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# The Washington Peace Declaration as a Milestone for Regional Peace and Cooperation

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**JUNE 2026**

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## Introduction

On August 8, 2025, President Donald Trump, President Ilham Aliyev, and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan signed the Washington Peace Declaration, representing a historic step in advancing peacebuilding processes. The Declaration promotes a sustainable and forward-looking framework for regional stability through economic interdependence, connectivity, and long-term cooperation between the parties. While the central focus of the 2020 trilateral statement brokered by Russia was to institutionalize a ceasefire, the Washington Peace Declaration illustrates a transition toward a more proactive and constructive approach to peacebuilding. It redefines peace not only as the absence of war but also as the presence of mutually reinforcing incentives for maintaining stability. Ultimately, it reflects a growing willingness of parties to move beyond conflict management toward future-oriented reconciliation.

The most significant outcome of the Washington Summit was the initialing of the long-awaited Armenia–Azerbaijan peace treaty, which has been negotiated over three years. The parties also agreed on the closure of the OSCE Minsk Group, whose relevance has steadily diminished. Importantly, the Declaration reconceptualized the traditionally contested notion of the “Zangezur Corridor” from a source of geopolitical tension to a key component of regional connectivity under the “Trump Route for International Peace Prosperity” (TRIPP) framework. Overall, the Washington Summit signaled the expanded U.S. role in the region through bilateral engagements with Azerbaijan and Armenia. Azerbaijan agreed to establish a Strategic Working Group to prepare a Charter on Strategic Partnership with the United States to deepen cooperation in energy, connectivity, and artificial intelligence.<sup>1</sup>

This article examines the Washington Peace Declaration as a turning point for peace processes between Azerbaijan and Armenia, arguing that it symbolizes the shift toward a more constructive peacebuilding in the region. It analyzes how strategic initiatives in energy, connectivity, and economic integration operationalize this approach. The study evaluates how these developments contribute to the gradual transformation of historically adversarial relations through referring to conflict

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<sup>1</sup> Vasif Huseynov, “Despite Threats and Challenges, the Washington Agreements May Bring Lasting Peace to the South Caucasus,” Aircenter.az, 2025, <https://aircenter.az/en/single/despite-threats-and-challenges-the-washington-agreements-may-bring-lasting-peace-to-the-south-caucasus-1881>.

resolution theory, particularly Deutsch's framework of cooperation and competition, trust-building, and reconciliation approaches. At the same time, it situates these processes within a broader regional context characterized by persistent geopolitical tensions and assesses how external dynamics may complicate the sustainability of this emerging peacebuilding model.

## **Historical Context**

A brief historical context of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is essential for understanding contemporary peacebuilding processes.<sup>2</sup> The origins of the conflict root back to the late Russian imperial period, when Armenians and Azerbaijanis confronted each other over political dominance across multiple governorates. The collapse of the Russian Empire intensified the conflict as Armenian nationalists claimed several regions incorporated into the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. Once the Soviet rule was established, territorial-administrative arrangements further reinforced these disputes. These included the transfer of the Zangezur (Syunik) region to Armenia and the creation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) within Azerbaijan in 1923.<sup>3</sup>

The contemporary phase of the conflict began during the late Soviet period (1987–1988), when Armenian nationalists sought to unite the NKAO with Armenia, initially through Soviet legal mechanisms and later through claims of self-determination. After the collapse of the USSR, the dispute transformed into an interstate conflict, leading to the First Karabakh War. It ended with Armenian control over NKAO and adjacent territories as well as the displacement of the Azerbaijani population from the region.<sup>4</sup>

Although several international instruments addressed the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, they remained unimplemented over the years. These include four UN Security Council resolutions adopted in 1993, which called for the withdrawal of occupying forces from Azerbaijani territories.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, negotiations mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group from 1992 to 2020 failed to produce a settlement of the conflict and instead resulted in a prolonged stalemate despite initiatives such as the Madrid Principles. Ultimately, the rising tensions culminated in the Second Karabakh

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<sup>2</sup> For more comprehensive historical analyses, see, for example, Thomas de Waal (2003) and Laurens Broers (2019).

<sup>3</sup> Farid Shafiyev, "Peace Negotiations Between Armenia and Azerbaijan," *Rondeli Foundation* 198 (2023), 3-5. <https://gfsis.org.ge/files/library/opinion-papers/198-expert-opinion-eng.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5.

<sup>5</sup> See UN Security Council Resolutions 822 (1993); 853 (1993); 874 (1993); and 884 (1993)

War in 2020, after which Azerbaijan restored control over its internationally recognized territory. A trilateral statement brokered by Russia in 2020 introduced a ceasefire, deployed Russian peacekeepers in parts of Karabakh, and introduced new regional arrangements.<sup>6</sup>

### Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the Washington Peace Declaration as a catalyst for advancing regional peacebuilding requires a theoretical perspective on how adversarial relations can transition toward cooperation and sustainable peace. This study draws on key concepts from conflict resolution theory, particularly Morton Deutsch's theory of cooperation and competition, trust-building in conflict resolution, and reconciliation theory.<sup>7</sup> Together, these concepts offer an analytical framework for interpreting how the Washington Declaration is reshaping the Azerbaijan-Armenia relations toward a more cooperative form of engagement.

Deutsch's theory of *cooperation and competition*<sup>8</sup> explains how the dynamics of conflict are shaped by the way parties perceive their relationship. When goals are considered mutually incompatible, parties tend to follow competitive strategies characterized by mistrust, limited communication, and efforts to weaken the other side. In contrast, when goals are perceived as positively linked, they adopt a cooperative strategy that encourages dialogue, trust-building, and joint problem-solving. This shift in approach leads to the increased likelihood of constructive conflict resolution and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Closely related to this is the role of trust in facilitating peace negotiations. Scholars distinguish between different types of trust that evolve over time in post-conflict environments. *Calculus-based trust* emerges when cooperation is based on cost-benefit considerations; in this case, actors comply because violating commitments carries significant costs.<sup>9</sup> Gradually, this may evolve toward *identification-based trust*, which is grounded on a shared sense of goals and mutual understanding. At this stage, actors internalize the relationship and are more willing to consider the

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<sup>6</sup> MFA, "Trilateral Statement of the Leaders of Azerbaijan, Russian Federation and Armenia of November 10, 2020," Mfa.gov.az (Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020), <https://mfa.gov.az/en/category/end-of-the-conflict-in-november-2020-and-post-conflict-situation/trilateral-statement-of-the-leaders-of-azerbaijan-russian-federation-and-armenia-of-november-10-2020>.

<sup>7</sup> Peter T Coleman, Morton Deutsch, and Eric Colton Marcus, *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, Ca: Jossey-Bass, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

interests of the other side. Differentiating this progression is particularly relevant in contexts where cooperation initially emerges from strategic necessity rather than genuine trust in each other.

Finally, reconciliation theory explains the transformation of previously hostile relations between former adversaries into peaceful coexistence. Scholars distinguish between the main post-resolution routes to reconciliation, namely *sociemotional and instrumental routes*.<sup>10</sup> The former aims to overcome the conflict-related emotions, especially revenge, through mechanisms such as truth-telling, apology, and forgiveness. Meanwhile, instrumental reconciliation focuses on practical cooperation in gradually rebuilding trust. It happens as previous adversaries align the interests through shared goals and tangible benefits, eventually increasing trust in each other. It provides a relevant framework for analyzing the peacebuilding efforts centered around economic interdependence and strategic connectivity.

### **Washington Summit: Key Documents and Provisions**

The Washington Summit of 8 August 2025 produced three key outcomes: the initialing of the Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Inter-State Relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the signing of a Joint Declaration outlining the principles of normalization, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Azerbaijan and the United States establishing a framework for strategic partnership, later formalized through a signed strategic partnership agreement.

The initialing of the [Agreement on Establishment of Peace and Inter-State Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia](#) represents the legal foundation for the normalization of bilateral relations. Based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of international borders, and political independence, the document is guided by foundational instruments of international law. It prohibits parties from making territorial claims against each other, using force, intervening in each other's internal affairs, and allowing third-party military actions. The agreement outlines the expectation from parties to establish diplomatic relations, cooperate in strategic areas, and implement confidence-building measures. It also addresses humanitarian issues such as information exchange and cooperation in investigating the cases of missing persons during armed conflict.

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<sup>10</sup> A Nadler, "Post-Resolution Processes: On Instrumental and Socio-Emotional Routes to Reconciliation," in *Peace Education Worldwide: The Concept, Principles, and Practices around the World*, 2002.

[The Joint Declaration](#) reinforces the process to achieve the ultimate ratification of the Agreement and symbolizes the political commitments and shared interests of both leaders to promote regional connectivity, cooperation, and peace. It marks a shift from the previous multilateral mediation framework toward a more direct engagement in peacebuilding by confirming that both sides have requested the termination of the OSCE's Minsk Process and related structures. A significant emphasis is put on enhancing regional connectivity and economic cooperation as the leaders reaffirm the importance of reopening communications for intrastate, bilateral, and international transportation. As part of these efforts, the declaration refers to the TRIPP connectivity project, which will link mainland Azerbaijan with the Nakhchivan exclave and serve as a regional transit hub to be developed through a partnership between Armenia and the U.S. Thus, economic integration is positioned as a key instrument for sustaining peace and stability in the region. The declaration also introduces new geopolitical realities in the region with the growing U.S. involvement and diminished role of Russia.

The [MoU](#) signed between the US and Azerbaijan regarding the establishment of a Strategic Working Group laid the foundation of a future Charter on Strategic Partnership between the two countries. Within the visit of U.S. Vice President JD Vance to Azerbaijan in February 2026, the [Charter on Strategic Partnership between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan](#) was signed. The Charter outlines the comprehensive framework for cooperation in economic, political, security, and technological fields, further elevating bilateral relations to a strategic level. Recognizing Azerbaijan's role as a transit hub connecting Central Asian and European markets, the Charter focuses on enhancing regional connectivity through the development of the Middle Corridor and TRIPP, particularly in the areas of energy, transport, and digital infrastructure. Another important component of the Charter constitutes strengthening economic cooperation by promoting investment and improving bilateral business relations. To support Azerbaijan's deeper integration into the global economy, it promotes the creation of economic and trade dialogue platforms, AI data centers, and joint R&D initiatives. Beyond connectivity and economic engagement, the Charter shares mutual interest in maintaining stability and security in the South Caucasus, thus including provisions on security cooperation, specifically defense collaboration, counterterrorism efforts, cybersecurity, and humanitarian demining assistance.

## Analysis

The Washington Peace Declaration represents a transition in Azerbaijan-Armenia relations toward a cooperative framework based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and jurisdiction. According to Deutsch's theory, once parties accept that stable borders and mutual recognition contribute to regional development, cooperation becomes a rational strategy rather than a concession. In this context, the future-oriented initiatives such as the development of new transport corridors and broader economic integration facilitate the gradual shift in the relationship from confrontation to pragmatic collaboration. Incentives for conflict diminish as both sides benefit from shared projects, while incentives for maintaining stable relations increase with growing positive interdependence between the parties.

From a trust-development perspective, the Declaration reflects *calculus-based trust*, in which cooperation is sustained because the expected benefits exceed the costs of non-compliance. The dual role of the United States as formal witness to the Declaration and principal guarantor of the TRIPP corridor creates an external enforcement mechanism. The declaration's rejection of any attempt of future revenge increases reputational and political risk of non-compliance. At the same time, Azerbaijan has undertaken several confidence-building measures to further strengthen trust between the parties. In October of 2025 Azerbaijan lifted all the transit restrictions to Armenia and supplied Armenia with several shipments of fuel, including multiple deliveries of RON-95 and RON-92 gasoline as well as diesel fuel, totaling thousands of tons transported primarily by rail.<sup>11</sup> By the end of January, Azerbaijani exports to Armenia had reached approximately 2.4 million USD.<sup>12</sup> In parallel, the reciprocal meetings between the civil society representatives within "The Peace Bridge" initiative added a people-to-people layer to the trust-building processes.<sup>13</sup> This process has also been reflected at the institutional level, as illustrated by Azerbaijan hosting the Armenian delegation in Gabala in November 2025 for the 12th meeting of the State Commission on the Delimitation of the Azerbaijan-Armenia State Border.<sup>14</sup> Such interactions also signal a potential for the

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<sup>11</sup> Trend News Agency, "Azerbaijan Throws Light on Export Costs to Armenia in January 2026," Trend.Az, February 16, 2026, <https://www.trend.az/business/energy/4154001.html>.

<sup>12</sup> AzerNews, "Azerbaijan Exports \$2.4 Million Worth of Goods to Armenia in Past Month," Azernews.Az, February 16, 2026, <https://www.azernews.az/business/254519.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Milli.az, "Ermənistanda 'Sülh Körpüsü' Təşəbbüsü Çərçivəsində Azərbaycan-Ermənistan Vətəndaş Cəmiyyəti Nümayəndələrinin İştirakı ilə Dəyirmi Masa Keçirilib - FOTO," Milli.Az, February 14, 2026, <https://news.milli.az/politics/1316417.html>.

<sup>14</sup> AIR Center, "Bulletin. January 2026.," <https://Aircenter.az/Uploads/Z7M1N58qxFe4.Pdf>, 2026.

growth of *identification-based trust* between the parties, in which they develop a deeper sense of cooperation based on mutual understanding.

The Declaration further advances a process of *instrumental reconciliation* by prioritizing the development of functional interdependencies in the form of shared transport, energy, and economic linkages. TRIPP is a key component of this approach as a multimodal corridor transforming the previously contentious region into a shared economic asset. Recent developments around TRIPP indicate growing progress around its practical implementation. In January 2026, the release of the TRIPP Implementation Framework was welcomed by Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an important step toward initiating practical work on the corridor.<sup>15</sup> It reaffirms the United States’ commitment to the agreements reached during the summit as well as operationalizes Armenia’s obligation to provide unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic through Armenian territory. According to the [framework](#), the development and management of the corridor will be implemented by TRIPP Development Company, operated with a 74% U.S. and 26% Armenian ownership structure. The company will manage the corridor for an initial period of 49 years with the possibility of extending the arrangement for an additional 50 years.

The development of parallel infrastructure initiatives further reinforces this trajectory. For instance, Azerbaijan’s construction of the Zangezur Power Line to connect the Nakchivan Autonomous Republic to the country's unified electricity system also offers Armenia an opportunity to interconnect its electricity grid with neighboring systems and utilize its surplus generation capacity.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the corridor is evolving into a broader connectivity platform that integrates transport, logistics, and energy infrastructure. Moreover, the recent extension of gas exports to Germany and Austria via the Southern Gas Corridor<sup>17</sup> demonstrates that Azerbaijan’s connectivity efforts become part of a broader transregional interdependence. Ultimately, these developments reflect the logic of the Washington peace process that prioritizes functional interdependencies. They generate shared economic incentives that extend beyond bilateral normalization and contribute to broader regional stability.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> AIR Center, “Bulletin. February 2026,” <https://Aircenter.az/Uploads/M2uFBQTla3hS.pdf>, 2026.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3-5.

## Challenges and Policy Implications

Despite the progress achieved through recent peacebuilding initiatives, the broader geopolitical environment surrounding the South Caucasus presents structural challenges. Situated between the two conflicts, the Russia-Ukraine war to the north and the Iran-Israel and US conflict to the south, there is increased risk of spillover effect in the South Caucasus.<sup>18</sup> For instance, on March 5 drones launched from Iranian territory targeted civilian infrastructure near the international airport and secondary school in Azerbaijan.<sup>19</sup> While Iranian authorities denied the responsibility of attacks, it demonstrates increasing operational influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other hardline elements within Iran's security apparatus and raises questions about the extent to which political leadership can effectively restrain decentralized military actors.<sup>20</sup>

In parallel, the relations between Azerbaijan and Russia face unresolved tensions over the December 2024 crash of an Azerbaijani Airlines plane. Despite the claims by President Vladimir Putin during the Dushanbe meeting that air defense activity during Ukrainian drone operations contributed to the crash, a January 2026 letter from Russia's Investigative Committee attributed the incident to weather and pilot error. This discrepancy raised questions in Baku regarding the inconsistency between the political statements and legal conclusions, which negatively affects the normalization of bilateral relations.<sup>21</sup>

At the bilateral level, domestic factors continue to complicate the normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In particular, the upcoming parliamentary elections in Armenia may slow progress, as leaders are likely to avoid politically sensitive decisions related to the peace process. At the same time, the issue of constitutional reform remains unresolved: Azerbaijan links the signing of a final peace treaty to changes in Armenia's constitution, while Yerevan treats this as an internal matter. It creates uncertainty in the negotiations and may delay the move from initial agreements to a fully implemented peace settlement.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Vasif Huseynov, "Opinion: The South Caucasus Caught between Two Wars," Aircenter.az, 2026, <https://aircenter.az/en/single/opinion-the-south-caucasus-caught-between-two-wars-2056>

<sup>19</sup> Vasif Huseynov, "Iran's Drone Attacks Strain Tensions between Baku and Tehran," Aircenter.az, 2026, <https://aircenter.az/en/single/irans-drone-attacks-strain-tensions-between-baku-and-tehran-2057>.

<sup>20</sup> Vasif Huseynov, "Opinion: The South Caucasus Caught between Two Wars," Aircenter.az, 2026, <https://aircenter.az/en/single/opinion-the-south-caucasus-caught-between-two-wars-2056>.

<sup>21</sup> AIR Center, "Bulletin. January 2026.," <https://Aircenter.az/Uploads/Z7M1N58qxFe4.Pdf>, 2026.

<sup>22</sup> Aghakazim Guliyev, "Armenia Rejects Azerbaijan's Call to Amend Constitution for Peace Deal | Caliber.Az," Caliber.az, October 14, 2025, <https://caliber.az/en/post/armenia-rejects-azerbaijan-s-call-to-amend-constitution-for-peace-deal>.

Considering the challenges in regional and bilateral contexts, the continuation of cooperation between the parties in functional areas such as trade, connectivity, and technical coordination requires a more resilience-based approach. This may include the expansion of participation beyond central governments to private sector actors and international partners adding additional layers of commitment to buffer against geopolitical risks. Moreover, the commitments that foster calculus-based trust remain fragile if not gradually complemented by initiatives that promote identification-based trust; these may include increased people-to-people engagement and reframing public narratives to emphasize common interests. In the long-term perspective, socio-emotional measures, such as acknowledging the grievances of both societies and promoting mutual recognition, are essential for reconciliation processes.

## **Conclusion**

The Washington Peace Declaration represents a transition from conflict management to a more constructive approach to peacebuilding processes between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The analysis of the Declaration and related key documents shows that the peace between the two parties is increasingly grounded in connectivity, economic cooperation, and sustained engagement. Thus, peace is framed not as the absence of conflict but as the presence of mutually reinforcing incentives. Drawing on Deutsch's framework, the provisions of the Declaration signal a gradual transition from competitive to cooperative interaction, where parties perceive their goals as mutually beneficial. The peacebuilding measures following the declaration demonstrate the early signs of emerging calculus-based trust that can be developed into deeper forms of mutual trust. Initiatives such as TRIPP and broader energy and transport linkages illustrate how instrumental reconciliation takes shape through practical cooperation.

At the same time, existing geopolitical tensions in the region and Armenia's domestic political constraints continue to condition the limits of peacebuilding processes. The significance of the Washington framework, however, lies not only in its immediate outcomes but also in the approach it reflects. By emphasizing sustained cooperation, shared economic interests, and gradual trust-building, it offers a broader example of how protracted conflicts can gradually evolve into a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationships.

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