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The Middle Corridor: A New Silk Road for Global Trade

The Silk Road has gained enormous importance in recent years as it connects two of the world's most important regions: the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic basins. Several routes already attempt to connect these basins, and one of the latest, and one that promises to become one of the most important, is the Middle Corridor.

The Middle Corridor, which links China with Europe through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, and crosses the Caspian Sea, also acquires strategic importance considering the complex geopolitical situation that has emerged in the region in recent years.

This article will examine the importance of the Middle Corridor in the current international context and the prospects for its future development.

1. What is the Middle Corridor?

To connect Asia with Europe, and to link China with Europe, several routes have been developed in recent years that cross the continent, apart from the traditional maritime routes that go through the South China Sea, connecting to the Indian Ocean via the Strait of Malacca, and then reaching the Suez Canal. Although lately there has been talk of another maritime route that would go through the Arctic, a route made possible by





global warming. However, this latter route, by crossing the territory of the Russian Federation, also becomes complicated in the current geopolitical environment.

The land routes that cross the continent are mainly grouped under the so-called China-Europe Express Railway, which has several variants: The northern route, which goes from China through Mongolia or Kazakhstan and crosses Russia to reach Europe; The Middle Corridor Route, also called the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), runs from China through Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan (crossing the Caspian Sea), and from there to Georgia and finally to Türkiye and Europe. The Middle Corridor is also considered to potentially include the route from China through Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan, from there to Turkmenistan, across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, then Georgia and Türkiye¹. In some publications, this route through Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan is also called the Southern Corridor².

There has also been recent talk of another initiative called the International North-South Transport Corridor

(INSTC), a 7,200 km multimodal network that includes maritime, rail, and road routes for freight transport, running from India, through Iran, then Azerbaijan, and reaching Russia.

The main advantage of the Middle Corridor is that it avoids going through Russia and Iran. Due to the war in Ukraine since 2022, Russia is subject to economic sanctions, as is Iran (the latter due to its uranium enrichment program).

2. Importance of the Middle Corridor

While it is true that, according to some statistics, the cost of transport via the Middle Corridor is still slightly higher than that of the Northern Route or Northern Corridor, the possibility of the Middle Corridor becoming a particularly important route is increasingly becoming a reality. Currently, as mentioned, transportation costs are still not competitive in the Middle Corridor. According to the Asia House research centre, "the cost of transporting a 40-foot equivalent container along the Middle Corridor ranges from US\$3,500 to US\$4,500, compared to US\$2,800 to US\$3,200 along the Northern



Corridor. This disparity is due to the infrastructure limitations of the Middle Corridor and the logistical challenges presented by its geographical location, which crosses the Caspian and Black Seas, several countries, and mountain ranges. The multimodal nature of transit along the Middle Corridor exacerbates inefficiencies in cargo transfer and processing, which increases costs.”³

But geopolitical tensions are making transit along the Northern Corridor increasingly complicated. For example, for 13 days, until September 25th, the train that travels along the Northern Corridor, which crosses Belarus upon reaching Russia to continue to Poland and Europe, was paralyzed because Poland closed its border with Belarus on September 12th due to joint Russian Belarusian military exercises⁴.

Events such as this, and the economic sanctions imposed on Russia for the invasion of Ukraine, as previously mentioned, are leading to the search for alternative routes. Transit along the Middle Corridor is increasing, and according to one report, “in 2024, 827 freight trains travelled from China to Azerbaijan, transporting approximately 378,000 tons of goods. This represents an 86% increase compared to the previous year.”⁵

But obviously, the Middle Corridor is not just an alternative for transporting goods from China to Europe. It is estimated that this Corridor would be a route that would help boost trade between Kazakhstan,

Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, and between these countries and Europe. In particular, the BTK railway, whose initials stand for Baku (in Azerbaijan), T for Tbilisi (in Georgia), and T for Türkiye, a railway that opened in 2017 but was modernized in 2024, offers a route that will undoubtedly increase trade between these four countries and throughout Central Asia in general.

Likewise, this Middle Corridor is expected to stimulate investment in the South Caucasus region and Central Asia in general. These areas not only have a significant population but also vast natural resources, including energy resources such as oil and natural gas, and critical minerals such as uranium.

3. Future of the Middle Corridor

Undoubtedly, the importance of the Indo-Pacific, Central Asian, and Euro-Atlantic regions, as previously mentioned, will increase over time. In short, as several have stated, the Eurasian region is acquiring such importance that⁶, for example, China announced and is implementing its Silk Road initiative in 2013 to link Europe and Asia.

Azerbaijan’s role in the Middle Corridor is vital for its success. As practically the central node on this route, with a balanced foreign policy and considerable political and economic stability, Azerbaijan is fulfilling the role of a bridge between the West and the East. The country has also been investing heavily in transport, logistics,



and energy infrastructure in recent years. For example, the port of Alat near Baku has become one of the most modern maritime centres in the region, with the capacity to handle millions of tons of cargo annually⁷.

It should also be mentioned that the peace agreement reached between Azerbaijan and Armenia this year, which further strengthens the atmosphere of stability in the region, offers the possibility that the so-called Zangezur Corridor, connecting Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan region (located south of Armenia) and Turkiye, could provide a new transport route and could also become part of the Middle Corridor. This area gained international relevance when, in August 2025, the project was presented at the White House as the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" (TRIPP)⁸.

Finally, the increased trade generated by this Middle Corridor is expected to foster stronger ties between the countries of the region, attract more investment, and generate greater economic integration. This is especially important in an environment where protectionist voices are rising globally and where unilateralism seeks to prevail over the openness and cooperation demonstrated, for example, by the countries involved in the implementation of the Middle Corridor. 🌟

Literature:

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