by Russia. This agreement has ended the fighting, at least for now, but at tremendous cost. Under the deal, Azerbaijan will hold territory in Nagorno Karabakh and be guaranteed passage to its enclave, Nakhichevan, through Armenia itself. Russian peacekeepers will be stationed in Nagorno Karabakh to prevent a renewal of hostilities.

While we welcome peace, we are deeply concerned about the immediate and long-term implications of this deal, which does nothing to settle the question of Nagorno Karabakh's ultimate status. Further, we believe that this tragic outcome was avoidable had the United States and the international community acted decisively. We completely concur with your strong and clear statement from October 28, which provided that, "The administration must fully implement and not waive requirements under section 907 of the Freedom Support Act to stop the flow of military equipment to Azerbaijan, and call on Turkey and Russia to stop fueling the conflict with the supply of weapons and, in the case of Turkey, mercenaries."

Sadly, in the absence of these and other actions that could have deterred Azerbaijan and Turkey from pressing their military advantage, they have pushed ahead to create new facts on the ground by force. For far too long, we have condoned the bellicose rhetoric and aggressive actions of Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the results are now devastatingly clear.

As you take office, you have the opportunity to forge a new policy towards the region, one that reorients our foreign policy towards supporting democracy, human rights, and the right to self-determination.

First, we believe your Administration should immediately end the waiver of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act with regard to Azerbaijan, and end military assistance to Azerbaijan under Section 333 which has totaled more than \$100 million in the past two years. The United States should not be building the capacity of a nation that uses its military to attack its neighbors.

Second, the United States should reengage on negotiations for a lasting settlement through the OSCE Minsk Group. The ceasefire that was reached this week does nothing to settle the underlying territorial dispute or ensure a lasting and equitable peace. The United States should work with the Minsk Group to define the future status of Nagorno Karabakh in a way that is consistent with the right of self-determination.

Third, we need to recognize that the civilian population, infrastructure, and economy of Nagorno Karabakh have been severely impacted by Azerbaijani military attacks that included cluster munitions and repeated shelling. We must ensure that displaced Armenian civilians can return to their homes and are secure from future military threats by Azerbaijan and Turkey. This should include significant humanitarian aid and assistance in clearing unexploded munitions.

Fourth, the United States must engage in a thorough review of our policy towards Turkey, a nation that while a member of NATO has repeatedly acted against U.S. interests. In Syria, Nagorno Karabakh, Cyprus, and elsewhere, Turkey's behavior has been destabilizing, and the once vibrant democracy within Turkey has been tragically diminished. As you know, Turkey has also tested Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missiles, in direct contravention of U.S. law. Our relationship with Turkey, long complex, has become increasingly untenable, and we believe developing a new policy that is consistent with our values and interests should be a high priority for your Administration.

Finally, the United States should seek to strengthen our ties to Armenia, a young democracy that has been shaken by the events of the past month. We request that your administration identify ways in which our economic, cultural, and other ties to Armenia can be improved, something that would be enormously beneficial to Armenia and to the large Armenian-American diaspora in the United States.

Thank you for your attention. We stand ready to work with you after your inauguration to craft a policy that is consistent with U.S. national security, universal principles of human rights, and our democratic values.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress