

## **Great Power Competition in the South Caucasus: Peace Agreement, US Involvement, and Türkiye's Strategic Concerns**

Few could have predicted that on August 8, 2025, two leaders who had presided over three decades of bloodshed would shake hands in the [White House](#). Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's signing of a United States-brokered peace framework to settle the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh stunned regional observers, seeming to end one of the post-Soviet world's longest-running conflicts. The agreement establishes a [major transit corridor](#), to be named the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), which will connect Azerbaijan through Armenia to its Nakhchivan exclave. This transit route will include a rail line, oil and gas pipelines, and fiber optic infrastructure under Armenian law, providing direct access to Türkiye and onward to Europe.



Proposed route of the corridor (Source [Economist](#))

In the past few decades, the fight over Nagorno-Karabakh, which was nominally a part of Azerbaijan but inhabited mostly by [ethnic Armenians](#), has led to prolonged conflict and multiple wars between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Whether or not the new agreement can last long enough to bring consolidated peace and stability to the area, it opens a new chapter in the balance of power in the South Caucasus region, and represents Türkiye's calculated rise as a decisive regional power, strategically leveraging both Russia's regional decline and America's pivot toward containing China's influence in Central Asia and reshaping the region in an increasingly multipolar global order.

## Historical Context, Shifting Balance

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict's origins trace back to the Soviet-era administrative decisions placing the [predominantly ethnic Armenian](#) region under Azerbaijani control. As the Soviet Union collapsed, these lurking tensions turned into the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988–1994), where Armenian forces gained control of the region.

In the following decades, Russia maintained influence over both sides, formally allied with Armenia through the Russian-led [Collective Security Treaty Organization](#) (CSTO), while maintaining strong ties with Azerbaijan, first as a crucial security partner in combating [Chechenya terrorism](#) in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and later as a needed conduit for obtaining [sanctioned goods](#) from the West following the War in Ukraine.

This balance was shattered during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020). While Azerbaijan received [Turkish military support](#), including training and equipment, due to their close linguistic and cultural ties, Russia did not activate the security [guarantees](#) of CSTO for Armenia, severely damaging its [reputation](#) as a peacemaker in the region and instead prioritizing Azerbaijan's role as a [transit hub](#) for Russia to facilitate trade in oil, gas, weapons, and other sanctioned goods. As a result, Azerbaijan achieved a decisive victory in 44 days, reclaiming approximately one-third of Nagorno-Karabakh. On September 19, 2023, conflict reignited when Azerbaijan launched a rapid offense that led to the surrender of the Karabakh local government, [the Republic of Artsakh](#). The offensive triggered the mass exodus of over [100,000](#) ethnic Armenians, raising serious humanitarian and legal concerns. In this conflict, Russia again remained neutral, both because of Moscow's unwillingness to antagonize Azerbaijan and the occupation of its forces in Ukraine. Russia's diminished role has opened strategic opportunities for other powers, particularly [Türkiye](#) and the United States, to redefine the power balance of the South Caucasus.

## **US Involvement: Stepping Into the Void Left by Russia to Face China**

In the past decades, the United States had limited influence in the South Caucasus due to Russian interference. However, as Russia's influence declined since the invasion of Ukraine, the United States obtained the chance to expand its influence in this energy-rich area that is full of oil and gas pipelines. The peace framework on August 8 not only marked direct US involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict but also granted the United States [exclusive development rights](#) to the Trump Route, which will boost economic ties between Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Europe, and allow for greater exports of energy. Through this event, the United States has positioned itself as a new and influential actor in the South Caucasus, supplanting the dominance of traditional regional powers like Russia. At the same time, this new corridor provides an alternate United States-backed corridor to China's Belt and Road Initiative that [already](#) transits through the South Caucasus, connecting Central Asia to Europe. A new Western-led initiative could dilute China's influence over the region and fulfill the Trump administration's strategic goal of [countering China](#).

## **Türkiye's Multi-Dimensional Strategy**

Türkiye's involvement in the region extends far beyond its strong ethnic and cultural ties with Azerbaijan, which President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan characterizes as "[two states, one nation](#)." Türkiye benefits from US and European interests in confronting Russian influence in the Caucasus and [Chinese influence](#) in the wider Central Asian trade routes. Since 2022, the European Union has taken a number of serious [steps](#) to reduce dependence on Russian energy and diversify its suppliers of gas and oil, making Azerbaijani gas increasingly valuable. Türkiye's geographic position makes it the inevitable transit route, strengthening its strategic importance to Azerbaijan and Europe. However, Türkiye's ambitions are not constrained to only Western interests. Through the construction of more pipelines, railways, and projects such as the [Middle Corridor](#), Türkiye has increasingly strengthened its strategic hand as a connective hub between Europe and Central Asia. Erdoğan has often emphasized the [Turkic ties](#) among Türkiye, South Caucasian states, Central Asian states, and even beyond, providing a

civilizational framework to Ankara's regional geopolitics. In addition, Türkiye's military has been training Azerbaijani officers for decades, and it is also Azerbaijan's third-largest supplier of military equipment. Through this strategic positioning Erdoğan aims to establish Türkiye as an influential regional power.

### **Implications on Global Order**

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has transformed the South Caucasus into a miniature of the world's shifting power balance, where the decline of Russian dominance, the United States' strategic entry, and the rise of Türkiye's regional influence are redrawing the geopolitical map. Moreover, it reflects the trend of multipolarity in the post-Cold War era on a larger scale. Russia, once the dominant power in the region, has witnessed the gradual erosion of its influence. Its inaction during Azerbaijan's offensive in 2023, with the addition of its preoccupation in Ukraine, has shaken its alliance with Armenia and significantly weakened Moscow's ability to keep other powers, such as Türkiye and the United States, from asserting their existence. In contrast, Türkiye has seized the opportunity to exert its influence. Through utilizing deep cultural ties with Azerbaijan, providing military support during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, and leveraging infrastructure projects connecting Central Asia to Europe, it is actively executing the strategy of making itself a decisive regional power. Moreover, the declining and emerging powers sketch a period of [strategic transition](#) that mirrors the shifting regional dynamics and the realignment of global powers, defining the post-Cold War era international relations. The Trump route may bear an American president's name, but its primary beneficiary will likely be the regional power that made it possible.