

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The Geopolitical Significance of the Middle Corridor in Eurasian Politics

Sultanli Sadig¹

¹ Science Expert;
University of Opole Global Studies; Republic of Poland

Abstract. In the modern world, the Middle Corridor stands out as an important Eurasian transit corridor linking China and Europe via Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus, and Türkiye. Growing geopolitical tensions, changes in supply chains, and the shift in global trade flows make this route increasingly relevant in comparison to other Northern and Southern corridors. In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the geopolitical importance of the Middle Corridor in Eurasian politics of today. The analysis of the interest of China, the EU, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Central Asian countries in the Middle Corridor would be conducted based on qualitative methods and comparative analysis of transport corridors. The research reveals that the Middle Corridor ensures better connectivity in the region, lowers the risk of dependence on the transit routes used, and builds economic and geopolitical resilience. However, at the same time, this transport route experiences some infrastructural issues, regulatory fragmentation, and geopolitical competition between the great powers. Despite all difficulties, the continuous investments in modernization of the transport infrastructure, digitization of logistics, and establishment of regional cooperation frameworks show that the Middle Corridor has a high potential for further development.

Keywords: *Middle Corridor, Eurasian geopolitics, connectivity, transport corridors, Belt and Road Initiative.*

Introduction

Over the past years, the interdependence between the world markets has brought into focus the issue of international transports and corridors. Given the increasingly strong economic relations between Asia and Europe, there is a need for diversified, effective and reliable transport network infrastructure. Under these circumstances, the Middle Corridor, or Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) has turned out to be one of the most important connectivity projects in Eurasia.

The Middle Corridor connects China and Europe through Central Asia, Caspian Sea, South Caucasus and Türkiye as an alternative transport route. The relevance of the Middle

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Corridor has risen due to geopolitical tension, supply chain interruptions and the need for diversification of transport routes. It was the COVID-19 outbreak and the war between Russia and Ukraine that highlighted the weaknesses of current transport routes and made countries look for alternative ones.

Apart from economic significance, the Middle Corridor also bears significant geopolitical importance. Firstly, it helps improve regional connectivity and increases the strategic importance of transit countries like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Türkiye; secondly, it is helpful in improving economic relations between Europe and Asia. Thirdly, being part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, it has also been increasingly noticed by European Union and other international actors interested in diversifying trade routes and avoiding traditional corridors.

As the Middle Corridor gains more importance, it has also started attracting the attention of researchers as a subject of Eurasian geopolitics. This paper will explore geopolitical implications of the Middle Corridor. More specifically, the focus will be on regional connectivity, economic integration, and strategic competition of key actors. The study will rely on qualitative approach, with document analysis and corridor comparison.

2. The Middle Corridor: Concept and Strategic Importance

Middle Corridor is also referred to as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), and it constitutes one of the connectivity initiatives connecting East Asia and Europe. It represents a multimodal transportation system consisting of rail, marine, and road transport networks running from China via Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye into Europe.

In particular, development of this route has been fostered by the emergence of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, which has contributed to infrastructure development, as well as modernization of logistic and customs activities. Due to its geographical location, the Middle Corridor can be viewed as an alternative to Northern Corridor passing via Russia and to International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Geopolitical significance of the Middle Corridor does not only include transport but diversification of routes and decrease in dependence on old routes and networks exposed to geopolitical problems and regional confrontations. Russia-Ukraine war particularly emphasized vulnerabilities of

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

traditional logistics chains and created interest towards alternative trade routes between Europe and Asia. In result, amount of goods moved along the Middle Corridor increased noticeably in recent years.



Figure 1
Map of the Middle Corridor

Source: Adapted from the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) Association (2025) and European Commission (2025)

Also, geopolitical significance of the Middle Corridor is confirmed by major infrastructure projects like Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, Port of Baku Alat, Aktau and Kuryk ports in Kazakhstan, as well as logistics centers in Central Asia and South Caucasus.

For transit countries like Azerbaijan and Türkiye, Middle Corridor means great chance for increasing their role of regional logistics hubs. In addition, this project contributes to economic cooperation and integration of Central Asian, South Caucasian, and European countries. In terms of development of global trade relations, Middle Corridor is turning into increasingly significant tool of economic and geopolitical influence.

3. Geopolitical Significance of the Middle Corridor

3.1. China's Belt and Road Initiative and the Middle Corridor

Geopolitical significance of the Middle Corridor is strongly associated with China's Belt and Road Initiative

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

(BRI) project aimed at increasing infrastructure connectivity between Asia and Europe. Geopolitical instabilities and interruptions in traditional transit corridors in Eurasia made the Middle Corridor more appealing as an alternative route for trade and transportation.

For China, it helps to diversify export routes, ensures the stability of the supply chain, and deepens economic collaboration with the countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus.

3.2. Azerbaijan as a Strategic Transit Hub

Azerbaijan holds a significant place in the Middle Corridor because of its particular geographic location, which makes it an intersection of Europe and Asia. It is considered an important link between Central Asia and the South Caucasus region along with Europe. Major developments in infrastructure, such as the construction of the Port of Baku at Alat and the railway Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, have increased the transiting ability of Azerbaijan.

Moreover, Azerbaijan has recently been using transport diplomacy in order to increase its geopolitical power in the region. By developing and supporting initiatives for regional connection, Azerbaijan has significantly expanded its influence. Thus, the importance of the Middle Corridor has contributed to this process as well.

3.3. Türkiye and European Connectivity

Türkiye is the western entrance to the Middle Corridor and an essential link between the Eurasian and European marketplaces due to its transport connections. In terms of transport infrastructure, Türkiye allows transferring cargo from the South Caucasus to Europe through railways, highways, and ports. Furthermore, it considers the corridor to be an effective tool to become a logistic and trading center in the region.

The partnership between Azerbaijan and Türkiye has had a positive impact on the development of the corridor.

3.4. European Union Interests and the Global Gateway Initiative

In recent times, the EU has shown increasing interest in the Middle Corridor through its attempts to diversify transport corridors and enhance economic ties with Central Asia and the South Caucasus countries. The Global Gateway Initiative is designed by the EU to finance sustainable infrastructure development to enhance connections between Europe and its key partners.

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

From the point of view of geopolitics, the corridor provides the EU with the chance to decrease reliance on conventional transport corridors while gaining better access to energy sources, vital raw materials, and new markets. Therefore, the Middle Corridor is seen as an essential part of Eurasian connectivity for European organizations.

3.5. Strategic Interests of Key Actors

The geopolitical significance of the Middle Corridor can be better understood through the strategic objectives pursued by the main stakeholders involved in its development.

Table 1

Strategic Interests of Key Actors in the Middle Corridor

Actor	Strategic Interests	Expected Benefits
China	Diversification of trade routes; Belt and Road Initiative implementation	Increased connectivity with Europe; supply-chain resilience
Azerbaijan	Strengthening transit hub status; regional influence	Transit revenues; geopolitical importance
Türkiye	Expansion of logistics and transport role	Enhanced regional leadership; economic growth
European Union	Diversification of transport and energy routes	Improved economic security and connectivity
Kazakhstan	Access to global markets; export diversification	Increased trade and transit opportunities
Georgia	Strengthening transit function between Asia and Europe	Economic development and foreign investment

Source: Author's compilation based on European Commission (2025), TITR Association (2025), World Bank (2025), and OECD (2025)

As shown by the information provided in Table 1, despite the fact **that** the parties have different national interests, all of them have one common goal, which is increasing the connectivity in Eurasia. Such interests' convergence has made the Middle Corridor move from being merely a regional transport project to becoming a geopolitically significant project as well. With the increase in competition between major transport corridors, the significance of the Middle Corridor will only keep increasing.

4. Challenges and Opportunities

However, the increasing significance of the Middle Corridor has presented various chances for the participating

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

countries, as well as posing some infrastructural, political, and geopolitical risks. Despite becoming increasingly viable for Eurasian trade and connectivity, the long-term success of the corridor will depend on the ability of the parties involved to overcome these constraints and maximize on their strengths.

4.1. Infrastructure Challenges

Although many investments have been made recently, infrastructure continues to be one of the key factors hindering the effectiveness of the Middle Corridor. The passage goes through several states with different stages of transport development that result in different railway capacities, port infrastructure, customs procedures, and logistics services.

One of the biggest obstacles is the transition via the Caspian Sea, where freight should be loaded from rail transport into maritime transport. Even though such ports as Baku, Aktau, and Kuryk have been modernized, the increase in cargo volume continues to put strain on the ports. Besides, differences in technical standards and border procedures may cause delays and additional transportation expenses.

The fast growth of cargo flows makes additional investment in the modernization of infrastructure inevitable.

Table 2
Growth of Cargo Transportation through the Middle Corridor (2021–2025)

Year	Cargo Volume (Million Tons)
2021	0.8
2022	1.5
2023	2.8
2024	4.5
2025	5.2

Source: Compiled by the author based on TITR Association (2025), World Bank (2025), and European Commission (2025).

This is illustrated in Table 2, where it is clear that the quantity of goods transported via the Middle Corridor significantly rose from 2021 until 2025. This is an indication of the increasing need for alternative ways of transporting goods across Eurasia.

4.2. Political risks

Maintaining political stability is still an important condition for the effective functioning of the Middle Corridor. Considering that this route goes through several

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

sovereign countries, the necessity of coordinated policy-making becomes obvious for securing continuous transport movements.

Potential political problems, shift of government's interests, and changes in the diplomatic situation could have an effect on the implementation of transport infrastructure projects and agreements. In addition, the ongoing unresolved regional conflicts in some parts of Eurasia could create threats for the safety of transport and investors.

An issue that needs to be addressed concerns regulatory fragmentation. Inconsistency of rules and regulations concerning customs, transport, and administration in different participating countries can lower effectiveness of the work.

4.3. Geopolitical competition

The formation of the Middle Corridor occurs against the background of general geopolitical competition on the territory of Eurasia, when transport corridors become tools of economic and political influence. China sees the corridor as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative and as a tool to increase market access to Europe. The European Union promotes the use of the corridor under the Global Gateway Initiative to improve connectivity and diversity of transportation. On the other hand, Russia perceives the Eurasian transport network as an element of regional influence strategy. In addition, the corridor faces competition with the Northern Corridor and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Thus, the future of the corridor depends not only on infrastructure but also on its competitiveness in the Eurasian transport system.

4.4. Future opportunities

Even in the face of current difficulties, the Middle Corridor represents a lot of promise in terms of economic development and collaboration in the region. Growing trade volumes between Asia and Europe are likely to increase demand for dependable transport corridors, which will add to the significance of the route. The use of digital solutions, including electronic customs clearance procedures and modern freight platforms, can increase efficiency through shorter transit periods and lower costs. Additionally, investments in sustainable transport infrastructure will enhance the appeal of the Middle Corridor in the context of global environmental initiatives. For countries taking part in the project, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Türkiye, there

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

are benefits in terms of increased transit revenues, attracting investments, improving infrastructure, and gaining geopolitical influence.

5. Comparative Assessment of Eurasian Corridors

The growing significance of the connectivity between Eurasia has increased rivalry between the major transport corridors connecting Asia and Europe. The Middle Corridor, Northern Corridor, and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) have become the most important transport corridors. Every route has some special features which affect their competitive capacity and significance in international trade and transportation. Comparative analysis of these transport corridors allows to better understand the potential and restrictions of the Middle Corridor.

5.1. Middle Corridor versus Northern Corridor

Traditionally, the Northern Corridor has served as the main transport link between China and Europe. This route covers countries such as China, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus prior to reaching Europe. Its development is due to well-established railway transport and significant capacity. Before 2022, the Northern Corridor was the main one for rail cargo transport between Asia and Europe.

Geopolitical changes in the region significantly affected the attractiveness of the route. Due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the sanctions imposed on Russia from Western countries, there are new challenges related to the Northern Corridor. Many logistics firms try to find new routes to avoid possible uncertainties and disruptions in transport process. As a result, the Middle Corridor attracts more international attention due to its geopolitical diversity.

Despite the existing benefits of infrastructure and transport capacity for the Northern Corridor, the Middle Corridor offers more flexibility from a geopolitical perspective. The route passes Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus, and Türkiye. This factor increases the resilience of supply chains. Moreover, infrastructure investments make this corridor more attractive and competitive.

5.2. Middle Corridor versus the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

While the Middle Corridor goes from east to west, connecting India, Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Europe, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) joins India, Iran, the Caucasus, Russia, and Northern Europe using

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

a north-south transport route. Although the INSTC can provide several benefits regarding reduced time and expenses related to transportations against the conventional way through the Suez Canal, the project's implementation is hampered by sanctions and politics of participating states. On the contrary, increasing attention has been paid to the Middle Corridor in recent years from the EU, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and many others because of its participation in the Belt and Road Initiative and the general European connectivity strategy. Thus, even though both corridors facilitate regional connectivity, they perform different geopolitical roles - while the INSTC builds up north-south transport corridors, the Middle Corridor acts as a link between East Asia and Europe.

Table 3

Comparative Characteristics of Major Eurasian Transport Corridors			
Criteria	Middle Corridor	Northern Corridor	INSTC
Main Route	China-Central Asia-Caspian Sea-South Caucasus-Türkiye-Europe	China-Kazakhstan-Russia-Belarus-Europe	India-Iran-Caucasus/Russia-Europe
Primary Direction	East-West	East-West	North-South
Geopolitical Risk	Moderate	High	Moderate to High
Dependence on Single Transit State	Low	High	Medium
EU Support	High	Limited	Low
BRI Relevance	High	High	Medium
Infrastructure Maturity	Developing	High	Developing
Strategic Flexibility	High	Medium	Medium
Growth Potential (2025-2030)	High	Moderate	Moderate

Source: Author's compilation based on European Commission (2025), World Bank (2025), OECD (2025), TITR Association (2025), and Asian Development Bank (2025).

The key differences among the principal Eurasian transport corridors are summarized in Table 3.

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

6. Conclusion and recommendations

In light of the current geopolitical landscape and diversification of the supply chains, the Middle Corridor has become a valuable and reliable transport route in the Eurasian region. Based on the analysis, one can conclude that the route is a viable alternative to the traditional transit corridors, offering opportunities for increasing regional connectivity and eliminating reliance on other routes. Although there are certain problems associated with the lack of infrastructure development, the inefficiency of multimodal logistics, issues of customs, and geopolitical competition, the corridor still receives considerable international attention. In light of projects like the EU's Global Gateway and the Belt and Road Initiative by China, along with the engagement of such nations as Azerbaijan and Türkiye, its future perspectives appear promising. In order to take advantage of its capabilities, participants of the route should concentrate on developing infrastructure, customs coordination, digitalization of logistics, and cooperation in the region.

References:

- [1] Asian Development Bank (2023). *Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program: Transport Sector Progress Report*. Manila: ADB.
- [2] Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (2024). *Eurasian Connectivity and Infrastructure Development Report*. Beijing: AIIB.
- [3] Bechev, D. (2022). *Russia and Eurasia's Transport Geopolitics*. London: Oxford University Press.
- [4] European Commission (2025). *Global Gateway: EU Strategy for Connectivity in Eurasia*. Brussels: European Commission.
- [5] European Commission (2026). *Sustainable Transport Connections between Europe and Central Asia*. Brussels: EC Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport.
- [6] European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2024). *Trade and Transport Facilitation in Central Asia*. London: EBRD.
- [7] ESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) (2023). *Enhancing Eurasian Transport Corridors*. Bangkok: United Nations.
- [8] International Transport Forum (OECD) (2025). *Transport Connectivity in Eurasia: Policy Perspectives*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- [9] Kenderdine, T. (2023). "The Trans-Caspian Corridor and Eurasian Logistics Shifts." *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 14(2), 101-118.
- [10] Laruelle, M. (2021). *Central Asia in the Global Economy: Connectivity and Geopolitics*. Washington, DC: George Washington University Press.
- [11] OECD (2024). *Eurasian Transport Corridors: Competitiveness and Risks*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- [12] Oxford Business Group (2025). *The Middle Corridor: Trade and Infrastructure Outlook*. London: OBG.

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

- [13] Pomfret, R. (2022). *The Central Asian Economies in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton University Press.
- [14] Shahbazov, F. (2024). "Azerbaijan as a Key Transit Hub in the Middle Corridor." *Caucasus Strategic Review*, 9(1), 45–62.
- [15] Steadman, L. (2023). *Belt and Road Initiative and Eurasian Connectivity*. London: Routledge.
- [16] Trans-Caspian International Transport Route Association (2025). *Annual Report on TITR Development*. Astana.
- [17] UNCTAD (2024). *Review of Maritime Transport and Multimodal Connectivity*. Geneva: United Nations.
- [18] World Bank (2023). *Resilient Supply Chains and Transport Corridors in Eurasia*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.
- [19] World Bank (2025). *Middle Corridor Performance and Trade Facilitation Analysis*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- [20] Zhang, H. (2024). "China's Belt and Road and the Middle Corridor Evolution." *Asia Europe Journal*, 22(3), 233–251.