



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

*file Caucasus*SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED
MEMORANDUM

TO: Melanne Vermeer
FROM: Dick Morningstar
SUBJECT: Possible Trip to the Caucasus and Turkmenistan

The attached memo outlines the overall policy objectives for a trip by the First Lady to the Caucasus and Turkmenistan. Her visit would focus on democratization, rule of law, civil society and regional cooperation. This is the perfect opportunity to reinforce our message that U.S. policy in the region is not based solely on energy - the "we care" theme. That said, a visit by the First Lady that highlights our continuing commitment to the new states of the region will also strengthen the momentum driving our Caspian energy policy.

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First Lady's Proposed Trip to the Caucasus and Turkmenistan

Travel by the First Lady to the Caucasus and Turkmenistan would promote key foreign policy objectives in the region, including democratization, rule of law, civil society and regional cooperation. In addition, the visit would focus attention on social welfare and health issues in a part of the world where war, political upheaval and the Soviet legacy have caused incredible hardships. The United States has good relations with all four countries and substantial aid programs. The First Lady would receive a warm welcome, as these nations all desire even closer ties with us. The visit would emphasize that we care about issues beyond energy, while at the same time reinforcing the momentum of our energy policy.

General Itinerary and Timing

The following lays out options for three stops in the Caucasus countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and a fourth on the eastern side of the Caspian Sea in Turkmenistan. The options set out are based on recommendations from our embassies in the field and built on the assumption that the First Lady would spend a full day and overnight at each of these destinations. While a meeting with the head of state in each capital would be obligatory, we propose the bulk of her contacts be non-governmental and include NGO representatives and projects receiving USG-funding. As in Central Asia, visiting cultural sites or participating in cultural events will be important to demonstrate respect for the unique history and identity of these countries. The best timing for a visit would be May, after the NATO summit, when many of the heads of state will be in Washington, and before the heat of the summer, or alternatively in the fall.

Dealing with Nagorno-Karabakh

All states in the Caucasus are embroiled in regional conflicts. Among the most intractable is the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K), an Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan. All sides in this dispute will look for a political message in the First Lady's schedule in the region. N-K was traditionally an autonomous part of Azerbaijan inhabited mainly by Armenians who have been fighting for union with Armenia or independence since 1988. There has been a cease-fire in place since 1994. The U.S. is neutral in the conflict but recognizes Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

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The U.S. is active in seeking a resolution of the conflict as a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group peace process. During a visit, the First Lady could emphasize our neutrality by keeping a rough balance in her programs in each country, e.g., visiting displaced person camps in Azerbaijan as well as earthquake victims in Armenia, and by underscoring the economic and political benefits of regional cooperation and finding a path to peace.

Armenia

Armenia has a rich history that reaches back as early as the sixth century BC. Occupying a contested region of Anatolia straddling the ancient Persian and Roman empires, Armenians established independent principalities and kingdoms when the power of their larger neighbors waned. The first Armenian state was founded in 190 B.C., and in 301 AD Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion. Armenian Church leaders withheld their approval from the rulings (e.g., on the nature of Christ) of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, and since that time the Armenian Apostolic Church has maintained its independence from both the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches.

Mrs. Clinton's visit would be the most momentous event in bilateral relations since Armenian independence in 1991 and would receive wide press play in Armenia and in the Armenian-American community here. It would significantly advance our vision of an Armenia that is secure, democratic, prosperous, fully integrated into evolving regional and Euro-Atlantic institutions and at peace with its neighbors. It would underscore the vital, but still limited role of women in building a new Armenia and fostering regional cooperation and conflict resolution.

We would recommend structuring Mrs. Clinton's schedule so that she would remain for most her visit within the Yerevan city limits to make best use of the time available and to emphasize independent/NGO groups rather than government entities. We suggest the following options:

-- A courtesy call on President and Mrs. Kocharian, followed by an event hosted by Mrs. Kocharian with female political, civic and business leaders. This would be an excellent occasion for addressing our support for economic, democratic, education and health reform and a larger role for women in society.

-- A speech at the U.S.-supported American University of Armenia (AUA) to the students who are enrolled in master's

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programs in public health, law, business administration, political science and engineering.

-- A visit to AUA's Mammography Center whose establishment was spear-headed by Alexandria, Virginia resident Rita Balian and the Armenian American Cultural Association and which has been vigorous in advancing women's health issues in Armenia. Dr. Nani Oskanian (wife of the foreign minister) is a very active co-chair of the center.

-- A gifted-children's musical program at Comitas Conservatory, which includes several children from the earthquake zone who survived the 1988 devastation as infants and have gone on to become talented musicians.

-- A visit to an experimental school or some other institution that advances innovative educational programs (with U.S. support) and is free of the Soviet-style approaches still followed by many schools in Armenia;

-- A reception for alumni of U.S. educational exchange programs (e.g., the Bradley and Muskie programs) to underscore that Armenia's future success relies heavily on educating and training its children to function in and contribute to a free market democracy.

-- A visit to an orphanage or some other opportunity to discuss the range of child welfare issues, including street children and adoption.

Time permitting the First Lady could consider travel outside of Yerevan to visit some of the centers of Armenian history and culture:

-- Etchmiazdin (approximately 30 minutes by car from Yerevan), the "Vatican" of Armenia, where the First Lady could meet the Catholicos, or patriarch, of the church who is a leading figure in the World Council of Churches.

-- The beautiful Khor Virab monastery at the Turkish border, about an hour's drive from Yerevan, under Mount Ararat.

Azerbaijan

Located at the crossroads of Caspian trade routes, Azerbaijan has historically been the subject of struggle among Turkey, Persia and Russia. Azerbaijan was incorporated into the Russian Empire in the 19th century, and discovery of its oil wealth later that century attracted foreign investors, such as the Nobel brothers and the

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Rothschilds. Since independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has signed a number of deals with major international oil companies and is poised to reap great benefits from development and export of its energy resources to Western markets. Azerbaijan's economic promise has not been matched by political reform. Heydar Aliyev, formerly a member of the Soviet Politburo, became president in 1993 and retained political power in a flawed election in October 1998. His regime has been responsible for human rights abuses against his political opposition.

We recommend that the First Lady, in addition to meeting with President Aliyev, stress contacts with NGO's and organizations promoting the growth of a civil society and the alleviation of human suffering in Azerbaijan. Other options we recommend include the following:

- A visit to a camp for persons displaced by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and/or to the Red Cross' Prosthetics Center, which helps those victimized by land mines planted in connection with the conflict.
- A visit to an orphanage supported by the International Women's Club (founded by Anne Kauzlarich, wife of the former U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan).
- Hosting a ceremony to announce donation of \$10-20 million of medical equipment and supplies by the Department of Defense. The donations will be distributed to a variety of Azerbaijani hospitals in the summer.
- A visit to one of the local banks receiving technical assistance through the USG-supported Caucasus Enterprise Fund. This program aims at strengthening the private sector.

Georgia

Georgian history is over 2,500 years old, and Georgian is one of the oldest spoken languages in the world. Tbilisi, its capital, is located in a picturesque valley divided by the Mtkvari River, and dates back more than 1,500 years. Much of Georgia's territory was besieged by its Persian and Turkish neighbors along with Arabs and Mongols over the centuries. In the 19th century Georgia turned to the Russian Empire for protection. Georgians are known for their hospitality and artistry in dance, theater, music and design.

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The First Lady's visit would be an opportunity to emphasize the close relationship that we have developed with Georgia's reformist government, headed by Eduard Shevardnadze, and its efforts to address social welfare issues. Women's reproductive health is a serious problem in Georgia as is the collapse of the "social safety net" following independence and civil strife in the early 1990's. Orphanages and hospitals are under-funded and in a sad state of neglect. The First Lady could usefully touch on these health issues, tax and other market reforms, and the need to combat corruption in government.

A meeting with President Shevardnadze would be especially important given his demonstrated support for democracy and Western-oriented foreign policy. Other options could include the following:

-- A visit to an orphanage or hospital in Tbilisi or a child-oriented institution, such as the children's ballet theater.

-- A meeting with the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, a Georgian NGO run by a young woman lawyer. USIA is considering providing the association with a law library.

-- A meeting with representatives of NGO's (perhaps through the Eurasia Foundation and its regional synergies programs) that are involved in regional approaches to address common problems in the three Caucasus states. Such a get-together could invite participants from other Caucasus capitals. This could give a positive boost to our regional cooperation/integration efforts.

--- A meeting with members of Georgia's parliament who have supported President Shevardnadze's reform program and who will be facing elections this fall.

The First Lady could also consider a visit to Mskheta, Georgia's ancient capital, about a 25-minute drive outside of Tbilisi. Aside from its superb cathedral, there is an ancient mountaintop monastery nearby which is the best photo opportunity in the Caucasus. Mskheta has a home for street children, which the First Lady could also visit.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan lies between the Caspian Sea to the west and Iran and Afghanistan to the south. The age-old silk road ran through Turkmenistan, and ruins related to these trade routes are located near the Turkmen cities of Mary and

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Dashhowuz. Turkmenistan's population of 4 million is about 70 percent ethnic Turkmen, a nomadic people conquered by the Russians late in the 19th century. The Soviets treated Turkmenistan as a backwater and concentrated on developing agriculture and its substantial gas reserves. Nonetheless, Turkmenistan has a rich culture; it is famous for its hand-woven carpets and the indigenous Ahal-Teke horse, whose bloodline can be traced in many modern racing breeds.

Turkmenistan has taken only rudimentary steps toward democratization. President Niyazov rules in an autocratic style, tolerates no opposition, and foments a cult of personality. His human rights record is poor. During his April 1998 visit to Washington, President Niyazov made a promise to President Clinton that he would release a leading political dissident, Geguldi Annaniyazov. Niyazov has so far failed to fulfill this commitment, and Annaniyazov is believed to be seriously ill in prison. We recommend against a visit to Turkmenistan at least until Annaniyazov is released.

The First Lady's visit could promote our democratization agenda in the country by supporting and thereby legitimizing independent NGO activity. In addition to an obligatory meeting with President Niyazov, we would recommend the following options:

- A roundtable meeting with NGO representatives and visits to selected NGO projects in the areas of health, education, and environment.
- A visit to Ashgabat's main carpet factory (where the majority of the artisans are women) to promote the rights of women in the workplace and show respect for an important part of Turkmenistan's cultural heritage.
- A cultural event over a meal focusing on Turkmen cuisine and traditional entertainment.

From the official Turkmen viewpoint a meeting with President Niyazov will be a central part of the program. In the First Lady's private discussion with Niyazov, as well as public remarks in Ashgabat, we would recommend that she focus on the need for greater political pluralism and economic reform and hold President Niyazov to his previously-stated commitment to hold multiple-candidate, parliamentary elections, currently scheduled for December.

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Embassy Community Events

A community event with embassy staff at each stop would be greatly appreciated. Embassy employees in these countries face significant hardships, including security threats and isolation. Recognition by the First Lady would be an important boost to mission morale.

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