

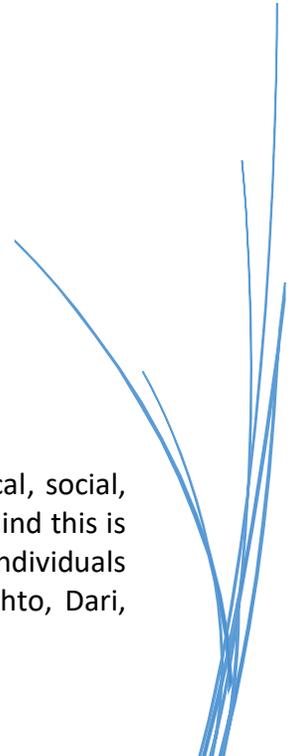
WEEKLY ANALYSIS

Issue Number – 491
(September 13-17, 2025)

TRUMP'S ROUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND PROSPERITY: THE EXPANSION OF WESTERN INFLUENCE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND IRAN'S POSITION



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



TRUMP’S ROUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND PROSPERITY: THE EXPANSION OF WESTERN INFLUENCE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND IRAN’S POSITION

Introduction

The *Agreement on the Establishment of the “Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity in the South Caucasus” (TRIPP)* was signed on August 8, 2025, at the White House by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, and the President of the United States, Donald Trump, within the framework of a peace accord between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

This route passes through the Zangezur region of Armenia’s Syunik province, connecting Azerbaijan to its autonomous exclave of Nakhchivan, and stretches for 43 kilometers. Before the signing of this agreement, the route was known as the *Zangezur Corridor*.

When this region was granted to Armenia in the early Soviet period (1923), Azerbaijan lost its land connection to part of its own territory. Following the 2020 war, when Azerbaijan regained the Nagorno-Karabakh region from Armenia, Article 9 of the ceasefire agreement stipulated:

“All economic and transport links in the region shall be unblocked. The Republic of Armenia shall guarantee the security of transport connections between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, ensuring the free movement of citizens, vehicles, and goods in both directions.”

Although Moscow mediated this agreement, the parties have so far failed to reach a consensus on implementing this provision. Against the backdrop of Russia’s engagement in Ukraine, the United States has sought to expand its influence in the South Caucasus, while also aiming to position its president as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. As a result, Washington launched initiatives to end the long-standing hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan. These efforts culminated in August 2025, when the two countries reached an accord and, as a symbolic concession, named the Zangezur Corridor after the U.S. president.

What advantages does the United States gain in the region through this agreement? And what is Iran’s position toward the construction of this route, along with the concerns it raises? These are the central questions this analysis seeks to address.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE “TRUMP ROUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND PROSPERITY” FOR THE UNITED STATES, TURKEY, AND AZERBAIJAN

Under the agreement signed in the United States between the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, and the President of the United States, not only was this corridor named after Donald Trump, but its construction was also formally



contracted to the United States. The agreement grants the U.S. exclusive control over the route for a period of 99 years, with the possibility of extension. During the development of this corridor, American, European, and Turkish companies will participate in building railways, highways, energy pipelines, and telecommunications networks.

Given the long-term nature of this agreement, the United States will be able to expand its influence into the former Soviet republics of the South Caucasus and counterbalance Russia's presence in the region. Furthermore, the involvement of American companies offers the United States—and even Israel—strategic opportunities to monitor Iran. The corridor also links Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Since Nakhchivan shares a border with Turkey, Ankara, as a NATO member, will be able to establish direct connectivity with Azerbaijan and, through this corridor, with the Turkic world in Central Asia, bypassing Iranian territory and avoiding transit costs to Tehran.

Both Azerbaijan and Turkey have actively pursued this goal and openly emphasized their cooperation. In this regard, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev declared at a joint press conference with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2021: *“Turkey and Azerbaijan will both take the necessary steps to establish the Zangezur Corridor... which will unite the entire Turkic world.”*

Accordingly, this corridor represents a major opportunity to strengthen ties among Turkic states such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Since these states have been striving to form a unified economic, cultural, and even political bloc, the project is likely to attract the attention of major global powers to their collective potential. The corridor thus enhances the geopolitical significance of the South Caucasus, positioning Azerbaijan and Turkey—rather than Iran—as key transit bridges between Central Asia and Europe, and even between China and Europe.

China, too, has expressed interest in the project. Currently, Beijing relies on Georgia as its primary route connecting the South Caucasus to Europe. Should the corridor be constructed, it would serve as an alternative pathway for China in the region. Following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, the Chinese Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Guo Min, emphasized that the Zangezur Corridor would play a valuable role in China's *Belt and Road Initiative*.

China's approach to the corridor, however, is primarily economic. Beijing focuses on securing commercial and transit advantages rather than involving itself in the political and security tensions that may arise between the United States and Iran, or between the United States and Russia, as a result of the project. For this reason, China welcomes the construction of the corridor as a means to secure a shorter and more efficient connection to Europe.



ARMENIA'S POSITION

Within the South Caucasus, Armenia is comparatively weaker than its neighbors. For more than three decades, it has endured hostilities with Azerbaijan and, as a result, faced an economic blockade imposed jointly by its two principal neighbors, Turkey and Azerbaijan. At the same time, Armenia has remained heavily under Russian influence, in part through its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Established in 1992 under Moscow's leadership, the CSTO was intended to ensure the collective defense of its member states, protecting their independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty from external aggression.

Moreover, the presence of Russian military bases on Armenian territory entrenched Moscow's dominance, leaving the country in a state of political and economic isolation. Consequently, Armenia's economy has remained fragile. The newly established route, however, is expected to enable Armenia not only to strengthen political relations with its immediate neighbors but also to expand ties with other regional states. The implementation of this project promises to bring benefits in transportation, infrastructure, job creation, and technological development. Over time, such changes may allow Armenia to diversify its foreign relations beyond Turkey and Azerbaijan, gradually reducing its dependence on Russia.

It is worth noting that Armenia had already made previous attempts to distance itself from Moscow's orbit and seek closer alignment with the West, particularly the European Union and the United States. A notable example was the recent delivery of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, which included over a thousand smartphones, computers, and tablets.

Furthermore, from September 11 to 20, 2023, Armenia conducted joint military exercises with the United States under the name *Eagle Partner 2023*, involving 85 U.S. soldiers and 175 Armenian troops.

Recent statements by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan further underscore Yerevan's intention to move away from Russian influence. He openly declared: *"The security agreement with Russia is ineffective, and the external security system in which Armenia participates does not serve the national security and national interests of the country."*

It should also be recalled that on October 3, 2023, the Armenian parliament ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). By joining, Armenia became legally bound to implement the Court's provisions. According to the Rome Statute, if an individual indicted for war crimes enters the territory of a member state, that state is obliged to arrest and surrender the accused to the ICC. In March 2023, the Court issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin on charges of war crimes committed in Ukraine. Thus, once Armenia's



membership in the ICC takes effect, any visit by President Putin to Armenian territory would legally compel the Armenian authorities to arrest him and hand him over to The Hague.

IRAN'S POSITION ON THE "TRUMP ROUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND PROSPERITY"

Following the signing of the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan at the White House, mediated by Donald Trump, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement declaring that Tehran was closely monitoring developments in the South Caucasus and maintaining contact with both parties. The statement welcomed the peace accord, while at the same time expressing concern over any form of foreign intervention—particularly actions near Iran's shared borders—that, in Tehran's view, could endanger regional security and long-term stability. It also welcomed the reopening of closed transport routes, but emphasized that such routes must be restored with full respect for mutual interests, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and without foreign interference. The statement concluded by reaffirming Iran's commitment to bilateral cooperation as well as participation in the "3+3" regional format.

From the wording of the statement, it is clear that Iran opposes foreign intervention in the region, and its primary concern is the expansion of U.S. influence. Under the agreement, the construction of the route has been granted exclusively to the United States for 99 years, with the possibility of extension. Tehran believes that, over the long term, this will guarantee a sustained U.S. presence along Iran's borders with the South Caucasus, a development perceived as a potential threat to regional security. Iran further fears that the agreement will increase Washington's strategic influence in the region and, in cooperation with Turkey, reinforce NATO's presence there.

The statement also alluded to the economic dimension of Iran's concerns. Currently, gas supplies to Nakhchivan and other Azerbaijani exchanges rely on routes through Iranian territory, from which Tehran collects transit revenues. The construction of the new corridor would deprive Iran of this income and weaken its geopolitical leverage at both the regional and international levels. With the completion of this route, energy from Central Asian states could be transported through the corridor to Turkey and then to European markets—a function that had traditionally been carried out via Iranian territory.

In its concluding remarks, the statement reiterated Iran's position that regional issues should be resolved through bilateral negotiations among Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, as well as through cooperation with Turkey, Iran, and Russia within the framework of the "3+3" mechanism. Tehran has long advocated this approach. Nevertheless, the "3+3" format has never played a decisive role in resolving South Caucasus disputes. The clearest example is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which regional states have been unable to settle over decades.



This lack of progress has deepened the mistrust of South Caucasus states toward the regional framework and pushed them to seek closer ties with Western powers beyond the region.

CONCLUSION

On the one hand, the United States seeks to maximize its strategic gains from the Russia–Ukraine war. While Moscow remains preoccupied in Ukraine, Washington has undertaken various initiatives to expand its influence in the South Caucasus—the most notable being the final peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Through this accord, the United States secured a long-term presence for its companies and enterprises in the region, enabling it to closely monitor the activities of both Iran and Russia, while simultaneously constraining their economic and transit interests. On the other hand, the U.S. president aims to position himself as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, and such reconciliations and peace agreements serve as an exceptional opportunity toward that end.

The construction of the route not only undermines Iran’s geopolitical advantages but also heightens its security vulnerabilities due to foreign intervention. Overall, the benefits of this initiative primarily accrue to the two directly involved parties—Azerbaijan and Armenia—as well as to the United States. Armenia moves closer to the West, escapes regional isolation, and gains the possibility of reducing its dependence on Russia. Azerbaijan, in turn, enhances its geopolitical significance by establishing direct territorial connectivity with its previously detached exclave.

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