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- لغة المجلة هي اللغة العربية والانكليزية على أن يراعى الوضوح وسلامة النص.
- ترحب المجلة بنشر البحوث والدراسات السياسية النظرية والتطبيقية ولا سيما التي تجعل من قضايا المنطقة والعالم محط اهتمامها، ماضياً وحاضراً ومستقبلاً، وعلى وفق الآتي:
 1. أن لا يزيد عدد صفحات البحث أو الدراسة عن (15) صفحة مطبوعة بحجم خط (14) والتباعد (1,15) ونوع الخط Simplified Arabic تقدم عبر المنصة الاليكترونية للمجلة على الرابط :
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 4. يرفق مع كل بحث او دراسة ملخصين (احدهما باللغة العربية والآخر باللغة الانكليزية/ يتضمن اهداف البحث ، المنهج والمعالجة ، ابرز النتائج واهم الاستنتاجات والمقترحات) مع ضرورة مراعاة ان الملخص مختلف اختلافا جذريا عن المقدمة وليس تكرارا لها .
 5. تخضع جميع البحوث المقبولة للنشر الى نظام الاستلال الالكتروني في كلية العلوم السياسية -جامعة النهريين.
 6. يرفق مع كل بحث ودراسة سيرة ذاتية مختصرة للباحث وتعهده .
- تقوم المجلة بإخطار الباحثين بإجازة بحوثهم أو دراساتهم من عدمها بعد عرضها على محكمين تختارهم على نحو سري من بين أصحاب الاختصاص.

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- يجوز للمجلة أن تطلب إجراء تعديلات شكلية أو شاملة على البحث أو الدراسة قبل إجازتها للنشر بما يتماشى مع أهدافها.
- البحوث المنشورة تعبر عن آراء أصحابها ، ولا تعبر عن رأي المجلة .
- ترحب المجلة بالمناقشات الموضوعية لما ينشر فيها أو في غيرها من الدوريات وبأية ردود فكرية أو تصويب، وكذلك ترحب بنشر التقارير عن المؤتمرات والندوات ذات العلاقة ومراجعات الكتب وملخصات الرسائل الجامعية التي تتم إجازتها على أن تكون من إعداد أصحابها.

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The Geopolitical Determinants of Arminia's Location in Its Impact on Formulating the Russian Strategy Concerning the South Caucasus:

A Geopolitical Critical Study[∇]

Asst. Prof. dr. Mustafa Jaber Fayyadh *

Abstract

The present paper tackles the basic geopolitical determinants of Armenia's location and its impact on formulating the "Russian Strategy Concerning the South Caucasus" through adopting a critical geopolitics and its strategic merits.

This research starts with the thesis that Russia treats Armenia as a "security asset" and a "geopolitical knot" within its "state-civilization" project and the doctrine of "near-neighborhood," viewing it as a tool for Russian hegemony.

The research wields a compound methodology, combining systems of analysis to deconstruct and reconstruct the inputs and outputs of Russian foreign policy. It utilizes tools of "critical geopolitics" to analyze Russia's discourse on the "Russian world" and Armenia, and uses a "future studies" methodology to anticipate potential scenarios for Russia's role in "corridor wars," particularly in the Zangezur Corridor and the "Middle Corridor ."

The research treated the actual and potential results of the decline of Russia's uniqueness in influencing "the security of the Caucasus" with the rise of roles for Turkey and the European Union, in addition to the shift of Russia's priority to "pragmatic and geoeconomic calculations" to "dominate the corridors and trade flows" to "keep Armenia in a state of "structural dependence" on Russia's Eurasian sphere.

Keywords: critical geopolitics; Armenia; Russian strategy; South Caucasus; Zangezur Corridor; middle corridor; Turkish states organization; near neighborhood.

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Introduction

As one of the geopolitical “seismic belts,” the South Caucasus¹ attracts competing projects of major and regional powers. It is a standard for indicators of the shape of the international system, its centers of power and their outcomes. It witnesses intersections between a Russian Eurasian project that seeks, with significant sensitivity, to “recycle”² the space left behind by the disintegrating Soviet Union to be placed in the shadow of the “Russian world,” the penetration of the Atlantic project of NATO and the European Union into the Eurasian sphere, as well as the Turanian project expressed by the Organization of Turkish states, and Iranian security considerations and the calculations of international actors.

Armenia, a landlocked and besieged state, stands at the core of the complicated scene. It is geographically strangled between Turkey and Azerbaijan. This has made Armenia economically, militarily, and in terms of security, dependent on Russia. This dependence is countered by the desire of its elites to open up to the West in order to reduce Russia’s influence, particularly following the 2018 Armenian Velvet Revolution. The geopolitical determinants of Armenia’s location have attained importance due to their impact on formulating Russian strategy, especially regarding the South Caucasus, and their role in its security operations.

Research Problem:

How have the geopolitical determinants of Armenia’s location influenced the formulation of Russian strategy regarding the South Caucasus, transforming Armenia into a "security asset" within the "near-neighborhood doctrine," amidst escalating competition with Western and Turkish projects concerning the region’s transport and energy corridors.

It raises several sub-questions, mainly:

1. What is the impact of critical geopolitical concepts (considering the geography of the region and its security implications) (Dalby, 2008; Dodds, 2007) on understanding the new picture in the Russian strategic vision for the South Caucasus and Armenia?

¹ The Caucasus is divided into two parts: a northern part, under Russian sovereignty, and a southern part, comprising the independent states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The region has witnessed conflicts among its states and manifestations of instability amidst political changes, both within its borders and in its political systems, as well as shifts in its foreign relations and within the framework of international balances and competition. Neighboring countries have been active participants in these conflicts and in the competition as a whole. See: "Crises and Conflicts in the South Caucasus and Their Impact on Political Stability and Regional and International Security," Haider Zayer Al-Amiri, *Political Issues Journal*, no. 76 (n.d.): 426–433.

²This is intended to be an attempt to return to a certain orbit.

2. How does the conflict over the Zangezur corridor integrate into the "Middle Corridor" project, shaping geoeconomic balances in the Eurasian region. Furthermore, what are its consequences for the nature of Russia's dominance there?

Research Hypothesis:

The present research is fundamentally based on a compound hypothesis: that the Russian strategy regarding the South Caucasus transcends the physical limitations of Armenia's geography, aiming to reshape it within Russia's geopolitical vision. This transforms it into a security function for sustaining the Eurasian sphere of influence, countering both NATO and Turkish expansionism. (Hassan, 2024, pp. 1724–1725)

Research Objectives:

1. To explore the conceptual dimensions of critical geopolitics, the principle of "near neighborhood," and the "state-civilization" model to analyze Russia's behavior in the South Caucasus.
2. To anticipate the future of Russia's role in the South Caucasus in terms of "corridor wars", Western sanctions, and the potential scenarios for conflict over the Zangezur corridor within the framework of the "Middle Corridor" project.

Significance of the Study

1. Wielding a critical geopolitical method so as to analyze the Armenian-Russian situation within the Eurasian sphere.
2. Facilitating a better understanding of "corridor wars" in Eurasia, the competition over the "Russian Northern Corridor" and the "Middle Corridor" (supported by Turkey and Europe), and its impact on "regional security in the Caucasus."

Research Methodology

1. The descriptive-analytical approach has been adopted to examine Russian foreign policy and explore the interaction between the inputs of strategic vision and its underlying principles.
2. Adapting the critical geopolitical approach so as to analyze Russian strategy regarding the Caucasus and Armenia.
3. A futures studies methodology was used to develop potential scenarios for the future of Russia's position and influence in the Caucasus amidst the ongoing competition.

Seventhly: Research Structure

Section One: The transformation of the considerations of the conventional geopolitics to critical geopolitics.

This transformation can be treated through two perspectives: theoretical, in terms of the development of the conceptual dimensions of geography. Then, the second perspective is its research in the practical dimension according to the research study of Caucasus zone especially in the Russian perception.

Subsection one: The transformation of the considerations of conventional geopolitics to critical geopolitics.

The field of geopolitics witnessed a developmental transformation from being attached to a conventional perspective, which is supposed to reduce the geopolitical dimensions among: location, area, borders, and resources, up to getting attached to the “dimensions of the critical perspective, which is capable of deciphering hypotheses provided by the acquaintance with the “neutral” reading of the map. The question is no longer traditionally rendered by saying

Firstly: Theoretical Guidelines: Motivation to form Russian Perception

Even though Friedrich Ratzel framed geopolitics centuries ago, at a time when his contributions were considered a cognitive development that combined the variables of politics and the constants of geography, in giving the state the developmental characteristic of exceeding its borders based on what its needs for growth impose, within the framework of its seven laws. **(Riyad, 2012, pp. 45–46)** Therefore, the concepts of “geopolitics” have historically developed from carrying its characteristics imposed by geography, I mean location, borders, resources, climate, and population, in determining the behavior of the state within its foreign policy, within the limits of its power. **(Riyad, 2012, p 107)**

However, the specification of the international behavior was different for states that share in their geographical properties, what contributed to formulate the “critical geopolitics” **(Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, pp. 190–204)** as an interpretive approach that reformulates the questions about any cognitive attempt in the field of international relations devoted to understand the international behavior and decipher and reconstruct the foreign policy of a certain state in terms of its being influenced by its geographical dimensions, according to those who are concerned.**(Dodds, 2007)**

Having been acknowledged, when talking about the impact of the political and geopolitical theories that have been developed in the field of Russian international relations during the era of "President Putin," including what was formulated by (Alexander Dugin), that made the strategic directions which are described as the great, becomes a clear echo and a practical response Russian foreign policy, over the course of more than a quarter of a century, was designed to, at least, situate Russia as a regional hegemon. **(Khashib, 2018, pp. 3–4)**

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Second: The Russian Strategic Activity: From Theory to Practice

One of the most important things that Russia can achieve within the framework of its former "Soviet" periphery is for that region to become a true "strategic support," and the biggest setback for Russia to be for that region to become a "strategic burden" on it. **(Huasheng, 2021)**

The term "post-Soviet sphere," by which the republics of the Soviet Union are referred to, is always called the "near periphery." It is a term that Russia is particularly concerned with, as it is a legacy acquired in the aftermath of the collapse of the "Soviet Union." It is an expression of Russian responsibility. However, the former Soviet neighborhood has a significant impact on Russian diplomatic activity, shaping the structure of Russian diplomacy and its priorities, tools, and objectives. In addition, its influence has become prominent in Russia's political and diplomatic confrontations with the United States, the West, and Turkey as well. **(Huasheng, 2021)**

Hence, it can be said that "the post-Soviet republics" are no longer a strategic power factor. However, it can be considered a burden that comes with a cost. It is an issue that the researcher sees as interpreting the decline of the American role toward developments that emerge in that zone, as observers expect a response from Russia, or a decisive action, regarding this region. It can be imagined as attractive, justifying "strategic effectiveness" and defining Russia's foreign policy, and it may sometimes be a strategic deterrent for Russia. **(Huasheng, 2021)**

On the other hand, the Turkish/Azerbaijani periphery and the project of a Turkish world constitute an expected menace that compels Armenia to make concessions regarding its sovereignty in exchange for Russia's protection and its contribution to preserving its identity, which is feared to be fading away, by exploiting the narratives of genocide to cultivate a belief that "Russian protection of Armenian society, and of Armenia itself, is a guarantee condition for their survival together."

Section Two: The principle of "near-neighborhood" and the dimensions of the concept of "state-civilization" in the Russian strategic vision:

First: "Near-neighborhood", the geographic nature, and justifications of domination

The term "near-neighborhood", or what is known "preferred interests area" in Russia's discourse that expresses the extension of its interests in Europe and Asia after the destruction of the Soviet Union the term "near-neighborhood" and what is also known as "the preferred area of interests" emerged in Russia's discourse,

expressing the expansion of its sphere of interest, in Europe and Asia, after the decline of the Soviet Union, including developing its relations with its former republics, within the framework of its search for partners, to prepare for natural integration, especially in Central Asia, and its effectiveness within the framework of the "Collective Security Treaty Organization" and the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," as precursors to the "Russian Union integration project." Although it appears to be a descriptive term, deconstructing it from a "critical geopolitical perspective" reveals its expansionist dimensions. It is a "colonial concept" intended to keep the republics formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union between two circles: fragile independence and dependency justified by the requirements of common interests. At the same time, for Russia and for those republics, it entails considerations of "entanglement", if the term may be used, between what is "internal" and what is "foreign". **(Russia's Return to Geopolitics, 2022, pp. 122–125)**

Accordingly, it entails constructing a strategic vision that conveys the principle of the "civilizational state," as a model that has proven successful in Russia, by overwhelming the consequences of the Soviet disintegration, especially the stifling economic consequences at that time. Moreover, Russia was able, after that, to rise to a level that makes it a competitor that can change the international system and be influential in the transition to multilateralism within it. **(Robinson, 2025, as cited in Osama, 2025)**

The perception is deeply rooted in what is known as the "Primakov Doctrine," which aims to restore Russia's status as a superpower. This status is achieved through direct or indirect control over the sphere of independent republics. In other words, Russia does not view Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan as ordinary neighboring states, but rather sees them from a strategic security perspective, as part of a "security belt" around Russia's North Caucasus flank: Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia, particularly against potential Atlantic or "Turanian" incursions¹. **(Major Russian Trends, 2021, pp. 584–585)**

As the most important matter resulting from the aforementioned above, especially on the sovereignty of the Caucasus states, can be perceived as "limited sovereignty" particularly in the Russian perception. What is intended behind that

¹ Turanism refers to Turkish attempts to build a union that could establish a comprehensive political entity, based on Turkish origin and the Turkish language as cultural unifiers that can be leveraged to build a broad Turkic federation, similar to the existing "Organisation of Turkic States." Historically, the Turanian peoples consist of the Ottoman Turks of Anatolia, the Tatars of the Caucasus, local settlers in central and southern Russia, Turks and Turkmens of Iran and Central Asia, Uzbeks, Mongols, Manchus, Altuniz, indigenous Siberians, Finns of the Baltic states, Hungarians, and Bulgarians. (United and Independent Turanism, Zarivant, Zavin Nalbandian, Dar al-Hiwar, Latakia, Syria, 2021). Today, Turanism is a cultural, political, and nationalist movement whose goal is to connect the Turkic-speaking peoples "civilized" across Anatolia and Central Asia, advocated by the discourse of the "Turkic world" and its organizations.

is the restriction of the states from joining hostile military allies like NATO. Logically, based up on that restriction is the prevention of establishing Western military establishments on the grounds of the states to be harnessed as a means of “energy security” which is reduced in the strategic Russian perception founder of its foreign policy objectives by “employing it in the energy diplomacy, and in the investment of constructing infrastructure of strategic energy projects, competing the Western influence, and expansion it its vicinity, in South America, and even in the Middle East.” **(Smith, 2012, as cited in Rashad, 2022)**

As far as the military bases are concerned, the basis no. (102) related to Russia, it is near the Turkish border. It is a member of NATO. It is a basis of shared joint air defense with Armenia. It was, up to before the deterioration of the Russian-Armenian recently, a license of the Russian to treat what is considers a source of danger that menaces Armenia and, therefore, the near Russian vicinity, considered as a veto constraining Armenia’s opportunities to move westward. **(Public Radio of Armenia, 2020)**

Secondly: The expansion of “near-neighbor” to “state-civilization”

The principle of “near-neighbor”, as Russian strategic doctrine, whose objectives have been formulated after the decline of the Soviet Union, and developed in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, to initiate for the principle of “state-civilization”. The document of “concept of foreign policy of the Russian Union” 2023 states that Russia, as a “distinguished cultural state” should shoulder a historical responsibility of protecting the Eurasian space from “Western hegemony” and grants -permission - to establish “Eurasian space of peace, stability, and complementary partnership. **(Russian Federation, 2023)**

As far as Armenia is concerned, its relation with Russia exceeds a mere ally of interest. Rather, it is a relationship of "civilizational affiliation." Within the framework of Russian discourse, Armenia is a "historical Christian ally." Russia participated in its wars against the Ottomans, and as part of the broader "Christian East," Russia plays a leading role in it. Hence, the "Armenian rapprochement" with the West, which arose as a result of its war with Azerbaijan since 2020, is considered by Russia to be an absurd departure from the natural civilizational path, disrupting security, and cannot be considered—in any case—a political choice imbued with legitimacy under the pretext of Armenian sovereignty.**(Prige, 2024)**

There is a civilizational mission that Russia, the "state-civilization," undertakes within the framework of Eurasia. Russian theorists, particularly those whose views are closest to the "descriptions of geopolitical theory," as described by those concerned, believe in the existence of a "human-civilizational" crisis whose effects are being felt in Eurasia, which has burdened it without establishing a homogeneous Eurasian regime. Thus, Russia has to work to overwhelm the

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"acute ethnic and spiritual" crisis by activating cultural actors and supporting tools that work to preserve the Eurasian nations in terms of existence, cultural particularities, and components of identity, by transcending narrow traditional national affiliations and their negative effects, which drive competition and conflict more than the new Eurasian orientations towards integration, openness, and merging, in a way that preserves security and achieves interests. (Shekhovtsov, 2009, pp. 1–4)

Thirdly: The Caucasus in Strategic Perspectives: Russian and Western Perspectives – "Strategic Necessity" or "Ethnic Motives"?

The literature presents a great divergence between how Russian and Western strategic perspectives view the Caucasus with respect to both its significance and its effect on the balance of power and the growth of hegemony in general. There are also quite a few stylistic and thematic distinctions. For example, in his book entitled Chessboard, Zbigniew Brzezinski notes that the Caucasus' role as a vital part of Eurasia's Balkans is a reference to both its ethnicities as well as to Russian geographic representations and to Russian peoples' geographical representation and human embodiment of the geography of Eurasia. Therefore, Russia desires to dominate the Caucasus. It needs the United States, as the world's only remaining global hegemon and thus, interests of the Western world to enter it and its allies and thus hinder Russia from returning to an imperialist status in the world. (Bourzan, 2022)

This issue has its own implications; in confirming the importance of the Caucasus, in the Western and Russian perceptions; and the awareness of the dangers of losing its influence in the Caucasus to make Armenia a testing ground in which the true extent of Russian power is revealed, by imposing the demands of action, by confirming its seriousness in considering the principle of "near neighborhood" and the principle of "state-civilization" and considering them as components of its strategic doctrine, especially in light of the growing Atlantic-Turkish pressures. These attempts have been followed by the acknowledgment of a crisis that Eurasia is suffering from, described as ethnic, cultural, and even spiritual, within the framework of the search for identity in light of cultural particularities. They were shaken by the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which, consequently, imposed the undertaking of restoration and maintenance operations; which only Russia is capable of undertaking; capable of leading it, managing its crises, and confronting them; Given the West's awareness of this Eurasian suffering, which is attractive to the effectiveness of their influence in reshaping identity, under Western values: democracy/capitalism, simultaneously. (Taha, 2023, pp. 73–78)

On the other hand, what is pointed out in the Russian vision, at the level of the international system, is its support for the appearance of rising powers in the

international system, which makes Russia eager to restore its status, to be one of the active poles in a multipolar international system, which, if achieved, would provide Russia with freedom of movement, the ability to maneuver, and the motivation to cooperate with neighboring countries and form alliances that achieve its goals in the region in light of the competition over it. (Baklitsky, 2014, pp. 82–83)

Section three: The Consequences of Russia's Influence in the "South Caucasus Corridor Wars":

The third decade of the 21st century witnessed a rapid shift in the nature of conflict, from a struggle to control territory or region to a quest to control "the flow of goods, energy, and people through cross-border corridors and routes. The essence of competition in the South Caucasus became the desire to control "corridors": oil and gas pipelines, railway lines, road networks, and trade routes."

The First Requirement: The Central Corridor Project and its Impact on Adjusting the Paths of Eurasian Map:

First: The Northern and Central Corridors: Dimensions and Objectives of the Project:

Overland trade between Asia and Europe has been linked for decades to what is called the "Northern Corridor," which refers to: railways and roads through Russia, and sometimes through Belarus, towards Europe. The corridor forms the backbone of the "Overland Silk Road" in its modern version, before Russia was subjected to a broad package of sanctions after 2014 and then again in 2022. This prompted a number of active international politicians to search for alternative routes in order to overcome the effects of those sanctions and the potential political risks that result from them. This is done after it retained its importance after the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2020, as it is a Russian guarantee. (Dolledz, 2025)

Accordingly, the "Middle Corridor," also known as the "International Caspian Sea Transport Corridor," emerged as a regional and international project. Its objectives extend to linking China and Central Asia with Europe by passing through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, and crossing "the Caspian Sea" to serve as a fundamental link. Therefore, the importance of the "Middle Corridor" cannot be grasped without discussing, comparing, and contrasting it with the "Northern Corridor," which is intended to be an alternative or complement to it, within the framework of objectives to reduce Russia's centrality. This is part of an equation intended to connect Eurasia and its systems. Thus, the "Organization of Turkish States" presented this corridor to be a fundamental pillar and a geopolitical starting point. The project known as

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“Turkish World 2040” aims to create a connecting space for “Turkish-speaking countries,” with a pivotal role for both Turkey and Azerbaijan in the land and sea bridge between Asia and Europe. The World Bank and international financial institutions support the project as a corridor that contributes to diversifying global trade routes and significantly reduces reliance on routes passing through Russian territory or through traditional straits described as maritime chokepoints, including the Suez Canal, the Strait of Malacca, and the Strait of Hormuz. **(Dolledz, 2025)**

Studies on this subject confirm that developing infrastructure, connecting new roads and upgrading existing ones to ports, and streamlining customs procedures via the “Central Corridor” would double the volume of trade passing through it and reduce transit time between China and Europe, thus enhancing the corridor’s strategic value following the obstacles imposed on the Northern Corridor by sanctions against Russia.

Secondly: Armenia’s potential position between the two corridors: the Central Corridor and the Zangezur Corridor:

The main route of the Central Corridor—in its initial form—does not include Armenia as a primary territory, as it follows the axis of Kazakhstan/Caspian Sea/Azerbaijan/Georgia/Turkey. However, there is a possibility that Armenia could become part of its branches, given its geographical location, should the Zangezur Corridor be opened or should railway lines be developed and expanded, and a road network be established that directly connects them. Armenia is in Iran, in Georgia, and in Turkey as well. **(Najat, 2024, p. 3)**

Herein lies the main difference between the “Middle Corridor,” as a project that can be described as “transcontinental, linking them,” and the “Zengzor Corridor,” which is described as a short link only at the regional level. Therefore, the “Middle Corridor” represents a wide network whose lines extend; Starting with China and Central Asia, and reaching Europe, the Zangezur Corridor—as described above—is a regional route expected to connect Azerbaijan to its territories in Nakhchivan via southern Armenia. Once activated, and provided the necessary political will exists, it will be integrated into this broader network or linked to the “Turkish World” project. In other words, the Zangezur Corridor is viewed as a branch or segment within the corridor system and is not intended to replace either the Central Corridor or the Northern Corridor. **(Dolledz, 2025)**

To understand Armenia’s role in the Central Corridor, three scenarios can be anticipated:

1. Exclusion: If the main corridors pass through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, the Zangezur Corridor will be excluded. The Middle East, without integrating Armenia into its networks, marginalizes it in the planning of corridors, making it

a void on the map—if not a geographical obstacle—rather than a connecting point.

2-Transit, but under guardianship: If the Zangezur corridor is opened under direct Russian/Azerbaijani supervision, supported by a significant role for Turkey, Armenia will then become a transit point for flows between Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan, and Turkey, without achieving control.

1. Effective sovereignty/economic control for Armenia, in terms of imposing conditions on transit or its revenues, as this section is used to connect the “Middle Corridor” to the “Turkish world” under Russian supervision. (Awda, 2023)
2. Balanced integration: whereby Armenia becomes an active participant within a broader network of corridors, with agreed-upon “legal arrangements” guaranteeing its sovereignty over any route passing through its territory, and with an international presence (European and UN) that dispels its potential security and sovereignty concerns, thus granting Armenia a tangible role in determining its transit conditions, fees, and investments in the two corridors: the “Middle Corridor” and the “Turkish world.” Or through branching off, it is created to be “south-north” links heading towards Iran and Georgia, and for Armenia to have the ability to move through the scenarios, from the first and second to the third scenario, it must exert its utmost political effort, paralleled by an active diplomatic movement with a superior ability to negotiate, and a readiness to absorb the pressures of Russia, which clings to the role of “guardian observer” over any corridor that arises in the region, as well as the pressures of Turkey and Azerbaijan, and their endeavor to achieve linking the “Turkish world” and Brussels, by searching for corridors that bypass Russia and Iran in its endeavor to be active in the network of corridors (Najat, 2024, pp. 9–12)

Third: The Russian/Turkish/European Competition in the Context of Corridor Wars:

The “corridor wars” in the Caucasus region are witnessing a complex escalation in the awareness of three key stakeholders, and in their pursuit of the “Northern Corridor,” the “Central Corridor,” and the “Zingzor Corridor”:

- Russia: Seeks to maintain its indispensable role in monitoring and overseeing transit between Asia and Europe. Historically, Russia has relied on the “Northern Corridor” as a vital artery passing through its territory. However, the sanctions imposed on it have compelled it to reintegrate into projects concerned with planning “alternative corridors,” not only through its own territory, but also by playing the role of “guarantor and gatekeeper” at points such as Zangezur, or through its influence in both Azerbaijan and Armenia, aims to prevent the “Middle Corridor” from becoming a completely independent route from it. (Caspian Policy Center, 2026)

- Turkey: it seeks to establish itself as a key gateway connecting East and West, becoming the heart of the “Turkish World” project. It considers the “Middle Corridor” a strategic passage that, through its implications, enhances its independence—in playing an active role in this regard—from both Russia and Iran. Turkey views the Zangezur Corridor as a missing link, connecting it directly overland to Azerbaijan and Central Asia, in addition to the pressure of relying on routes passing through other countries. **(Khader, 2021)**
- The European Union: Aims to reduce its dependence on Russian energy and transit routes through its territory. The EU seeks to enhance energy and trade security through alternative routes, especially after the crises in importing Russian gas. Therefore, the European Union views the development and activation of the “Middle Corridor” with great interest and keenness to implement it. Its financial institutions support projects aimed at developing the relevant infrastructure within the Caucasus region. However, it is done without a direct clash with Russia.

The “Middle Corridor” is at the heart of the competition. Its acquisition of a significant portion of trade between China and Europe will diminish the importance of the “Russian Northern Corridor,” pushing the latter to find alternative roles in managing and monitoring these new corridor networks. This justifies Russia's efforts to control strategically important sections, such as the Zangezur Corridor, and to strengthen its influence in Azerbaijan and Armenia, remaining a decisive player in the Eurasian connectivity equation, even if Russia is not the initiator in determining the major economic routes.

The second requirement: The impact of corridor wars on scenarios for Russia's role in the South Caucasus:

Three scenarios can be identified for the future of Russia's role in the South Caucasus and Armenia:

First: The scenario of “relative hegemony”

Assuming that Russia—despite the sanctions—will succeed in maintaining a position of relative dominance in the Caucasus by accepting executive modifications that acknowledge the rise of the “Middle Corridor” **(Jabr, 2025)** not as a complete replacement for the “Northern Corridor” nor as an impediment to it—this is supported by the following possibilities:

- The continued presence of the Russian base in Armenia (102), as well as the Russian border guard units stationed there, without any fundamental changes, ensures Russia's dominance over key points in the Caucasus.
- The opening of the Zangezur corridor under predominantly Russian supervision makes Russia the “guardian and monitor” of the flows between Azerbaijan,

Nakhchivan, and Turkey. This section becomes part of the “Central Corridor” from a Russian perspective.

- The continued existence of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), (Samira & Nabila, 2022, pp. 909–910) which has established a framework that restricts Armenia's moves toward unilateral security arrangements, while armament and training programs remain under the purview of the Russian system. **(Collective Security Treaty Organization, n.d.)**
- The effectiveness of Russia’s ability to reach an understanding with Turkey regarding “splitting influence” in the Caucasus, so that the “Central Corridor” project is not entirely hostile to Russia, but rather intended to be a pathway; This enables Russia to participate in it, to a beneficial extent, in exchange for its role as a “security guarantor” and observer.
- Armenia remains in a state closer to structural dependence on Russia, with a limited margin—acceptable to Russia—for rapprochement with the West, which does not reach a level that threatens the security architecture in the region, established with Russian support. The “northern corridor” should remain complementary to the central one, not supersede it.

Second: The “balanced security pluralism” scenario: **(Dolledz, 2025)**

This situation is one of factors in which Russia’s monopoly on guaranteeing and directing “Caucasus security” and controlling its strings is eroding, though some of those strings remain in Russia’s hands. Russia accepts the reality that the “Northern Corridor” will no longer be the sole route, with the “Central Corridor” assuming a prominent position:

- The base of 102 and the CSTO will remain, within the framework of what is being “renegotiated” regarding roles and powers, which will reduce the manifestations of Russia’s military presence in favor of shared roles in security arrangements supported by international monitoring.
- Expanding EU bodies dedicated to monitoring and maintaining stability, with Russia participating in these tasks to secure borders and corridors.
- Active participation of Turkey in corridor projects, particularly the “Central Corridor” and the “Zengezur Corridor,” with a European guarantee of Armenian sovereignty, without provoking Russia or excluding its participation. **(Emirates Policy Center, 2026)**
- Armenia’s move to diversify its sources of armament, training programs, and expand its economic partnerships, in order to overcome dependence on Russia, to form a balanced network with Russia, the European Union, the United States, and potential Asian partners, while maintaining a privileged position for Russia among them, is acceptable.

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Then, this is a scenario for a complex reality characterized by multiple factors and influences in the Caucasus, giving Armenia a wider margin to benefit from the “Northern Corridor,” the “Central Corridor,” and the “Zangzor Corridor.” This can be achieved if Armenia demonstrates a high capacity to manage its numerous intertwined relationships, rather than allowing its territory to become an arena for conflict among major powers.

Third: The scenario of “a clear decline of Russia and the rise of competing corridors”: **(Dolledz, 2025)**

This is a more severe scenario that assumes that the Russian-Ukrainian war will result in long-term sanctions that will weaken Russia and its capabilities, leading to:

- A significant reduction or partial withdrawal of Russian forces from Armenia, and a decline in its influence within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).
- A rapid rise in the prominence of the “Central Corridor” and the “Zangzor Corridor,” under Turkish/Azerbaijani/European supervision, with limited Russian participation or its complete exclusion, relegating the “Northern Corridor” to a marginal role in Asian/European trade.
- A complete reorientation of Armenia towards the European Union or towards advanced partnerships with NATO, resulting in sharp tension—or even a complete break—with Russia.

The risks of this scenario are high for both Russia and Armenia, given its expansionist ambitions towards Azerbaijan, the weakening of Russia’s veto power, and the potential for provoking Iranian reactions. The scenario is less likely, but possible if uncontrolled developments occur in Ukraine and Russia, and if the arrangements for the corridors become more complicated.

Conclusion

This paper confirmed that Armenia’s landlocked location and its demographic and identity vulnerabilities are understood within the framework of Russia’s geopolitical vision. The rise of “corridor wars” in the Caucasus region leads to the following key conclusions:

1. Armenia is a complex issue, not a peripheral one. Its situation combines geographical vulnerability, a unique identity, and its location along strategic corridors, making it a complex issue where Russian, Turkish, and European Union interests intertwine.
2. The Turkish/Azerbaijani blockade has transformed from an institutional project by Turkish states into a matter with international legal implications.

3. The principle and effectiveness of “near-neighborhood” policies have eroded due to Russia’s monopoly on security guarantees, giving way to the influence of international influences such as Turkey, the European Union, and the United States, while Russia retains considerable leverage.
4. The shift in priority from “protecting an ally” to “protecting corridors”: This is occurred with the decline in the importance of the Northern Corridor due to sanctions.
5. The use of Armenian identity, religion, memory, and the Armenian diaspora in Russia as geopolitical tools to ensure security, prevent the repetition of history, and leverage policies related to Armenian residency and financial remittances.
6. Armenia’s limited room for maneuver: Geographical constraints, demographic pressures, security structures, and corridor warfare compel Armenia to adopt a policy of “short, quick steps” with Russia and the West, avoiding drastic strategic leaps.

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