

# FROM THE CAUCASUS TO THE LEVANT: HOW THE TRIPP (ZANGEZUR) CORRIDOR REORDERS REGIONAL STRATEGY

MOHAMAD FAWAZ

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## Introduction

The geopolitical map of the world resembles a vast chessboard where every move reshapes the balance of power. States compete not only through confrontation but also through strategic maneuvers that gradually shift influence, redraw alignments, and open or close the doors to future possibilities. In this grand game, some moves are aimed at “coloring” a zone or a state in one’s favor, thereby consolidating influence. In contrast, others act as gateways that trigger far-reaching consequences across entire regions.

In recent years, the United States has demonstrated a renewed ability to maneuver with precision in the Middle East, pursuing clever and calculated strategies that strengthen its presence despite mounting regional challenges and the growing assertiveness of rival powers. This renewed activism has relied not only on diplomacy and soft influence but also on the revival of hard power, even at the expense of humanitarian considerations. Nowhere was this more visible than in Washington’s unwavering support for Israel during Tel Aviv’s genocide in Gaza, where geopolitical calculations outweighed concerns for human suffering. In this context, the underlying priority of U.S. policy has been clear: to secure and expand geopolitical control in a contested environment.

Yet the game is not confined to the Middle East alone. One of Washington’s most significant moves has unfolded further north, in the South Caucasus. Through persistent diplomatic engagement and long-term planning, the U.S. has managed to reposition itself as a decisive actor in a region traditionally dominated by Russia and contested by Iran and Türkiye. The culmination of this effort is best illustrated in the recent developments surrounding what was long called the Zangezur (Syunik) Corridor. Since August 2025, Washington and Yerevan have officially adopted the name Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), while Baku continues to use ‘Zangezur’ and Armenia prefers the neutral ‘Syunik.’ This initiative that has, in effect, “colored” a strategic zone in Washington’s favor and revealed the depth of America’s ability to reshape regional dynamics.

Although this step does not take place in the Middle East itself, it is closely connected to it—reinforcing U.S. geopolitical calculations for the region and offering essential insights into its strategic direction.

Therefore, this expert brief is structured around three main sections. It begins with Armenia’s historic position between Russia and the West, tracing Yerevan’s long-standing dependence on

Moscow as a security guarantor and the gradual erosion of that role in favor of a westward pivot. The second section examines the Zangezur (Syunik) corridor as a new stage in the Caucasus, focusing on how the TRIPP agreement establishes U.S. dominance in the region while elevating Türkiye to a position of centrality as the primary gatekeeper of East–West connectivity. Finally, the brief examines the implications for the Levant Region, analyzing how these geopolitical shifts reverberate in the Levant, reinforce Israeli security priorities, and reshape U.S. engagement with Türkiye and its Arab partners across the Middle East.

### **Armenia’s Historic Position Between Russia and the West**

Armenia’s geopolitical trajectory has long been shaped by its geography: a small, landlocked state with limited resources, situated at the crossroads of empires. Surrounded by its historic rival, Türkiye—both directly and through Azerbaijan, whose identity is rooted in Turkic heritage and closely aligned with Ankara—Armenia found itself historically compelled to rely on Ankara’s traditional rival, Russia, as a protector. Since the nineteenth century, Moscow has positioned itself as Armenia’s primary security guarantor, offering shelter against Ottoman and later Turkish pressure.

Under the Russian Empire, Armenia was absorbed into imperial structures that provided a measure of security but simultaneously entrenched political and economic subordination. This dependency deepened during the Soviet era (1922–1991), when Armenia became highly integrated into Moscow’s political,<sup>1</sup> financial, and security order. Following independence in 1991, Yerevan inherited this reliance: Russian military bases on its soil, Moscow’s control over critical energy infrastructure, and Armenia’s membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)<sup>2</sup> all reflected the country’s dependence on Russia for survival in a hostile neighborhood. Armenia’s political identity and security architecture were thus firmly “colored” in Russia’s shade.

Even within this framework, Armenia maintained limited ties with the West, mainly through its influential diaspora communities in the United States, France, and the Middle East, which acted as bridges to Western capitals by lobbying foreign governments, mobilizing political advocacy, shaping cultural narratives, and providing substantial financial support<sup>3</sup>. This gradual orientation toward the West<sup>4</sup> gained new momentum with the Velvet Revolution of 2018, which brought Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan to power<sup>5</sup>. The revolution marked a decisive step toward reform and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, signaling a popular mandate for reducing Armenia’s structural dependence on Moscow<sup>6</sup>.

Despite intermittent talks, relations with Azerbaijan remained dominated by the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, with the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 which resulted in Ankara supported-Azerbaijan's victory against Armenia. A turning point: Moscow brokered the ceasefire and deployed some 1,960 Russian peacekeepers<sup>7</sup> but—consistent with CSTO rules that apply to attacks on a member's internationally recognized territory—did not intervene militarily<sup>8</sup>—consistent with CSTO rules limited to Armenia's recognized territory—underscoring the limits of Yerevan's reliance on Russia. Subsequent crises underscored those limits: the Lachin Corridor blockade in 2022–23 and Azerbaijan's September 2023 offensive precipitated a mass exodus of more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians from the enclave,<sup>9</sup> and Russia's peacekeeping mission began withdrawing in spring 2024<sup>10</sup>. For many Armenians, this sequence amounted to a breach of trust, a view reflected in Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's 2023 admission that relying solely on Russia for security was a “strategic mistake”<sup>11</sup>. (Osborn 2023) From 2023 onward, Armenia's foreign policy gradually but clearly shifted toward Western partners, marked by the EU's launch of a civilian monitoring mission (EUMA)<sup>12</sup>, ratification of the ICC's Rome Statute, and a formal “freeze” on participation in the CSTO in February 2024<sup>13</sup>. In parallel, Pashinyan attended Erdoğan's 2023 inauguration and paid a working visit to Türkiye in June 2025, underscoring a readiness to normalize ties with a NATO member alongside his broader Western re-orientation. He attended President Erdoğan's inauguration in 2023 and later paid a working visit to Türkiye in June 2025, signaling a readiness to normalize relations that had long been burdened by historical enmity.

This erosion of trust deepened after Russia failed to defend Armenian territory during Azerbaijan's renewed offensives. By early 2024, Armenia announced it was effectively [freezing its participation in the CSTO](#), underscoring the collapse of the security alliance's credibility. In a symbolic step, Armenian border guards assumed control of the checkpoint with Iran<sup>14</sup>—a post previously managed by Russian forces for more than three decades—signaling a decisive shift in the balance of security arrangements.

Armenia's domestic politics simultaneously grew more polarized. Critics of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan—including parts of the Armenian Apostolic Church hierarchy and opposition parties often described as pro-Russian—mobilized against his West-leaning agenda. In late June and July 2025, authorities arrested Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan<sup>15</sup> and, days later, Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan<sup>16</sup>, along with opposition figures, on charges of plotting to overthrow the government; prosecutors alleged an organized conspiracy, while the detainees deny wrongdoing and some opposition figures frame the cases as politically motivated. Reuters also reported<sup>17</sup> the detention of seven figures linked to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, part of a parliamentary coalition it describes as pro-Russian; opposition groups

call the cases politically motivated. Analysts note that several of Pashinyan's hard-line opponents enjoy near-overt support from Moscow, though the Kremlin publicly called the affair an internal Armenian matter<sup>18</sup>.

Against this backdrop of regional insecurity and domestic fragility, Yerevan accelerated its engagement with the West. This trajectory culminated in the signing of a Strategic Partnership Charter with the United States on January 14, 2025<sup>19</sup>. The agreement outlined a comprehensive framework for cooperation encompassing defense, governance, economic development, and democratic reform—marking a new phase in Armenia's strategic reorientation and a direct challenge to Russia's historical role in the South Caucasus.

### **Zangezur (Syunik) Corridor: A New Stage in the Caucasus—U.S. Dominance and Turkish Centrality**

The westward pivot of Armenia is so striking that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan engaged Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan three times within a nine-month period—New York (September 24, 2024)<sup>20</sup>, a leader-to-leader call (June 5, 2025)<sup>21</sup>, and Istanbul (June 20, 2025)<sup>22</sup>. For a nation whose modern identity is deeply tied to the memory of Ottoman-era trauma, this cadence is unprecedented, symbolically rewriting Armenia's historic posture toward Türkiye. Such a shift could not have occurred without both American hope and pressure—surely in addition to the results of the latest Karabakh war.

This American pressure, fused with the promise of economic gain for Armenia through a historic corridor bridging East and West—and anchored to an industrial, strategically pivotal NATO member like Türkiye—made the country's transformation both possible and irresistible. This momentum reached its apex with the unveiling of the Trump Route for International Peace & Prosperity (TRIPP) [on August 8, 2025](#)<sup>23</sup>. Per U.S. and Armenian readouts, the parties unveiled the TRIPP corridor. While some outlets have characterized the arrangement as granting the United States “exclusive development rights” [for up to 99 years](#)<sup>24</sup>, Armenian officials dispute that description<sup>25</sup>, and the full text has yet to be published. As outlined, Armenian sovereignty remains intact, but Washington would oversee and administer the design, construction, and management of transit, energy, and digital infrastructure along the corridor—a modest tract with outsized strategic significance.

Zangezur (Syunik) is not merely a mountainous region in southern Armenia—it is the hinge between the South Caucasus and global trade routes. Historically, it has been the landlocked bottleneck preventing the Caspian basin (Azerbaijan, Central Asia) from achieving direct westward access to Türkiye and Europe. For Armenia, the corridor promises to transform

isolation into integration, embedding Yerevan into Euro-Atlantic structures and tying its future to a NATO power that straddles continents. For Türkiye, it cements its role as the indispensable bridge connecting Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

**In a single but sweeping move, Trump achieved:**

■ **For the United States:** A century-long strategic foothold in the South Caucasus, with control over transit, pipelines, and digital infrastructure. This position enables Washington to project influence across Eurasia, bypassing both Iran and Russia, while strengthening its ties with Türkiye and the wider region, and extending its line of access into Central Asia—even within what has historically been regarded as Russia’s sphere of influence. At the same time, the corridor complements Washington’s broader global strategy of establishing alternative connectivity routes to counterbalance China’s Belt and Road Initiative, ensuring that American-backed infrastructure, rather than rival projects, defines the arteries of trade and influence across Eurasia. Importantly, this orientation also sidelines Georgia—long seen as wavering from the United States to Russia<sup>26</sup>—signaling both a circumvention of Tbilisi’s instability and a form of strategic pressure or “discipline” against its geopolitical shifting.

■ **For Türkiye:** the deal elevates Ankara’s role from regional neighbor to dominant gatekeeper of the Caucasus under U.S. endorsement. Ankara’s new leverage became immediately visible when it announced plans to route Azerbaijani gas to Syria via Kilis<sup>27</sup>—a project quietly greenlighted by Washington and packaged as humanitarian relief. With this, Ankara positioned itself not only as a mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan but also as a logistical and energy hub linking the Caspian, the Levant, and beyond.

Looking ahead, this corridor is more than a local project for Türkiye. It opens Ankara’s doors eastward toward Central Asia - which is very important for the Turkic world-, Pakistan, and India, while consolidating its bridge role westward into the Middle East and Europe.

All of this takes place under the broader umbrella of strengthening and deepening the strategic alliance, with the United States increasingly relying on Ankara as its primary partner in the region.

■ **For peace in the Caucasus:** A framework that transforms the Zangezur (Syunik) corridor into a shared economic artery, reducing isolation and providing a structural incentive for cooperation rather than conflict between historic rivals. Beyond politics and economics, it offers a symbolic gateway for reconciliation between two peoples whose relationship was defined by enmity for over a century.

■ **For Russia:** According to Reuters<sup>28</sup>, the Russian Foreign Ministry cautiously welcomed the U.S.-brokered Armenia–Azerbaijan peace accord, affirming its support for initiatives that promote regional stability and prosperity. However, Russia emphasized that enduring solutions should be developed primarily by the regional countries themselves, with the support of neighboring powers such as Russia, Iran, and Türkiye. Moscow also issued a clear warning that foreign involvement should reinforce the peace agenda rather than create new divisions, implicitly alluding to past “Western-led conflict resolution<sup>29</sup>” failures in the Middle East.

However, this development has eroded Russia’s traditional role in the South Caucasus while simultaneously consolidating the American presence. Preoccupied with the protracted and complex war in Ukraine—which Moscow seeks to resolve on its own terms—Russia has shown little capacity, and perhaps limited willingness, to engage in a new confrontation with the West in the south Caucasus. This dynamic enhances the effectiveness of the initiative in constraining Russia’s regional influence, regardless of whether Moscow accepts it or not.

■ **For Iran:** A significant setback, as the deal effectively severs Armenia from Tehran’s sphere of influence and curtails Iran’s northern reach, intensifying its regional encirclement.

In response, Ali Akbar Velayati—senior adviser to Iran’s Supreme Leader—boldly denounced the corridor as “political treachery,” proclaiming: “This passage will not become a gateway for Trump’s mercenaries — it will become their graveyard. <sup>30</sup>” He warned that Tehran is “ready to prevent any geopolitical changes” near its border, even “with or without Russia,” underscoring Iran’s willingness to use military force to thwart the corridor. The Iranian Foreign Ministry also warned that foreign intervention near its frontiers could “undermine the region’s security and lasting stability<sup>31</sup>.”

This development also aligns with the broader objectives of the United States, which aim to undermine Iran—this time from the north. By severing Armenia from Tehran’s sphere of influence and embedding American oversight in the Zangezur (Syunik) corridor, Washington effectively shuts down one of Iran’s last potential gateways to the Caucasus and Europe. The move reinforces the U.S. strategy of encirclement, complementing pressure from the Gulf, Iraq, and Syria, while now extending that containment line into the South Caucasus.

■ **For Armenia:** A path out of landlocked isolation through integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, tied to long-term economic development and alignment with a NATO partner. The agreement offers Yerevan unprecedented opportunities for Westernization at a moment when Russia’s failure to protect it in the most recent war exposed the limits of reliance on

Moscow. Economically, it opens direct channels with Europe, positioning Armenia along a historic transit line that can redefine it as both a corridor state and a future hub for imports and exports. Politically and socially, it carries the potential to ease a century-old conflict with Türkiye, replacing entrenched hostility with incentives for coexistence. Strategically, it orients Armenia toward the strongest global pole—the United States and its allies—anchoring its future in a Western-led order rather than in dependence on declining regional patrons.

### **The implication in the Levant?**

Anchoring TRIPP in the South Caucasus, affirming signals to the Middle East about American policy: the United States is committed to sustainable, long-term partnerships—especially with Türkiye, which is increasingly stepping into geopolitical spaces once held by others. A clear example is the reports that indicate that Ankara is set to assume control of the Abéché military base following France’s withdrawal<sup>32</sup>, a development that highlights Türkiye’s expanding influence in Africa.

Moreover, Türkiye has demonstrated its evolving diplomatic role by hosting high-level peace talks between Ukraine and Russia<sup>33</sup>, including proposals for potential meetings between leaders such as Trump and Putin in Istanbul or Ankara. This underscores Ankara’s emergence as a credible mediator in a major international conflict—an initiative the United States has tacitly supported.

Beyond international diplomacy, Türkiye has also pursued domestic political initiatives involving Kurdish actors<sup>34</sup>, fostering dialogue and political accommodation without U.S. opposition—reflecting Washington’s tacit recognition of Ankara’s internal leadership on security matters. Taken together—with the shifts unfolding in the Caucasus and Syria—these developments illustrate that the U.S. is strengthening the relationship with Türkiye and reinforcing a strategic alliance that transcends short-term alignments, laying the foundation for multi-generational projects spanning Africa, Eurasia, and the Middle East. In this configuration, the U.S.–Türkiye partnership emerges as a durable axis of regional influence.

It also reinforces America’s comprehensive strategy to contain Iran from every angle—not a tactical maneuver but a coherent strategy. It echoes the Trumpian geopolitical principle of corridors and economic zones as foundational solutions that bind regions of influence, penetrate new spaces, contain adversaries, and serve as alternatives to conventional frontlines—from the Caucasus to the economic zone recently proposed in southern Lebanon as an alternative to military solutions.

However, some may argue that the US's increased confidence in Türkiye necessarily implies complete alignment with it in Syria. But that is not necessarily the case. The U.S. invests in a strategic partnership with Türkiye and with Gulf states, yet it simultaneously does not elevate one over its relationship with Israel and Israeli security. Thus, the expansion of U.S.–Turkish ties appear to stop at Damascus and does not extend to full support for Syrian unification under full command in Damascus. For example, in mid-July 2025, Syrian government forces entered al-Suwayda amid intense sectarian clashes—moves that Tel Aviv viewed as a potential geopolitical threat to Israel's security. In response, on July 16, 2025, Israel launched heavy airstrikes on Damascus<sup>35</sup>, targeting the Syrian military headquarters and adjacent defense ministry buildings and areas near the presidential palace. This strategy did not begin with the clashes in al-Suwayda, nor did it end there; instead, it has continued beyond them<sup>36</sup>. These strikes were explicitly framed as a stern warning to both the Syrian regime and Türkiye that Israeli security red lines remain inviolate.

Moreover, the new Syrian leadership—backed by its alliances—has not yet established<sup>37</sup> control over the eastern region held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which includes key infrastructure such as oil fields, airports, and border crossings. The northeastern and coastal areas remain outside central government authority, with the SDF and its autonomous administration, which has been backed by the US, maintaining an operational presence for the last decade. Meanwhile, Syria under President Ahmed al-Sharaa, who assumed the presidency in January 2025, continues to negotiate with the SDF while facing persistent challenges in asserting control over these territories. Tensions remain high in areas such as Raqqa and Hasaka, where parliamentary elections have been postponed<sup>38</sup>, further underscoring that things are far from settled.

Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the reality of a fortified U.S.–Turkish strategic relationship, extending into Syria without crossing Israel's security red lines. So far, these dynamics suggest that central and northern Syria are reinforced through the Turkish–Gulf–American alignment, while maintaining red lines such as Israel's security—and possibly even accommodating Israel's more extreme demands in the future. In other words, the strengthening of U.S.–Turkish relations, along with Gulf involvement, does not necessarily extend to southern Syria or to the unification of Syrian leadership under al-Sharaa. This highlights both the ongoing and future struggle in Syria: a complex competition involving Israel, the Syrian regime (backed by Türkiye and Arab states), and a U.S.-driven containment of Iran that spans from the Caucasus to the Levant. It also reflects Washington's balancing act between Turkish, Gulf, and Israeli interests in Syria—lines that will remain decisive until they are delineated.

The most recent confirmation of this balancing act came with the arrival of a large U.S. delegation in Lebanon. The visit was marked by the absence of an Israeli response, which Lebanese actors had been expecting<sup>39</sup>, and was widely interpreted as evidence of Washington's complete alignment with Israel. Thus, the Israeli border—and the areas around it—are effectively managed in line with American alignment with Israeli policy, and often with Washington's full support for Israel's broader strategic aims. In sum, the configuration represents a durable U.S.–Turkish strategic alignment that does not extend to the Israeli border or its approaches, while other spaces remain contested; yet all of this unfolds beneath the American umbrella, which continues to entrench its regional presence.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohamad Fawaz is a researcher specializing in international relations. He holds a master's degree in international relations from the Lebanese American University, focusing on Middle Eastern affairs.