

The US’s Turkey-backed “economic corridor” plan in the Caucasus targets Russia and Iran

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On 11 July, Tom Barrack, US Ambassador to Ankara and Special Envoy for Syria, proposed at a briefing in New York that operation of the planned “Zangezur Corridor”, set to pass through Armenian territory between Azerbaijan and Turkey, be leased to the US for 100 years. According to *Middle East Eye*, the proposal to award the operation of the corridor to a “private company” came from Turkey.

In the briefing, Barrack said: “They [Armenia and Azerbaijan] are arguing over 32 kilometres of road [in reality, 43 kilometres.], but this is no joke. It’s been going on for a decade—32 kilometres of road. So what happens is, America comes in and says, ‘Okay, we’ll take it over. Give us the 32 kilometres of road on a 100-year lease, and you can all share it.’”

The “Zengezur Corridor,” to be located in the Syunik region of Armenia, is in the south of the country, on the border with Iran. The corridor will connect Azerbaijan to its landlocked enclave of Nakhchivan, and consequently to Turkey. Turkey, a NATO member, and Azerbaijan, an ally of the US and Israel, are demanding that control of the corridor not remain with Armenia and that free passage be granted. The corridor is a critical component of the Turkish ruling elite’s plans for a “Middle Corridor” extending to China.

Both Russia and Iran view the growing influence and potential military presence of the US in the region as a serious threat. This initiative comes at a time when Armenia is reducing Russia’s military presence in the country.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s government suspended his country’s membership in the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in February 2024. At the end of 2024, Russian forces withdrew from the Agarak border crossing between Armenia and Iran at Yerevan’s request. Russian border guards had been performing this duty since 1992. In 2024, Russian forces also withdrew from Armenia’s main airport and Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia now only has a military presence in the country at its base in Gyumri, on the northern border with Turkey.

Iran, which is uneasy about Azerbaijan strengthening its ties with the US and Israel, and which has an estimated 20 million Azeris living in the north of the country, has reacted strongly to the US plan to enter the region under the guise of a “private company”.

According to *The Cradle Turkiye*, Ali Akbar Velayati, advisor to Iran’s religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said, “The main

goal of these projects is to weaken the Axis of Resistance, sever Iran’s ties with the Caucasus, and encircle Iran and Russia from the south of the region along their land borders,” adding: “This project is not only part of the US plan to prepare the Caucasus as a new front to pressure Russia and Iran instead of Ukraine, but it is also being carried out with the support of NATO and certain pan-Turkic circles.”

The Tehran Times wrote on Monday: “It appears that a military confrontation would be unavoidable should Azerbaijan, Turkey, and the US persist in pursuing these plans. In his statement, Velayati indicated that Tehran has redeployed forces to the border and intends to pursue a policy of ‘active prevention’ rather than reactive measures.”

Workers in the Caucasus and around the world need to be alert: Under the guise of an “economic corridor”, preparations are being made for bloody wars that will devastate the region’s peoples as US imperialism pushes forward its predatory plans. The regimes in Turkey and Azerbaijan are supporting these plans.

Last week, *Periodista Digital*, published in Spain, claimed to have obtained a secret agreement approved by the US, Azerbaijan, and Armenia from “anonymous” sources in the Armenian diaspora in France. According to the agreement, the planned corridor is referred to as the “Trump Bridge,” and the website’s editors claim that this agreement has caused Armenia to move away from the influence of France and the rest of the European Union and come under the control of the US and Turkey.

According to the report, the corridor will be operated by a US “private company” for 100 years. Furthermore, 1,000 American mercenaries will be deployed to the region under the pretext of “ensuring security.” It adds:

This private military company, which is currently estimated to comprise 1,000 fighters, will be responsible for securing the transport corridor ...

Initially, the border will be controlled by unarmed soldiers. However, for the army, this will mean that there will no longer be any distance between Iran and the United States, the arch-enemy of this Islamic republic. This situation carries with it the danger of a major war breaking out in the region stretching from the Mediterranean to the

South Caucasus.

Barack's statement came after Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Pashinyan met in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on 10 July. The status quo in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan—two former Soviet republics—was broken in Azerbaijan's favour in 2023. This conflict dates back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Supported by the government of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and armed with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), Azerbaijani forces defeated the Armenian forces that had been controlling Nagorno-Karabakh and took control of the region in a lightning offensive.

According to the ceasefire agreement brokered by Moscow following the 2020 war, Russia was to provide security for the planned "Zengezur Corridor". However, Azerbaijan's seizure of full control of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, with the support of Turkey, was seen as an opportunity to sideline Russia, which was preoccupied with the US-NATO conflict in Ukraine.

On July 19, President Donald Trump stated that the US "worked magic" in the peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan and "it's pretty close if it's not already done".

As the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and Israel's genocide in Gaza with US-NATO support are followed by an imperialist attack against Iran, preparations for war against China are accelerating. While Russia is focused on the war with NATO in Ukraine, its ally, the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, was overthrown in December 2024; another ally, Iran, was attacked by the US and Israel in June and Russia now faces the threat of encirclement from the Caucasus.

Meanwhile, on June 25, the Pashinyan government's imprisonment of Armenian Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and 14 others on charges of attempting a coup d'état highlighted the growing tensions between Moscow and Yerevan.

Following the arrests, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed serious concern about the attacks on the Armenian Church, while his counterpart, Ararat Mirzoyan, said that Russia should not interfere in Armenia's internal affairs.

Pashinyan claimed that this operation was against a clique preparing for a coup, which included former presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, who were in favour of close relations with Russia. For some time, the church had played an important role in organising protests against plans to officially hand over villages in the Nagorno-Karabakh region to Azerbaijan.

As for Azerbaijan, on December 25, 2024, a plane belonging to Azerbaijan Airlines was shot down by Russia with a ground-launched missile, straining relations between the two countries. Russian President Vladimir Putin's apology for the incident did not lead to a thaw in relations. Baku closed the Russian House in the country in February this year on espionage charges and revoked the accreditation of the Russian news agency Sputnik.

On June 27, the deaths of two Azerbaijani citizens during a police operation in Russia prompted Azerbaijan to accelerate its anti-Russian measures. All Russian cultural events in the country were cancelled and two Sputnik employees were detained.

The Aliyev regime is trying to consolidate its power with the external support it has gained in exchange for the geostrategic services it provides to NATO member imperialist powers. Azerbaijan, located south of Russia, north of Iran, and west of the Caspian Sea, is seen as a critical country in Washington's plans to dominate the Middle East and the Caucasus and wage war against Moscow and Tehran.

Azerbaijani natural gas is emerging as an important alternative to Europe's dependence on Russian natural gas. Ukraine's state-owned energy company, Naftogaz, announced on July 28 that it has signed its first natural gas import agreement with Azerbaijan.

The country, which has increased its military and strategic cooperation with Israel in recent years, is complicit in the genocide in Gaza by fuelling the Zionist war machine with oil sent through Turkey. According to an August 2024 report by Oil Change International, Israel imports nearly 99 percent of the oil it uses, with Azerbaijan the main supplier, providing 28 percent of the crude oil going to Israel.

Following the imperialist attack by the US and Israel on Iran in June, Iran's Ambassador to Armenia, Mehdi Sohbani, requested an investigation into allegations that Israeli drones may have entered the country via Azerbaijan. Baku denied the allegations, saying they were a "provocation."

The plans being developed in the South Caucasus amid imperialist aggression against Russia and Iran demonstrate how this region could also become a battleground in the emerging global conflict. The capitalist regimes in Russia and Iran, which are pursuing agreements with US imperialism, are incapable of providing a progressive response to this encirclement. The only way forward is to unite and mobilise the working classes of the Caucasus, the Middle East and beyond in a revolutionary movement for workers' power against imperialism.



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