

Zangezur Corridor: Geopolitics vs. Geoeconomics

(Translated)

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The Zangezur Corridor project is moving from the negotiation stage to the technical implementation stage. Azerbaijan is actively developing its transportation infrastructure on its territory, including along the Nakhchivan border. Türkiye has also confirmed its readiness to provide a railway line through Kars. Meanwhile, Armenia has unilaterally refused to accept the corridor project, demanding full control over the transportation route on its territory. This means that the implementation of this project depends on political agreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the stances of major foreign powers seeking to interfere in the new transportation structure in the region.

At first glance, this logistics initiative appears to be a clash of interests between regional actors such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Türkiye. However, the reality is that the Zangezur Corridor continues to become an arena of global competition, one that the United States, China, and Russia are seeking to control. This conflict is not limited to goods alone; it also encompasses a means of influencing transport corridors, opening up access to markets, and altering the strategic balance in Eurasia.

Economically, comparing the Zangezur Corridor to the Suez and Panama Canals, its benefits are minimal. The volume of goods passing through these two canals, and their importance to global trade are far greater. For example, the Suez Canal covers approximately 12% of global trade, generating revenues for Egypt of between \$9 and \$10 billion annually. The Panama Canal, the main artery between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, generates net revenues of \$4 billion annually.

For comparison, the Zangezur Corridor handles between 10 and 15 million tons of cargo annually, generating revenues of up to a few hundred million dollars, for the participating countries: Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Armenia, and Kazakhstan. The costs of this land-based infrastructure, given the complex logistics chains and the risk of political instability, are significantly lower than those of maritime canals.

However, from a US foreign policy perspective, the Zangezur Canal is of strategic value as a target for control. In America's history, the Panama Canal was not an economic project. Instead the Panama Canal is a strategic tool for controlling maritime trade and military movements. Its current offer to lease part of the Zangezur Canal indicates its desire to maintain a presence and exert influence in the region. It seeks to gain political influence, not additional income.

The US is considering granting Armenia control over the main 32-kilometer section of the corridor, and placing it under its external administration for up to 100 years. This approach is similar to the strategies used in the Panama Canal or military bases. The primary objective is geopolitics, not logistics. Through this measure, the US seeks to expel Russia, weaken Iran, and limit China's influence in this part of the

“Middle Belt.” Control of Zangezur is therefore a means of preventing China from using Eurasian infrastructure without US control.

On the other hand, China sees this route as an alternative to the route through Russia, as Russian transport routes are vulnerable to sanctions and military action. Beijing is interested in diversifying its corridors within the framework of the One Belt, One Road Project. To this end, it is investing in infrastructure in the Caspian Sea and the South Caucasus, developing ports, terminals, and railways. However, China is taking cautious and indirect steps in this direction, preferring to implement multimodal transport cooperation, and multilateral logistics platforms, rather than direct political or military intervention.

Azerbaijan faces a difficult position in this conflict. On the one hand, Baku is actively using this corridor as a means to increase its influence, economic growth, and strengthen its relations with Nakhchivan. On the other hand, the opening of the Zangezur corridor, especially if accompanied by military or political intervention by foreign powers, would effectively transform the region into an arena for colonialist interests. Azerbaijan may gain transit revenues and political concessions from Armenia in the short term, but in the long term, it could lose sovereign control over this corridor, and face increasing foreign pressure and the threat of instability in the border regions.

Turkey is emerging as an active partner in this field, but its goals are not limited to logistics. Ankara is striving to build a direct political transport line from the Bosphorus to the Caspian Sea, and then to Central Asia and Beijing, justifying this with the idea of a “Turkish world.” However, the United States is not directly intervening in this project, but rather supporting Turkey as a balancing power in the region, capable of simultaneously limiting the influence of Iran, Russia, and China. Thus, the United States is creating an adaptive alliance of interests with Turkey and Baku, transforming them into separate, but coordinated players. However, this alliance is not without internal contradictions: while Turkey maintains a balance between West and East, Azerbaijan could become a victim of the West’s strategy. Despite its weakness, Armenia has a crucial advantage: the region through which this route passes. Will Yerevan retain its sovereignty in this area or not? This will determine the shape of the future corridor. In other words, will this be a transit route under Armenian jurisdiction, or an extraterritorial project under American control? The results of the negotiations will be revealing.

The Zangezur Corridor project is currently in a transitional phase. Despite its infrastructure development, it remains politically unstable. This project will remain a dead letter until the promised economic benefits and reliable guarantees are delivered to the participating countries. Meanwhile, political risks are increasing for these Muslim-majority countries. As Azerbaijan seeks control and revenue, its territory risks becoming a battleground for major powers like the United States, China, and Russia. This creates the risk of political dependency and long-term instability. Prosperity and stability in this region can only be fully guaranteed under the shade of the Second Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly Guided Caliphate).