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## ***Iran–Armenia joint drills warn off foreign-designed border changes***

Joint military drills with Yerevan highlight Tehran’s deepening concerns over regional destabilization, Turkic expansionism, and border security threats posed by the Azerbaijan-touted Zangezur Corridor.



As tensions escalated between Iran and the US ahead of indirect talks in Oman, Iran and Armenia held a [joint military exercise](#) on 9–10 April along their shared border. Conducted in Iran’s Norduz region in East Azerbaijan Province, the drill aimed to reinforce bilateral security cooperation and regional stability.

Brigadier General Valiollah Madani, deputy commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces, stressed the geopolitical importance of the area, [declaring](#), “The strategic importance of our border with Armenia cannot be overstated.”

Though Madani refrained from explicitly mentioning the [Zangezur Corridor](#), it remains clear that Tehran views any forced implementation of the corridor as a [direct threat](#) to its territorial integrity and regional influence.

### **Zangezur as a red line**

Since the 2020 [Karabakh ceasefire](#), Iran has conducted several [unprecedented](#) military drills on its northwestern border, largely in response to Israeli–Azeri military cooperation and the “[Three Brothers](#)” exercises involving Azerbaijan, Turkiye, and Pakistan. Tehran perceives the Zangezur Corridor as a potential wedge severing its direct link to Armenia – a scenario it has long warned against.

Despite the recent 13 March [announcement](#) of a draft peace agreement between Baku and Yerevan, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev introduced two [conditions](#) that Tehran views as destabilizing: the dissolution of the OSCE Minsk Group and constitutional amendments in Armenia. Therefore, a binding peace treaty continues to remain elusive, and the security situation between Iran’s two northern neighbors remains volatile.

The collapse of former Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's government has also emboldened Turkiye in the West Asia arena, with Tehran fearing that Ankara’s growing assertiveness may extend into the [South Caucasus](#). This could potentially prompt Azerbaijan to launch an offensive into Armenia’s Syunik Province to forcibly implement the Zangezur route.

The situation is further complicated by intensified Israeli and US military deployments in the region – most notably the [stationing](#) of B-2 bombers in the Indian Ocean's strategic Diego Garcia island – on the eve of resumed Iranian nuclear negotiations with Washington. For Tehran, now facing military threats from its south, joint drills with Armenia served to convey the message that it was not neglecting the security of its northwestern borders.

### **Russia’s shift and Iran’s strategic isolation**

Moscow’s [shifting](#) stance has added another layer of concern for Tehran. Following Russian President Vladimir Putin’s [visit](#) to Baku in August 2024, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov publicly [backed](#) Azerbaijan’s call for unrestricted access to Nakhichevan.

Iran had [expected](#) Moscow to maintain a more neutral position, and this realignment has left Tehran increasingly isolated. Today, Iran stands alone alongside Armenia in opposition to the Zangezur project – one that is rooted in several interrelated concerns.

First, the legal basis for the corridor is highly contentious. The 2020 Karabakh [ceasefire agreement](#) includes no mention of a “Zangezur Corridor.” The only corridor identified in the agreement is Lachin, which allowed Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh access to Armenia.

With Azerbaijan’s seizure of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 and the subsequent exodus of Armenians from the region, the Lachin Corridor has become obsolete. Tehran and Yerevan insist on strict adherence to the original terms of the agreement and reject any reinterpretation that introduces new transit routes through Armenian territory.

Second, both Iran and Armenia view the corridor as a cover for broader territorial ambitions by Baku and its allies. In recent years, senior Azerbaijani officials and media outlets have [referred](#) to Syunik Province as “Western Zangezur” or “Western Azerbaijan,” framing it as part of Azerbaijan’s historical domain.

This rhetoric suggests that the corridor is more than a transit route; it is a geopolitical project aimed at reshaping borders. For Iran, the implications are particularly grave. Any alteration of its 40-kilometer border with Armenia would leave Iran’s entire northwestern frontier abutting Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan alone, severing a vital transit link to Georgia and the Black Sea via Armenia.

Third, the corridor’s intended function remains ambiguous. It is unclear whether it is meant to be a domestic route, a regional commercial channel, or a strategic military corridor. As the ceasefire agreement’s ninth article [emphasizes](#):

**“Transport links between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic in order to organize the unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions.”**

However, Azerbaijani officials appear to envision the corridor as part of a broader international initiative – linking to Turkiye and forming a key leg of the “[Middle Corridor](#).”

There are fears in both Tehran and Yerevan that it could also facilitate the unregulated movement of military personnel and hardware. Accordingly, both governments demand that any transit link be monitored and controlled by Armenian security, customs, and border forces.

Fourth, Iran and Armenia reject the idea of an uncontrolled foreign corridor passing through Armenian sovereign territory. Allowing a foreign power to administer and patrol a military or commercial corridor within Armenian borders would set a dangerous precedent and violate basic principles of national sovereignty.

Just as Iran and Russia maintain authority over the [North-South Corridor](#) and Azerbaijan and Georgia over the Middle Corridor, Armenia insists on its right to oversee any such route within its borders.

Fifth, Iran is deeply concerned about who controls its shared border with Armenia. Following a 2024 [agreement](#) between Putin and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Russian border forces withdrew from this frontier in January 2025, handing over full control to Armenian border guards. Iran supports this arrangement and strongly opposes any foreign military presence – particularly from Turkiye or Azerbaijan – on this sensitive frontier.



A map showing the planned route of the Zangezur Corridor.

### **Iran and Armenia offer alternatives**

Despite opposing the Zangezur Corridor, Tehran and Yerevan are not against restoring connectivity between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan. On the contrary, both countries support the implementation of Article 9 of the 2020 ceasefire agreement – provided it does not compromise sovereignty or existing borders.

One such alternative is the “[Aras Corridor](#),” agreed upon by Iran and Azerbaijan in October 2023. This 55-kilometer highway and railway route would [link](#) Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan through Iranian territory.

In a public statement, Aliyev’s foreign policy advisor Hikmet Hajiyev [signaled](#) Baku’s willingness to proceed via Iran, saying the Zangezur plan “had lost its attractiveness.” Yet despite such remarks, Turkish and Azerbaijani leaders continue to push publicly for the corridor through Armenia.

Meanwhile, Armenia has proposed its own initiative, dubbed the “[Crossroads of Peace](#)”. Unveiled by Pashinyan at the 2023 Silk Road Forum in Tbilisi, the plan envisions a web of regional connectivity – including roads, railways, pipelines, and electricity links – designed to normalize relations and foster cooperation with Azerbaijan, Turkiye, and Iran. However,

the proposal has received little backing from key regional powers and has so far remained aspirational.

Both Tehran and Yerevan have also advocated for the revival of the Soviet-era railway network that once linked Jolfa in Iran to Nakhichevan, Syunik, and southern Azerbaijan. Destroyed during the First Karabakh War, the route has gained renewed attention following the latest shifts in the South Caucasus balance of power. As such, Armenia has placed the restoration of the Yeraskh–Julfa–Meghri–Horadiz railway on its post-war development [agenda](#).

### **Tehran draws a line in the South Caucasus**

The Iran–Armenia military drills near the Norduz border were not just defensive gestures; they served as a clear political signal.

As [Israel and the US](#) threaten Iran from the south and Ankara and Baku make strategic gains to the north, Tehran is signaling that it will not tolerate encroachment on its territorial or transit interests.

Through joint drills, alternative corridors, and a firm rejection of the Zangezur project, Iran is staking its claim to a regional order that respects sovereign borders and prevents the Balkanization of the South Caucasus.

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