



By: TA | AP Insight

# Is America pushing Russia out of the Caucasus?



The agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan is a geopolitical blow to Russia, which has had a dominant influence in the region for decades.

The leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan shook hands Friday at a White House peace summit before signing an agreement aimed at ending decades of conflict.

President Donald Trump was in the middle as Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan flanked him on either side. As the two extended their arms in front of Trump to shake hands, the U.S. leader reached up and clasped his hands around theirs.

The two countries in the South Caucasus signed agreements with each other and the U.S. that will reopen key transportation routes while allowing the U.S. to seize on Russia's declining influence in the region.

The deal includes an agreement that will create a major transit corridor to be named the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, the White House said.

Trump said at the White House on Friday that naming the route after him was "a great honor for me" but "I didn't ask for this." A senior administration official, on a call before the event with reporters, said it was the Armenians who suggested the name.

Trump has sought to be known as a peacemaker and made no secret of the fact that he covets a Nobel Peace Prize. Friday's signing adds to a series of peace and economic agreements brokered by the U.S. this year.

Both leaders said the breakthrough was made possible by Trump and his team.

"We are laying a foundation to write a better story than the one we had in the past," Pashinyan said, calling the agreement a "significant milestone."

"President Trump in six months did a miracle," Aliyev said.

Trump remarked on how long the conflict went on between the two countries. "Thirty-five years they fought, and now they're friends and they're going to be friends a long time," he said.

That route will connect Azerbaijan and its autonomous Nakhchivan exclave, which are separated by a 32-kilometer-wide (20-mile-wide) patch of Armenian territory. The demand from Azerbaijan had held up peace talks in the past.

For Azerbaijan, a major producer of oil and gas, the route also provides a more direct link to Turkey and onward to Europe.

## Trump indicated he'd like to visit the route

Trump indicated he'd like to visit the route, saying, "We're going to have to get over there."

Asked how he feels about lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Trump said "very confident."

Aliyev and Pashinyan on Friday joined a growing list of foreign leaders and other officials who have said Trump should receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in helping ease long-running conflicts across the globe.

The peace deal between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda helped end the decadeslong conflict in eastern **Congo**, and the U.S. mediated a **ceasefire** between India and Pakistan, while Trump **intervened** in clashes between Cambodia and Thailand by threatening to withhold trade agreements with both countries if their fighting continued.

Yet peace deals in Gaza and Ukraine have been elusive.

## US takes advantage of Russia's waning influence

The signing of a deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan, both former Soviet republics, also strikes a geopolitical blow to their former imperial master, Russia.

Throughout the nearly four-decade conflict, Moscow played mediator to expand its clout in the strategic South Caucasus region, but its influence **waned** quickly after it launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The Trump-brokered deal would allow the U.S. to deepen its reach in the region as Moscow retreats, senior U.S. administration officials said.



*The Trump administration began engaging with Armenia and Azerbaijan in earnest earlier this year, when Steve Witkoff met with Aliyev in Baku*

The Trump administration began engaging with Armenia and Azerbaijan in earnest earlier this year, when Trump's key diplomatic envoy, Steve Witkoff, met with Aliyev in Baku and started to discuss what a senior administration official called a "regional reset."

Negotiations over who will develop the Trump Route — which will eventually include a rail line, oil and gas pipelines, and fiber optic lines — will likely begin next week, and at least nine developers have expressed interest already, according to the senior administration official, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity.

Separate from the joint agreement, both Armenia and Azerbaijan signed deals with the United States meant to bolster cooperation in energy, technology and the economy, the White House said.

Trump previewed much of Friday's plan in a social media post Thursday evening, in which he said the agreements would "fully unlock the potential" of the South Caucasus region.

"Many Leaders have tried to end the War, with no success, until now, thanks to 'TRUMP,'" Trump said on his Truth Social site.

## The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict has lasted for decades

The two nations were locked in **conflict** for nearly four decades as they fought for control of the Karabakh region, known internationally as Nagorno-Karabakh.

The area was largely populated by Armenians during the Soviet era but is located within Azerbaijan.

The two nations battled for control of the region through multiple violent clashes that left tens of thousands of people dead over the decades, all while international mediation efforts failed.

**Russia stood back when Azerbaijan reclaimed control of Karabakh in the September 2023 offensive, angering Armenia**

Most recently, Azerbaijan **reclaimed** all of Karabakh in 2023 and had been in talks with Armenia to normalize ties. Azerbaijan's insistence on a land bridge to Nakhchivan had been a major sticking point, because while Azerbaijan did not trust Armenia to control the so-called Zangezur corridor, Armenia resisted control by a third party because it viewed it as a breach of sovereignty.

But the prospect of closer ties with the United States, as well as being able to move in and out of the landlocked nation more freely without having to access Georgia or Iran, helped entice Armenia on the broader agreement, according to U.S. officials.

Meanwhile, Russia stood back when Azerbaijan reclaimed control of Karabakh in the September 2023 offensive, angering Armenia, which has moved to shed Russian influence and turn westward. Azerbaijan, emboldened by its victory in Karabakh, also has become increasingly defiant in its relations with Moscow.