

# TRIPP and Anaklia

## The New Architecture of Logistics in the South Caucasus

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The South Caucasus today is a space where the interests of major powers intersect. Against the backdrop of ongoing conflicts, sanctions, and crises of trust around the world, foreign policy models based on flexibility, pragmatism, and strategic autonomy are attracting particular attention. In this context, Azerbaijan’s experience—as a state seeking to shape its own course of action and vision of regional architecture in a complex environment of major-power rivalry—while maintaining the ability to influence broader processes—is especially relevant.

One of the clearest examples of this approach is Azerbaijan’s role in advancing the Trans-Caspian East-West International Transport Corridor (hereafter, the Middle Corridor). Its development is a long-term process that requires not only investment in physical infrastructure—seaports, railways, highways, and air cargo transportation—but also sustained diplomatic effort and workable relations with neighboring states to the west and the east. Azerbaijan’s connectivity strategy therefore represents a multi-track effort that combines infrastructure building with political and diplomatic groundwork. This strategy is already producing visible results in cargo volumes and corridor functionality. At the same time, current expansion plans indicate that Azerbaijan aims not only to participate in the corridor but also to shape its future scale and operational capacity.

At the regional level, the end of the conflict over Karabakh and the ongoing peace agenda have opened the possibility of rethinking connectivity across the South Caucasus. The projected impact of an expected peace agreement goes beyond bilateral

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relations and has implications for the transport geography and connectivity architecture in the Silk Road region. This emerging connectivity agenda is also part of a renewed great-power interest in the region, including a more visible U.S. role in supporting new formats and routes. The U.S.-backed Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP)—a proposed transit corridor that would pass through Armenia and link Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhchivan, facilitating transit between Central Asia and Europe while bypassing Russia and Iran—would add a new land-based routing option to existing cargo routes and could reshape cargo flows, transit incentives, and the distribution of leverage among regional actors. TRIPP should therefore be understood not as a stand-alone infrastructure project; but as part of a broader reconfiguration of east-west linkages through the South Caucasus, shaped by both regional developments and external strategic inputs.

This IDD Analytical Policy Paper examines the reconfiguration of logistics systems in the South Caucasus and offers projections on their likely development and expansion. It argues that the region is entering a new phase of transport connectivity development marked by the diversification of routes—including the prospective TRIPP—and by expanded transit capacity through the Black Sea via the Anaklia Deep Sea Port project. Using TRIPP as an analytical lens, the paper assesses how a prospective new route could affect Middle Corridor routing options and reshape the region’s connectivity landscape, particularly with respect to Georgia’s role in the Silk Road region’s transit architecture. Its central proposition is that although TRIPP may alter the routing architecture of the South Caucasus and affect transit volumes and distribution decisions, it does not diminish Georgia’s established role in regional logistics.

Georgia’s role in the Middle Corridor will remain strategically important because it provides maritime access that a purely land-based corridor such as TRIPP simply cannot replace. From this perspective, the Anaklia Deep Sea Port project is a major factor in expanding the Middle Corridor’s capacity and in turning the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway into a scalable route for Middle Corridor traffic. The paper therefore proposes a broader understanding of the Middle Corridor that treats BTK and TRIPP not as competing or mutually exclusive routes but as complementary arteries within a wider Silk Road region connectivity and logistics network, making the Middle Corridor more competitive, diversified, and resilient. This vision points to Georgia as an indispensable platform integrating a complex logistics system consisting of multiple layers: rail and road infrastructure, ports, energy pipelines, and digital fiber routes.

The paper concludes by proposing that the Middle Corridor evolve from a transport-and-trade route model—whether for Chinese goods or Central Asian raw materials, with earnings generated through container, bulk, and oil transit fees across rail, sea, and port operators—toward a “production/value-creation corridor model,” in which improved connectivity enables industrial development and manufacturing activity along the route. In practical terms, this would mean prioritizing investment in industrial nodes in both parts of the Silk Road region (i.e., Central Asia and the South Caucasus), with a view to

using logistics networks to move intermediate and finished goods produced in these regions to European markets.

## TRIPP

Like the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, often understood as Europe’s pivot from protracted war toward a negotiated interstate order based on sound balance-of-power principles, the U.S.-brokered Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Agreement of August 2025 seeks to close a decades-long conflict and reset the rules of coexistence around borders, sovereign authority, and connectivity. The agreement included the construction of TRIPP, a land-based analogue of the Strait of Malacca: a short connector that compresses distance and concentrates strategic leverage by channeling high-value flows through a managed gateway. Beyond its transport logic, TRIPP has also been interpreted as a marker of renewed U.S. strategic engagement in the South Caucasus.

In terms of strategic logic, the foundation for TRIPP was laid in the [10 November 2020 trilateral ceasefire statement](#) between Armenia and Azerbaijan and brokered by Russia. Article 9 of that statement envisaged the restoration of regional transport links and specified that Armenia would guarantee the security of transit connections between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, with oversight by Russia’s FSB Border Guard Service. Yet nearly five years later, this provision had still not produced an operational route—illustrating a recurring dynamic in the Silk Road region, where political considerations continue to outweigh economic calculations in shaping regional outcomes.

In Armenian political and public discourse, the term “Zangezur corridor” has repeatedly been rejected in favor of formulations emphasizing full sovereignty, jurisdiction, and reciprocity, including through Armenia’s “Crossroads of Peace” narrative. Actors within the world of the EU, for their part, have likewise expressed concerns about sovereignty, emphasizing that connectivity discussions should not imply extraterritorial arrangements. Such concerns were unfounded, however. In June 2022, the spokesperson for European Council President Charles Michel stated that both sides had confirmed there were “no extraterritorial claims” related to future transport infrastructure.

Against this backdrop, recent EU-Azerbaijan [discussions](#) about the possible inclusion of the Zangezur corridor in the EU’s Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) are noteworthy as evidence that the connectivity agenda is being reframed in light of U.S. backing.

TRIPP’s practical significance lies in the fact that it would add an additional land-based connection to the South Caucasus transport system, strengthening the Middle Corridor. The more alternative links a region has, the stronger the conditions for competition, route choice, and risk management. In the South Caucasus context, a new Armenia-based alignment would reduce the degree to which east-west land connectivity is channeled

through a single corridor logic. This does not automatically lead to a TRIPP-versus-BTK contest over cargo or influence, but it does reconfigure the Middle Corridor from a single corridor into a network with a more diversified connectivity architecture.

As implementation of the TRIPP project advances, preparatory work is moving forward in parallel across the corridor's main segments. On the Azerbaijani side, the Horadiz-Aghband railway is expected to be completed by the end of 2026, which will [link](#) to the 42-kilometer TRIPP segment that would run through Armenia. That Armenian section is [expected](#) to begin construction in late 2026. Once completed, it will represent a permanent rail connection from mainland Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan and onward into Türkiye's network as part of an international corridor. Azerbaijan has also reported on the reconstruction and modernization of the 188-kilometer Nakhchivan rail section. On the Turkish side, the under-construction Kars-Iğdır-Aralık-Dilucu railway (approximately 224 kilometers) is intended to provide the connection at the Nakhchivan border. Once completed and operationalized, the corridor's rail configuration is projected to have an initial freight potential of around 15 million tons.

TRIPP enters a Silk Road region connectivity landscape already shaped by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with its broad portfolio of railways, ports, pipelines, and associated logistics infrastructure. By adding another land-based east-west linkage, TRIPP contributes to the wider trend toward route diversification and risk mitigation in regional logistics—that is, the collective effort to reduce excessive dependence on any single set of transit geographies. This logic has gained further momentum amid the 2026 U.S.-Israel war against Iran and the resulting disruption risks across regional transport and energy networks. At the same time, TRIPP's strategic purpose of rebalancing connectivity also means that the corridor may itself become more politically exposed, as elements in Tehran have rhetorically framed such routes as detrimental to Iran's economic and security leverage in the South Caucasus.

## *Anaklia Port*

Georgia's economic growth and strategic relevance have long been tied to its corridor role: pipelines, highways, and railways crossing Georgian territory have enabled Caspian energy and trade links to reach markets in Türkiye and the European continent. Today, Tbilisi is seeking to consolidate and upgrade that role through an ambitious development agenda that positions Georgia as a gateway between Europe and Asia, with infrastructure at its core. This agenda includes the Anaklia Deep Sea Port, the planned new Tbilisi Airport at Vasiani, the East-West Highway, railway modernization (including its portion of the the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) line), and the development of modern logistics centers.

The modernization and scalability of Georgia's rail backbone, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, form a core part of this agenda. In particular, the [latest modernization](#) of the

184-kilometer Georgian section has been treated as a priority given the route's challenging terrain, including mountainous and forested areas, and the operational delays it historically generated: freight delivery from Baku to Kars often exceeded 70 hours, with winter snowfall causing even longer disruptions. The upgrade, financed by Azerbaijan with more than \$100 million allocated, was completed in 2024. Following this modernization, BTK's annual freight capacity increased to [about 5 million tons](#), and official projections envisage expansion to roughly [17 million tons by 2034](#). These upgrades illustrate the deepening of investment and coordination across Middle Corridor countries, with Azerbaijan playing a particularly important role in enabling corridor functionality and scaling volumes.

In this evolving landscape, Anaklia is emerging as the next strategic symbol of Georgia's connectivity agenda, much as BTK previously functioned as a flagship marker of Georgia's corridor role. The Anaklia Deep Sea Port is a capacity-scaling gateway for the Middle Corridor's Black Sea access. With [Phase 1](#) planned at around 600,000 containers per year and the first ships expected by 2029, officials link the project to the need to accommodate larger vessels. The Georgian prime minister has likewise [emphasized](#) Anaklia's strategic role as more than port infrastructure, describing it as "a platform for scaling up transit volumes, attracting global shipping lines, and reinforcing the Black Sea's role as a competitive gateway between Europe and Asia," while stressing that trade facilitation and predictable cross-border flows are as important as the physical buildout.

A Georgian senior policy expert interviewed for this paper by the author describes Anaklia's significance as having "greater political weight than economic value," with transit framed primarily as a strategic asset rather than an economic end in itself. At the same time, the expert cautions against treating Anaklia as a standalone solution, pointing to structural constraints such as limited Caspian throughput, difficult Caucasus terrain, and the cost-and time profile of multimodal shipment, all of which will continue to shape the corridor's competitiveness even if port capacity expands. The same logic suggests that supplementary routes within the Middle Corridor framework should be treated as enhancements to overall transit potential rather than as internal competitors.

## *From Corridor to Network*

Transport infrastructure is called a network for a reason: the more diverse the connections that cover a given region, the stronger the conditions for competition. This allows a wider range of companies to operate in different directions and can improve tariff conditions. The conflict over Ukraine created a need to act more proactively, but many of the grand transport development plans visible today were in fact laid out decades ago. What has changed is the urgency, the scale of demand, and the geopolitical premium now placed on route optionality.

Taken together, Anaklia and TRIPP can be read as two parallel capacity expansions within the Middle Corridor architecture, each shaped by different external vectors: Anaklia is increasingly associated with [China-linked investment interest](#), while TRIPP is explicitly U.S.-backed. Importantly, however, this does not reduce the region to a passive arena of great-power rivalry. Rather, it creates an opportunity for South Caucasus states to translate competing external interests into infrastructure that improves corridor capacity and optionality on terms that serve local economic objectives.

It has long been assumed that Georgia's competitiveness as a transit hub depends exclusively on sustaining speed, predictability, and reliability through continuous upgrades, maintenance, and effective corridor governance. That view underestimates Georgia's significant assets, including established transit infrastructure, strong relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan, and economic sectors integrated into Western markets.

By contrast, TRIPP's full rail functionality depends on completing and operationalizing several unfinished segments, including the Armenian and Turkish connecting railways, as well as the border-management and regulatory arrangements required for uninterrupted transit. The constraint is not purely technical: for decades, Armenia's borders with both Türkiye and Azerbaijan have been closed, meaning that the corridor's activation hinges as much on political normalization and workable cross-border governance as on infrastructure. Even if it becomes usable by the end of this decade, TRIPP is therefore more likely to function initially as a complementary route—adding optionality and incremental capacity—than as an immediate substitute for Georgia-centered transit. A further constraint is TRIPP's volatile security environment, with the 2026 Iran war heightening sensitivity around the infrastructure of such strategic significance.

If the key developments discussed in this paper materialize—BTK capacity expansion, completion of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port, and the operationalization of TRIPP—the South Caucasus could gradually move toward a model of regional operation in which coordination in trade and economic affairs is central. Connectivity projects would then increase regional throughput, resilience, and optionality, collectively enhancing the region's transit capabilities by creating a more robust rail system capable of absorbing growing flows—provided that political agreements are translated into operational rules and predictable cross-border governance.

### *From Transit Corridor to Economic Corridor and Beyond*

At present, the Middle Corridor generates economic benefits for the states it traverses through transit-related rents and services: rail and port fees, logistics and forwarding, warehousing, and employment linked to these operations. Since its establishment, corridor states have pursued reforms in infrastructure, trade facilitation, and supranational coordination in order to increase these gains, including through the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), which aims to align the

actions of corridor participants and support more competitive and streamlined operations along the route.

As [World Bank analysis](#) also suggests, the Middle Corridor should not be viewed only as an Asia-Europe land bridge. It should also be seen as a long-needed platform for intra-regional trade and broader economic gains, with important implications for corridor economies and regional geopolitics. This perspective shifts the assessment of corridor success away from a narrow focus on transcontinental volumes and reduced transit times toward a broader question: Do corridor upgrades expand trade volumes, diversify markets, and attract investment into sectors located along the route?

Corridor-development advocates are clear on this conceptual evolution: transit corridors should grow into economic corridors that are not merely routes linking large economic centers across a defined geography, but spaces that generate greater value by integrating transport and logistics upgrades with trade facilitation, policy coordination, and investment opportunities. Middle Corridor states have already adopted measures consistent with this “economic corridor” approach, such as the signing of the 2022-2027 Roadmap between Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye aimed at upgrading the corridor and coordinating the removal of bottlenecks.

This IDD Analytical Policy Brief proposes a further-looking vision for the Middle Corridor: moving beyond an “economic corridor” understood mainly in terms of improved logistics to a production/value-creation corridor model, in which connectivity enables industrial development and manufacturing activity along the route. This approach implies prioritizing investment not only in infrastructure—ports, railways, and highways—but also in industrial development in the Silk Road region, so that improved logistics can be used to export intermediate and finished goods competitively to European markets. It also changes the metric of success: the Middle Corridor should be assessed not only by throughput volumes and transit times, but by whether it enables industrial upgrading, supplier ecosystems, and participation in value chains within corridor economies.

A Georgian senior policy expert interviewed for this paper captures the underlying logic directly: for Central Asian states to be integrated sustainably, they must “evolve into manufacturing states rather than remaining solely exporters of energy resources,” and the Caucasus-Central Asia space must become increasingly attractive to European markets through “value-added goods resulting from industrial manufacturing processes.” The same interview underscores why a production-oriented trajectory matters under the region’s structural constraints—limited Caspian throughput, difficult Caucasus terrain, and the cost and time profile of multimodal shipments—all of which suggest that long-term competitiveness cannot rest on transit rents alone.