



ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS AFTER THE 2020 KARABAKH SECOND WAR. GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION AND A FOCUS ON EXTERNAL ACTORS

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Abstract.

This article scientifically studies and analyzes the political relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan after the Second Karabakh War in 2020. In it, we analyze the interests and influences of external actors in the resolution of this conflict.

The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict had a significant impact on the geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus. As a result of the ongoing second war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan established full control over Nagorno-Karabakh, which led to the mass displacement of the ethnic Armenian population of Karabakh. Despite active peace negotiations, significant obstacles remained in the relations between the two countries and in the process of resolving the conflict. However, it should be noted that the

peace summit held in Washington on August 8, 2025, with the mediation of President Donald Trump, outlined the contours of an end to the conflict between these two countries. In this article, we try to analyze the consequences of the growing role of the US in the South Caucasus region, which is significantly related to the opening of the Zangezur corridor. There are descent opportunities for economic cooperation between these countries, if international actors and the parties themselves show good faith in the negotiations and create solid security mechanisms that will become the foundation for a lasting peace and economic development in the future, both in the region and specifically between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Key words: Region, Actors, Conflict, Karabagh, Armenia, Azerbaijani.

Introduction.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a long-standing territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with its roots tracing back to the Soviet Union period. To put it briefly, in 1923, the Soviet Union created the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast within Azerbaijan's territory, which laid the background for future tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 1988, the regional legislative body of Nagorno-Karabakh adopted a resolution expressing its intention to join the Republic of Armenia, which sparked the first tensions and armed clashes between the two republics, who already had tense ethnic relations.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan regained their independence. This was followed by the First Karabakh War, which lasted until 1994, claimed the lives of around thirty thousand people, and created hundreds of thousands of refugees. By 1993, Armenia had gained control of 20% of Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1994, a ceasefire agreement, known as the Bishkek Protocol, was signed between them with Russia's mediation. Despite this, the confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan continued.

At the end of September 2020, after a number of border clashes, heavy fighting resumed on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. The six-week war was quite severe, claiming the lives of more than seven thousand soldiers and civilians. On November 9 of the same year, an agreement was reached between the conflict parties with Russia's mediation, which officially ended the Second Karabakh War.

Now, we will discuss the geopolitical situation after 2020, the ongoing peace negotiations, and the complex and often competing role of external actors in shaping the future political landscape of the South Caucasus region.

Discussion.

The Second Karabakh War in 2020 largely changed the geopolitical landscape in the South Caucasus region. As a result of a decisive and successful military operation on September 19, 2023, Azerbaijan established control over Nagorno-Karabakh. This led to the dissolution of the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh, which had been under Armenian control since the 1990s.¹ This military success significantly shifted the balance of power in the South Caucasus. The new political landscape was characterized by Azerbaijani hegemony and Armenian vulnerability. This situation wasn't just another territorial redistribution between the countries of the South Caucasus, it presented a new geopolitical picture of the region, where, following its military success, Azerbaijan dictated a new set of rules to Armenia.

¹Tensions Between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Center for Preventive Action Updated August 07, 2025. P-1.
<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict>

Armenia lost the war, and a contributing factor can be seen in the lack of activity from its key ally and protector, Russia, in supporting Armenia during the conflict. Russia's passivity forced Armenia to seek new partners and forces on its political agenda. Russia's passive behavior in the South Caucasus region is largely due to the Russia-Ukraine war. The confrontation with Ukraine directed a large part of Russia's military resources toward that war, while Russia's political relations with both Yerevan and Baku became significantly strained.² Because of establishing the political vacuum in the South Caucasus region, Yerevan began seeking opportunities and connections for military and political cooperation with countries outside the region, such as France and India.

At the same time, Turkey and Azerbaijan further deepened their partnership, which made Azerbaijan's position in the region even more dominant. As a result, the security architecture of the South Caucasus region became even more multipolar.

The Role of External Actors: Interests and Influence

Russia. For several centuries, Russia has been an influential player in the South Caucasus region and, consequently, held a significant position in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. After the Second Karabakh War in 2020, Russia mediated a ceasefire between the conflict parties and deployed its peacekeepers to the Nagorno-Karabakh and Lachin regions. In doing so, Russia further advanced its political influence in the South Caucasus and strengthened its military presence.

This military mission was not a typical Russian peacekeeping mission. It was fundamentally different from its other missions in the post-Soviet space. Instead of building permanent bases, Russian peacekeepers lived in temporary plastic shelters and fortified their positions with sandbags - hardly the infrastructure for a military force aiming to achieve long-term stabilization. At the same time, the Russian-Turkish Joint Monitoring Center controlled the progress of the peacekeeping mission with drones.³ In addition, this mission had many legal shortcomings and ultimately only partially fulfilled its task. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 redirected a large part of Russia's military resources and attention to Ukraine. The military campaign launched by Azerbaijan against Armenia in 2023 clearly showed how ineffective Russian mediation was in the South Caucasus. Armenia, which considered Russia its political and, to some extent, military protector, saw Russia's indifference to Armenia in this conflict and began searching for new political allies in the West. As a result, Russia's position in Armenia was significantly weakened, and in the summer of 2025, the political situation with Azerbaijan became particularly tense when Russian forces began forcibly detaining Azerbaijani citizens in Russia. These events weakened Russia's influence in the South Caucasus region, creating a political vacuum that represented a political opportunity for other external powers.

Turkey. Turkey was a firm ally and supporter of Azerbaijan during the 2020 and 2023 military confrontations. Their relationship is characterized by a strong strategic partnership, which includes both military and economic support and cooperation. By opening the Zangezur corridor, Azerbaijan will become a connecting hub for Turkey with the countries of Central Asia, while Turkey will facilitate Azerbaijan's access to European countries and the Western market. Turkey's regional ambitions are also evident in its position regarding the Zangezur corridor. It is an active supporter of the corridor's opening. Although the US has

²Why Is Azerbaijan Ramping Up Tensions With Russia? Bashir Kitachaev, July 7, 2025 P 1-3.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/07/azerbaijan-russia-arguments?lang=en>

³Nagorno-Karabakh and the Collapse of Russia's Peacekeeping Mission: What Weak Mandates and Absent Guarantees Can Teach Us, Olesya Vartanyan, July 30, 2025. 1-2. <https://demsecinstitute.org/?p=1255>

emerged as the main mediator on the issue of opening this corridor, which on the other hand favors Turkey.

"If this corridor, which we are jointly planning, is implemented, it will become an important part of a transport route stretching uninterruptedly from Europe to the depths of Asia. The Zangezur Corridor will be a key link connecting Turkey with the Turkic world through the Caucasus and the Caspian, and also connecting the Turkic world with Europe through Turkey, and further - to the depths of Asia. It will be a multifunctional route. I believe that this (Washington agreement) is a very important and positive development, and I hope that the corridor will be implemented in the near future," said the Turkish Foreign Minister.⁴

As we can see, Turkey is the external power that unequivocally supported Azerbaijan in the ongoing Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

United States.

In recent times, the United States has been particularly active in the geopolitical processes underway in the South Caucasus region. It was more or less constantly involved in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and tried to assume the role of a mediator. The US was not the only country that tried to play this role. Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and France all acted as mediators in this conflict. While the efforts of all of them reached to some results, none had tangible outcomes that would end the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.⁵

The United States increased its involvement in the South Caucasus region after Russia's position here weakened significantly starting in 2023. Russia's weakening created a political vacuum in the region, which the US effectively utilized.

The United States became a significant mediator in the conflict from 2025. On August 8, 2025, President Donald Trump hosted the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan at the White House to reach a new peace agreement, and he was quite successful.

"It's a long time, 35 years, they fought, and now they're friends, and they're going to be friends for a long time," Trump said at the White House with Aliyev and Pashinyan seated next to him. "Many tried to find a resolution, including the European Union. The Russians worked very hard on it; it never happened. Sleepy Joe Biden tried, but you know what happened there"⁶-said US President Donald Trump at the White House, while hosting the Aliyev and Pashinyan at the peace summit.

At this meeting, the issue of the Zangezur corridor was also finally decided, which for years had been a subject of discussion and confrontation between the parties. The Zangezur corridor will have great political and economic significance for the South Caucasus region. After the agreement on August 8, 2025, this corridor, for the purpose of infrastructure development and transit corridor development, will be leased to an American private company, which will be guaranteed by the United States of America. The corridor will be named: "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity." The project will operate under

⁴Fidan: The Zangezur Corridor will connect Turkey with Turkic world and Turkic world with Europe through Turkey, <https://news.am/eng/news/898577.html>

⁵The Paradoxical Role of Mediators in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Prospects and Concerns, Sarwat Rauf, December 30, 2023. P 167-169. <https://www.insightturkey.com/file/1623/the-paradoxical-role-of-mediators-in-the-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-prospects-and-concerns>

⁶Trump presides over Armenia-Azerbaijan peace framework, upstaging Russia, Francesca Ebel, Matthew Choi. 9.08.2025.P-1. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/08/08/azerbaijan-armenia-nagorno-karabakh-trump/>

the jurisdiction of Armenia.⁷ As a result, Azerbaijan will have a land connection to its exclave of Nakhchivan, which means a new Asia-Europe connecting corridor in the South Caucasus.

As we can see, the U.S. is successfully fulfilling its role as a mediator between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The end of this conflict with the scenario mentioned above will be a great political success for President Donald Trump, while for Russia and Iran, it will mean a further weakening of their positions in the South Caucasus region.

The European Union.

Since 2023, the European Union has been involved in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict with its own observation mission to fill the political vacuum left after the OSCE Minsk Group's mediation. During the trilateral meeting in Brussels on May 14, 2023, the leaders reaffirmed their full support for the territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan and agreed that the final delimitation of the border would be carried out through negotiations, which both sides (Armenia and Azerbaijan) agreed to resume. They also agreed to resolve the disputed issues related to opening a transport corridor to and through Nakhchivan.⁸ The main principle of the EU's involvement was based on supporting the territorial integrity of the parties involved in the conflict.

While the European Parliament condemned the military actions carried out by Azerbaijan in September 2022,⁹ this did not stop Azerbaijan's future military operation, which could be called a failure of the European Union and its mission in this conflict.

Iran.

Iran has deep historical and cultural ties to the South Caucasus region. One of Iran's main interests is to reduce and obstruct the growing influence of the United States, Israel, and NATO in the South Caucasus. Since this region directly borders Iran to the north, it perceives the activation of the western actors near its borders as a threat. Iran sharply condemns the Armenian-Azerbaijani agreement reached through Trump's mediation, one point of which concerned the opening of the Zangezur corridor. Iran is against the launch of this corridor project and states that it will prevent its opening. Iran's spiritual leader's chief advisor, Ali Akbar Velayati, regarding the August 8, 2025 summit in America, said that the South Caucasus is not a piece of real estate that Trump can lease. He also stressed that the Zangezur corridor cannot become a means of bringing American forces into the region, and that this decision is a disrespect for Armenia's sovereignty.¹⁰

As we can see, the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and the opening of the Zangezur corridor are associated with Iran conceding its political positions in this region, and it will try its best to prevent the strengthening of the involvement of the United States and the West in the South Caucasus region.

⁷ Armenia, Azerbaijan Sign Historic Deal to Help Settle Nagorno-Karabakh Feud, Alexandra Sharp, 8.8.2025. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/08/08/armenia-azerbaijan-war-peace-deal-trump-white-house-tripp-zangezur-corridor/>

⁸ Armenia and Azerbaijan: Between war and peace, Anna Caprile and Jakub Przetacznik, June 2023. P 3-4. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/747919/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)747919_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/747919/EPRS_BRI(2023)747919_EN.pdf)

⁹ Armenia and Azerbaijan: Between war and peace, Anna Caprile and Jakub Przetacznik, June 2023. P 5. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/747919/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)747919_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/747919/EPRS_BRI(2023)747919_EN.pdf)

¹⁰ Iran vows to block Trump-brokered Caucasus corridor 'with or without Russia, Iran International, 9.08.2025. P-1. <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202508093340>

Conclusion.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict has at some extent changed the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus. These events allowed Azerbaijan to gain full control over Nagorno-Karabakh, which was followed by the massive forced displacement of the ethnic Armenian population.

In conclusion, we can note that although a peace agreement has been reached between Armenia and Azerbaijan and they have agreed to open the Zangezur corridor, peace in the region remains fragile. Despite the progress in peace talks and the emergence of a framework for resolving the conflict, fundamental disagreements between the parties, for example concerning the Zangezur corridor, still remain. To achieve peaceful and long-term coexistence, it is essential that the parties focus on good-faith negotiations and the creation of security mechanisms. All of this is compounded by the positions of external political actors who are trying to strengthen their political influence in this region.

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