

# ISSUE BRIEF

No. 3618 | MAY 31, 2012

## To-Do List for Hillary Clinton's Upcoming Trip to the Caucasus and Turkey

*Ariel Cohen, PhD*

On May 31, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will begin her tour of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. In Scandinavia, she will address several forums on climate change and green energy. While in Sweden, she will also discuss Internet freedom, Afghanistan, and the Middle East.

But it is in the Caucasus and Turkey that Clinton will face threats to U.S. friends and engage in intense geopolitical discussions. On June 4, she will meet with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan; on June 5, she will open the U.S.–Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission plenary session in Batumi, Georgia, and meet with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili; and on June 6, she will be meeting with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Baku.

**Security Challenges Abound.** Clinton will be meeting all three South Caucasus presidents, which opens an opportunity to promote the Nagorno–Karabakh talks, which have stalled after almost two decades of Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory. The occupation of Karabakh is the powder keg that threatens to blow up the South Caucasus. If this happens, the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan will endanger energy transit from the Caspian Sea, threaten Georgia (as Russia may demand troop transit to assist its ally Armenia), and strengthen the regional involvement of another Armenian ally—Iran.

It is not very likely that Armenia and Azerbaijan would listen to Clinton's calls for an equitable resolution, which should include liberation of the occupied Azerbaijan lands. After all, years of mediation by former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who developed excellent relations with both Baku and Yerevan, have not resulted in a breakthrough.

Another priority for the Secretary of State's visit to Baku should be expression of support for the Caspian state and its president in the face of incessant Iranian terrorist activities

and plotting. Just recently, a massive Iranian-directed campaign to murder American and Israeli diplomats, their family members, and others in Baku came to light. Iranian agents were planning to kill diplomats and their families with car bombs and silenced sniper rifles and attack American and Jewish community targets.

Similar attacks took place in India, Georgia, and Thailand and were planned elsewhere. This is part of a global Iranian terrorist campaign that also targeted the Saudi embassy in Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, the Obama Administration went out of its way not to blame the Iranian regime for the terrorist plots.

**Ethnic and Religious Tolerance Model.** The recent host of the popular Eurovision song contest, Azerbaijan demonstrates levels of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance unknown in the broader Muslim world, especially in neighboring Iran. This model should be acknowledged and promoted in U.S. public diplomacy efforts aimed at the Muslim world. At the same time, Azerbaijan can do more to improve good governance, transparency, and the rule of law. Clinton can address these issues in a balanced, friendly way.

---

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib3618>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison  
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

**The Heritage Foundation**  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 546-4400 | [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

**Engaging Turkey.** In Ankara, Clinton will speak at the anti-terrorism ministerial. Turkey took the lead in supporting opposition to Syria's ruler, Bashar al-Assad. However, the moderate opposition is in disarray, and the Sunni Islamist extremists, including the Muslim Brotherhood (supported by the ruling AK Party of Turkey) and elements of al-Qaeda, are increasingly leading the resistance to the sectarian Alawi regime in Damascus. Yet Ankara's obstruction of Iranian sanctions and its anti-Israeli course, as well as its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, demonstrate the limits of the U.S.-Turkish "honeymoon" under the Obama presidency.

**What Secretary Clinton Should Do.** In Armenia, Clinton should demand the renewal of peace negotiations under the umbrella of the Minsk Group, of which Russia and U.S. are the co-chairs, based on the 1996 OSCE Lisbon Declaration and the 2007 Madrid Statement, which calls for the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azerbaijani territories and the return of refugees. She should also call for Yerevan to recognize that its close ties with Tehran are incompatible with a friendly relationship with (and U.S. assistance to) Armenia.

In Georgia, Clinton should proclaim U.S. support for Georgian territorial integrity and call for an end to Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. She should also reiterate U.S. support for future Georgian membership in NATO. She should repeat her call at the Chicago NATO summit in May that "our commitment to enlargement, done right, [is] a core element of our purpose and our community."

In Azerbaijan, Clinton should offer an expanded program of anti-terrorism assistance, including training and equipment for the Azerbaijani security services and special forces and a certain amount of intelligence sharing that does not endanger U.S. sources and methods. Clinton should reiterate American support for good governance, democratization, human rights, and transparency in Azerbaijan as it enjoys larger-than-ever oil and gas revenues. Improving access for Azerbaijani students, academics, and government officials to educational opportunities in the U.S.—both longer-term academic degrees and short-term training—should be a priority.

In Turkey, Clinton should acknowledge Ankara's leadership in seeking a negotiated solution in Syria; however, she should

request that Turkey, in solidarity with its NATO allies, fully embrace the U.S. and Europe's sanctions on Iran, stop its support of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Middle East, and improve its relations with Israel and Cyprus, including toning down the rhetoric on the offshore Cypriot gas fields, which are located in that country's Exclusive Economic Zone.

**Offended Friends, Implacable Enemies.** As Clinton may be stepping down after the November elections, the Administration is leaving behind a strategic landscape strewn with deeply offended friends and enemies who remain implacable despite attempts to mollify them. Clinton should use her trip to the region to reverse this trend.

—*Ariel Cohen, PhD, is Senior Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies and International Energy Policy in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*