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Washington Joint Declaration Between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Its Implications

By Gulkhanim Mammadova and Krševan Antun Dujmović

Introduction

On 8 August 2025, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met in Washington under the auspices of U.S. President Donald J. Trump to sign the Washington Joint Declaration. For the first time, both leaders publicly confirmed that their foreign ministers had initialled the Agreement on Peace and Inter-State Relations, a draft treaty intended to close the decades-long conflict between their

nations. The declaration also called for the formal end of the OSCE Minsk Process, the reopening of communications and transit links, and introduced the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP).

After nearly three years of peace negotiations, with more than 15 rounds of exchanged drafts and multiple tracks of thematic framework

discussions, the signing of the Joint Declaration cannot be understood as a sudden breakthrough alone. Since the Second Karabakh War back in 2020 war and the subsequent ceasefire, Armenia–Azerbaijan relations have been subject to overlapping, sometimes competing, mediation tracks: Russia, the EU (Brussels), the United States, and occasionally other actors. Each track could push forward discrete elements (communications, confidence measures, delimitation working groups, transport links), but none resolved the full package of core disagreements between Baku and Yerevan.

By 2023, however, the talks began to shift toward more bilateral channels between Yerevan and Baku, which reduced reliance on outside mediators, especially as Russia's role diminished. Against this backdrop, the U.S. re-entered the scene more forcefully, with officials traveling to the region to nudge the parties closer. The Washington ceremony therefore appeared sudden, but in reality, it was the point where fragmented tracks converged and bilateral understandings were formalized. What Washington offered was less a new peace formula and more a framework to elevate the existing progress. U.S. officials reportedly proposed to oversee elements of the transit corridor plan. Seen in this light, the U.S. role was less about authoring every clause than about midwifing an outcome already in gestation. Both Yerevan and Baku have emphasized that Washington's involvement should not be interpreted as geopolitical maneuvering against third parties, underlining that there is no reason for Russia or Iran to feel threatened.

What the Joint Declaration says and what it means

At its core, the Joint Declaration by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan is a political statement that seeks to outline the principles of a new relationship between the two states. Its central accomplishment lies in the confirmation that the two foreign ministers have initialled the Agreement on Peace and Inter-State Relations. This means that the text of a treaty exists and is agreed upon, even if not yet formally signed or ratified by parliaments. By initialling but not ratifying a peace treaty, Baku and Yerevan created an interim framework that commits both governments to pursue normalization process. That, in turn, consolidates the post-war reality.

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The Declaration thus situates itself as a political umbrella for the next steps of ratification and implementation. In diplomatic practice, the distinction between a declaration and a treaty is that the former is political and the latter legal. Here, the Declaration functions as a visible manifestation of intent, meant to signal to the world and to domestic constituencies that the conflictual era is ending. The declaration also calls for the formal closure of the OSCE Minsk Process, which for nearly three decades had

been the main forum for mediating the conflict. For decades, the Minsk Group, co-chaired by the U.S., Russia, and France, had been the primary international mediator for the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. By declaring it obsolete, Baku and Yerevan have effectively recognized that the Minsk Process no longer has relevance in the current environment. At the same time, the declaration leaves major issues open. It does not specify the modalities of border demarcation, the governance of the corridor, or mechanisms for dispute resolution. Nor does it address humanitarian questions arising from past wars, such as the fate of displaced populations or cultural heritage protection. These omissions reflect the declaration's nature as a framework rather than a settlement.

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The Washington summit also produced a set of agreements and deliverables that go beyond. For example, the agreement on the Zangezur Corridor, rebranded in Washington as the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP). This corridor is to connect mainland Azerbaijan to its Nakhchivan exclave via southern Armenia's Syunik province. Crucially, while sovereignty over the territory remains with Armenia, the U.S. will hold exclusive development rights for ninety-nine years, with the intention of leasing it to a joint US-Armenia

consortium. The corridor represents a practical solution to Azerbaijan's longstanding demand for connectivity in the South Caucasus. For Armenia, the corridor promises infrastructure, investment, trade opportunities, and also bilateral opportunities in the US-Armenia track. At its core, TRIPP is not yet a physical project but a framework to be defined through feasibility studies and negotiations. It will pass through Armenian territory, remain under Armenian sovereignty, and provide reciprocal benefits. The design of TRIPP will determine its legitimacy.

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In addition, the Washington summit produced parallel bilateral agreements between the U.S. and each of the two South Caucasus states. These cover areas such as energy cooperation and infrastructure investment. By signing these side deals, Washington sought to lock in its influence and ensure that both Baku and Yerevan view U.S. involvement as mutually beneficial. Finally, there is the commitment to reopen communications and transport links across the region. For decades, borders and transport lines have been closed, which isolated Armenia in particular. The reopening of rail, road, and trade corridors will create interdependence and embed peace in material interests. If trade flows and jobs are created the incentive to return to armed conflict diminishes.

Implications

The Washington Declaration and its accompanying agreements cannot be understood solely through their text; they must be situated within the broader geopolitics of the South Caucasus. The U.S. has become the central arbiter of peace in the South Caucasus. For Washington, the declaration represents a reassertion of influence in a region where U.S. engagement has long been episodic. By hosting the summit and facilitating the TRIPP initiative, the U.S. has positioned itself as both mediator and stakeholder. Yet the commitment also entails responsibility: Washington will be expected to provide financial and technical support to ensure implementation. In turn, by brokering the agreements and by securing exclusive development rights in the corridor project, Washington has displaced other actors who previously held sway. Russia, historically the dominant power in the region, is conspicuously sidelined. This reflects both Moscow's diminished capacity, consumed as it is by its war in Ukraine, and the deliberate U.S. effort to expand its influence in a strategically important corridor linking Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

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Even though officially, Moscow “welcomed” the Armenia-Azerbaijan accord and expressed support for regional stability, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova argued that U.S. involvement must not “create new

divisions,” and Russian officials have flagged the risk that extra-regional players might upset the geopolitical balance. Some analysts suggest that the Kremlin may be laying groundwork to obstruct implementation. Iran, too, looks on with unease. Tehran has long relied on Armenia as a northern partner and as a “check against pan-Turkic connectivity projects.” The idea of a corridor linking Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan through Armenian territory, blessed by the U.S. is viewed in Tehran as a direct threat. Already under heavy Western sanctions, Iran is wary that peace between Yerevan and Baku under U.S. auspices will diminish its role as a transit state and weaken its capacity to exert influence in the Caucasus. In the immediate aftermath of the Washington signing, Iranian officials made their displeasure clear. Ali Akbar Velayati, a top adviser to Iran’s Supreme Leader, warned that Tehran would block the corridor “with or without Russia,” accusing the U.S. of treating the Caucasus as a “piece of real estate” and calling the project “political treachery.” Iran’s foreign ministry offered a more diplomatic tone, welcoming the peace agreement in principle, but expressing concern over “negative consequences of any foreign intervention” near its borders. Iranian media and analysts view the corridor deal as a strategic encroachment that sidelines Tehran and enables a greater U.S. and NATO presence along its northern borders.

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By contrast, Türkiye emerges as the clear winner in political terms. Ankara has stood by Baku throughout, providing military assistance in 2020 and political backing since. The normalization of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations opens the prospect of a Türkiye-Armenia border opening. It would give Türkiye direct access not only to the Caucasus but to Central Asia through the much-discussed Middle Corridor. For Ankara, this is a validation of its strategic patience, an alignment of its role as a regional patron of Azerbaijan and as an emerging Eurasian hub. At the same time, Türkiye is notably absent from the TRIPP framework, which is structured as a U.S.-Armenia consortium. This exclusion reflects Washington's intent to keep development rights firmly under U.S. oversight and perhaps a degree of unease about ceding corridor management to Ankara. For Georgia, the declaration is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, TRIPP could redirect some flows away from Georgian territory. On the other, it could relieve congestion and integrate Georgia into a wider network. Much will depend on whether the corridor is framed as complementary to existing Georgian routes or as an alternative. Tbilisi's stake lies in ensuring interoperability and fair tariff regimes.

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 The Central Asian republics view the declaration through the prism of connectivity. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have been eager to reduce their dependence on Russian transit infrastructure. A peaceful South Caucasus provides a reliable route to European markets, strengthening the viability of the Middle Corridor, which links China

and Central Asia to Europe via the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus. Turkmenistan, rich in gas, sees opportunity as well. If peace holds, westward energy projects might at last gain traction. Still, the Central Asian states remain cautious. They know that the fragility of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations means that routes could be closed with little warning if hostilities resume. In turn, the global significance of the Washington declaration rests on its implications for the Middle Corridor. As the war in Ukraine has disrupted northern transit routes through Russia and as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) faces political resistance in the West, the Caucasus has become a vital alternative. Peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan would accelerate the development of infrastructure linking Central Asia and the Caspian to Europe, enabling pipelines, railways, and highways to bypass both Russia and Iran. For Europe, this is a strategic prize: a more secure supply of energy and a diversified trade route. For China, it represents a critical fallback option to sustain westward exports without relying on politically problematic northern paths.

 ***TRIPP could redirect some flows away from Georgian territory.***

 However, in Armenia, the Washington Joint Declaration has been met with skepticism and outright opposition. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has presented the agreement as a difficult but necessary step to secure Armenia's future. His narrative emphasizes the promise of investment and integration into Euro-Atlantic frameworks as Armenia's pathway out

of isolation. Opposition parties, however, have framed the declaration in starkly different terms.

In Azerbaijan, in turn, the Joint Declaration was received considerably more positively. The decision for the Armenian section of the route to be managed by a joint venture between Armenia and the U.S. was viewed by some observers as a favorable outcome for Baku as it aligns with Azerbaijan's grand objective of keeping foreign boots out. Government officials and pro-government media outlets framed the agreement as recognition of Azerbaijan's regional leadership and a step toward consolidating post-conflict stability. Nonetheless, some expressed concerns regarding possible Russian reactions, particularly given Moscow's sensitivity to its waning influence over the peace process.



As China's Belt and Road Initiative faces resistance in the West, the Caucasus has become a vital alternative.



The Armenian Revolutionary Federation and other nationalist forces describe the deal as a "blow to Armenia's sovereignty." The 99-year development rights for the Trump Route are seen by critics as creeping external control over Armenian land. Commentators warn that such arrangements could erode sovereignty in practice even if legal ownership is preserved. This framing resonates with a population still reeling from the loss of Karabakh, where many feel abandoned by both Russia and the West. The Washington Declaration, while framed as a regional peace effort, has implications that

extend well beyond Armenia and Azerbaijan. For the U.S., the declaration represents a strategic re-entry into Eurasia at a time when Russia's influence is waning and Iran is under growing pressure. Over the next 10-20 years, Washington's stewardship of the peace process and its control over the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) could anchor a sustained American presence in the South Caucasus and transform the region into a strategic corridor aligned with Euro-Atlantic interests. What is striking, however, is that both Armenia and Azerbaijan have insisted that this is not about creating blocs or encircling others. Instead, they argue that Washington's role is to consolidate progress and deliver tangible benefits such as connectivity, trade, and investment that can bind the region into interdependence.

Conclusion

The Washington Joint Declaration is a turning point in the South Caucasus. It acknowledges a post-Karabakh reality and introduces a connectivity project that could reshape regional dynamics. Yet success is far from assured. The declaration's implementation depends on domestic stability in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Pashinyan's opponents are poised to denounce every compromise as treachery, potentially destabilizing his government. Moreover, external spoilers are possible. Russia and Iran, both sidelined by the Washington accords, may seek to undermine the process through diplomatic or covert means. Regional instability could spill over, particularly if the peace dividends are slow to materialize. And finally, the role of the U.S., so central in brokering the deal, raises questions about sustainability:

will American administrations over the next ninety-nine years maintain the same level of commitment?

Gulxhanim Mammadova is a Research Fellow at the Topchubashov Center, based in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Krševan Antun Dujmović is an Expert Advisor at the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO).

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IRMO

Institut za razvoj i međunarodne odnose
Institute for Development and International Relations

Lj. F. Vukotinovića 2, Zagreb, Croatia
www.irmo.hr