

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CAUCASUS TO THE UNITED STATES IN TERMS OF TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS (1992-2000)

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### Introduction

The demise of the Cold War and the disintegration of the communist bloc presented the United States with tremendous opportunities to enlarge the frontier of peace, democracy, and capitalism. This strengthened Washington's leadership worldwide. It should, nevertheless, be noted that the years 1992-2000 not only cemented the position of the United States as a global power but also compelled it to address emerging challenges. The rise of Russia and China as new power centers following the Cold War, and particularly China's economic challenge to America, pushed Washington to take several steps ahead. In response to these developments, the United States began to concentrate on building international and regional transportation corridors as a means of entrenching its position in the area and securing energy security.

The main part. The "Contract of the Century" fundamentally raised the geopolitical significance of the Caucasus region. Following the contract, the United States and other Western countries began to develop a strong interest in the region. The Caucasus region became significant not only for the extraction and transit of energy resources, but also as a critical point on international trade routes. The US interest in the region, along with its energy security policy, was directed towards opening East-West transport lines while restricting the roles of its geopolitical competitors such as Russia and Iran. To completely grasp the strategic significance of the region, there is a necessity to examine its importance in relation to transportation corridors.

Azerbaijan's geographical location, between North and South, East and West, made the country an important hub for international transportation lines. This strengthened Azerbaijan's position as a regional and global transit and logistics hub. The North-South and East-West transportation routes, in particular, boosted Azerbaijan's position in international trade, providing the country with economic and geopolitical advantages. Cargo movement across these corridors was more efficient and faster, establishing Azerbaijan as a key link in the global commerce network. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the Baku International Sea Commercial Port, and the East-West transport corridor were key infrastructure

projects that improved the speed and efficiency with which commercial goods were transported from Asia to Europe and vice versa. This corridor considerably improved Azerbaijan's involvement in the global trade network by allowing China and other Asian countries to access European markets. At the same time, the North-South transport corridor, which included the Astara-Rasht-Qazvin railway and the correspondingly developed highways, encouraged freight travel between countries spread across a broad geographical area, including Russia, Iran, and India.

Georgia's significance in terms of transportation corridors arose from its strategic geographic location and regional transit function. Georgia served as a gateway to the Caucasus and was a key component of the East-West Transport Corridor, with the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the ports of Poti and Batumi. It also contributed significantly to the delivery of Caspian region energy resources to global markets via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline and the South Caucasus Gas Pipeline. Georgia not only connected Turkey and Azerbaijan directly, but it also served as a strategic transit country, allowing China and other Asian countries to gain access to European markets.

Armenia's absence from international transport corridors stemmed primarily from its failure to restore relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. At that time, Armenia only transported cargo through Iran and Georgia. However, normalizing relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as the opening of borders, could have created conditions for Armenia to overcome regional isolation and participate in international transport networks. The creation of the Zangezur corridor, initiated by Azerbaijan, was critical for Armenia in terms of increasing its participation in regional economic cooperation and profiting from improved transit opportunities.

The North Caucasus, which serves as the southern entryway to the Russian Federation, is also at the crossroads of routes connecting Europe and Asia. Ports on the Black, Azov, and Caspian Seas, as well as railway and highway networks, strengthen the North Caucasus's position as a transit zone. The North Caucasus region also plays an important role in the transit of products between Russia, Europe, the Middle East, and the Caspian Basin.

The Caspian Basin's abundance of energy resour-

ces created numerous prospects for the Caucasus region. The entire Caucasus region had the potential to act as a transit corridor for Caspian oil and natural gas exports to regional and global markets. The region was a transit point for the Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor (TRACECA) project, which was creating a transportation artery. In May 1993, the European Union proposed the TRACECA initiative at an international summit in Brussels attended by delegates from Central Asian and South Caucasian countries. At the summit, the European Union's technical assistance program for the project was approved. This concept envisioned the creation of a transportation corridor stretching from Europe to Central Asia via the Black Sea, the South Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea. TRACECA included a number of infrastructure measures, such as the construction of road and rail links, as well as oil and gas pipelines, all aimed at reconstructing the medieval Silk Road, as well as a planned increase in exports. At the time, four unsolved armed conflicts in the Caucasus (Chechnya, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh) provided further hurdles to the corridor's operation [4].

In 1997-1998, the Caucasus region sparked widespread interest, not just for its hydrocarbon riches, but also for transportation corridor projects. Azerbaijan played a significant role in the US and European Union's East-West transport corridor idea and plans for the development of the Great Silk Road.

On April 24, 1999, a bill to restore the Great Silk Road was debated in the US Congress. These consultations were attended by the Caucasus and Central Asian countries' heads of state and foreign ministers. Senator Sam Brownback of the United States Congress spearheaded the event's organization.

Regarding the "Silk Road" concept, US President Bill Clinton briefly stated in a special letter to Senator S. Brownback on April 17, 1999, "The goal of the United States is to assist the newly independent states of the Caucasus and Central Asia. These young countries express a desire for stability, democracy, and progress. If we stand with them, we can help them succeed. The United States should continue to play an active and balanced role in the Caucasus and Central Asia, supporting the establishment of peace in Nagorno-Karabakh" [3;70].

Senator S. Brownback remarked that the "Silk Road" concept "connects Asia with Europe and the rest of the world. The countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia on the Silk Road are at a historical crossroads; they are independent; they are positioned

at the meeting point of the world's major powers; and they are wealthy in natural resources. They are one of the primary deterrents to the rise of anti-Western, belligerent fundamentalism and terrorism in Iran and other extremist governments. Most importantly, after a lengthy war with communism, the doors of this area have opened, allowing the United States to assist institutions that guarantee individual rights and help establish circumstances for the emergence of pluralistic cultures, including religious tolerance." [3;71].

It should be mentioned that the Silk Road served as an essential link between the West and Central Asia, as well as the South Caucasus. It connected the Caspian and Black Seas, running from Kazakhstan to Georgia and then into Europe. Many Caspian littoral governments benefited from US technical aid and training programs to enhance their legal systems, encouraging private investment in energy development and transportation. On September 8, 2000, a meeting on regional cooperation of countries along the Silk Road was held in New York, marking the next step in the TRACECA project's execution. The summit was coordinated by the East-West Space Sciences Center and the East-West Institute at the University of Maryland in the United States. The reasons for the United States' interest in the East-West transportation route were as follows:

- To strengthen trade links between Central Asia, Caucasus, and Europe while protecting geopolitical interests;

- To minimize the Caucasus region's dependence on Russia and Iran. The United States and the European Union utilized these initiatives as a strategic instrument to reduce Russia and Iran's influence in the Caucasus. The development of alternative routes was critical in this regard;

- To provide safe and efficient transportation. This was most commonly discussed during the period when wars in the Caucasus threatened the security of transportation corridors;

- To improve their position by entering new markets. This was vital for the region's economic development. In light of these facts, the US administration backed the implementation of projects such as Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan as part of the East-West transportation corridor. On April 15, 1999, US President Bill Clinton declared that "the opening of the Baku-Supsa line ensures the implementation of a long-desired goal: the creation of a multi-branch pipeline network to transport the Caspian region's oil and gas reserves to world markets. However, the benefits of this pipeline extend beyond the energy sector;"

- Gain control of the region's abundant oil and gas resources. The tremendous energy potential was extremely valuable not only as a source of economic revenue, but also as an instrument for geopolitical power. As an alternate energy source to Russia and the Middle East, the Caspian area had emerged as a strategic priority for US policy in the Caucasus;

- Encourage the formation of pro-American democratic nations in the Caspian region. This program aimed not only to secure regional peace and growth, but also to safeguard and expand its geopolitical interests.

The Trans-Caspian Pipeline was one of the initiatives developed by the United States in the Caucasus during the 1990s. The project aimed to connect the Caspian region's energy resources to Western markets, ensure energy security, and contribute to the regional countries' economic development. The Trans-Caspian pipeline was designed primarily to transfer Turkmen gas from the Caspian Sea to Europe via Azerbaijan. The project aimed to balance Russia and Iran's dominance in the energy market and diversify energy channels. The project was not fully executed due to a variety of political, economic, and technological factors. Resistance from Russia and Iran, as well as confusion over the legal status of the Caspian Sea, was a major impediment to the project's advancement [5].

The Trans-Caspian East-West International Transport Corridor is a multimodal transportation corridor that connects the People's Republic of China to the European Union via Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey. It is an alternative to both the Northern Route (China-Kazakhstan-Russia-Belarus-Europe) and the Suez Canal sea route. The Middle Corridor begins at the China-Kazakhstan border, travels through Kazakhstan, and continues over the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan and Georgia. From Georgia, this corridor runs in two directions: across Turkey to Europe and across the Black Sea to Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria [2].

Conclusion. Following the Cold War, the United States' worldwide leadership strengthened, and new threats emerged, leading to the growth of its global and regional geopolitical interests. The Caucasus region attracted the interest of the US, particularly given its strategic location at the intersection of energy resources and international trade routes. Infrastructure projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline made the region a vital link in the movement of commerce cargo between Asia and Europe. The

United States also wanted to ensure that the Caucasus region remained free of Russian and Iranian influence. In this context, the US-backed Silk Road and Trans-Caspian pipeline projects were critical initiatives aimed at connecting the region's energy resources with global markets. Through these initiatives, the United States helped to promote democratic and pro-Western administrations throughout the region. Additionally, the United States actively participated in assuring the security of these projects and expanding access to new markets. The marketing of the Caspian Sea's oil resources to global markets was especially important. Equally significant was the protection of the economic interests of US and Western firms in the region.

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### SUMMARY

The new geopolitical environment that arose in the Caucasus region following the demise of the Soviet Union presented a number of strategic opportunities for the United States. This circumstance prompted official Washington to take significant steps to improve its economic and political ties with the region. Using the Caucasus' natural and geographical advantages, the US began to support the development of a number of vital transportation corridors. The Caucasus's advantageous geographi-



cal location for multiple transportation lines made the region a transit point between the East and the West, which became a significant factor for the United States. In this new geopolitical climate, one of the US priorities was the establishment of an East-West transportation route and the reconstruction of the Great Silk Road. The rebuilding of the Great Silk Road aims to promote commercial flows, improve access to energy resources, and deepen ties between regional states. The Trans-Caspian transport corridor was one of the major initiatives funded by the United States in the early 1990s. This project highlighted the importance of the Caucasus and Caspian region in the trade and energy industries. By completing the project, the US hoped to diversify energy channels in the region and undercut Russia's and Iran's positions.

**Keywords:** *USA, transport corridors, Silk Road, Azerbaijan, Georgia, North Caucasus.*

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### **Nəqliyyat dəhlizləri baxımından Qafqazın ABŞ üçün əhəmiyyəti (1992-2000) XÜLASƏ**

SSRİ-nin dağılmasından sonra Qafqaz regionunda yaranan yeni geosiyasi mühit ABŞ üçün müxtəlif strateji imkanlar yaratdı. Bu vəziyyət, rəsmi Vaşinqtonun öz iqtisadi və siyasi maraqlarını bölgədə daha da möhkəmləndirmək üçün mühüm addımlar atmasına səbəb oldu. ABŞ, Qafqazın təbii və coğrafi üstünlüklərindən istifadə edərək, burada bir sıra strateji nəqliyyat dəhlizlərinin inkişafını təşviq etməyə başladı. Qafqazın müxtəlif nəqliyyat dəhlizləri üçün əlverişli coğrafi mövqeyi, regionu Şərq və Qərb arasında bir keçid nöqtəsi halına gətirdi və bu, ABŞ üçün əhəmiyyətli bir amil oldu. Bu yeni geosiyasi şəraitdə, ABŞ-nin prioritet məsələlərindən biri Şərq-Qərb nəqliyyat dəhlizinin yaradılması və Böyük İpək Yolunun bərpası ilə bağlı layihələr oldu. Böyük İpək Yolunun bərpası, həm də ticarət axınlarını artırmaq, enerji resurslarına çıxışı asanlaşdırmaq və regiondakı müxtəlif dövlətlər arasındakı əlaqələri gücləndirmək məqsədi daşıyırdı. 1990-cı illərin əvvəllərində ABŞ-nin dəstəklədiyi əhəmiyyətli layihələrdən biri də Transxəzər nəqliyyat dəhlizinin qurulması idi. Bu layihə, Qafqazın və Xəzər regionunun ticarət və enerji sahələrindəki mühüm

rolunu vurğulayan bir addım idi. Layihənin reallaşdırılması ilə ABŞ, bölgədəki enerji marşrutlarını diversifikasiya etməyə və Rusiya və İranın mövqeyini zəiflətməyə çalışırdı.

**Açar sözlər:** *ABŞ, nəqliyyat dəhlizləri, İpək yolu, Azərbaycan, Gürcüstan, Şimali Qafqaz.*

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### **Значение Кавказа для США с точки зрения транспортных коридоров (1992-2000) РЕЗЮМЕ**

Новая геополитическая обстановка, возникшая в Кавказском регионе после распада Советского Союза, предоставила ряд стратегических возможностей для Соединенных Штатов. Это обстоятельство побудило официальный Вашингтон предпринять существенные шаги для улучшения своих экономических и политических связей с регионом. Используя природные и географические преимущества Кавказа, США начали поддерживать развитие ряда жизненно важных транспортных коридоров. Выгодное географическое положение Кавказа для многочисленных транспортных линий сделало регион транзитным пунктом между Востоком и Западом, что стало значимым фактором для Соединенных Штатов. В этом новом геополитическом климате одним из приоритетов США стало создание транспортного маршрута Восток-Запад и реконструкция Великого Шелкового пути. Восстановление Великого Шелкового пути направлено на содействие торговому потоку, улучшение доступа к энергетическим ресурсам и углубление связей между государствами региона. Транскаспийский транспортный коридор был одной из основных инициатив, финансируемых Соединенными Штатами в начале 1990-х годов. Этот проект подчеркнул важность Кавказа и Каспийского региона в торговле и энергетической промышленности. Завершив проект, США надеялись диверсифицировать энергетические каналы в регионе и ослабить позиции России и Ирана.

**Ключевые слова:** *США, транспортные коридоры, Шелковый путь, Азербайджан, Грузия, Северный Кавказ.*