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AZERBAIJAN-U.S. RELATIONS: CHARTING A NEW COURSE FOR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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Foreword

Ambassador Farid Shafiyev, Chairman, Center of Analysis of International Relations

The South Caucasus has long stood as one of the most contested crossroads of global politics. For centuries, competing empires and ideologies have vied for influence in this small but pivotal region, attracted by its geography, resources, and cultural diversity. Few other areas of the world combine such a density of historical grievances, strategic importance, and geopolitical rivalry. It is in this landscape that Azerbaijan has sought to secure its independence since the collapse of the Soviet Union, often navigating between larger powers while struggling to assert its sovereignty, restore its territorial integrity and pursue national interests.

The trilateral summit convened in Washington, D.C. on August 8, 2025, represents a watershed moment in this complex story. By bringing together U.S. President Donald J. Trump, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the summit not only advanced the long-sought peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan but also marked the reemergence of the United States (U.S.) as a central actor in shaping the region's future. The initialing of a peace treaty, based on principles long championed by Azerbaijan, signaled the closure of a painful chapter of conflict and displacement while opening a path toward stability, prosperity, and integration.

The significance of this development should not be underestimated. For decades, the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict defined regional geopolitics, undermined trust in international mediation, and constrained the South Caucasus from realizing its full potential as a hub of trade, connectivity, and cultural exchange. The agreement reached in Washington, accompanied by commitments to dissolve the OSCE Minsk Group and to establish the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), reflects not merely a diplomatic success but a strategic breakthrough that reshapes the architecture of Eurasian connectivity.

For Azerbaijan, the Washington summit is the culmination of consistent and

principled diplomacy. Over the past three decades both the late National Leader President Heydar Aliyev, and President Ilham Aliyev have pursued peace while defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity. President Ilham Aliyev's ability to secure international recognition of these principles, enshrined in the framework of the peace treaty, demonstrates how patience, resilience, and persistence can ultimately yield results. For Armenia, the summit offers a chance to recalibrate its policies and embrace cooperation over confrontation. For the U.S., it represents a moment to reassert a balanced, forward-looking role in Eurasia, one that prioritizes integration and prosperity over division and stalemate.

This report situates the Washington summit within the broader trajectory of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations. It reminds us that this partnership is not new, but rather rooted in the early years of independence, when the "Contract of the Century" opened Azerbaijan's Caspian resources to global markets with strong American participation. From cooperation in Afghanistan after 9/11 to the diversification of Europe's energy supply through pipelines like Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC), Azerbaijan has proven itself to be a reliable partner of the United States. Yet the relationship has also been tested, by Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, the influence of lobby politics in Washington, and inconsistent mediation efforts that at times undermined trust.

The return of Donald Trump to the White House has created the necessary conditions for a recalibration. His decision to reinstate waivers of Section 907 and his direct mediation in the peace process with Armenia are emblematic of a pragmatic approach that nevertheless recognizes Azerbaijan's strategic importance. More importantly, the agreements on energy cooperation, digital innovation, and connectivity reached in Washington point to a partnership that is not limited to traditional sectors but is instead preparing for the challenges of the 21st century.

This report is therefore not merely an account of past achievements but a guide for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to understand and shape the next chapter of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations. At a time of global uncertainty, it is a reminder that strategic partnerships, grounded in mutual respect and practical cooperation, can indeed produce historic outcomes.

Executive Summary

On August 8, 2025, U.S. President Donald J. Trump hosted Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in a trilateral meeting. The meeting was of great importance for peace and security in the South Caucasus, particularly between Armenia and Azerbaijan. During this historic gathering, the two South Caucasian republics initialed a long-awaited peace treaty, developed on the basis of the five principles introduced by Azerbaijan in March 2022. The treaty is a product of Azerbaijan's long-term peace efforts and affirms mutual recognition of territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders. **In their joint declaration, signed also by President Trump, Armenia and Azerbaijan confirmed their commitment to sign a peace treaty in the near future. Azerbaijan reinstated its readiness to sign the document once Armenia removes territorial claims against Azerbaijan from its constitution.**

In Washington, Armenia and Azerbaijan also agreed on the dissolution of the OSCE Minsk Group, closing a decades-long chapter of conflict and removing it from the international agenda. **A landmark agreement was also reached on the establishment of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), a transportation corridor linking mainland Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic through southern Armenia under U.S. oversight, creating unprecedented opportunities for regional connectivity**.

Alongside these achievements, **Azerbaijan and the United States signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a Strategic Working Group tasked with developing a Charter on Strategic Partnership, while Azerbaijan's State Oil Company (SOCAR) and ExxonMobil concluded an agreement to expand cooperation in energy exploration, production, and infrastructure**. These accords elevated the U.S.–Azerbaijan partnership to a new level and reinforced America's neutral role as a guarantor of peace, stability, and integration in the South Caucasus.

This summit represented not only the culmination of Azerbaijan's sustained diplomatic efforts and the peace agenda consistently advanced by President Aliyev but also the outcome of direct engagement by

President Trump, whose personal involvement significantly accelerated the peace process. For Azerbaijan, the summit symbolized the closure of a turbulent chapter in its history, characterized by occupation, displacement, and repeated conflict, while simultaneously opening a new era of regional stability, economic cooperation, and strategic alignment with the United States. The summit not only restored hope for sustainable peace in the South Caucasus but also necessitated a reassessment of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations, particularly in light of the shifting political landscape in Washington, regional dynamics, and Azerbaijan's demonstrated commitment to stability and sovereignty.

Examining the historical and current dynamics of US–Azerbaijan relations, this report highlights the challenges and opportunities and offers policy recommendations to further strengthen these relations in the interest of both parties.

Key Points and Findings

U.S.–Azerbaijan relations have deep roots, beginning in the 1990s immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The early period of engagement was shaped by strategic and economic considerations, as the United States sought reliable partners in the post-Soviet space while Azerbaijan pursued international recognition, territorial integrity, and the development of its energy sector. A defining milestone in this era was the "Contract of the Century," signed in 1994 between the Azerbaijani government and an international consortium that included major American companies. This agreement, which unlocked Azerbaijan's vast oil and gas reserves in the Caspian Sea, marked the beginning of intensive U.S. investment and collaboration in Azerbaijan's energy sector. Beyond energy, Azerbaijan demonstrated its strategic reliability by providing critical support to U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks, permitting the use of its territory for the transportation of troops, equipment, and supplies. These contributions underscored Azerbaijan's role as a trusted partner in regional security.

Relations between the two countries have evolved over the past 32 years, but often under the shadow of the controversial Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. Originally adopted in 1992 under the influence of the Armenian lobby in the United States, Section 907 prohibited American assistance to

Azerbaijan unless it ceased "all blockades and other offensive uses of force" against Armenia. This legislation was enacted despite Armenia's invasion of Azerbaijani territories in the early 1990s, which involved civilian casualties and the ethnic cleansing of occupied areas. In the same year, Armenia committed the Khojaly massacre in Karabakh, violently killing hundreds of civilians, including children and the elderly. The U.S. Congress's disregard for these realities on the ground underscored a biased stance toward Azerbaijan influenced by pro-Armenian lobby groups.

For over two decades, since Azerbaijan's decision to contribute to the Afghanistan mission in 2001, Section 907 was routinely waived in recognition of Azerbaijan's contributions to U.S. strategic objectives, particularly counterterrorism cooperation. These waivers symbolized a tacit acknowledgment of Baku's constructive engagement and ensured that the U.S.–Azerbaijan partnership could expand without legislative barriers.

Nevertheless, the persistence of Section 907 in U.S. law and the influence of pro-Armenian lobbying in Congress created an underlying sense of mistrust in the US-Azerbaijan relations, as Azerbaijan perceived American policy as transactional and selective. While Washington benefited from Azerbaijan's support in energy security of its European allies and security operations, it hesitated to challenge Armenian occupation or address humanitarian concerns of displaced Azerbaijanis, reflecting a gap between rhetoric and practice. This inconsistency eroded confidence in the neutrality of U.S. mediation and foreshadowed the tensions that later emerged under the Biden administration.

In the critical period of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace talks following the Second Karabakh War (2020), the Biden administration demonstrated a rather pro-Armenian standing. This biased attitude culminated in the aftermath of Azerbaijan's September 2023 anti-terror operation in Karabakh. That operation brought an end to the separatist regime, resulted in the voluntary relocation of the local Armenian population, and ensured the full restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Yet, instead of recognizing these developments as a decisive step toward lasting peace, the Biden administration adopted a markedly biased stance, portraying Azerbaijan's legitimate counter-terrorism measures as aggressive and disproportionately amplifying the narrative of Armenian victimhood. At that time, Washington stopped issuing waivers to the 907 Amendment in a way that brought the US-Azerbaijan relations to a record low. By refusing to issue further waivers, the Biden administration

not only undermined decades of established cooperation but also signaled that its South Caucasus policy was increasingly shaped by domestic lobbying pressures rather than a balanced assessment of regional realities. This approach further eroded trust in U.S. neutrality and deepened perceptions in Baku that American policy under Biden was tilted against Azerbaijan.

With the inauguration of Donald Trump for his second term, U.S.–Azerbaijan relations rapidly gained new momentum. Trump's engagement was underpinned by a pragmatic understanding of Azerbaijan's strategic importance, historical grievances, and capacity for regional leadership. Among the most significant developments was the reinstatement of the Section 907 waivers in August 2025, a move that not only restored previous levels of cooperation but also symbolically acknowledged Azerbaijan's right to act decisively in defense of its territorial integrity. **The August summit in Washington provided an opportunity for both leaders to consolidate these gains, with Trump offering personal mediation, political leverage, and the integration of incentives that aligned peacebuilding with broader economic and infrastructural cooperation.**

Energy and economic collaboration remained central to the renewed partnership. Azerbaijan's role as a supplier of Caspian oil and gas to European markets continued to diversify energy sources and reduce dependence on Russian supplies. On August 7, during President Aliyev's visit to Washington, Azerbaijan's State Oil Company (SOCAR) and ExxonMobil finalized an agreement which consolidated collaboration on exploration, production, and infrastructure development, reinforcing the energy dimension of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations.

This momentum was embraced in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan regarding the establishment of a Strategic Working Group to develop a Charter on Strategic Partnership, which was signed by President Aliyev and President Trump on August 8, 2025. This strategic partnership aims to enhance bilateral coordination across energy, trade, security, infrastructure, and digital innovation, ensuring predictability and resilience in the relationship.

Furthermore, on August 8, 2025, another major announcement was made concerning the Zangezur corridor, which is a planned transportation passage

between mainland Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan exclave. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the United States agreed on fundamental conditions for the opening of the corridor, which was renamed to **the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP).** The opening of the TRIPP will make a significant contribution to regional economic integration, peace, and prosperity. It will also further increase the potential of the Middle Corridor.

A particularly important outcome of the August 8 summit was the decision to broaden U.S.–Azerbaijan cooperation into cutting-edge areas such as artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, and space technologies. The Memorandum of Understanding signed in Washington, establishing a Strategic Working Group to prepare a Charter on Strategic Partnership, explicitly identified these domains as priorities for future collaboration. This aligns with Azerbaijan's newly adopted Artificial Intelligence Strategy for 2025–2028, which aims to enhance competitiveness, develop human capital, and accelerate digitalization across the economy. U.S. companies such as SpaceX, Microsoft, Cisco, and Oracle already play an important role in Azerbaijan's technological landscape, and the summit opened the way for more structured partnerships in AI applications, cybersecurity, broadband expansion, and knowledge transfer. By embedding digital innovation at the core of the bilateral agenda, both sides signaled a shared recognition that the future of their partnership extends beyond energy and into spheres that will define the global economy of tomorrow.

Beyond the digital sphere, the summit also underscored the importance of expanding U.S.–Azerbaijan cooperation in non-energy sectors. Since independence, American companies have invested nearly $19 billion in Azerbaijan's economy, of which $1.5 billion has been directed to the non-oil sector, including construction, telecommunications, agriculture, and services.[1] Today, more than 300 U.S. companies operate in Azerbaijan, with around 220 actively engaged in the local market.[2] The August 8, 2025 discussions highlighted opportunities to build on this foundation through new platforms for trade, green technologies, logistics, and industrial cooperation, with the U.S.

1 Report.az, "US has invested $18.9B in Azerbaijan since 1995, minister says", 26 August 2025, Available at: https://report.az/en/business/us-has-invested-18-9b-in-azerbaijan-since-1995-minister-says (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

2 Khazar Akhundov, "New chapter in Azerbaijan-US economic relations post Washington summit – 'Contract of the century' and beyond", Caliber.az, 29 August 2025, Available at: https://caliber.az/en/post/new-chapter-in-azerbaijan-us-economic-relations-post-washington-summit (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

Export-Import Bank offering financial instruments to support major projects. These initiatives complement Azerbaijan's diversification strategy and create favorable conditions for deeper, broad-based economic engagement between the two countries.

The August 2025 summit, therefore, represented a historic breakthrough; it was a transformative event with multilayered significance. Politically, it confirmed the effectiveness of Azerbaijan's peace agenda, demonstrating that careful, principled diplomacy can yield tangible outcomes. Strategically, it reinforced Azerbaijan's centrality in the South Caucasus, providing the United States and its allies in Europe with reliable access, diversified energy supplies, and a stable corridor for regional transit. Economically, the summit catalyzed opportunities for investment, trade, and infrastructure development, including energy projects, industrial collaboration, and high-volume transit logistics.

President Trump's personal involvement also exemplified a departure from previous approaches to conflict resolution. Rather than imposing externally driven solutions, his engagement prioritized incentives, economic cooperation, and infrastructure projects alongside security guarantees. By aligning peacebuilding with tangible economic and strategic benefits, the Trump administration created a durable framework in which both Azerbaijan and Armenia could pursue national interests while simultaneously contributing to regional stability. This approach contrasted sharply with the previous administration's handling of the peace process, which had eroded trust and contributed to Azerbaijan's decision to temporarily disengage from U.S.-mediated diplomacy.

The reestablishment of trust between the United States and Azerbaijan following Trump's election for the second time has significant long-term implications. Energy collaboration, including SOCAR-ExxonMobil partnerships, reinforces both countries' economic interests and technological exchange. Institutional frameworks, such as the Strategic Working Group to develop a Charter on Strategic Partnership, ensure that these gains are embedded within formal channels with long-term stability. The TRIPP project and related connectivity initiatives enhance regional economic integration, provide secure trade routes that bypass geopolitical chokepoints, and position Azerbaijan as a central player in Eurasian transit and trade.

In sum, the Washington summit held on August 8, 2025 represents a watershed moment for the South Caucasus, the United States, and

Azerbaijan. By integrating Azerbaijan's peace principles, energy and economic cooperation, strategic partnerships, and regional connectivity initiatives into a coherent framework, the summit has laid the groundwork for lasting peace, stability, and prosperity. For Azerbaijan, it marked the successful closure of the conflict with Armenia that had long defined its international posture and domestic priorities. For the United States, it reinforced access to energy, trade, and security opportunities while enhancing its geopolitical influence in a strategically important region. Looking ahead, the consolidated U.S.–Azerbaijan partnership, anchored in strategic agreements, and high-level cooperation, provides a durable platform for advancing peace, economic growth, and regional connectivity, ensuring that the South Caucasus emerges as a hub of stability, opportunity, and international engagement.

Setting the Stage for the New Phase of the U.S. -Azerbaijan Relations

Vasif Huseynov

Azerbaijan's geographic location makes it a key country in the broader geopolitics of Eurasia. Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, adjacent to major powers and energy routes, it is a location that no state with geopolitical designs on Eurasia can afford to ignore. The late U.S. statesman Zbigniew Brzezinski underscored this reality when he identified Azerbaijan – alongside South Korea, Türkiye, Iran, and Ukraine – as one of the five "critically important geopolitical pivots" in the world in his seminal work titled *"The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*" in 1997. Likewise, in that year, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott described the Caspian region as "strategically vital," insisting that it must be integrated into the Euro-Atlantic community and could no longer be neglected by Washington.[3]

Almost three decades have passed since that time, but the imperatives of this geographic factor remain unchanged. If anything, the geopolitical turbulence of the past decade – from the Russia–Ukraine war to the shifting alignments in Eurasia and the global competition between great powers – has only reinforced the enduring relevance of Azerbaijan's location. For the United States, Azerbaijan is not merely a regional actor but a strategic linchpin that connects multiple theaters of interest: the security of Europe's energy supply, the stability of the South Caucasus, the viability of East–West and North–South connectivity corridors, and the broader struggle to balance against rival powers in Eurasia.

Likewise, for Azerbaijan, cultivating close relations and partnership with the United States has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy since regaining independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Such ties have enabled Baku to consolidate its sovereignty, strengthen its resilience against pressure from larger regional powers, and secure a place in the evolving geopolitical

3 R. Craig Nation, Russia, the United States, and the Caucasus, U.S. and Russia, Regional Security Issues and Interests, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007), Available at: https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/1862.pdf (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

order. U.S. support has been instrumental in the realization of Azerbaijan's major energy projects, which not only transformed the country's economy but also reshaped the strategic map of Eurasia by diversifying Europe's energy supplies and reducing dependency on Russia. These achievements underscore the depth of mutual interest in cooperation, which has consistently gone beyond bilateral considerations to address wider regional challenges.

The good news for both Azerbaijan and the United States is that there is a strong foundation for the further development of bilateral relations. Since the early days of Azerbaijan's post-Soviet independence, the two countries have demonstrated a strong will and interest in cooperation in multiple spheres. This partnership was solidified by the "Contract of the Century" signed in September 1994 with Western oil companies, including leading U.S. firms such as Amoco, Exxon, Pennzoil, and Unocal. At the time, American companies accounted for nearly half of the foreign investment in Azerbaijan's oil sector, laying the groundwork for long-term economic and strategic cooperation. The American engineering and construction firm McDermott played a crucial role in implementing projects under the contract, while U.S. companies also took part in the consortium to develop the "Dan Ulduzu" and "Ashrafi" fields in 1996.

The role of U.S. businesses in Azerbaijan has steadily expanded ever since. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce opened its office in Baku in 1996 and today represents around 250 American companies and business associations.[4] By 2025, the United States had invested nearly $19 billion in Azerbaijan's economy – $17.4 billion in oil and gas, and $1.5 billion in the non-oil sector – ranking among Azerbaijan's top partners in foreign trade.[5] A comprehensive legal and contractual framework now underpins these ties, including 87 bilateral agreements on trade, investment, and taxation, while the Azerbaijan–U.S. Economic Partnership Commission, created in 2007, serves as an institutional mechanism to strengthen dialogue.[6]

4 Khazar Akhundov, "New chapter in Azerbaijan-US economic relations post Washington summit – 'Contract of the century' and beyond", Caliber.az, 29 August 2025, Available at: https://caliber.az/en/post/new-chapter-in-azerbaijan-us-economic-relations-post-washington-summit (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

5 Report.az, "US has invested $18.9B in Azerbaijan since 1995, minister says", 26 August 2025, Available at: https://report.az/en/business/us-has-invested-18-9b-in-azerbaijan-since-1995-minister-says (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

6 Khazar Akhundov, "New chapter in Azerbaijan-US economic relations post Washington summit – 'Contract of the century' and beyond", Caliber.az, 29 August

Importantly, cooperation has never been limited to energy alone. American construction firms and hotel chains have long operated in Azerbaijan, Boeing aircraft have modernized its civil aviation fleet, and leading U.S. technology firms such as Microsoft, Cisco, Oracle, HP, Lockheed Martin, and Booz Allen Hamilton have contributed to Azerbaijan's growing digital economy. In recent years, even cutting-edge services such as Starlink satellite internet have entered the Azerbaijani market. As of August 2025, nearly 300 U.S. companies are registered in the country, with more than 220 actively conducting business across diverse sectors, including agriculture, industry, and transportation.[7] Trade turnover has reflected this momentum: in 2024, bilateral trade reached $1.7 billion, marking a 94 percent increase over the previous year.[8]

The signing of the "Contract of the Century" and subsequent energy projects such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline illustrate how U.S. support allowed Azerbaijan to secure its independence and emerge as a reliable energy partner for the West. In addition to the BTC, Washington also backed the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum gas pipeline and related initiatives, further consolidating Azerbaijan's role as a hub of Eurasian energy transit.

Heydar Aliyev, the former president of Azerbaijan (1993-2003), under whose leadership Azerbaijan laid the foundation for the giant energy projects, had clearly acknowledged the contribution of the United States. This quote from his speech during the ceremony for the signing of the documents on the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline on November 18, 1999, clearly underscores the pressure from other regional actors opposing the implementation of these projects and how important the U.S. role was to resist:

I would like to emphasize that without the support of the United States of America, we could not have implemented any of these projects. In the period leading up to the signing of the "Contract of the Century," independent Azerbaijan faced heavy pressures for more than a year, aimed at preventing us from moving forward. It was only thanks to the support of the United States

2025, Available at: https://caliber.az/en/post/new-chapter-in-azerbaijan-us-economic-relations-post-washington-summit (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

7 Ibid.

8 Report.az, "Mikayil Jabbarov: Azerbaijan–US trade cooperation on an upward trajectory", 26 August 2025, Available at: https://report.az/en/business/mikayil-jabbarov-azerbaijan-us-trade-cooperation-on-an-upward-trajectory (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

and its President, my esteemed friend Mr. Bill Clinton, that we were able to sign the "Contract of the Century" in September 1994. Even after that, we encountered many difficulties. Several countries did not accept the Baku–Ceyhan pipeline. Yet President Bill Clinton personally followed this matter with great consistency, offering us his backing and encouragement. He also worked to bring Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and other Caspian littoral states into this project. Thanks to his stature, authority, and consistent policy in this direction, we succeeded in realizing such an important achievement as the "Contract of the Century." Therefore, on behalf of all of us, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the United States of America and to its President, our esteemed friend Mr. Bill Clinton.[9]

Beyond energy, the partnership between Azerbaijan and the United States has been pivotal in the challenging geopolitical landscape of Eurasia. This partnership has been particularly visible in the joint struggle against terrorism. Azerbaijan supported the U.S.-led "war on terror" by contributing troops and participating in coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Successive U.S. administrations have consistently acknowledged and valued Azerbaijan's assistance, including its contributions to the anti-terror coalition and its longstanding support for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. These efforts have highlighted Azerbaijan not only as an energy partner but also as a security partner, capable of aligning with U.S. and allied interests in maintaining stability across regions extending far beyond the South Caucasus.

The United States, as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, also played a central role in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process. However, this role was negatively affected by the influence of pro-Armenian lobby groups, to the detriment of relations between Washington and Baku. In 1992, at a time when Armenia was conducting full-scale military operations against Azerbaijan to occupy its territories and carrying out violent ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis from their homelands, the U.S. Congress adopted the notorious Section 907 to the Freedom Support Act. Adopted in the same year as the Khojaly Genocide, this amendment prohibited direct U.S.

9 Heydar Aliyev Heritage Research Center, "Speech of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic Heydar Aliyev at the ceremony of signing of the documents on transportation of crude oil through the territory of Azerbaijan – Georgia – Türkiye by means of the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan main export pipeline,", November 18, 1999, Available at: https://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/en/9474675.html (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

assistance to Azerbaijan unless it was "taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh".[10] Although the measure remained in force, senior U.S. officials later acknowledged both its inconsistency with the realities on the ground and its negative impact on U.S.–Azerbaijan relations. For example, in 1997 State Department Spokesman James Rubin admitted that the complete ban on aid to Azerbaijan hindered U.S. policy in the Caucasus and had "tied America's hands in its ability to promote peace in the region."[11] While U.S. presidents were authorized to temporarily waive the amendment after the launch of military operations against the Taliban in 2001, Azerbaijan's persistent efforts to achieve its full repeal were unsuccessful.

The influence of pro-Armenian lobby groups also affected other aspects of U.S. policy toward the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process. This dynamic brought U.S.–Azerbaijan relations to a record low following the anti-terror operations conducted by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces against Armenian separatist groups in Karabakh in September 2023. The Biden administration adopted a clearly one-sided and biased stance against Baku, warning that "there would be no business as usual with Azerbaijan."[12] Against this backdrop, the return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency was welcomed in Azerbaijan and soon proved to be positive for both U.S.–Azerbaijan relations and the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process. The Washington summit between the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders, mediated by President Trump, was a historic milestone for the entire South Caucasus, as it resolved many longstanding disputes between Baku and Yerevan and set in motion tectonic shifts in the regional geopolitical landscape.

These realities make the recalibration of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations not only timely but necessary, laying the groundwork for a renewed and more comprehensive strategic partnership that reflects both enduring geography

10 Congress.gov, *Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets Support Act of 1992* (S. 2532, 102nd Cong., became Public Law No. 102-511, 24 October 1992), Available at: https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/senate-bill/2532/text (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

11 Kevin Foley, "Azerbaijan: U.S. Would Like Aid Ban Lifted," RFE/RL, October 9, 1997, Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/1086900.html (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

12 Vasif Huseynov, "Strained Relations Between Azerbaijan and the West", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 27 November 2023, Available at: https://jamestown.org/program/strained-relations-between-azerbaijan-and-the-west/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

and evolving global dynamics. At a time when the South Caucasus stands at the intersection of great power competition, regional integration efforts, and unresolved conflicts, the United States and Azerbaijan have an opportunity to redefine the parameters of their partnership. Building on past achievements in energy and security cooperation, while learning from past shortcomings in conflict mediation and legislative constraints, both sides can now chart a new course that is more balanced, forward-looking, and resilient. This report is an attempt to shed light on more than three decades of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations and to offer perspectives on how this partnership can evolve into a truly strategic framework capable of meeting the challenges and opportunities of the coming decades.

Historical Trajectory of Bilateral Relations

Yunis Gurbanov

The history of U.S.–Azerbaijani relations is rooted in a complex interplay of diplomacy, geopolitics, and shifting international orders. From the first efforts of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) to gain recognition at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, to the renewed independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the bilateral relationship has been defined by both aspiration and constraint.[13] In each period, Azerbaijan sought to present itself as a legitimate and reliable actor, capable of engaging with American ideals of self-determination, democracy, and stability, while at the same time navigating the vulnerabilities of a small state located at the crossroads of empires.[14]

The early contacts between Azerbaijani diplomats and U.S. President Woodrow Wilson in Paris revealed the potential for alignment between Baku's national aspirations and Washington's emerging vision of a postwar international system. Although recognition was limited and short-lived, these exchanges set a precedent: Azerbaijan demonstrated an awareness of the importance of American support and sought to situate itself within the broader framework of global power politics.[15] The symbolic recognition achieved in 1920, cut short by the Soviet invasion, remained an enduring reference point, allowing the modern Azerbaijani state after 1991 to connect its renewed sovereignty to earlier diplomatic efforts.[16]

13 Vusal Gafarov, "The Azerbaijani Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference," Visions of Azerbaijan Magazine, 2012. Available at: https://aem.az/en/members-of-the-diplomatic-staff-of-azerbaijan-at-the-paris-peace-conference (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

14 Tadeusz Swietochowski, Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 103–105.

15 Daniel Pommier Vincelli, "The Wilsonian Moment of the Azerbaijani Delegation in Paris (1919–1920)," in Carlo Frappi and Paolo Sorbello (eds.), Armenia, Caucaso e Asia Centrale: Ricerche 2020 (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2022), pp. 97–114. Available at: https://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-453-0/006 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

16 Elchin Ismayilov, Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy in the Early 20th Century: From

In the decades following independence, U.S.–Azerbaijani relations developed against the backdrop of post–Cold War transformation. Energy diplomacy became the cornerstone of cooperation, most visibly through the "Contract of the Century" in 1994 and subsequent U.S. support for strategic pipeline projects such as Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC).[17] These initiatives not only integrated Azerbaijan into global markets but also positioned it as a crucial partner in Washington's broader strategy of reducing European dependence on Russian and Iranian energy. Over time, the agenda expanded to include counterterrorism cooperation after September 11, Azerbaijan's contribution to NATO missions, and its role as a reliable transit corridor linking Europe and Asia.[18]

Yet, the partnership has never been without contradictions. U.S. legislation such as Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act and the Jackson–Vanik Amendment constrained engagement and fostered skepticism in Baku about Washington's reliability.[19] Similarly, American emphasis on democracy and human rights periodically clashed with Azerbaijan's sovereignty-driven approach to domestic governance. Nonetheless, both sides consistently found grounds for pragmatic cooperation, particularly in energy, security, and regional stability. The ability of the relationship to endure, despite political frictions, reflects its underlying strategic logic.[20]

Today, U.S.–Azerbaijani relations stand on the legacy of both early diplomatic encounters and decades of post-Soviet engagement. The initial contacts of 1919 revealed how even small nations could project their case onto the international stage by appealing to American ideals, while the energy and security partnership of the modern era illustrates the convergence of necessity

Independence to Diplomacy (Baku: National Academy of Sciences, 2020), pp. 17-24.

17 Akbar Novruz, "Contract of Century turns 31 as Azerbaijan hits new oil and gas records," Azernews, 2025. Available at: https://www.azernews.az/analysis/247721.html (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

18 U.S. Department of State, U.S.–Azerbaijan Energy Cooperation: Strategic Partnership and Regional Stability (Washington, DC: Bureau of Energy Resources, 2014), pp. 1–32.

19 Svante E. Cornell, Azerbaijan Since Independence (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2011), pp. 375–395.

20 U.S. Congress, Freedom Support Act, Section 907, Public Law 102–511 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 1–5.

and strategy. Taken together, these experiences highlight not only the resilience of bilateral ties but also their broader significance: they show how Azerbaijan, positioned at the intersection of Eurasia, has consistently sought to align with the U.S. as part of its effort to secure sovereignty, stability, and recognition in an ever-changing geopolitical environment.

Early contacts and recognition

The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 marked a decisive moment for the newly independent ADR as it sought international recognition and legitimacy in the aftermath of the First World War and the collapse of the Russian Empire. For Azerbaijan, participation in the conference was not merely symbolic; it represented an urgent diplomatic effort to secure the survival of the first secular democratic republic in the Muslim world.[21] The Azerbaijani delegation, led by Alimardan bey Topchubashov, arrived in Paris with the aim of presenting Azerbaijan's independence as both a political reality and a necessity for stability in the South Caucasus. In this setting, Azerbaijan's contacts with key Allied leaders, including President Woodrow Wilson of the U.S., underscored the republic's early attempts to engage with the emerging international order shaped by American ideals of self-determination and democratic governance.[22]

From the outset, the Azerbaijani delegation framed its arguments within the principles articulated in Wilson's Fourteen Points, particularly the right of nations to self-determination. The appeal was designed to resonate with American political rhetoric, which had gained immense influence in shaping postwar diplomacy. Topchubashov emphasized that Azerbaijan had established a functioning democratic parliament with representation from various ethnic and religious groups, positioning the ADR as a modern and legitimate state rather than a temporary nationalist experiment.[23] This alignment with Wilsonian

21 Tadeusz Swietochowski, Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 103–105.

22 Vusal Gafarov, "The Azerbaijani Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference," Visions of Azerbaijan Magazine, 2012. Available at: https://aem.az/en/members-of-the-diplomatic-staff-of-azerbaijan-at-the-paris-peace-conference (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

23 Daniel Pommier Vincelli, "The Wilsonian Moment of the Azerbaijani Delegation in Paris (1919–1920)," in Carlo Frappi and Paolo Sorbello (eds.), Armenia, Caucaso e

ideals was not accidental; it reflected a deliberate effort by Azerbaijani diplomats to highlight the republic's compatibility with the new international order that the U.S. was helping to design. In doing so, Azerbaijan sought to distinguish itself from the turmoil of the Russian Civil War and to prevent its future from being decided solely by neighboring powers.[24]

Meetings with President Wilson were among the most significant milestones of Azerbaijan's diplomatic efforts at the conference. In their exchanges, the Azerbaijani representatives stressed both the democratic credentials of their government and its strategic importance as a source and transit route for Caspian oil. These arguments resonated with the American President, who, according to contemporary accounts, expressed genuine admiration for the ADR's attempt to build a democratic and pluralistic state in a historically volatile region.[25] Wilson reportedly remarked that he was impressed by Azerbaijan's aspirations and the seriousness of its representatives, a sentiment that gave the delegation a measure of hope for eventual recognition by the United States and the broader international community.[26]

Recognition of Azerbaijan came in January 1920, when the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers, influenced in part by Wilson's favorable view, extended de facto recognition to the Azerbaijani government. This decision was a landmark achievement for the ADR, as it signified acknowledgment by the international community of its sovereignty, even if only temporarily.[27] For U.S.–Azerbaijani relations, the moment was equally important: it marked the first instance of formal international recognition in which American views played a central role. While U.S. recognition was indirect and limited

Asia Centrale: Ricerche 2020 (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2022), pp. 97–114.

24 Elchin Ismayilov, Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy in the Early 20th Century: From Independence to Diplomacy (Baku: National Academy of Sciences, 2020), pp. 45–67.

25 Zaur Gasimov, "Historical Legacies and Contemporary Relations: Azerbaijan and the West," in Historical Legacies of the Caucasus (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), pp. 89–110.

26 Alimardan bey Topchubashov, Memorandum presented to the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers (Paris: Paris Peace Conference Archives, Fonds des délégations étrangères, Archives diplomatiques françaises, 1919), pp. 1–12.

27 Daniel Pommier Vincelli, "The Wilsonian Moment of the Azerbaijani Delegation in Paris (1919–1920)," in Carlo Frappi and Paolo Sorbello (eds.), Armenia, Caucaso e Asia Centrale: Ricerche 2020 (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2022), pp. 97–114.

to de facto acknowledgment rather than full diplomatic ties, it nonetheless symbolized a meaningful connection between Washington and Baku at a formative stage in their relations.[28] The legacy of the Paris Peace Conference endures as the first moment when Azerbaijan asserted itself as an independent state in dialogue with the U.S., laying a historical foundation for the modern bilateral relationship.[29] In this sense, the early contacts with the U.S. and President Wilson foreshadowed the future trajectory of U.S.–Azerbaijani relations, which would develop on a more durable foundation after 1991.[30]

U.S.–Azerbaijan Relations in the Post-Soviet Era

The U.S. was among the first countries to recognize Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, but Washington's engagement was constrained from the outset. The trajectory of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations since independence has been shaped by energy diplomacy, regional security, and the competing pulls of values and interests. From the early constraints of Washington's Armenia-focused policy to the more pragmatic energy and counterterrorism cooperation of the post-9/11 years, the partnership developed into a complex engagement defined as much by strategic necessity as by recurring political friction.[31] Over time, both sides demonstrated an ability to adapt to changing global and regional circumstances. While challenges were inevitable, the relationship consistently found new areas of common ground. Whether through energy, security, or trade, the two countries built a framework that allowed cooperation to continue despite differences, underscoring the resilience of the partnership.[32]

28 Svante E. Cornell, Azerbaijan Since Independence (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2011), pp. 7–12.

29 Zaur Gasimov, "Historical Legacies and Contemporary Relations: Azerbaijan and the West," in Historical Legacies of the Caucasus (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), pp. 89–110.

30 Svante E. Cornell, Azerbaijan Since Independence (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2011), pp. 6–19.

31 Zaur Gasimov, "Historical Legacies and Contemporary Relations: Azerbaijan and the West," in Historical Legacies of the Caucasus (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), pp. 89–110.

32 Galib Bashirov, 2019. Energy, security and democracy: The shifting US policy in Azerbaijan. Cambridge Review of International Affairs, pp. 771-798.

The U.S. supported Azerbaijan in the 1990s on three important dimensions: security, economy (especially energy) and the promotion of democracy. While Armenia eagerly joined the Russia-led regional political and military structures in hopes of counterbalancing Azerbaijan and its strategic ally Türkiye, Azerbaijan succeeded in pursuing a more independent foreign policy.[33] Notwithstanding the threat and pressure from parts of its territories that remained under Armenian control, Azerbaijan initiated or participated in various Western economic and geopolitical projects, proving to be a reliable ally. Given that the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict is now relegated to history, and Azerbaijan has restored its territorial integrity, Baku has gained more strategic autonomy and could play a crucial role in U.S. policy toward Eurasia. The emergence of new security threats in the region, such as the recent tensions between Baku and Tehran, necessitates quick and substantial engagement by the U.S. The lack of such engagement risks undesired consequences not only for Azerbaijan–U.S. relations but also for U.S. policy towards the entire region.[34]

Beginning in 1991, the U.S. began to implement a regional policy that strengthened its geopolitical interests while preparing for any challenges from regional powers. The U.S. policy on the Caspian Basin has primarily involved strengthening the political and energy independence of regional countries, weakening Russian influence, expanding U.S. economic opportunities, and facilitating the export of Caspian oil and natural gas to Western markets.[35]

From the outset, the relationship was framed by the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The U.S. was among the first to recognize Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, but its ability to engage constructively was limited by domestic politics. The passage of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act in 1992, which barred direct assistance to Azerbaijan, institutionalized asymmetry in Washington's approach to the South Caucasus. While the U.S. declared support

33 Svante E. Cornell, Azerbaijan Since Independence (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2011), pp. 6–19.

34 Jim Nichol, Azerbaijan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013). Available at: https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/97-522.pdf (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 1-10.

35 Hatem Cabbarli, "Azerbaijan–US Relations and the 907th Amendment," Academia.edu, n.d. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/19594468/U_S_Foreign_Policy_in_the_1990s_and_2000s_and_the_Case_of_the_South_Caucasus_Armenia_Azerbaijan_Georgia_ (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 2-9.

for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, Baku interpreted the sanctions as a sign that American policy privileged Armenia and constrained the development of a genuine partnership.[36]

The Jackson-Vanik Amendment of 1974, originally aimed at pressuring the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) to allow free emigration, particularly for Jewish populations, continued to apply to Azerbaijan after its independence as a successor state of the USSR. Although Azerbaijan never restricted Jewish emigration and in fact maintained one of the most tolerant environments for its Jewish community in the post-Soviet space, the amendment nevertheless limited the scope of U.S. trade relations with Baku in the early 1990s. This created a legal framework that placed Azerbaijan in the same category as other non-market economies, complicating its efforts to establish a normalized trade partnership with Washington.[37]

In practice, the Jackson-Vanik restrictions highlighted a broader problem in U.S. policy toward Azerbaijan: the application of Cold War–era legislation that did not reflect the country's realities. For Baku, this reinforced the perception that American policy was driven more by domestic politics and inertia than by an objective assessment of Azerbaijan's strategic role. Although Azerbaijan was granted annual presidential waivers under the amendment, the lingering presence of Jackson-Vanik in the legal framework constrained bilateral economic ties until its eventual repeal for most countries in 2012.[38] The amendment thus stands alongside Section 907 as an early example of how U.S. legislative measures, often rooted in other contexts, shaped the trajectory of the relationship in ways that generated frustration and mistrust in Baku.[39]

36 Azertag, "Waiver of the Unjust Section 907 Marks Another Milestone in Azerbaijan–U.S. Strategic Partnership", August 18, 2025. Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/waiver_of_the_unjust_section_907_marks_another_milestone_in_azerbaijan_us_strategic_partnership____commentary-3704619 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

37 APA News, "Legislation Repealing Jackson-Vanik Trade Restrictions on Azerbaijan," APA News, n.d. Available at: https://en.apa.az/foreign-policy/-103289 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

38 Jim Nichol, Azerbaijan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013). Available at: https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA523021.pdf (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 1-10.

39 Azertag, "Waiver of the Unjust Section 907 Marks Another Milestone in Azerbaijan–U.S. Strategic Partnership", August 18, 2025. Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/waiver_of_the_unjust_section_907_marks_another_milestone_in_azerbaijan_

Following the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence in 1991, diplomatic relations with the U.S. gained momentum under the leadership of President Heydar Aliyev. His first official visit to Washington, D.C. in 1994 marked a turning point in bilateral ties. During this visit, Heydar Aliyev met with President Bill Clinton, laying the foundation for long-term cooperation in security, energy, and political affairs. It was during this period that the "Contract of the Century" was signed, with strong support from the U.S., paving the way for Azerbaijan to become a key energy partner in the Caspian region. The visit symbolized Washington's recognition of Azerbaijan's independence, sovereignty, and strategic role in the evolving post-Cold War order.[40]

The "Contract of the Century" was signed with Western oil companies, including U.S. firms such as Amoco, Pennzoil, and McDermott. The energy deal opened the door to large-scale U.S. and European investment in Caspian hydrocarbons. Washington swiftly recognized Azerbaijan's role as a pivotal energy actor and supported the construction of strategic pipelines, particularly the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which bypassed Russia and Iran.[41] These initiatives aligned neatly with U.S. grand strategy in the post-Cold War era, aimed at diversifying energy supplies to Europe, limiting Moscow's monopoly, and preventing Tehran from reasserting influence in the South Caucasus. Energy thus became the first foundation of the partnership, embedding Azerbaijan in a web of Western economic and strategic interests.[42]

This landmark deal underscored Azerbaijan's central role in Caspian energy development and created an economic foundation for U.S.–Azerbaijan relations. Furthermore, Washington strongly supported the agreement, seeing

us_strategic_partnership____commentary-3704619 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

40 Heydar Aliyev Heritage Research Center, "President Heydar Aliyev's Official Visit to the United States and the Signing of the Contract of the Century," Aliyev Heritage, 1994. Available at: https://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/en/6045759.html (Accessed: October 3, 2025).

41 Ministry of Energy of Azerbaijan, Contract of the Century (Baku: Ministry of Energy, 2020). Available at: https://minenergy.gov.az/en/neft/esrin-muqavilesi (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

42 Brenda Shaffer, *In the Era of U.S. Energy Abundance: The U.S. Strategic Rationale for Deepening Relations with Azerbaijan* (Washington, DC: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2020). Available at: https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Shaffer-In-the-Era-of-U.S.-Energy-Abundance-1.pdf (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 1–10.

it as both an opportunity to diversify global energy supplies and a way to limit Russian and Iranian influence over Caspian exports.[43] The deal thus gave U.S. policymakers a pragmatic reason to engage Baku more deeply, balancing out the constraints imposed by Section 907.

In 1997, Heydar Aliyev made an important visit to the U.S., further solidifying the bilateral partnership. He addressed policy circles, met with leading members of Congress, and held consultations with major American energy companies. These meetings strengthened U.S. involvement in Caspian energy projects and reaffirmed Azerbaijan's importance in diversifying global energy supply routes.[44] The discussions also touched upon regional security issues, including the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, where the U.S. emerged as one of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. Heydar Aliyev's 1997 visit thus deepened mutual trust and institutionalized U.S.–Azerbaijani dialogue at the highest level.

By the late 1990s, U.S. policy had become closely intertwined with pipeline development. Washington's backing of the BTC pipeline was not only an energy initiative but also a geopolitical strategy to anchor Azerbaijan to the West. The BTC's eventual completion in 2006 represented a culmination of a decade-long effort to bypass both Russia and Iran in Caspian oil exports.[45] U.S. diplomacy was instrumental in overcoming commercial and political obstacles to the BTC, and Azerbaijan's commitment to the project demonstrated its willingness to align with Western strategic objectives. This alignment marked the first major institutionalization of U.S.–Azerbaijan cooperation beyond ad hoc energy deals.[46]

43 Jim Nichol, Azerbaijan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013). Available at: https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA523021.pdf (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 5-19.

44 Aliyev Heritage Research Center, President Heydar Aliyev's Official Visit to the United States (Baku: Aliyev Heritage Research Center, 1997). Available at: https://lib.aliyevheritage.org/en/7270415.html (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

45 E. H. Mikail, H. Çora, and A. N. Çora, "Azerbaijan's Energy Resources and BTC (Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan) Project," Open Journal of Political Science, vol. 10, no. 2 (2020), pp. 123–135.

46 Richard E. Hoagland, "It's High Time to Reset the U.S.–Azerbaijan Relationship," Caspian Policy Center, June 24, 2025. Available at: https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/commentary/its-high-time-to-reset-the-us-azerbaijan-relationship (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

After 9/11: Azerbaijan's Strategic Alignment with the United States

After the September 11 attacks, Azerbaijan's geopolitical value to the U.S. increased dramatically. Baku granted the U.S. military overflight rights and access to its airbases, while also contributing troops to both Iraq and Afghanistan. These actions were highly symbolic for Washington, as Azerbaijan became one of the few Muslim-majority states actively participating in the U.S.-led "war on terror."[47] The waiver of Section 907 restrictions after 2001 allowed for direct security and military assistance, paving the way for Azerbaijan to be integrated into U.S. counterterrorism strategies in Eurasia. This period represented one of the closest alignments between the two states, though it remained fragile due to unresolved political differences.[48]

Azerbaijan's demonstrated support elevated Baku's standing in Washington, which responded by partially waiving Section 907 restrictions to enable military and security assistance.[49] For Azerbaijan, this was not only an opportunity to consolidate ties with the U.S. but also a means of balancing against Russian and Iranian pressures. By the early 2000s, the bilateral agenda had broadened from energy to security, solidifying Azerbaijan as a "frontline state" in U.S. regional strategy.[50]

Another important point is Azerbaijan's consistent pursuit of multivector diplomacy. While U.S. engagement was valuable, Baku deliberately avoided overdependence on Washington by maintaining relations with Russia, Türkiye, and later China. This balancing act has remained a defining feature of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, shaping the limits and possibilities of the U.S.–

47 Sevda Garashova, "United States–Azerbaijan Relations (1991–2020)," Eminak: Scientific Quarterly Journal, no. 4(44) (2023), pp. 301–322.

48 Rusif Huseynov, "Armenia–Azerbaijan Peace Process and Section 907," Topchubashov Center, September 27, 2024. Available at: https://top-center.org/en/analytics/3674/armenia-azerbaijan-peace-process-and-section-907 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

49 Brenda Shaffer, *In the Era of U.S. Energy Abundance: The U.S. Strategic Rationale for Deepening Relations with Azerbaijan* (Washington, DC: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2020). Available at: https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Shaffer-In-the-Era-of-U.S.-Energy-Abundance-1.pdf (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 25–40.

50 U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Azerbaijan," August 27, 2021. Available at: https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-azerbaijan/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

Azerbaijan partnership. This perception hardened in the 1990s, creating a sense of mistrust in Baku that colored its dealings with Washington for years to come. Azerbaijani leaders increasingly viewed U.S. policy as shaped by domestic lobbying rather than geopolitical logic, leading them to seek leverage by pursuing different relationships with a range of actors. This early frustration underscored the limits of U.S. influence and reinforced the notion in Baku that strategic diversification and balancing ties with Russia, Türkiye, and later China was essential to avoid overdependence on any single partner.[51]

This alignment also illustrated the pragmatic dimension of the partnership. While disagreements over the humanitarian dimension persisted, the imperatives of counterterrorism and regional security consistently promoted the bilateral relations.[52] The post-9/11 environment thus created a convergence of necessity that elevated the relationship to its most strategically significant phase, setting a precedent for how shared threats could temporarily mute underlying frictions.[53]

Ilham Aliyev, who became president in 2003, continued this tradition of close engagement with Washington. His visits to the U.S. in the mid-2000s reflected a shared focus on energy security, counterterrorism, and cooperation in Afghanistan.[54] Ilham Aliyev's meetings with U.S. officials underscored Azerbaijan's role as a reliable partner in ensuring the safe transport of Caspian oil and gas to Western markets, reducing dependence on Russian energy routes. His dialogue with American policymakers also highlighted Azerbaijan's contributions to international peacekeeping missions and its growing role in East–West strategic connectivity.[55]

51 E. H. Mikail and H. Çora, "Trump Era U.S. and Azerbaijani Relations," Sociology Mind, vol. 15, no. 1 (2025), pp. 1–13.

52 Rovshan Ibrahimov, U.S.–Azerbaijan Relations: A View from Baku (Washington, DC: Rethink Institute, 2014). Available at: https://www.academia.edu/8711416/U_S_Azerbaijan_Relations_A_View_from_Baku (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

53 Brenda Shaffer, *In the Era of U.S. Energy Abundance: The U.S. Strategic Rationale for Deepening Relations with Azerbaijan* (Washington, DC: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2020). Available at: https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Shaffer-In-the-Era-of-U.S.-Energy-Abundance-1.pdf (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 25–40.

54 Sevda Garashova, "United States–Azerbaijan Relations (1991–2020)," Eminak: Scientific Quarterly Journal, no. 4(44) (2023), Available at: https://doi.org/10.33782/eminak2023.4(44).688 (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 301–322.

55 Rauf Mammadov, "Azerbaijan's Strategic Role in U.S. Energy and Securi-

The significance of these projects extended well beyond economics. The U.S. effectively transformed Baku into a stakeholder in transatlantic security by anchoring Azerbaijan firmly within a Western-backed energy corridor. Still, the partnership was never free of contradictions. The gap widened under the Obama administration, which placed renewed emphasis on domestic affairs and governance.[56] Baku interpreted these pressures as undermining sovereignty, especially against the backdrop of the unresolved conflict with Armenia, where Washington's efforts as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group often appeared to Azerbaijan as slow, ineffective, and tilted toward Armenia. Political strains became more visible, culminating in occasional rhetorical clashes and a cooling of high-level contacts.[57]

Yet, despite these frictions, cooperation endured. The completion of the BTC pipeline in 2006 and U.S. backing for the SGC a decade later underscored Washington's long-term commitment to Azerbaijan's role in European energy diversification. Equally, Azerbaijan's sustained contributions to NATO operations in Afghanistan highlighted its willingness to act as a security partner even when political relations were strained. What emerged was a pragmatic modus vivendi: Washington relied on Baku as an indispensable energy and security partner, while Baku relied on Washington's support to balance external threats, particularly from Moscow and Tehran.[58]

In April 2016, President Ilham Aliyev attended the Nuclear Security Summit hosted by President Barack Obama. In addition to participating in global discussions on nuclear non-proliferation, Ilham Aliyev held bilateral meetings

ty Policy," *Caucasus Strategic Review*, no. 2(18) (2022), Available at: https://doi.org/10.24588/csr2022.2(18).mammadov (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 215–238.

56 Arms Control Association & Partnership for Global Security, The 2010 Nuclear Security Summit: A Status Update (Washington, DC: Arms Control Association & Partnership for Global Security, 2011). Available at: https://docslib.org/doc/4089454/the-2010-nuclear-security-summit-a-status-update (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

57 Scott Diehl and Patricia Humphrey, "The April 2010 Nuclear Security Summit: One More Step Toward the Mountaintop," James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, April 19, 2010. Available at: https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/april-2010-nuclear-security-summit/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

58 E. H. Mikail, H. Çora, and A. N. Çora, "Azerbaijan's Energy Resources and BTC (Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan) Project," Open Journal of Political Science, vol. 10, no. 2 (2020), pp. 123–135.

that emphasized Azerbaijan's central role in the U.S. regional strategy. Topics included the diversification of energy routes through projects such as the BTC and Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum (BTE) pipelines, Azerbaijan's cooperation in counterterrorism and Afghanistan supply chains, and the need for continued U.S. engagement in resolving the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The visit demonstrated that nearly two decades after independence, Azerbaijan had transformed from a newly recognized state into a pivotal partner in U.S. security and energy policy.[59]

Azerbaijan's contribution to NATO missions

Azerbaijan was one of the earliest countries to declare unconditional solidarity with the U.S. in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Within weeks, Baku committed military personnel to support international stabilization efforts in Afghanistan, and shortly afterward, it extended this commitment by sending troops to Iraq as part of the U.S.-led coalition. This step was significant for a newly independent state in the South Caucasus, both symbolically and practically, as it demonstrated Azerbaijan's readiness to align itself with the global fight against terrorism.[60] Whereas many NATO allies gradually scaled down their presence in Afghanistan over the years, Azerbaijan went in the opposite direction. Consequently, by early 2018, Baku had increased its contribution from 49 soldiers to 120, making it the only Muslim-majority NATO partner to raise its level of participation at a time when others were reducing theirs.[61]

Beyond the human deployment, Azerbaijan became a critical logistical artery for NATO's mission in Afghanistan. Through the Northern Distribution Network, approximately 40 percent of NATO cargo destined for allied troops

59 Jim Nichol, Azerbaijan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests, Congressional Research Service, March 13, 2013. Available at: https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/97-522.pdf (Accessed: September 14, 2025), pp. 6–10.

60 Nazrin Babayeva, U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan, "US Will Always Appreciate Azerbaijan's Support After 9/11 Terrorist Attacks," Report.az, September 11, 2023. Available at: https://report.az/en/foreign-politics/us-will-always-appreciate-azerbaijan-s-support-after-9-11-terrorist-attacks-embassy-says/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

61 Official Website of NATO, "Relations with Azerbaijan" (n.d.). Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49111.htm (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

transited via Azerbaijani territory, either by land, air, or Caspian Sea routes. This figure was particularly important during peak operations in 2011– 2013, when the international presence in Afghanistan exceeded 130,000 troops.[62] The secure flow of material through Azerbaijan reduced NATO's dependence on alternative and often more politically sensitive supply routes through Pakistan. Azerbaijani forces also contributed directly to security operations on the ground. Together with Turkish troops, Azerbaijani units played a decisive role in safeguarding Kabul International Airport during the Taliban's takeover in 2021, helping to ensure the orderly evacuation of civilians and military personnel. This mission highlighted the professionalism and operational discipline of Azerbaijan's forces, despite their relatively modest numerical size compared to larger NATO contributors.

Furthermore, the role Azerbaijan played in logistics also had a long-term impact on how NATO viewed the South Caucasus. Baku reinforced its image as an indispensable transit partner bridging Europe and Asia by acting as a reliable corridor for equipment, food, and fuel. The country's investment in modernizing its airports, railways, and the Baku International Sea Trade Port supported these efforts, making Azerbaijan a hub for NATO's logistical planning.[63]

Azerbaijan's cooperation with NATO, however, cannot be reduced solely to troop contributions. Since joining the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994, Azerbaijan has participated in an extensive series of joint activities, exercises, and training programs aimed at aligning its defense institutions with NATO standards. Over three decades of engagement, Baku has steadily expanded its participation in interoperability projects, operational planning exercises, and command post simulations.[64] Many of these efforts extend beyond strictly military dimensions, encompassing humanitarian relief, disaster response, and counterterrorism coordination. For instance, Azerbaijani officers

62 Ibid.

63 Official Website of the U.S. Department of Commerce, "Azerbaijan – Transportation and Logistics," Country Commercial Guide, November 21, 2023. Available at: https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/azerbaijan-transportation-and-logistics (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

64 Official Website of NATO, "Relations with Azerbaijan," May 27, 2024. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49111.htm (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

have regularly joined NATO-led training in search and rescue operations, while Azerbaijani medical teams have worked alongside NATO counterparts during disaster relief drills.

Energy security constitutes another central pillar of NATO–Azerbaijan cooperation. As a major producer and transit state for Caspian hydrocarbons, Azerbaijan occupies a strategic position in ensuring the diversification of Europe's energy supplies away from over-reliance on a single source. NATO, while not an energy organization per se, has long recognized the importance of secure energy routes as an element of strategic stability. Protection of critical infrastructure such as the BTC oil pipeline, which delivers around 1 million barrels per day, and the SGC, capable of transporting 16 billion cubic meters annually, is a matter of shared concern.[65] Azerbaijan has invested in information-sharing mechanisms, capacity-building programs, and maritime security in the Caspian Sea to mitigate risks such as sabotage, terrorism, or cyberattacks against energy assets.[66]

The emphasis on energy cooperation reflects a mutual recognition that energy is both an economic and a strategic asset. The natural gas from Azerbaijan is not a competitor to other gas sources in Europe. For Europe, Azerbaijan offers an alternative energy source for the diversification of sources and routes, which is highly important for long-term energy security.[67] The Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) is a valuable gas source for Southeastern Europe, helping to decrease energy dependence on a single supplier and reduce vulnerability. As European countries secure their energy security, respectively, the deepening partnership between the West and Azerbaijan has become a win-win arrangement.

Maritime cooperation has been another area of sustained focus. Azerbaijan has modernized its navy and aligned parts of its doctrine with NATO standards

65 Robert Cutler, "NATO Strengthens Energy-Security Ties with Azerbaijan," September 14, 2023. Available at: https://natoassociation.ca/nato-strengthens-energy-security-ties-with-azerbaijan/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

66 Hamza Preljević, Hasan Korkut, "NATO's New Energy Security Role in Azerbaijan: Balancing the Interest Between West and Russia,", 2017. Available at: https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/355285 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

67 Gabriel Gavin, Federica di Sario and Victor Jack, "EU Wants Azerbaijan to Fuel Russian Gas Pipeline in Ukraine", Politico.eu, June 13, 2024. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-asks-azerbaijan-replace-russian-gas-transit-deal-ukraine-expiring/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

under the Operational Capabilities Concept. Particular emphasis has been placed on mine countermeasures, maritime situational awareness, and the reinforcement of port security in Baku and other Caspian facilities. These measures are not merely technical; they deter a spectrum of transnational threats including trafficking, arms smuggling, and terrorism.[68] For example, coordinated patrols in the Caspian Sea have improved Azerbaijan's ability to monitor illicit shipping routes, which remain vulnerable given the region's proximity to Central Asian instability. NATO's support for Azerbaijani naval training, through advisory missions and exercises, has further bolstered the country's capacity to defend its maritime borders. This is especially relevant in the shifting geopolitical landscape of the Caspian Basin, where competition over resources and the spillover of instability from the Middle East or Afghanistan could pose serious challenges.[69]

Beyond military deployments, Azerbaijan has increasingly involved NATO in discussions concerning broader regional security. Following the end of the 2020 Second Karabakh War, Baku has positioned itself as a driver of peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. The Joint Declaration signed in Washington in 2025 between Azerbaijan and Armenia was a landmark in this regard. It created new avenues for NATO to provide technical assistance, including demining cooperation in formerly occupied territories, capacity building for border security, and reconstruction of critical infrastructure in liberated lands.[70] Such engagement expands NATO's role from traditional security to resilience-building and supports Azerbaijan's narrative of being a peace-promoting actor in the South Caucasus. For instance, NATO experts have already been involved in knowledge transfer for mine clearance operations, which remain a significant humanitarian challenge, with more than 1.5 million mines and unexploded ordnance estimated to be present across the liberated territories.[71]

68 Nurani, "NATO on the Caspian's Doorstep? Azerbaijan Plays Big," Aze.media, February 27, 2025. Available at: https://aze.media/nato-on-the-caspians-doorstep-azerbaijan-plays-big/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

69 Shahla Jalilzade, "Azerbaijan and NATO: Strategic Partnership in Progress," Caspian-alpine.org, December 13, 2024. Available at: https://caspian-alpine.org/azerbaijan-and-nato-strategic-partnership-in-progress/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

70 Official Website of NATO, "Relations with Azerbaijan," May 27, 2024. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49111.htm (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

71 Official Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, " Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reintegration", (n.d.). Available at:

Azerbaijan's consistent reliability, demonstrated contributions to peacekeeping, and constructive diplomatic posture make it a natural partner for the Euro-Atlantic community.[72] NATO's broader concern for stability, connectivity, and integration in the South Caucasus aligns closely with Azerbaijan's interests in peaceful coexistence, economic diversification, and safeguarding transit corridors of global significance.[73]

Azerbaijan's active participation in NATO programs further underscores the depth of the partnership. Since 1994, Azerbaijan has contributed more than 1,200 personnel to NATO-led operations, including deployments in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. This level of contribution, relative to the country's size, is significant. In addition, Azerbaijan has taken part in several collaborative projects under NATO's Science for Peace and Security (SPS) program, spanning areas from counterterrorism technologies to disaster resilience and cybersecurity.[74]

These initiatives have directly enhanced Azerbaijan's defense sector capabilities while strengthening regional resilience to asymmetric threats. Between 2020 and 2024, Azerbaijan hosted at least five NATO-led multinational exercises on its territory, including crisis management simulations and peacekeeping drills.[75] Such exercises have improved Azerbaijan's ability to operate seamlessly alongside NATO forces, while also showcasing Baku's willingness to serve as a venue for multinational training in the South Caucasus.

https://mfa.gov.az/en/category/end-of-the-conflict-in-november-2020-and-post-conflict-situation/post-conflict-reconstruction-rehabilitation-and-reintegration (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

72 Erkin Baidarov, "Middle Corridor: A New Chapter in Eurasian Connectivity," Caspianpost.com, October 3, 2024. Available at: https://caspianpost.com/opinion/middle-corridor-a-new-chapter-in-eurasian-connectivity (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

73 Farid Guliyev, "Post-Conflict Resettlement in Karabakh: Rebuilding Livelihoods," Researchinginternaldisplacement.org, February 13, 2025. Available at: https://researchinginternaldisplacement.org/short_pieces/post-conflict-resettlement-in-karabakh-rebuilding-livelihoods/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

74 Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to NATO, Science for Peace and Security, (n.d.). Available at: https://nato-pfp.mfa.gov.az/index.php/en/category/science-for-peace-and-security (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

75 Official Website of NATO, "Relations with Azerbaijan," May 27, 2024. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49111.htm (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

Looking ahead, the NATO–Azerbaijan partnership may increasingly define the security architecture of the South Caucasus. If NATO continues to expand technical assistance, and if Azerbaijan remains committed to aligning its security institutions with alliance standards, the region could witness a gradual consolidation of stability. This would not only reinforce deterrence against external pressures but also create conditions for long-term economic growth, integration into global trade networks, and greater resilience against hybrid threats.[76]

Conclusion

The history of U.S.–Azerbaijani relations is marked by a unique blend of aspiration, resilience, and strategic calculation. The Azerbaijani delegation's participation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 reflected the young republic's determination to secure recognition from the world's leading powers, including the U.S. under President Woodrow Wilson. Although short-lived due to the Soviet takeover in 1920, this early contact established a symbolic precedent that Azerbaijan would later return to after regaining its independence following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. The collapse of the Soviet system not only restored Azerbaijan's statehood but also reopened the opportunity to pursue balanced and strategic relations with the United States, which quickly recognized the country's independence and supported its sovereignty during a fragile period of transition.

As Azerbaijan navigated the challenges of the 1990s, including the conflict with Armenia and the difficult process of state-building, relations with the U.S. became a key pillar of its foreign policy. The leadership of Heydar Aliyev played a decisive role in consolidating this partnership. His visits to Washington, most notably in the mid-1990s, underscored Azerbaijan's commitment to building strong political and economic ties with the U.S. Ilham Aliyev's meetings with American leaders focused on energy partnership, economic cooperation, and security, laying the foundation for Azerbaijan's participation in major oil and

76 Daniel Pommier Vincelli, "The Wilsonian Moment of the Azerbaijani Delegation in Paris (1919–1920)," in Carlo Frappi and Paolo Sorbello (eds.), Armenia, Caucaso e Asia Centrale: Ricerche 2020 (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2022), pp. 121–140. Available at: https://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-453-0/006 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

gas projects that would reshape the energy map of the Caspian region. These visits highlighted Azerbaijan's potential as a bridge between East and West, and as a strategic partner in ensuring the diversification of global energy supplies.

By 2010, the cumulative effect of these efforts was clear: U.S.–Azerbaijani relations had grown from initial recognition and cautious engagement into a comprehensive partnership rooted in mutual interests. The dialogue between Baku and Washington encompassed not only political and security concerns but also cultural and educational exchanges that expanded the scope of bilateral cooperation. More importantly, this relationship reflected Azerbaijan's success in positioning itself as both an independent actor and a regional leader, able to balance ties with major global powers while safeguarding its national interests.

In this sense, the evolution of U.S.–Azerbaijani relations demonstrates the interplay between history and strategy. From the aspirations of 1919 to the realities of the post-Cold War era, Azerbaijan consistently sought recognition, security, and integration into the global system.Looking forward, the foundations established during this period provide a durable framework for further cooperation, ensuring that the partnership between the U.S. and Azerbaijan will remain an essential component of regional and global stability.

The United States and the Armenia–Azerbaijan Conflict

Vasif Huseynov

The United States maintained a relatively low profile regarding the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict for much of the post-Soviet period. In the early 1990s, this was, among other factors, affected by a cautious approach to Russia's influence in the former Soviet territories. Some in Washington also harbored expectations that Russia could succeed in implementing liberal reforms, potentially aligning more closely with the West. Characterized by some analysts as a "Russia First" policy, this perspective did not translate into active U.S. involvement in conflict resolution, with its role largely limited to participation in the OSCE Minsk Group.

While the "Russia First" policy was eventually abandoned, the United States continued to maintain only limited engagement with the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. In 2017, a prominent American analyst observed that "the United States appears to identify little or no interest in either of those regions and has no policy to meet already existing, not to mention impending, security challenges in the Caucasus or Central Asia."[77] This assessment reflected the prevailing view within the U.S. foreign policy establishment, which classified the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict as a "third-tier" issue – an indication that it was considered a low priority for preventive diplomacy. Such a perception implied not only that a renewed outbreak of violence was regarded as unlikely, but also that even if it did occur, it would not significantly affect U.S. interests.[78]

Officially, the U.S. consistently voiced support for the territorial integrity of all states in the region, even if the manner of expressing this support has varied. From Baku's perspective, this amounted to a double standard: while the U.S. was outspoken in defending Georgia's territorial integrity and supported Tbilisi's efforts to regain control over its occupied territories, Azerbaijan

77 Stephen Blank, "Missing in Action: US Policy," in Laurence Broers (ed.), The International Politics of the Armenian–Azerbaijani Conflict: The Original "Frozen Conflict" and European Security (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp.125–148.

78 Ibid.

received mixed and often ambiguous messages from different political circles in Washington.

This was also reflected in the U.S. position on the resolution prospects of the Armenian-occupied territories. Neither the United States nor any other Western power put pressure on Armenia to withdraw its forces from the occupied territories in line with the four resolutions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which were adopted in 1993 and called for the withdrawal of the Armenian forces from the Azerbaijani territories. There were no sanctions or punitive measures against Armenia due to its blatant refusal to implement the UNSC resolutions. Instead of this, a more diplomatic approach was pursued, calling for a peaceful resolution to the issue of the status of Karabakh, even though its status had already been determined by the UNSC resolutions as an integral part of Azerbaijan.[79] Furthermore, no significant initiative was undertaken to repeal Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which epitomized the fundamentally biased approach of the United States in this matter.

The significant influence of Armenian lobby groups on Congress and other U.S. institutions has limited the degree of support for Azerbaijan's position. As a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the U.S. has consistently advocated for a peaceful resolution to the conflict while emphasizing that the solution must be determined by the conflicting parties themselves. This stance, however, has often resulted in equating the aggressor and the victim, effectively overlooking the occupation of Azerbaijani territories and the displacement of up to 700,000 Azerbaijanis from the territories occupied by Armenia.

Nevertheless, the U.S. has officially backed Azerbaijan's territorial integrity throughout the duration of the conflict and rejected calls from the pro-Armenian lobby groups for the recognition of the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic". These lines formed the basis of all U.S. administrations' approaches to the conflict: "The United States does not recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent country, and its leadership is not recognized internationally or by the United States. The United States supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan…"[80].

79 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, "The United States and the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh," U.S. Department of State, April 15, 2008, Available at: https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/103560.htm (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

80 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, "The United States and the Conflict

The U.S. role as the mediator prior to the Second Karabakh War

An early and significant U.S. initiative to structure the peace process was the introduction of the so-called "Baker Rules" in 1992, named after then–Secretary of State James Baker. These guidelines sought to establish clarity over the format of negotiations by designating Armenia and Azerbaijan as the principal parties to the conflict, while defining the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of Karabakh as "interested parties" with a consultative role.[81] The logic behind this framework was to prevent ambiguity regarding the status of the Karabakh region in the talks: Washington aimed to acknowledge the need for representation of its communities while simultaneously upholding Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and avoiding any legitimization of the secessionist claims. The Baker Rules were subsequently incorporated into the practice of the OSCE Minsk Group and, despite their limitations, represented one of the earliest and most consequential U.S. contributions to the institutionalization of the negotiation process.

In the late 1990s, the Clinton administration undertook direct efforts to facilitate peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 1997, Washington formally assumed its co-chairmanship of the Minsk Group and began to invest political capital in supporting negotiations. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott took on a leading role in 1999, working on an American-led initiative that operated somewhat independently of the broader Minsk framework. These efforts, however, were abruptly disrupted when Armenian Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan and Speaker of Parliament Karen Demirchyan were assassinated in October 1999, only hours after Talbott had left Yerevan.[82] This event shocked Armenia's political system and stalled what little progress had been made, underscoring the fragility of the peace process.

The high point of U.S. mediation came in April 2001, when Secretary of State Colin Powell hosted Armenian President Robert Kocharyan and Azerbaijani

over Nagorno-Karabakh," U.S. Department of State, April 15, 2008, Available at: https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/103560.htm (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

81 Esmira Jafarova, "The Role of the United States in the Armenia–Azerbaijan Conflict," in M. Broers, H. van Gils, and L. Mouradian (eds.), The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (London: Routledge, 2022), pp.321-340.

82 Stephen Blank, "Missing in Action: US Policy," in Laurence Broers (ed.), The International Politics of the Armenian–Azerbaijani Conflict: The Original "Frozen Conflict" and European Security (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp.125–148.

President Heydar Aliyev at a summit in Key West, Florida. The talks lasted several days and involved high-level negotiations, with mediators attempting to finalize a comprehensive peace agreement. However, the summit ended without an agreement. The collapse of the Key West talks represented a major setback for American diplomacy: from that point forward, U.S. involvement became less assertive, and other actors – most notably France at the 2006 Rambouillet meeting, and later Russia after the 2008 Georgia war – took on a more prominent role in the mediation process.[83] The United States did not pursue any further initiatives to directly engage with the peace process or to organize a U.S.-mediated trilateral meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijani representatives – until after the Second Karabakh War in 2020.

In the years that followed the Kew West talks, U.S. initiatives largely focused on sustaining the Minsk Group framework and encouraging incremental progress. Washington lent support to the Madrid Principles, first introduced in 2007, which envisaged a phased settlement: the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories surrounding ex-Nagorno-Karabakh, the return of displaced persons, interim arrangements for the governance of the Karabakh region, and a final determination of its status through a legally binding expression of will. Successive American administrations endorsed these principles as a balanced compromise and a pragmatic pathway to peace.

However, in practice, they failed to produce results, as Yerevan refused to withdraw its forces from any part of the occupied territories and instead sought to prolong the negotiations as a means of consolidating the status quo. This strategy was facilitated by the lack of strong pressure from the mediating powers, including the United States, which limited itself to rhetorical support for the principles without introducing enforcement mechanisms or meaningful incentives for compromise. Over time, this allowed Armenia to entrench its control over the occupied regions while simultaneously undermining confidence in the negotiation process on the Azerbaijani side. The inability of the Madrid Principles to advance beyond paper commitments illustrated both the structural weakness of the Minsk Group format and the broader reluctance of external actors to invest the political capital necessary to overcome entrenched resistance and advance the peace process.

While U.S. officials continued to declare their support for the Minsk Process, in practice Washington's influence in shaping the trajectory of negotiations

83 Ibid.

waned. By the late 2010s, American diplomacy was perceived as reactive rather than proactive, often constrained by domestic political considerations, such as the influence of the Armenian-American lobby in Congress, which further complicated U.S. credibility as an impartial mediator.

In the mid-2000s, the U.S. unsuccessfully sought to decouple the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process from another related dispute: the normalization of Armenia–Türkiye relations and the opening of their shared border. Türkiye closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in response to Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories, consistently conditioning any normalization on progress in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Under the mediation of the U.S., France, and Russia, Armenia and Türkiye negotiated a set of bilateral protocols in 2009, which aimed to establish diplomatic relations, reopen the border, and promote cooperation in trade, transport, and cultural exchange. The United States encouraged Türkiye to pursue its diplomatic engagement with Armenia independently, pressing Ankara to advance the ratification of these protocols without linking the process to broader developments in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict.

This approach provoked strong discontent in Baku. From Azerbaijan's perspective, U.S. support for Turkish–Armenian rapprochement without linking it to the withdrawal of Armenian forces from occupied territories, undermined Azerbaijan's core interests and effectively rewarded Armenia's intransigence. President Ilham Aliyev publicly warned that if normalization proceeded in isolation from progress on Karabakh, Armenia would have little incentive to continue meaningful negotiations and might instead seek to freeze the conflict indefinitely. As a result, the U.S. initiative, rather than fostering trust, deepened Azerbaijan's skepticism about Washington's impartiality as a mediator.

The fallout from this episode was visible in bilateral relations. Not only did Baku resist the protocols, but it also grew increasingly wary of U.S. intentions in the peace process. Rather than recalibrating its approach by applying pressure on Armenia to comply with international law and the four UN Security Council resolutions, Washington appeared to place the onus on Azerbaijan.

Nevertheless, throughout this period, U.S. policy officially maintained support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, repeatedly rejecting calls by Armenian lobby groups for recognition of the self-proclaimed "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic". Washington's consistent position was that the separatist regime

was not an independent state and that its leadership enjoyed no international recognition. This provided Baku with a measure of reassurance, even as it criticized Washington for failing to apply meaningful pressure on Armenia to withdraw from the occupied territories in accordance with the four UN Security Council resolutions adopted in 1993.

In sum, U.S. initiatives before the Second Karabakh War were characterized by intermittent bursts of activism – most prominently at Key West in 2001– combined with long stretches of limited or reactive engagement. While Washington's mediation offered important frameworks for settlement and lent legitimacy to Azerbaijan's claims of territorial integrity, the lack of sustained political will, both domestically within the conflict parties and internationally among the co-chairs, meant that these efforts were ultimately unable to prevent the outbreak of renewed large-scale hostilities in 2020.

The United States and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict after the Second Karabakh War

All attempts at a peaceful settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over many years have failed to achieve any success as a result of the destructive policies of the Armenian leadership. Interested in extending the status quo and strengthening control over the occupied territories of Azerbaijan after the ceasefire agreement signed in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan in May 1994, Yerevan imitated negotiations and refused to implement the proposals made by the OSCE Minsk Group to resolve the conflict. Although the Azerbaijani side repeatedly stated that the negotiations were not going to last forever and that it would resort to military action if the peace initiatives continued to fail, the military and political leaders of Armenia ignored this and felt safe behind a supposedly impenetrable defense barrier they had built along the Line of Contact (i.e., the frontiers of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan). Therefore, they did not shy away from provocations that insulted the Azerbaijani people and played with their sensitivity and even made new territorial claims. This approach of Armenia gradually increased the tension between the conflict parties and led to the intensification of military clashes in the border regions and on the Line of Contact.

After a long period of stagnation, the change of government in Armenia in mid-2018 created an opportunity for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and

resulted in a reduction of tension in the region. The messages of Armenia's new leadership led by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in closed meetings about its interest in resolving the conflict, the signals it gave in this direction, and the reduction of military clashes in the frontline increased hopes for peace. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that Pashinyan was abusing this process to consolidate the internal control of his government. After consolidating power, he immediately returned to an extremist approach regarding Armenia's claims to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and announced the infamous statement: "Karabakh is Armenia, period".[84] Since the beginning of 2020, provocations against Azerbaijan had increased, amid provocative statements from Armenian military circles asserting that more Azerbaijani lands would be occupied in the event of a new war.

In July 2020, after clashes in the territory of the Tovuz region, news began to spread about the rapid arming of Armenia by Russia and preparations for a larger-scale military aggression. In parallel with this, the consolidation of Armenian military units, increase in the supply of weapons and even the creation of voluntary military units was observed in the frontline areas. The country's leadership in Azerbaijan brought this information to the attention of the world community and emphasized that Armenia's preparation for a new war is a great threat to peace and security in the region. Unfortunately, neither the OSCE nor any other international organization had tried or succeeded in dissuading Yerevan from its aggressive plans. As a result, early in the morning on September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan was subjected to an armed attack by Armenian military units.

The 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan began with the counter-offensive operation ordered by President Ilham Aliyev, the Commander-in-Chief of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces. Thanks to the heroism of the Azerbaijani army, this war became an honorable stage in the history of Azerbaijan. In a short period of time, the strongest of defense lines built by the enemy over the years were broken, and Armenia was hit with a blow it could never have imagined. The Armenian leadership was powerless in the face of this shock and had to sign the act of capitulation on the night of November 9-10, 2020. With the liberation of Karabakh and surrounding districts and, thus, the end of the Karabakh conflict, a new era began for Azerbaijan and the entire region.

84 Joshua Kucera, "Pashinyan calls for unification between Armenia and Karabakh", Eurasianet, 6 August 2019, Available at: https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-calls-for-unification-between-armenia-and-karabakh (Accessed: October 5, 2025)/

Reactions from the international community to the 44-day War were generally supportive of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Notably, the roles of Türkiye and Pakistan, which supported Azerbaijan in the complex international political landscape and strengthened its diplomatic position, should be emphasized. The moral and political backing from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, his government, and the Turkish people – who maintained constant communication with the President of Azerbaijan from the first hours of the war – coupled with numerous visits from high-ranking Turkish officials to Azerbaijan during the conflict, allowed Azerbaijan to withstand pressure from pro-Armenian states and organizations and fight with greater confidence.

Many countries, including Israel, Ukraine, Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina also supported Azerbaijan's territorial integrity throughout the war. Furthermore, the support of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), chaired by Azerbaijan since 2019, and its member states participating in the UN Security Council played a significant role in Azerbaijan's diplomatic efforts. Thanks to the principled positions of these member states, the UN Security Council prevented the adoption of a draft resolution during the war that did not align with Azerbaijan's interests.

At the time, the United States was in the final weeks of the Trump administration, which was consumed by the presidential election campaign. The turbulence of the electoral season, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic that had overwhelmed the country since early 2020, severely curtailed Washington's ability to devote sustained attention to developments in the South Caucasus. As a result, the American reaction during the 44-day war was limited.

From the earliest days of the fighting, the U.S. State Department issued statements expressing alarm at the outbreak of violence. On September 27, 2020 – the very day hostilities began – Washington urged both parties to cease military operations.[85] This reaction was consistent with the United States' long-standing position as a Minsk Group co-chair: an emphasis on restraint, avoidance of further bloodshed, and a call for the parties themselves to recommit to negotiations.

85 Aljazeera.com, "Armenia-Azerbaijan clashes: How the world reacted", 27 September 2020, Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/27/armenia-azerbaijan-clashes-world-reactions (Accessed: October 5, 2025).

Members of Congress also quickly voiced concern. Statements from legislators were numerous, though often influenced by the strong presence of the Armenian lobby in American politics. While some lawmakers echoed calls for an immediate ceasefire without taking sides, others explicitly framed the conflict through an Armenian lens, urging stronger U.S. support for Yerevan. This divergence underscored the domestic political pressures that have long complicated Washington's role in the conflict and have limited its ability to act as a neutral broker.

On October 2, 2020, the United States joined with France and Russia – the other Minsk Group co-chairs – in issuing a trilateral statement. The declaration called for an "immediate cessation of hostilities" and urged the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to "commit without delay to resuming substantive negotiations, in good faith and without preconditions."[86] The text closely followed the established diplomatic vocabulary of previous decades, reiterating general appeals rather than introducing new approaches.

In the weeks that followed, Washington attempted to raise its diplomatic profile. However, these efforts were overshadowed by Moscow's initiatives and by the rapid pace of developments on the battlefield. The State Department and the U.S. Mission to the OSCE regularly echoed the messages of the Minsk Group, condemning civilian casualties and urging restraint.

A significant, though belated, attempt at direct U.S. involvement occurred on October 24, 2020, when Secretary of State Michael Pompeo hosted the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Washington. This initiative was presented as an American effort to facilitate a humanitarian ceasefire, building on earlier Russian and French attempts. A trilateral statement issued after the meeting announced that the United States had "facilitated intensive negotiations" and that a ceasefire had been agreed.[87]

However, just like the previous effort in Moscow, this ceasefire collapsed almost immediately. Armenian forces resumed strikes, including missile attacks on the city of Ganja, which caused civilian casualties and hardened Azerbaijani

86 OSCE, "Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group", 2 October 2020, Available at: https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/465711 (Accessed: October 5, 2025).

87 Official Website of the U.S. Embassy Azerbaijan, "U.S.-Armenia-Azerbaijan Joint Statement", October 26, 2020, Available at: https://az.usembassy.gov/u-s-armenia-azerbaijan-joint-statement/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025)

public opinion. The failure of the Washington-brokered truce exposed the limitations of U.S. leverage: by 2020, neither side saw the United States as capable of enforcing commitments, nor were American leaders willing to back diplomacy with significant political or material pressure.

The decisive phase of the war unfolded in early November, when Azerbaijani forces liberated the strategically important city of Shusha, effectively rendering Armenia's military posture untenable. On November 10, 2020, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan signed a Russia-brokered agreement with President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and President Vladimir Putin of Russia. The deal mandated Armenia's withdrawal from the remaining occupied districts – Aghdam, Lachin, and Kalbajar – while also introducing a Russian peacekeeping contingent into the Karabakh region.

Washington was not a party to the negotiations that produced the agreement, nor did it play any meaningful role in shaping its provisions. The sidelining of the United States underscored the extent to which regional powers, particularly Russia (and, indirectly, Türkiye), had supplanted Western mediation during the war. American officials acknowledged the outcome with measured statements. Secretary of State Pompeo characterized the agreement as only "a first step toward a peaceful negotiated settlement".[88]

In contrast to the highly visible role of Moscow, Washington's contribution was limited to rhetorical support for peace, modest humanitarian aid, and continued affirmation of its support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. The absence of American involvement in the ceasefire arrangements was understandable, as the US public and government were overwhelmed by the presidential election campaign in the fall of 2020.

The November 2020 agreement created new geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus. Most notably, it facilitated the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity while introducing Russian peacekeepers into Karabakh. Türkiye also achieved a greater role, establishing a joint monitoring center with Russia in

88 Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary Of State, The United States Welcomes Cessation of Hostilities Between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Announces New Assistance to Respond to the Nagorno-Karabakh Humanitarian Emergency, Press Statement, November 17, 2020, Available at: https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-welcomes-cessation-of-hostilities-between-armenia-andazerbaijan-and-announces-new-assistance-to-respond-to-the-nagorno-karabakh-humanitarian-emergency/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025)

January 2021. For the first time since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ankara had "boots on the ground" in the conflict zone, reshaping the balance of power.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the United States expressed cautious support for post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. American officials emphasized the importance of reopening transportation links, promoting economic cooperation, and advancing dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Secretary Pompeo's statement following the ceasefire noted that the cessation of fighting was "only a first step" and stressed Washington's readiness to assist with humanitarian needs.[89]

Practical engagement, however, remained limited. The U.S. announced modest assistance packages, including $5 million for conflict-affected populations, but refrained from significant new initiatives.[90] The administration also signaled support for U.S. companies interested in participating in the reconstruction of liberated Azerbaijani territories. In January 2021, U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Earle Litzenberger publicly stated that American firms were prepared to contribute to rebuilding efforts. However, this declaration immediately provoked criticism from Armenian lobby groups, which accused Washington of "taking sides" and legitimizing Azerbaijan's gains. The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), for example, denounced Litzenberger's remarks, demanding clarification on whether the U.S. was encouraging investment in "areas seized by Azerbaijan."[91]

This episode illustrated the enduring tension in U.S. policy: while official Washington upheld Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, domestic political pressures often constrained the scope of practical cooperation. Lobby politics, particularly Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act – which restricts direct U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan – remained a significant obstacle to deeper engagement.

The war and its aftermath highlighted several structural features of American policy toward the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict. First, Washington consistently

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Asbarez.com, "U.S. Ambassador to Baku Congratulates Azerbaijan for 'Restoring Territorial Integrity'", 29 January 2021, Available at: https://asbarez.com/u-s-ambassador-to-baku-congratulates-azerbaijan-for-restoring-territorial-integrity/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

reaffirmed its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both states but avoided imposing consequences on Armenia for its occupation of Azerbaijani territories. Second, the United States remained wedded to the OSCE Minsk Group framework, even though that format lost credibility in the eyes of both Baku and Yerevan. Third, domestic politics, particularly the influence of the Armenian lobby, constrained U.S. flexibility and, at times, skewed its positions. Finally, Washington demonstrated a readiness to defer to regional powers – above all Russia – when the conflict escalated beyond diplomatic control.

The Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Process During the Biden Administration

The start of the Biden presidency coincided with the launch of the post-war peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The peace process following the war continued with the mediation of Russia, which was based on the trilateral statement of November 9, 2020. In the first meeting after the war, on January 11, 2021, President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan met at a trilateral summit in Moscow with President Putin, at the latter's initiative.[92] The summit concluded with the signing of another document that primarily built upon the ninth article of the November 9, 2020, trilateral statement. According to this article, all economic and transport links in the region shall be restored in the region. In addition, Armenia agreed to provide a land passage between the western region of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and guaranteed the safety of this transport link. This passage, which came to be known as the Zangezur corridor, was agreed to provide "unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions". According to the trilateral statement, control over transport through the corridor "shall be exercised by the bodies of the Border Guard Service of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of Russia."[93]

92 Official Website of President of the Russian Federation, "Meeting with Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan," Kremlin.ru, November 26, 2019, Available at: https://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64877 (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

93 Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, and President of the Russian Federation," November 10, 2020, Available at: https://president.az/en/articles/view/45923 (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

The negotiations concerning the Zangezur corridor turned out to be the most controversial element in terms of geopolitical dynamics. Russia was seeking to carry out the process entirely in line with the terms of the November statement. The new trilateral statement signed in January 2021 declared the creation of a working group, co-chaired by the Deputy Prime Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, as well as the Deputy Chairperson of the Government of the Russian Federation. The working group was supposed to ensure the implementation of Article 9 of the 2020 trilateral statement and submit a list of activities.

Russia remained in the driving seat of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace negotiations throughout 2021. On November 26 of that year, the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan met for the second time since the end of the Second Karabakh War (September 27–November 9, 2020). The meeting took place at the initiative of the Russian government, in a similar format to the previous trilateral summit attended by the leaders in Moscow on January 11, 2021. The sides reached agreements on other contested issues, including the unblocking of regional transportation links and the delimitation/demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. According to the trilateral statement issued after the trilateral summit, Armenia and Azerbaijan have basically recognized their mutual international borders and agreed to take measures to launch the delimitation and demarcation process. President Vladimir Putin announced at the press conference that the sides pledged to create a mechanism by the end of this year to carry out this process – which may also include the establishment of an international commission with the participation of Russia, as envisaged by the joint statement.

Russia's plans did not materialize. The start of the Russia-Ukraine war brought about completely new dynamics in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process. For the first time in the post-Soviet period, the EU took up a mediating role between Baku and Yerevan, while Russia's mediation, to the disillusionment and resentment of the Kremlin, embarked on a steady decline.

The first steps towards EU mediation were made before the start of the Ukraine war. On December 14, 2021, Brussels hosted the first EU-mediated meeting of the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders since the 44 Day Karabakh War of 2020. Organized on the sidelines of the summit of the Eastern Partnership Programme with the participation of the European Council President Charles Michel, the meeting opened up a new path in the peace process. Building on

a previous meeting and an online discussion in early February, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met in Brussels on April 6, 2022. It was also the first time the leaders of the two countries had paid a visit to Brussels for the sole purpose of negotiating about the dispute between their countries. Hence, the rendezvous was of great symbolic as well as political significance, marking the growing role of the EU in the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process and offering a viable alternative to Moscow's involvement.

This was a major shift in the peace process. Moscow gradually lost its honest broker status in the settlement of the most substantial issues between Baku and Yerevan. The Brussels summit additionally launched preparations for an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace treaty. Specifically, the foreign ministers of the two countries were tasked with initiating talks and contacts in this direction. A week later, the two sides took their first major step: On April 11, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan, for the first time in years, spoke on the phone, without any third-party arbitration. According to the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both officials "had an exchange of views about the work on the preparation of a future peace treaty, convening of a Joint Border Commission, as well as the humanitarian issues".[94]

This breakthrough in the peace process and the growing role of the EU opened up a window of opportunity for more substantive engagement of the West, including for the United States. On September 19, 2022, within the framework of the high-level week of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, a meeting took place between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Jeyhun Bayramov, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Ararat Mirzoyan, initiated and attended by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Another foreign ministerial meeting via the mediation of the Biden administration took place in November 2022. While these two meetings did not produce any publicly known breakthrough, the fact that the U.S. got involved in the process with more active engagement was important.

During that same period, the United States also facilitated a meeting between Azerbaijani Presidential Advisor Hikmet Hajiyev and Armenian Security

94 Official Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Telephone Conversation between Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan," April 11, 2022, Available at: https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/no17422 (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan in Washington on September 27, 2022. The Biden administration also succeeded to arrange a meeting between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Germany on February 18, 2023.

The following year, in 2023, from May 1 to 4, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Ararat Mirzoyan and Jeyhun Bayramov, respectively, held four-day peace talks facilitated by United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in Washington. Reportedly, Blinken only attended the introductory and closing sessions of the negotiations, which were held bilaterally between the delegations of the two countries for the remainder of the talks.

These talks, which represented the longest round of negotiations since the end of the Second Karabakh War in 2020, marked the third ministerial meeting between Armenia and Azerbaijan mediated by the United States since September 2022. The growingly active role of the United States was critical, with EU led mediation struggling at that time. While the EU assumed the lead mediating role in negotiations following the decline of Russia's role in the process after its invasion of Ukraine, Brussels failed to sustain the process due to, among other issues, controversy surrounding France's biased stance and its intervention in the Brussels-mediated peace talks.

The Washington meeting of May 2023 took place against the backdrop of stalled communications between Baku and Yerevan over differences on what the peace treaty should contain as well as Azerbaijan's installation of a border checkpoint along the Lachin road on April 23. Later, on May 4, while the foreign ministers were still deep in discussion in Washington, President Aliyev revealed that Yerevan had only responded to Baku's latest comments on the text of the peace treaty after more than 40 days, and just prior to the Washington meeting.

Furthermore, the Azerbaijani President stated that he was not optimistic about the current state of negotiations, as Yerevan, in its latest response to Baku's proposals, again made "attempts to question the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan; attempts to incorporate Karabakh, in some way, into a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan; and attempts to remove a joint proposal on combating terrorism, extremism, radicalism and separatism."[95]

95 Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Ilham Aliyev

President Aliyev added that the "Armenians kept everything but crossed out separatism".

Notably, several days before the ministerial meeting in the United States, Pashinyan stated that Armenia fully recognizes Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and expects the same from Baku. Likewise, a day before President Aliyev's aforementioned statement, Pashinyan confessed that his country needs to declare unequivocally that it has no territorial claims against Azerbaijan. He acknowledged that "the Republic of Armenia must declare that it has no territorial claims and will never have them. This is the only principle that will give us a chance to have a state."[96]

Despite these messages, which were largely interpreted in the region as a sign of Armenia's readiness to reach an agreement in Washington, the ministerial meeting did not deliver any official document, joint press statement or visible agreements on specific issues. In his remarks at the closing session, Blinken disclosed that "the two sides have discussed some very tough issues over the last few days and they've made tangible progress on a durable peace agreement".[97] The U.S. official added, "We really are within reach of an agreement."

In identical statements after the talks in Washington, Foreign Ministers Mirzoyan and Bayramov stated that they "advanced mutual understanding on some articles of the draft bilateral Agreement on Peace and Establishment of Interstate Relations, meanwhile acknowledging that the positions on some key issues remain divergent".[98]

attended international conference on "Shaping the Geopolitics of the Greater Eurasia: from Past to Present to Future" in Shusha", 3 May 2023, Available at: https://president.az/en/articles/view/59576 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

96 Armenpress.am, "Armenia Should Declare That It Not Only Has No Territorial Aspirations, but Also Will Not Have Them", May 3, 2023, Available at: https://www.armenpress.am/eng/news/1110172/ (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

97 Official Website of the U.S. State Department, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken at the Bilateral Peace Negotiation Closing Session with Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov, 4 May 2023, Available at: https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-the-bilateral-peace-negotiation-closing-session-with-armenian-foreign-minister-ararat-mirzoyan-and-azerbaijani-foreign-minister-jeyhun-bayramov/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

98 Official Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "No:239/23, Press Release on the meeting between the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan

The role of the Biden administration as the mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan was seriously damaged after the one-day anti-terror operation of Azerbaijan against the separatist regime in Karabakh in September 2023. The operations led to the collapse of the separatist regime in Karabakh and the voluntary departure of the local Armenian community to Armenia. The collapse of the separatist entity put an end to the occupation of the Azerbaijani territories, marking a full restoration of the country's territorial integrity. However, the Biden administration demonstrated a rather biased approach to these events, completely disregarding Azerbaijan's concerns about the illegal activities of the separatist regime.

On November 16, 2023, Baku canceled a meeting between the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan scheduled to take place on November 20 in Washington. [99] The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry asserted that, under the existing circumstances, it was not possible to proceed with US-mediated peace negotiations. The statement alluded to US Assistant Secretary of State James O'Brien's comments during "The Future of Nagorno-Karabakh" hearing held by the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Europe on November 15. The hearing highlighted a growing break between Baku and Washington on how to proceed with the peace talks. Azerbaijan called for "more regional solutions to regional problems," while the United States and the European Union wanted to maintain influence over negotiations between Baku and Yerevan.[100]

O'Brien's remarks raised eyebrows in Baku. The US official commented on the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process, bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and the United States, and regional transit projects in the South Caucasus. He stipulated that it cannot be 'business as usual' with Azerbaijan without significant progress in the peace talks: "We've canceled a number of high-level visits, condemned [Baku's] actions, and [canceled] the 907 waiver. We don't

and Armenia held Arlington, Virginia", 4 May 2023, Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/no23923 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

99 Apa.az, "Azerbaijan refuses meeting with Armenia in Washington", November 16, 2023, Available at: https://en.apa.az/foreign-policy/azerbaijan-refuses-meeting-with-armenia-in-washington-416401 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

100 Azatutyun.am, "U.S. Official Says Next Few Weeks 'Critical' In Armenia-Azerbaijan Talks", November 16, 2023, Available at: https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32687150.html (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

anticipate submitting a waiver until such time as we see a real improvement in the situation".[101] O'Brien was referencing Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act of 1992. The amendment, adopted on October 24, 1992, bars the United States from offering assistance to Azerbaijan unless Baku takes "demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh".[102]

The United States has granted annual waivers for this amendment since 2002. That year, Baku permitted Washington to use its territory to supply US troops in Afghanistan. Hence, O'Brien's statement stirred ire in Baku. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry responded, "It turns out that the US side has always considered the support of Azerbaijan as occasional, while it should be remembered that history has always repeated itself."[103] The government ministry also reminded Washington of Azerbaijan's numerous contributions to US counterterrorism efforts following 9/11.

O'Brien also spoke against the role of Iran and Russia in the South Caucasus, as well as Azerbaijan's decision to build a corridor through northern Iran to reach Nakhchivan, which would have served as an alternative to the Zangezur corridor. The US official declared, "A future that is built around the axis of Russia and Iran as the main participants in the security of the region, the South Caucasus, is unstable and undesirable, including for both the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia. They have the opportunity to make a different decision now".[104] He further stressed that Washington prefers a land corridor passing through Armenia's southern territory. The United States hopes to use such a passage to limit Russian and Iranian involvement in regional transit.

101 Ibid.

102 Freedom Support Act, S. 2532, 102nd Congress (1991–1992), Text – S. 2532 – Library of Congress, introduced June 25, 1992, Available at: https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/senate-bill/2532/text (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

103 Official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Commentary in Response to Groundless Remarks by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James O'Brien at the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Europe Hearing," April November 15, 2023, Available at: https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/no65423 (Accessed: August 28, 2025).

104 Azatutyun.am, "U.S. Official Says Next Few Weeks 'Critical' In Armenia-Azerbaijan Talks", November 16, 2023, Available at: https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32687150.html (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

Tensions continued to mount between Azerbaijan and the United States regarding differences in their regional policies. On November 21, Hikmet Hajiyev, foreign policy advisor to the Azerbaijani President, issued a response to a statement from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Samantha Power. In a video posted on X, Power announced a package of $4 million in humanitarian aid for the Armenian people who, according to her, were forcibly displaced by Azerbaijan's military operation in Karabakh.[105] Hajiyev criticized Power's statement on multiple fronts. He highlighted her apparent indifference to the challenges faced by internally displaced persons and refugees in Azerbaijan and for supporting the Russian oligarch Ruben Vardanyan, who had served in a senior position in the separatist regime in Karabakh.

This break between Azerbaijan and the United States persisted until the end of the Biden administration. In December 2024, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry rejected another United States-initiated meeting with its Armenian counterpart on the sidelines of the 31st meeting of the OSCE Council of Foreign Ministers in Malta. It was reported that the reason behind Azerbaijan's refusal was related to the "insistence" of the United States' Secretary Antony Blinken to mediate between the two sides. Citing the overall "unjust and biased policy" of the Biden administration towards Azerbaijan, the diplomatic source of the report stated that "For this reason, Azerbaijan does not want the U.S. to participate in the peace agenda at all and does not consider it appropriate".[106] Earlier, in July 2024, Azerbaijan's President Aliyev voiced his frustration with the challenges in U.S.-Azerbaijan relations, criticizing the Biden administration for making what he described as "unrealistic demands" of Azerbaijan.[107]

105 Vasif Huseynov, "Strained Relations Between Azerbaijan and the West", November 27, 2023, Available at: https://jamestown.org/program/strained-relations-between-azerbaijan-and-the-west/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

106 Caliber.az, "Media: Azerbaijan rejects US mediation for foreign ministers' meeting at OSCE session in Malta", 5 December 2024, Available at: https://caliber.az/en/post/media-azerbaijan-rejects-us-mediation-for-foreign-ministers-meeting-at-osce-session-in-malta (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

107 Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Meeting of the President Ilham Aliyev with the participants of the 2nd Shusha Global Media Forum", July 20, 2024, Available at: https://president.az/en/articles/view/66533 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

In the same speech, President Aliyev, talking about the upcoming November 2024 presidential elections, said his government could get along better with a Republican president. "Of course, if you look at the development of our relationship, particularly the visible aspects, of course, with the Republican administration, our relations have always been much more productive, fruitful, and result-oriented", he stated.[108] President Aliyev expressed hope that Donald Trump would win the presidential election. Consequently, Trump's win was welcomed in Azerbaijan with optimism. About six months after taking over the leadership, President Trump proved President Aliyev right. The U.S.-Azerbaijan relations and the U.S. role in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process gained new dynamics after Trump entered the Oval Office for the second presidency.

The U.S. Role in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict under Trump administration: Washington summit

On August 8, 2025, President Trump hosted President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan, for the signing of agreements hailed by all three leaders as "historic." The agreements were presented as a potential end to the decades-long territorial conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, formalizing mutual recognition of each country's territorial integrity and the inviolability of their borders. The leaders also reached a resolution on several of the most complex issues in recent Armenia-Azerbaijan peace talks.

The Washington summit held particular importance for the two South Caucasus countries for several reasons. Before their trilateral meeting with the U.S. President, the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders held separate bilateral talks with the United States, signing agreements on a range of strategic issues.

For Baku, a key outcome was the agreement with Washington to establish a Strategic Working Group tasked with preparing a *Charter on Strategic Partnership* between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the United States of America. This document is expected to elevate bilateral relations to a higher level and open new opportunities for cooperation in priority sectors such as energy, connectivity, and artificial intelligence. The two sides also agreed to annul the 907th Amendment to the Freedom Support Act (1992), adopted

108 Ibid.

under the influence of Armenian lobby groups, which prohibited direct U.S. aid to Azerbaijan as long as Azerbaijan maintained its "blockade" of Armenia – although it was Azerbaijan that was the target of Armenian aggression in the early 1990s.

Similarly, Armenia signed bilateral agreements with the United States to deepen cooperation in the same priority sectors – energy, connectivity, and artificial intelligence. However, Yerevan currently holds a slight advantage over Baku in terms of formal bilateral arrangements with Washington. In the final days of the Biden administration, whose leadership openly adopted a pro-Armenian stance on South Caucasus issues, Armenia signed its own *Charter on Strategic Partnership* with the United States.

Unlike the Biden administration, Trump holds a more neutral and unbiased stance in the relations towards the two countries and seeks to pursue the relations at an equal pace. This is primarily due to the fact that US geopolitical plans concerning the South Caucasus cannot be implemented without the involvement of Azerbaijan – which the late American statesman Zbigniew Brzezinski once described as "the cork in the bottle containing the riches of the Caspian Sea Basin and Central Asia".[109]

Without a doubt, the most consequential outcome of the Washington summit for the people of the South Caucasus was the set of agreements reached between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The two countries initialed their long-awaited peace treaty, intended to bring a definitive end to their decades-long conflict. The founding principles of the treaty were first proposed by Azerbaijan in March 2022, and the two sides spent three years negotiating its provisions, finalizing the text in March of this year.

However, initialing the treaty does not mean it has been formally signed. Armenia is expected to amend its constitution to remove territorial claims against Azerbaijan before the treaty can be concluded. This process is likely to take at least a year, as Armenia must first hold parliamentary elections, which are scheduled for June 2026.

In Washington, Armenia and Azerbaijan also jointly called for the dissolution of the OSCE Minsk Group – the mediation format established in the early

109 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geo-strategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

1990s to address their conflict. The decision to disband this body removed yet another obstacle on the path toward signing the peace treaty.

However, perhaps the most debated agreement reached in Washington was the one concerning the transportation link between mainland Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan exclave – until recently known as the Zangezur corridor. First proposed in the Russia–Armenia–Azerbaijan trilateral statement signed after the Second Karabakh War in 2020, the corridor was originally intended to provide unimpeded passage between the two parts of Azerbaijan and to be operated under the control of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) Border Guards. For Moscow, this arrangement carried immense geopolitical significance, as it would have cemented Russia's presence in the region and placed it in a pivotal position to oversee transport links not only between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, but also between Europe, Central Asia, and China. Since 2020, Russia has consistently emphasized the trilateral statement as the indispensable foundation for any agreement on the Zangezur corridor.

Today, however, the reality looks very different. The corridor will open, but the trilateral statement has virtually vanished from public discourse. Moreover, it will now bear the name of the U.S. President – officially designated the *Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity* (TRIPP) – and will be placed under U.S. control for at least 99 years. The specific arrangements for the route, including its operational modalities and security provisions, remain to be negotiated and are likely to remain confidential until the final agreement is reached. What is clear, however, is that the third-party guarantor of its security and oversight will be the United States, not Russia, as originally envisaged.

The implementation of these agreements – particularly the one on the Trump Route – will fundamentally reshape relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and, more broadly, the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus. In an ideal scenario, this would create a favorable environment for lasting peace between the two countries, open avenues for regional economic integration, and strengthen economic ties both within the South Caucasus and with the wider region, stretching from Central Asia to Europe.

Moreover, under the TRIPP project, the United States would serve as the guarantor of these agreements, helping to prevent the "divide and rule" strategies of other powers.

Yet, despite these promising prospects, a range of challenges, both local and geopolitical, could hinder or complicate the implementation of the Washington agreements. At the local level, they are closely tied to Armenia's domestic political situation. The signing of the peace treaty depends on a constitutional amendment in Armenia, a process likely to be complicated by the fateful parliamentary elections scheduled for June 2026. Russia-backed opposition parties, clerical circles, and diaspora groups fiercely oppose the Western-backed peace agenda, portraying it as a capitulation.

Prime Minister Pashinyan's government will need to mount an effective election campaign to overcome these forces – an uphill task given his low approval ratings. The standoff between the government and opposition could turn violent, particularly if externally supported elements intervene. A Pashinyan defeat and the rise of a pro-Russian political group would likely derail the Washington agreements, especially the Trump Route and the constitutional amendment. However, it is reasonable to expect that many Armenians, weary of the long-standing conflict, will reject the appeals of radical forces advocating hostility toward neighbors over peace and reconciliation. The choices the people of Armenia make in the coming year will therefore be decisive for the smooth implementation of the peace agenda.

On the geopolitical front, the process faces further headwinds. While Türkiye and Georgia – the South Caucasus' immediate neighbors – along with the European Union and nearly all other countries worldwide, have welcomed the Washington agreements, two critical players have not: Russia and Iran. Both have traditionally opposed Western involvement in South Caucasus affairs, instead promoting the formula of "regional solutions to regional problems." The events in Washington on 8 August went well beyond the red lines they have implicitly drawn in the region.

In a telephone call with his Armenian counterpart, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned against any geopolitical changes in the South Caucasus resulting from the Washington agreements. While President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration maintained a cautious official tone, radical circles in Iran did not mince words, openly threatening the countries involved in the Trump Route with military action. "This passage will not become a gateway for Trump's mercenaries — it will become their graveyard," declared Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor to the Supreme Leader.[110] Ali Bagheri-Kani,

110 Aljazeera.com, "Iran rejects planned transit corridor outlined in Armenia-Azer-

a member of the Foreign Ministry's Strategic Council, told state television that Iran would respond "regardless of whether Russia participated or not." Meanwhile, Iranian state-controlled media denounced the corridor agreement as an act of betrayal and urged the government to take countermeasures. The government of Armenia, on whose territory the Trump corridor will operate, has reached out to both Tehran and Moscow, seeking to assure them that the opening of the Trump Corridor will not threaten their interests.

Yerevan has previously rejected Russia's involvement in the corridor, arguing that the trilateral statement of November 2020 has lost its relevance. This stance, coupled with Armenia's broader drift toward the West under Prime Minister Pashinyan, stands in clear contradiction to the country's commitments within the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

The Washington agreements mark a significant step toward resolving the decades-long conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, addressing both the peace treaty and the establishment of the Trump Route connecting mainland Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan. While welcomed by many regional and global actors, the agreements face some obstacles. Domestically, Armenia's constitutional amendment process and the upcoming 2026 parliamentary elections create uncertainty, with strong opposition from pro-Russian political forces, clerical circles, and parts of the diaspora, including influential Washington based Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA).

Geopolitically, Russia and Iran view the agreements – particularly U.S. oversight of the corridor – as a challenge to their influence in the South Caucasus, prompting harsh rhetoric and threats. Armenia has sought to reassure both powers, but its pivot toward the West and rejection of Russian involvement have created deep distrust and sparked tensions. Whether the Washington agreements bring lasting peace or trigger new instability will depend on how these local and geopolitical challenges unfold in the coming years. Here, the determination of the U.S. will play a significant role.

baijan pact", 9 August 2025, Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/9/iran-rejects-planned-transit-corridor-outlined-in-armenia-azerbaijan-pact (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

Energy Cooperation as a Strategic Pillar

Shahmar Hajiyev

Introduction

The dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991 reshaped the geopolitical map of Eurasia and created new opportunities for global powers to establish influence in the Caspian region. Rich in hydrocarbons, the Caspian Basin quickly emerged as a vital area for international energy markets. The United States (U.S.), recognizing both the economic and strategic potential of the region, developed a coherent policy to secure access to energy resources, diversify global energy supply routes, and counterbalance regional powers such as Russia and Iran.

Washington's strategic approach to the region has been guided by three main objectives:

- **Energy Security** – ensuring the availability of Caspian hydrocarbons for global markets to reduce dependence on the Middle East and Russia;
- **Geopolitical Balance** – curbing Russian and Iranian influence over transit routes and regional politics;
- **Regional Integration** – promoting economic development, independence, and stability among Caspian states through energy-driven cooperation with Western institutions.

These objectives aligned with broader U.S. foreign policy goals in Eurasia, namely securing a multipolar balance of power and establishing the Caspian as part of the East-West corridor connecting Europe with Central Asia.

At the center of these objectives stands Azerbaijan, a country endowed with significant crude oil and natural gas reserves, as well as a strategic geographical position bridging Europe and Asia. Recognizing this, U.S. energy companies actively participated in various large-scale energy projects across the region. Azerbaijan's role in exporting Caspian energy resources to Western markets, particularly through infrastructure projects bypassing Russia, has made it an indispensable partner for Washington. The U.S.-Azerbaijan partnership has

enabled the transport of Caspian energy resources to global energy markets without reliance on Russian routes.

Following independence, Azerbaijan leveraged its geographical position and hydrocarbon wealth to establish itself as a vital energy player. The country pursued an energy strategy that aligned with its national interests, elevating its geopolitical importance in the Caspian region. By exporting energy resources to global markets, Azerbaijan positioned itself as a potential hub for both Caspian and Central Asian energy flows.

Former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski described Azerbaijan as a "geopolitical pivot," underlining its importance to U.S. security interests. Washington has recognized that Azerbaijan's location between Europe and Asia, along with its ability to facilitate East-West connectivity, makes it indispensable.

Energy cooperation has been one of the most crucial dimensions of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations. The signing of the *"Contract of the Century"* in 1994, under the leadership of National Leader and former President Heydar Aliyev, ushered in a new era in Azerbaijan's economic and political development. As noted by former President Heydar Aliyev:

"Prior to the signing of the 'Contract of the Century,' heavy pressures were made for a year on an independent Azerbaijan. They wanted to prevent us. Only due to the support of the United States of America, its President, my esteemed friend Mr. Bill Clinton, we signed the 'Contract of the Century' in September of 1994."[111]

This landmark agreement attracted substantial foreign investment into Azerbaijan's oil sector and laid the foundation for the country's modern energy policy. U.S. companies became directly involved in production-sharing agreements for crude oil and natural gas exploration, deepening economic ties between the two nations.[112] The "oil factor" gave Azerbaijan greater leverage

111 Lib.aliyev-heritage.org, "Speech of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic Heydar Aliyev at the ceremony of signing of the documents on transportation of crude oil through the territory of Azerbaijan - Georgia - Türkiye by means of the Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan main export pipeline - Istanbul, palace "Chiraghan", November, 18, 1999, Available at: https://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/en/9474675.html (Accessed: August, 10, 2025).

112 Minenergy.gov.az, "Contract of the Century", Available at: https://minenergy.gov.

in its foreign policy, strengthened its independence, and catalyzed socio-economic development. U.S. involvement in production-sharing agreements underlined the long-term partnership in energy cooperation.

It is worth noting that because the Caspian Sea is landlocked, energy export requires extensive pipeline infrastructure. For the U.S., facilitating the construction of pipelines was critical. Washington actively supported new transit corridors through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, providing financial, political, and diplomatic backing to ensure their completion. This engagement was particularly strong in the 1990s, when the U.S. helped strengthen the region's energy export infrastructure by assisting in the construction of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. A key U.S. interest thus lies in ensuring accessible, depoliticized, and reliable energy supplies, which would help reduce dependence on the Persian Gulf and other unstable regions.[113]

Today, Azerbaijan promotes international energy cooperation, and mega energy projects such as BTC oil pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) were initiated by the country to carry the Caspian crude oil and natural gas to the global energy markets. Azerbaijan deepens international energy cooperation as the country's role as a net gas producing and exporting country is growing year by year.

The country established an effective consumer-producer dialogue and cohesive strategy that are important to realize the mega energy projects.[114]

Strategic Energy Projects

The U.S. has supported several mega-projects that link Caspian energy resources with Western markets. The following are the most critical energy infrastructure projects:

az/en/neft/esrin-muqavilesi (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

113 Alexander Latsabidze, "The Strategic Importance of the Caspian and Black Sea Regions for Europe's Energy Security", Carleton.ca, Available at: https://carleton.ca/eetn/2025/the-strategic-importance-of-the-caspian-and-black-sea-regions-for-europes-energy-security/ (Accessed: August, 14, 2025).

114 Shahmar Hajiyev, "Azerbaijan as a reliable energy partner during Covid-19", ICBSS Research Paper #2, July 2020, Available at: https://icbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2051_original.pdf (Accessed: September 10, 2025).

The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline:

Source: The State Oil Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ)

The **BTC pipeline**, operational since 2006, stands as a cornerstone of U.S.–Azerbaijan energy cooperation. Stretching 1,768 km from the Caspian Sea to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, it enables Azerbaijan to export oil directly to global markets. Since becoming operational in June 2006, the BTC pipeline has, as of the end of June 2025, transported approximately 4.6 billion barrels (about 605 million tonnes) of crude oil, which has been loaded onto 6,007 tankers and delivered to world markets.[115] Notably, the BTC also supports the energy security of Washington's key ally, Israel, as Azerbaijan provides around 40% of Israel's crude oil supply through this route.

From a geopolitical perspective, the BTC pipeline was the first major project that firmly integrated the region into the Western-oriented East-West energy corridor, effectively bypassing Russian transit routes. Beyond its economic significance, the pipeline has become a symbol of Azerbaijan's strategic alignment with the West.

115 Bp.com, "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline", Available at: https://www.bp.com/en_az/azerbaijan/home/who-we-are/operationsprojects/pipelines/btc.html (Accessed: August 13, 2025).

Southern Gas Corridor (SGC)

The **SGC** is a multi-stage strategic project designed to deliver Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe, diversifying the continent's energy supply and reducing dependence on Russian gas. U.S. officials have consistently emphasized the indispensability of the **Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP)** and the **Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP)** for European energy security. By delivering gas from the Shah Deniz field to Europe, the SGC fulfills a core U.S. strategic objective: securing new, non-Russian energy supplies for the European market. Baku and Washington have also agreed to cooperate in expanding the SGC's capacity in the coming years.[116]

Source: Southern Gas Corridor (www.sgc.az)

The SGC aims to increase and diversify Europe's energy supply by transporting Caspian gas resources to European markets. The SGC comprises the following four projects: (i) Shah Deniz natural gas-condensate field ("SD1") and its full-field development ("SD2"), (ii) South Caucasus Pipeline ("SCP") and its expansion ("SCPX" project), (iii) Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline ("TANAP") and (iv) Trans Adriatic Pipeline ("TAP") (SD2, SCPX, TANAP and TAP collectively, the "Projects").[117] The SGC is a significant energy

116 David O'Byrne, "Azerbaijan, U.S. to cooperate on gas transit to Europe", Eurasianet, 22 February 2024, Available at: https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-us-to-cooperate-on-gas-transit-to-europe (Accessed: August, 15, 2025).

117 Sgc.az, "What is Southern Gas Corridor?", Available at: https://www.sgc.az/en#:~:text=WHAT%20IS%20SOUTHERN%20GAS%20CORRIDOR,is%20more%20than%203%2C200%20kilometres (Accessed: August 15, 2025).

infrastructure project that opens new opportunities not only for Azerbaijan but also for the Caspian region to export natural gas to the European energy markets. This project became a reality due to the effective cooperation of all involved actors.[118]

South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) and South Caucasus Pipeline Expansion (SCPX)

The SCP and its expansion (**SCPX**) form the first link in the chain of pipelines creating the SGC. This system delivers Caspian gas to Türkiye, where it connects with TANAP at Türkiye's eastern border. TANAP, in turn, links to TAP at the western border, ensuring onward delivery to Europe. The SCPX system began delivering commercial gas to Türkiye in June 2018 and to Europe in December 2020.[119]

TANAP: The Backbone of the SGC

The **Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP)** is the Turkish segment and the most critical section of the SGC. TANAP links the SCP with TAP, creating a continuous corridor from the Caspian to Europe. With a potential capacity expansion to 31 bcm/year, TANAP significantly enhances the energy security of both Türkiye and Europe. Beyond its energy role, TANAP strengthens the strategic alignment between Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and the European Union, reshaping the global geopolitical energy landscape.[120] Over 83.36 bcm of Azerbaijani natural gas has been supplied via TANAP – 34.18 bcm to Türkiye and 49.18 bcm to Europe.[121]

118 Shahmar Hajiyev," Geopolitical Dynamics Impacting Energy Security", Global Academy, Policy Brief № 4, 11 August 2025, Available at: https://www.globacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/SBS-Policy-Brief-4-11.08. 2025.pdf (Accessed: September 20, 2025).

119 Apa.az, "Capital expenditures on South Caucasus Pipeline increased by 50%/" , Available at: https://en.apa.az/energy-and-industry/capital-expenditures-on-south-caucasus-pipeline-increased-by-50-474510 (Accessed: August 15, 2025).

120 Tanap.com, "TANAP", Available at: https://www.tanap.com/en/tanap-project (Accessed: August 16, 2025)

121 Anews.az, "Azerbaijan delivers 83.4 bcm of gas via TANAP to Türkiye and Eu-

TAP: Europe's Gateway for Caspian Gas

The **Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP)** is the European leg of the SGC and a critical link for delivering Azerbaijani gas to the EU market. With an initial capacity of 10 bcm/year, TAP connects to TANAP at the Greek–Turkish border, traverses Northern Greece and Albania, crosses the Adriatic Sea, and comes ashore in Southern Italy, integrating with Italy's natural gas network.[122]

TAP became operational in late 2020, and currently transports over 28 million cubic meters per day.[123] Key buyers include Italy, Türkiye, Georgia, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and North Macedonia. Recently, Germany joined the list through a 10-year contract between SOCAR and Securing Energy for Europe (SEFE), which plans to increase annual exports to Germany up to 1.5 bcm.[124] Importantly, TAP pipeline is one of the most strategic energy infrastructure projects in Europe which supports diversification of natural gas sources and supply routes.

TAP also supports **European interconnectors** such as the **IGB interconnector** between Greece and Bulgaria and provides an exit point to the planned **Ionian Adriatic Pipeline (IAP)**, which will link markets in Croatia, Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Geopolitical Context and Future Expansion

The ongoing Russia–Ukraine war has transformed Europe's traditional energy map, increasing the urgency of securing alternative supply routes. Azerbaijan's energy strategy and resource availability have enabled the direct delivery of Caspian gas to European consumers, thereby reducing dependency on a single supplier.

rope", Available at: https://anews.az/en/ekonomika/487711/azerbaijan-delivers-834-bcm-of-gas-via-tanap-to-Türkiye-and-europe/ (Accessed: August 16, 2025).

122 Tap-ag, "TAP at a glance", Available at: https://www.tap-ag.com/ (Accessed: August 16, 2025).

123 Azernews.az, "TAP gas deliveries to Europe surge in spring 2025, marking new milestone", Available at: https://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/243545.html (Accessed: August 17, 2025).

124 Aa.com, "Azerbaijan's SOCAR, Germany's SEFE sign 10-year natural gas deal", Available at: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/general/azerbaijans-socar-germanys-sefe-sign-10-year-natural-gas-deal/49734 (Accessed: August 17, 2025).

To strengthen this role, Azerbaijan and the EU signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on a Strategic Partnership in Energy on July 18, 2022, in Baku. The landmark agreement aims to double the SGC's capacity to deliver at least 20 bcm annually to the EU by 2027, supporting the EU's REPowerEU Plan and accelerating the clean energy transition.[125]

The MoU also emphasizes long-term cooperation on energy efficiency and renewable energy development. Since then, Azerbaijan has accelerated renewable energy projects, aiming to increase electricity generation from renewables and reduce domestic gas use for power generation. This strategy will diversify energy exports and strengthen Azerbaijan's role as a regional energy hub.

The SGC, alongside the BTC pipeline, remains a cornerstone of Azerbaijan's energy infrastructure, ensuring the delivery of natural gas and crude oil to global markets. Collectively, its segments have:

- Established strong partnerships between Azerbaijan and Europe;
- Opened new opportunities for energy consumers in Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans;
- Enhanced supply security by diversifying gas sources and routes.

Future expansions of TAP and TANAP will further increase Europe's access to Caspian gas, consolidating the SGC as a critical component of European energy security and a strategic pillar of Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

Challenges and Opportunities

In recent years, relations between Washington and Baku have faced challenges, particularly due to the biased stance of the Biden administration. This strained dynamic contrasts with the period under President Donald Trump, during which bilateral relations saw renewed engagement. The Trump administration viewed the South Caucasus as a strategic bridge in Eurasia, recognizing U.S. geopolitical, economic, and security interests in the region.

125 Enlargement.ec.europa.eu, "EU and Azerbaijan enhance bilateral relations, including energy cooperation", Available at: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-azerbaijan-enhance-bilateral-relations-including-energy-cooperation-2022-07-18_en (Accessed: August 17, 2025).

A significant development in U.S.–Azerbaijan relations took place during President Ilham Aliyev's recent visit to Washington, which marked a turning point in deepening bilateral cooperation. During the visit in August 2025, the two sides signed an agreement to establish a Strategic Working Group tasked with preparing a **Partnership Charter**[126] **-** an ambitious framework covering areas such as:

- Regional connectivity, including energy, trade, and transit;
- Economic investment, particularly in artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure;
- Defense, security, and counterterrorism.

This document has particular significance as it creates an institutional framework for practical cooperation between the two countries. Additionally, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between SOCAR and ExxonMobil, building on a June 2025 agreement to explore onshore oil and gas production in Azerbaijan.[127] These agreements signal a renewed U.S. investment interest in Azerbaijan's energy sector and reflect confidence in the country's energy reserves.

All signed documents underscore a commitment to strengthen the strategic partnership between Washington and Baku, focusing on energy security, connectivity, and regional stability. Azerbaijan places great importance on its relationship with the U.S. and values American support for implementing energy and connectivity projects. President Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly stated: *"Azerbaijan highly values the consistent support from the United States for its energy strategy and the implementation of major infrastructure projects that promote regional stability and development."*[128]

126 Mfa.gov.az, "Press Release on the outcomes of the visit of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev to the United States of America", available at: https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/no33525 (Accessed: August 18, 2025).

127 Reuters.com, "Exxon signs agreement with Azerbaijan's SOCAR to explore onshore oil production", Available at: https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/azeri-socar-sign-agreements-with-exxon-mobil-bp-soon-three-sources-tell-reuters-2025-06-02/ (Accessed: August 17, 2025).

128 Azertag, "President Ilham Aliyev: United States has been reliable partner of Azerbaijan in energy sector for many years", Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/president_ilham_aliyev_united_states_has_been_reliable_partner_of_azerbaijan_in_energy_sector_for_many_years-3641763 (Accessed: August 18, 2025).

Currently, Washington has opportunities to deepen cooperation with Azerbaijan to secure long-term energy security and geopolitical stability in the region. Key priorities include:

1. Strengthening the SGC and Expanding Capacity

The U.S. can support the expansion of the SGC and facilitate additional gas flows from Central Asian nations. This includes fostering investment in crude oil and natural gas production, petrochemicals, and renewable energy across the Caspian region. A more integrated Caspian–Black Sea–Europe Energy Corridor could supply both fossil fuels and renewable energy to European markets, reducing reliance on a single supplier.

Towards this end, the **Trans Caspian Pipeline (TCP)**, a proposed natural gas pipeline which would run under the Caspian Sea, connecting Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan, and linking with the SGC to deliver gas to Europe via Türkiye, holds geostrategic importance for the entire region. This importance concerns multiple dimensions: energy security, geopolitics, regional balance, and economic influence.

This project, supported by the EU and U.S., gained significant momentum after the signing of the Caspian Convention and a memorandum of understanding on the joint exploration of the "Dostluk" offshore field in the Caspian Sea.[129] Washington and Brussels continue to support energy cooperation in the Caspian Sea, and TCP is a strategic project to facilitate the export of Turkmen natural gas to Europe via Azerbaijan. In this context, cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan in the energy sector has the following geostrategic advantages:

- Enhances EU energy diversity by providing an alternative supply route from Turkmenistan;
- Strengthens the SGC , feeding up additional natural gas, allowing Europe to access Caspian energy;
- Fits with the EU's Energy Diversification Strategy, especially after

129 Azertag, "Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan sign MoU on joint exploration and development of "Dostlug" field in Caspian Sea", Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Azerbaijan_Turkmenistan_sign_MoU_on_joint_exploration_and_development_of_Dostlug_field_in_Caspian_Sea-1693989 (Accessed: August 20, 2025).

disruptions due to the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia;

- Provides export diversification for Turkmenistan, and increases its geopolitical significance by connecting it to Europe;
- Azerbaijan becomes a critical transit nation in the East-West energy corridor, whereas Türkiye consolidates its position as an energy hub between Asia and Europe;
- Aligns with U.S. and EU strategy to create an East-West energy and trade corridor.

All the aforementioned facts make the diversification of its export routes a high priority for Turkmenistan. Azerbaijan has crucial energy infrastructure in the Caspian region and has finalized important mega energy projects such as BTC and SGC, which support cross-regional energy cooperation. Hence, the TCP is not just an energy project - it is a strategic tool for reshaping Eurasian geopolitics and enhancing the connectivity of Central Asia with the West.

2. Integrating Renewable Energy Cooperation

Azerbaijan has significant renewable energy potential —particularly solar and wind—and aims to diversify its energy mix as part of its Energy Strategy 2030.[130] The country aspires to transform into a regional energy hub, exporting not only hydrocarbons but also green energy.

A flagship initiative in this direction is the Black Sea Submarine Cable (BSSC), a joint project of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary, supported by the European Commission. The project will create a high-voltage direct current (HVDC) cable connecting the South Caucasus to Southeast Europe, enabling renewable electricity exports.[131]

Additionally, Azerbaijan seeks to develop infrastructure to transport renewable energy from Central Asia to Europe. In July 2025, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan,

130 Cop29.az, "Azerbaijan's Green Energy Transition Initiatives", Available at: https://cop29.az/en/sustainability/energy-transition-initiatives (Accessed: August 21, 2025).

131 Submarinenetworks.com, "Black Sea Submarine Cable (BSSC)", Available at: https://www.submarinenetworks.com/en/systems/asia-europe-africa/bssc (Accessed: August 21, 2025).

and Uzbekistan signed an agreement to establish "Green Corridor Union LLC", coordinating efforts to export surplus renewable electricity to Europe through high-voltage transmission systems.[132] An earlier MoU on green energy cooperation was signed during COP29, with plans for an Intergovernmental Agreement on Strategic Partnership in Green Energy.

A partnership involving U.S. investment and technology in renewable energy could make a decisive shift in Azerbaijan's long-term energy strategy, aligning with global energy transition goals.

3. Balancing Geopolitical Competition through U.S. Engagement

Sustained U.S. engagement in Caspian and Central Asian energy diplomacy is essential for balance of power in the region. The **C5+1 platform**—which brings together the U.S. and five Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) can serve as a basis for enhanced regional energy cooperation.

The South Caucasus nations, including Azerbaijan, can deepen engagement within this platform to support connectivity and energy projects. With its critical energy infrastructure, strategic location, and U.S. support, Azerbaijan can become a catalyst for regional economic integration and secure energy exports to global markets.

Conclusion

Azerbaijan has established itself as a key energy player in the Caspian region, with mega-projects such as BTC and SGC playing central roles in delivering Caspian hydrocarbons to global markets. These U.S.-backed initiatives have been instrumental in enhancing Europe's energy security and reducing dependence on a single energy supplier.

U.S. political and economic support has enabled Azerbaijan to decrease its reliance on regional powers and emerge as an influential energy hub. In

132 Euronews.com, "A new energy bridge: Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan unite for a Green Corridor to Europe", Available at: https://www.euronews.com/business/2025/07/15/a-new-energy-bridge-azerbaijan-uzbekistan-and-kazakhstan-unite-for-a-green-corridor-to-eur (Accessed: August 22, 2025).

turn, Azerbaijan seeks to deepen its ties with the West, which makes it in Washington's interest to facilitate dialogue among energy-rich Caspian states and transit countries to enable future projects that ensure secure energy flows to global markets.

Despite recent challenges, the U.S.-Azerbaijan partnership holds immense potential. By expanding the SGC, investing in renewable energy projects, and strengthening regional connectivity, Washington and Baku can enhance energy security, economic cooperation, and geopolitical stability. The evolving partnership not only serves bilateral interests but also supports Europe's energy diversification goals and the global clean energy transition.

Moving forward, Washington must intensify its engagement with Azerbaijan to consolidate its economic interests in the Caspian basin. As global energy competition intensifies, Azerbaijan's role as both a geopolitical and energy pivot will remain indispensable to U.S. strategy in Eurasia. Ultimately, deepening U.S.–Azerbaijan cooperation is essential for ensuring long-term global energy security and advancing shared strategic objectives in the region.

Non-Energy Fields of Economic Cooperation and Connectivity

Vasif Huseynov

The trilateral summit held in Washington on August 8, 2025, between U.S. President Donald J. Trump, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has already been recorded in the annals of South Caucasus diplomacy as a decisive turning point. Not only did it culminate in the initialing of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but it also heralded the launch of a new vision for regional connectivity through the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP). These developments were accompanied by an equally significant breakthrough in bilateral U.S.–Azerbaijan relations, where the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on establishing a Strategic Working Group to develop a Charter on Strategic Partnership underscored Washington's renewed commitment to Baku. For Azerbaijan, a country long balancing between regional powers and seeking stronger integration into the global economy, this was more than symbolic: it was the opening of a new chapter in cooperation with the United States.

The U.S.–Azerbaijan economic partnership has been traditionally defined by hydrocarbon development and energy security. American companies were among the first to invest in the oil and gas sector after Azerbaijan regained independence, with their involvement in projects such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline placing Azerbaijan firmly on the global energy map. Yet, as Baku intensifies efforts to diversify its economy and prepare for a post-oil future, the logic of cooperation is shifting.

Today, non-energy fields – from trade diversification and digital transformation to artificial intelligence, space exploration, and educational exchanges – are increasingly central to the bilateral agenda. The timing could hardly be more auspicious: Azerbaijan's push to integrate artificial intelligence into its development strategy, its emphasis on diversifying the non-energy sectors of its economy, its expanding role as a transport hub, and its ambitious postwar reconstruction agenda align closely with U.S. technological expertise, financial resources, and strategic interests in Eurasia.

In this context, the United States can play a critical role in the economic transformation of Azerbaijan. Just as American engagement played a catalytic role in the transformation of South Korea, Singapore, Israel, and Japan, it can likewise shape Azerbaijan's trajectory as it aspires to become a regional leader in digital innovation and a diversified economy. To appreciate the scope of these opportunities, it is necessary to look beyond hydrocarbons and examine the emerging contours of cooperation in non-energy sectors.

New Horizons of Cooperation in Non-Energy Sectors

The political reset achieved in Washington has provided a favorable backdrop for deepening non-energy cooperation. The two countries have already achieved a strong foundation for further progress in their economic relations by having signed nearly 90 agreements over the past three decades.[133] Azerbaijan's leaders have repeatedly emphasized that the U.S. is not merely a commercial partner but also a source of innovation, institutional capacity, and global market access. This vision is gradually being translated into tangible initiatives that span trade, infrastructure, digital innovation, space technology, and education. Each of these domains reflects not only Azerbaijan's domestic priorities but also America's broader geopolitical agenda in Eurasia.

One of the most visible manifestations of this diversification lies in the field of trade and investment. Since 1995, U.S. investments in Azerbaijan have totaled nearly $19 billion, with $1.5 billion flowing into non-oil sectors.[134] Although hydrocarbons remain the largest magnet for U.S. capital, recent data suggest a notable rebalancing: in the first quarter of 2025 alone, U.S. direct investments in Azerbaijan rose by more than 30 percent year-on-year, reaching over $42 million, much of it in non-oil fields.[135] Equally notable is the rise

133 Report.az, "US has invested $18.9B in Azerbaijan since 1995, minister says", 26 August 2025, Available at: https://report.az/en/business/us-has-invested-18-9b-in-azerbaijan-since-1995-minister-says (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

134 Report.az, "US has invested $18.9B in Azerbaijan since 1995, minister says", 26 August 2025, Available at: https://report.az/en/business/us-has-invested-18-9b-in-azerbaijan-since-1995-minister-says (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

135 Aze.Media, "The United States has increased its investments in Azerbaijan's economy", 12 July 2025, Available at: https://aze.media/the-united-states-has-increased-its-investments-in-azerbaijans-economy/ (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

in Azerbaijan's non-oil sector. Once negligible, they have doubled in recent years, moving from $1.8 billion to $3.4 billion.[136] The U.S. is currently one of the top ten markets for Azerbaijan's non-oil and gas exports, with export volumes consistently increasing each year.[137] For Azerbaijani producers, access to the U.S. market brings not only revenues but also international prestige and validation.

In addition to these trade links, the digital transformation of Azerbaijan's economy offers new avenues for cooperation. The country's Artificial Intelligence Strategy for 2025–2028 illustrates an ambitious plan to make Azerbaijan a regional leader in digital technologies.[138] The strategy emphasizes competitiveness, workforce training, infrastructure development, and security. In each of these areas, U.S. companies and institutions have a comparative advantage. Collaboration could take the form of joint research projects, academic exchanges, or startup incubation programs. American venture capital and Silicon Valley expertise can accelerate the growth of Azerbaijan's nascent AI ecosystem, while U.S. universities can offer training and capacity-building. The establishment of secure data centers in Azerbaijan, potentially serving the broader Caspian and Central Asian regions, could become another avenue for cooperation. Such projects would not only advance Azerbaijan's technological base but also anchor the U.S. presence in a digital sphere where Chinese and European actors are increasingly active.

Azerbaijan's postwar reconstruction, particularly in the liberated territories, presents further opportunities. The government's ambitious plans to create "smart cities" in the region require the integration of AI, renewable energy, and digital governance. U.S. technology firms are well positioned to provide solutions in areas ranging from intelligent transport and e-governance to sustainable urban planning. If implemented successfully, Karabakh could serve as a model of digital innovation, demonstrating both Azerbaijan's modernization drive and the value of American partnership. Importantly,

136 Azernews, "How US, Azerbaijan strengthen economic pillars beyond oil" (Analysis), 8 August 2025, Available at: https://www.azernews.az/analysis/245752.html (Accessed: 6 September 2025)

137 Ibid.

138 Innovation and Digital Development Agency, "Artificial Intelligence Strategy" Approved – What to Expect?", *News*, 19 March 2025, Available at: https://idda.az/en/news/artificial-intelligence-strategy-approved-what-to-expect (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

cybersecurity will be essential to these efforts, and U.S. experience in securing digital infrastructures could play a vital role in protecting Azerbaijan's emerging technological ecosystem.

The partnership is also extending into high-tech fields once considered beyond Azerbaijan's immediate reach. The dialogue between the Azerbaijani government and SpaceX highlights a growing interest in space exploration and satellite technology. During President Ilham Aliyev's working visit to the U.S. on August 8, 2025, Azerbaijan's Minister of Economy Mikayil Jabbarov and SOCAR President Rovshan Najaf met with SpaceX Vice President Stephanie Bednarek.[139] The discussions emphasized Azerbaijan's sustainable development, economic diversification, and digitalization efforts, highlighting the country's favorable investment climate. Both sides explored potential cooperation in innovative and space technologies, artificial intelligence applications, and knowledge transfer, aiming to leverage U.S. expertise to support Azerbaijan's high value-added sectors and strategic development goals. For Azerbaijan, whose space program is still in its infancy, cooperation with American firms represents a leap into the global high-tech economy. Joint ventures could involve satellite communications, broadband internet provision, or even participation in international space research projects.

Financing these endeavors will require robust mechanisms, and here U.S. institutions such as the Export–Import Bank (EXIM) can play a decisive role. By extending credit guarantees and loans, American institutions can support U.S. companies investing in Azerbaijan's infrastructure and digital economy. In doing so, they would help mitigate risks while catalyzing projects in renewable energy, smart infrastructure, and digital corridors. The proposed Trans-Caspian Digital Corridor is a case in point: by enabling secure and diversified internet connectivity across Eurasia, it would reduce dependence on Russian and Iranian infrastructure and align directly with U.S. strategic goals.

Underlying these economic and technological dimensions is the question of human capital. Since independence, thousands of Azerbaijani students have studied in the United States, creating a generation of leaders, professionals, and academics with strong ties to American institutions. Nevertheless, the potential

139 Official Website of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Expansion of economic cooperation between Azerbaijan and U.S. discussed", 8 August 2025, Available at: https://www.economy.gov.az/en/post/2847/azerbaycan-ve-abs-arasinda-iqtisadi-emekdasligin-genislendirilmesi-muzakire-edilib (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

remains far from exhausted. The next phase of educational cooperation should focus on AI, biotechnology, environmental sciences, and digital governance – fields aligned with Azerbaijan's diversification agenda. Academic exchanges, joint research centers, and scholarship programs can consolidate the soft power dimension of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations, ensuring that cooperation is not limited to elites but extends across societies.

Taken together, these strands of cooperation suggest a vision of Azerbaijan as more than just an energy supplier or a geopolitical ally. Instead, it is emerging as a testing ground for U.S. engagement in Eurasia, where non-energy cooperation can produce tangible economic, technological, and political dividends. The analogy that can often be drawn here is telling: just as American support played a decisive role in the postwar transformation of South Korea, Singapore, Israel, and Japan, it can now catalyze Azerbaijan's rise as a diversified, innovative, and strategically important state. In each of those earlier cases, sustained U.S. involvement provided security guarantees, technological transfer, and access to global markets. Azerbaijan, with its stable governance, strategic location, and reform agenda, offers similar conditions.

Connectivity

Connectivity has become one of the most important themes in U.S.–Azerbaijan relations, particularly following the Washington Summit of August 8, 2025. The agreement reached there, under the mediation of U.S. President Donald J. Trump, not only marked a breakthrough in negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia but also laid the foundations for a major strategic corridor — the so-called "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" (TRIPP), also known as the Zangezur Corridor. This project, championed by President Ilham Aliyev, has emerged as both an infrastructure undertaking and a peace initiative, designed to integrate the South Caucasus into wider Eurasian transport networks while consolidating reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

President Aliyev has consistently framed the Zangezur Corridor as part of his broader peace agenda. For Baku, connectivity is not just about shortening transport routes — it is about ending decades of conflict and creating tangible interdependence that will lock Armenia and Azerbaijan into cooperation rather

than confrontation. President Aliyev underlined that "the Zangezur Corridor is a new connectivity project, which will be one of the important parts of international transportation routes," and stressed that it poses no threat to any country.[140]

The corridor is envisaged as a multi-modal transport link that will connect mainland Azerbaijan to its Nakhchivan exclave, and through Nakhchivan to Türkiye. According to official plans, Azerbaijan will reconstruct 150 kilometers of railway inside Nakhchivan and build an additional 20 kilometers of new track there. These will connect with the Turkish line under construction from Kars to Dilucu on the Nakhchivan border. On August 22, Türkiye launched construction of the 224-kilometer Kars–Iğdır–Aralık–Dilucu railway along the border with Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. This line, which will integrate the Zangezur Corridor with Türkiye's broader railway network, is expected to play a pivotal role in the Middle Corridor. At the groundbreaking ceremony, Türkiye's Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Abdulkadir Uraloğlu noted that the project, backed by €2.4 billion in external financing, will be a double-track electrified railway capable of handling 15 million tons of cargo and 5.5 million passengers.[141]

According to Uraloğlu, the corridor will be fully operational within five years and cut transit times from China to Europe from 18 to 14 days. He stressed that the project is designed to carry not only passengers but also large volumes of freight, making it one of the most important new routes in Eurasian transport. The figures are significant: the corridor is expected to handle more than 15 million tons of cargo annually, along with millions of passengers.[142]

140 Azertag, "President Ilham Aliyev: The Zangezur Corridor is a new connectivity project and will become one of the important parts of international transport routes", 15 August 2025, Available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/president_ilham_aliyev_the_zangezur_corridor_is_a_new-connectivity-project-and-will-become-one-of-the-important-parts-of-international-transport-routes-3701919 (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

141 Official Website of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Türkiye, "Zengezur Koridoru'nda tarihi adım", 20 August 2025, Available at: https://www.uab.gov.tr/haberler/zengezur-koridoru-nda-tarihi-adim (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

142 Anadolu Agency, "Türkiye begins laying groundwork for Zangezur Corridor", 22 August 2025, Available at: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkiye-begins-laying-groundwork-for-zangezur-corridor/3666546 (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has described the project as a "steel gateway" that will strengthen Türkiye's role as a transport hub between Asia and Europe.[143] He added that it will "boost exports, stimulate production, and support tourism growth" in the wider region.

On the ground, Azerbaijan has made the most visible progress in implementing its part of the corridor. President Aliyev announced at the 3rd Shusha Global Media Forum in July 2025 that construction of the Azerbaijani section of the railway is expected to be completed by spring 2026. According to him, Baku has "almost finished laying the railway up to the borders with Armenia and Iran," while no work has been carried out on the Armenian side for the past five years.[144] The backbone of Azerbaijan's contribution is the Horadiz-Agbend railway, stretching more than 110 kilometers. Work began in 2021 and has advanced in three phases, with significant progress on tunnels, bridges, and stations. Parallel to the railway, Azerbaijan is also constructing the Ahmedbeyli–Horadiz–Minjivan–Agbend highway, a 150-kilometer modern road with four to six lanes, interchanges, tunnels, and bridges. According to official data, physical progress has already reached 95 percent, with completion scheduled for spring 2026.

The practical benefits of the Azerbaijani section extend beyond freight volumes. By restoring Nakhchivan's long-severed land connection to the rest of Azerbaijan, the project will end the exclave's isolation, integrate the Julfa and Sadarak districts into regional trade flows, and stimulate growth in the broader region. Officials predict that the corridor will generate thousands of new jobs in logistics, services, and tourism, while reinforcing Azerbaijan's position as a reliable hub between Europe and Asia.

The Washington Declaration gave the U.S. a decisive role in shaping and overseeing the corridor. President Aliyev himself acknowledged this, thanking President Donald Trump and his team for their role in achieving the agreement.[145] The corridor was branded in Trump's name, symbolizing U.S.

143 Ibid.

144 Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "New economic cooperation agreements signed during Azerbaijan-U.S. talks", 31 August 2025, Available at: https://president.az/en/articles/view/69421 (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

145 Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Ilham Aliyev gave interview to Azerbaijani media representatives in Washington",, 9 August 2025, Available at: https://president.az/en/articles/view/69574 (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

sponsorship and ensuring that the project would be closely tied to Washington's peace and prosperity agenda. This represented a clear departure from earlier arrangements. Under the November 2020 ceasefire statement, the Zangezur link was envisioned to operate under Russian oversight, with Moscow's border guards expected to control the transit. By 2025, however, the new agreement shifted oversight firmly toward Washington. This was a major geopolitical shift: it gave the United States strategic leverage in the South Caucasus while removing a potential tool of pressure from Moscow's hands. For Azerbaijan, U.S. involvement guaranteed that the corridor would not be vulnerable to unilateral blockages or political manipulation. For the U.S., it offered a way to support a peace settlement and advance its broader connectivity agenda linking Europe with Central Asia.

The TRIPP (Zangezur) Corridor must also be understood in the context of the broader Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (the Middle Corridor), which links China to Europe via Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye. This route has grown in importance as a result of disruptions to Russia's traditional transit networks and instability along the southern maritime routes. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has emphasized that "if implemented, the Zangezur Corridor will become an important part of a continuous transport route from Europe to the depths of Asia."[146] Cargo moving along this axis can already reach London in just 18 days, compared to 35 days through Russia and 45 days via the Cape of Good Hope. By providing a more direct and reliable connection across Armenia's Syunik region, the TRIPP enhances both the efficiency and resilience of the Middle Corridor. President Erdoğan went further, predicting that the corridor "will usher in a golden era for global trade, especially for countries involved in the Middle Corridor."[147] With freight potential across the Middle Corridor estimated at tens of billions of dollars annually, the Zangezur link dramatically strengthens Azerbaijan's and Türkiye's positions as indispensable nodes in Eurasian trade.

146 Khagan Isayev, "Zangezur corridor to become vital transport link connecting Europe and Asia, Turkish FM says", Caliber.az, 10 August 2025, Available at: https://caliber.az/en/post/zangezur-corridor-to-become-vital-transport-link-connecting-europe-and-asia-turkish-fm-says (Accessed: 6 September 2025).

147 Anadolu Agency, "Türkiye begins laying groundwork for Zangezur Corridor", *News*, 22 August 2025, Available at: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkiye-begins-laying-groundwork-for-zangezur-corridor/3666546 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

For Baku, the 'TRIPP' corridor is not only an element of East-West connectivity, but also a potential link along the North-South Corridor. During his interview with the Al Arabiya channel on August 27, President Ilham Aliyev talked about this prospect and dismissed claims that TRIPP is a threat to Russia and Iran. "The route may run from Northern Europe through Russia into Azerbaijan. From there, it can pass through Zangezur into Nakhchivan, and from Nakhchivan, continue via the existing railway connection with Iran, ultimately reaching the Persian Gulf. Actually, the Zangezur Corridor will not only be East-West, but also a North-South transportation corridor," he said.[148] Thus, he asserted that Iran and Russia have no reason to oppose the TRIPP project and can benefit from it if they act constructively.

For President Aliyev, the message remains consistent: the corridor is first and foremost about peace. He has stressed repeatedly that our main goal is peace and stability in the South Caucasus, and connectivity is the foundation for achieving this. He described the Washington agreement as "a final step towards peace" and highlighted that infrastructure cooperation is the most effective way to ensure that the tragedies of the past are not repeated.[149] In this sense, the TRIPP (Zangezur) corridor is more than a transport link. It is a peace instrument designed to lock former adversaries into shared interests. It is also a U.S.-backed project that provides Armenia with international guarantees, reducing fears of domination while offering economic dividends. For Azerbaijan, it demonstrates that reconciliation can be based not just on documents but on concrete projects that deliver prosperity.

The TRIPP corridor illustrates how connectivity has become a central pillar of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations. By anchoring the project in Washington's sponsorship, President Aliyev not only secured a vital transport link to Nakhchivan and Türkiye but also embedded it in a peace agenda with international legitimacy. The corridor is expected to be fully operational in five years, with both Turkish and Azerbaijani officials committed to completing their sections within this timeframe. For Azerbaijan, the project consolidates its role as a pivotal hub in Eurasian connectivity, enhances its

148 Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Ilham Aliyev gave interview to Al Arabiya TV channel", 27 August 2025, Available at: https://president.az/en/articles/view/69968 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

149 Aze.Media, "President Ilham Aliyev: 'We have taken the final step towards peace'", 15 August 2025, Available at: https://aze.media/president-ilham-aliyev-we-have-taken-the-final-step-towards-peace/ (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

partnership with the United States, and strengthens its peace agenda. For Washington, it provides a strategic lever in the South Caucasus, reduces Russian and Iranian influence, and advances its vision of a secure, rules-based Eurasian order. As President Aliyev put it, "the Zangezur Corridor will soon become another important segment of the Middle Corridor, as well as the North-South Corridor, which will contribute to enhancing peace, multilateral partnership and benefit all of Azerbaijan's close and distant neighbors to the east, west, north and south of our borders."[150] This vision, rooted in connectivity, has become the foundation of the new U.S.–Azerbaijan partnership — a partnership where railways and roads are not just infrastructure but instruments of diplomacy, reconciliation, and shared growth.

Conclusion

The U.S.–Azerbaijan relationship is entering a qualitatively new stage. Long associated with hydrocarbons and energy security, it is now increasingly defined by dynamic engagement in non-energy fields. Trade diversification, the TRIPP corridor, artificial intelligence and digital innovation, space exploration, and education form the pillars of this emerging agenda. Each reflects not only Azerbaijan's domestic priorities but also America's broader strategic interests in Eurasia.

The agreements reached on August 8, 2025, should be viewed as the core institutional frameworks for this transformation. They provide the political momentum and the practical mechanisms to channel U.S. expertise, capital, and technology into Azerbaijan's diversification journey. If sustained, this cooperation could reproduce, in the South Caucasus, the transformative role that U.S. engagement once played in East Asia and the Middle East.

For Azerbaijan, the stakes are existential: the success of its post-oil economy depends on innovation, connectivity, and integration into global markets. For the United States, the benefits are both strategic and economic: a reliable partner in a volatile region, new opportunities for American companies, and

150 Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the SCO Plus format meeting in Tianjin, China",, 1 September 2025, Available at: https://president.az/en/articles/view/70040 (Accessed: September 14, 2025).

the consolidation of a presence in Eurasia at a time of intensifying global competition. The path will not be without obstacles, but the convergence of interests, the lessons of history, and the momentum of recent agreements suggest that the prospects for non-energy cooperation have never been brighter.

The future of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations will therefore be measured not only in barrels of oil or cubic meters of gas, but increasingly in algorithms, data centers, satellites, smart cities, and human capital. It is in these domains that the partnership will prove its resilience, its modernity, and its ability to adapt to the demands of a changing world.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations:

Toward a Strategic Reset in U.S.–Azerbaijan Relations

Since the early years of the post-Soviet period, Azerbaijan and the United States have built a relationship rooted in shared interests and constructive engagement. The partnership has evolved across multiple domains, from ensuring regional stability and promoting peacekeeping operations to advancing economic cooperation and people-to-people exchanges. Over the decades, this collaboration has strengthened mutual trust and demonstrated the resilience of bilateral ties.

The visit of Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev to the United States on August 8, 2025, and the agreements reached during this visit opened a new chapter in bilateral relations, marked by greater ambition and potential. Of particular significance is the Memorandum of Understanding establishing a Strategic Working Group to develop a Charter on Strategic Partnership. This agreement provides a formal framework for long-term cooperation across energy, trade, security, infrastructure, and digital innovation. Together, these accords address past challenges in U.S.–Azerbaijan relations prior to President Donald Trump's second term and create new opportunities for a strategic reset in the partnership.

The record of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations over the past three decades, along with the agreements signed in Washington on August 7–8, 2025, underscores Azerbaijan's capacity to act as a reliable, forward-looking partner. The United States now has the opportunity to respond with a policy framework that is equally ambitious, pragmatic, and multidimensional. Multiple spheres of bilateral cooperation can be further developed, including economic engagement across energy, artificial intelligence (AI), and technological sectors, as well as connectivity, regional, and global security. Each of these domains presents opportunities for U.S. involvement that would yield tangible benefits not only for Azerbaijan but also for broader American strategic objectives across Eurasia.

Enhancing the U.S. – Azerbaijan cooperation will advance regional stability, unlock economic opportunities, ensure long-term energy security, and support Europe's energy diversification strategy.

In this context, expanding the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) and securing U.S. support for the construction of the Trans-Caspian (TCP) gas pipeline, connecting the TCP with the SGC as a complementary element, will significantly reshape the energy map of Eurasia. Furthermore, U.S. companies can invest or increase their investments in upstream and midstream projects across the Caspian region, particularly in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan has ambitious plans to develop renewable energy capacity and increase clean energy exports. Therefore, the two parties can strengthen cooperation in renewable energy, focusing on onshore and offshore wind, solar power, and grid modernization. U.S. technology and financing in the renewable energy sector could play a decisive role in shifting Azerbaijan's long-term energy strategy. Moreover, the U.S. can actively support the Black Sea Submarine Cable (BSSC) project and the Caspian-European Union Green Energy Corridor, linking South Caucasus and Central Asian nations to European markets and enabling the export of vast energy resources. Azerbaijan will position itself as a regional energy hub for both hydrocarbons and renewables.

The U.S.–Azerbaijan Partnership Charter also envisions collaboration in artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure, which are crucial for Azerbaijan's efforts to integrate AI across its economy, government, and education sectors. AI technologies are especially important for implementing the 'Smart City' concept in the Karabakh region, where the government continues to invest heavily in infrastructure projects. The U.S. and Azerbaijan can develop joint programs to secure critical infrastructure and financial systems. In this regard, academic and exchange programs will be highly effective in expanding partnerships between U.S. and Azerbaijani institutions and companies. Joint AI educational programs, startup initiatives, private sector investment, and co-developed data centers serving the South Caucasus and Central Asia could significantly accelerate the region's digital transformation. Additionally, U.S. support for the Trans-Caspian Digital Corridor, connecting Azerbaijan, Central Asia, and Europe via the Caspian Sea, holds strategic importance in Eurasia.

Beyond energy, the non-oil sector and trade offer significant potential for deepening U.S.-Azerbaijan economic ties. The TRIPP corridor, agreed upon between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Washington, presents a major opportunity for broader regional economic integration. This corridor could unlock logistics-intensive and infrastructure-driven business models. Consequently, the U.S.

and Azerbaijan can further strengthen engagement within the C5+1 platform to support connectivity and trade. With active U.S. support, Azerbaijan's strategic location and critical infrastructure can serve as a catalyst for regional economic integration and trade.

In the security and defense domain, the U.S. can move decisively beyond symbolic gestures and toward a framework of substantive, sustained cooperation. Azerbaijan has consistently demonstrated its value as a contributor to international peacekeeping missions, counterterrorism efforts, and maritime security operations. Its strategic location on the Caspian Sea, proximity to volatile regions, and proven operational capabilities make it an indispensable partner in advancing regional stability. The U.S. can now reflect this reality by institutionalizing defense collaboration through long-term planning, capacity-building programs, and joint operational frameworks. The U.S. should consider the full annulment of Section 907, a relic of the now-resolved Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict which continues to cast shadow over the long-term prospects of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations in multiple spheres, primarily defense and security.

The two countries can also consider expanding joint training initiatives with a focus not only on conventional military readiness but also on asymmetric threats, disaster response, and hybrid warfare scenarios. Defense modernization support can include advisory assistance in procurement reform, logistics optimization, and command-and-control systems. Intelligence-sharing mechanisms should be deepened through secure platforms and joint analytical units, particularly in areas such as counter-narcotics, terrorist financing, and regional threat mapping. Special emphasis should be placed on cybersecurity, where Azerbaijan faces increasing challenges from state and non-state actors. Collaborative efforts in cyber defense, digital forensics, and critical infrastructure protection would enhance resilience on both sides.

Existing cooperation within NATO must also be deepened and diversified. Although Azerbaijan is not a formal member of the Alliance, its longstanding participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program and its operational compatibility with NATO forces make it a natural candidate for enhanced engagement. The U.S. can advocate for Azerbaijan's inclusion in more advanced NATO planning cycles, facilitate access to NATO-standard training curricula, and support the development of interoperable systems and doctrines. Encouraging Azerbaijan's participation in multinational exercises, such as

those focused on crisis response, cyber defense, and maritime security, would reinforce its role as a reliable contributor to collective security.

Furthermore, the sides should explore trilateral formats that include Türkiye as a strategic bridge partner. There is potential for another trilateral format involving Azerbaijan, Israel and the U.S. These trilateral engagements would not only strengthen security in the South Caucasus but also reinforce the rules-based international order without provoking unnecessary escalation. The U.S. can help shape a more stable, resilient, and cooperative regional environment, one that reflects shared values and strategic alignment by anchoring Azerbaijan more firmly within the transatlantic security architecture.

The U.S. is expected to play a major guarantor role in the implementation of the Washington agreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan, particularly in the realization of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP).

The peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains fragile but promising, shaped by a complex interplay of historical grievances, geopolitical interests, and emerging opportunities for reconciliation. The U.S. now stands at a pivotal juncture, with a unique opportunity to play a constructive, credible, and forward-leaning role –not by imposing externally crafted solutions, but by facilitating meaningful dialogue, supporting confidence-building measures, and encouraging inclusive development across the region. This engagement must be rooted in a deep understanding of local dynamics and a commitment to long-term stability.

The opening of regional transport routes, such as the TRIPP (Zangezur) Corridor, should be supported through technical assistance, infrastructure investment, and regulatory harmonization. These routes are not merely logistical; they are symbolic pathways toward economic interdependence and political trust. The agreement on the TRIPP offers a unique opportunity for the U.S. to play a pivotal role in regional connectivity and gain its strategic presence in the South Caucasus. The enhanced role of the U.S. in the region can support the efforts of regional countries to counterbalance hostile actors and safeguard their independence and security.

In parallel, the U.S. can expand its role in post-conflict stabilization, offering targeted assistance in demining operations, environmental remediation, and

community-based peacebuilding. The legacy of landmines and unexploded ordnance in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan remains a daily threat to civilians and a barrier to development. U.S. expertise and funding in humanitarian demining in the Azerbaijani territories liberated from the Armenian occupation can accelerate safe resettlement and agricultural recovery.

Importantly, U.S. engagement should be balanced, principled, and forward-looking. The legacy of Section 907 and past policy inconsistencies should not cloud the current opportunity for strategic reset.

The annulment of Section 907 is essential for the stable advancement of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations and for enabling a constructive American role in the post-war peace and reconciliation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The peace process is not only a bilateral issue, but also a gateway to broader regional stability, economic growth, and democratic resilience. A durable peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan would unlock new opportunities for trade, energy transit, and cultural exchange across the South Caucasus and beyond. It would also reduce the risk of renewed conflict, mitigate external interference, and strengthen the region's capacity to chart its own future. For the U.S., supporting this process is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic investment in a more stable, prosperous, and interconnected Eurasia.

By embracing a proactive and principled role in the peace process, the U.S. can help transform a fragile ceasefire into a lasting settlement which reflects the aspirations of both peoples and contributes to a more peaceful regional order. This is not a moment for caution; it is a moment for leadership.

Connectivity is the final pillar, and perhaps the most transformative. Azerbaijan's geographic position at the crossroads of Eurasia gives it unparalleled potential as a transit and digital hub.

The U.S. can support infrastructure projects that enhance the Middle Corridor, including rail modernization, port development, and customs harmonization. These efforts will not only improve regional trade efficiency but also embed Azerbaijan more deeply into global supply chains aligned with Western standards. The U.S. role in the expansion of links between Azerbaijan and Central Asian states through connectivity, energy, and other economic projects as well as within the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) is highly important.

In this aspect, the importance of the OTS, which includes NATO member Türkiye along with Azerbaijan and the Turkic states of Central Asia, needs to be adequately assessed by the U.S. policymakers.

This institution is a critical instrument to enhance independence and sovereignty of the member states through integration in economic and security spheres and empowering them against hostile pressures. Hence, it is in the interests of the U.S. to pay particular attention to the OTS and the Middle Corridor, which is a strategic linkage amongst the OTS members.

Digital connectivity between Central Asia and Europe via Azerbaijan is equally vital. Azerbaijan's ambitions to become a regional leader in e-governance, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure align with U.S. interests in promoting open, secure, and interoperable digital ecosystems. The U.S. should support the development of fiber-optic corridors, cloud infrastructure, and digital public services. Technical cooperation in data protection, AI governance, and digital literacy would further strengthen Azerbaijan's resilience and competitiveness.

The U.S. can help shape the future of Eurasian integration by investing in Azerbaijan's connectivity agenda. This is not merely about infrastructure but also about values, standards, and strategic alignment. Azerbaijan's stability, openness, and multivector diplomacy make it an ideal partner for advancing a connectivity-first strategy that promotes prosperity and counters malign influence.

Taken together, it is high time for the U.S. and Azerbaijan to seize the historic momentum generated in their bilateral relations during President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Washington on August 7-8, 2028.

The sides can secure a partnership that advances energy security, regional stability, and global connectivity. This is not a transactional moment; it is a strategic opportunity to reshape the South Caucasus and reaffirm America's role as a constructive, forward-looking power in Eurasia.

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