



**Jeoekonomik
Perspektiften
Türkiye'nin Uluslararası
Arabuluculuk
Kapasitesi: Stratejik
Bağlantısallık ve
Uluslararası Uyumazlık
Çözümü Analizi**

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Özet

Ekonomik araçların dış politikadaki ağırlığının artması, jeoekonomik kaynaklarla uluslararası arabuluculuk kapasitesi arasındaki ilişkinin daha sistematik biçimde incelenmesini gerekli kılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin enerji, ulaşım ve bağlantısallık varlıklarının arabuluculuk kapasitesini hangi mekanizmalarla ve hangi sınırlar içinde desteklediğini araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, altyapı projelerini doğrudan arabuluculuk girişimleri olarak değerlendirmemekte; doğrudan arabuluculuk, diplomatik kolaylaştırıcılık ve arabuluculuğu destekleyen yapısal kapasite arasında analitik bir ayrım yapmaktadır. Nitel ve karşılaştırmalı araştırma tasarımında doküman analizi ile yapılandırılmış vaka karşılaştırması kullanılmıştır. Karadeniz Tahıl Girişimi doğrudan arabuluculuk vakası; TANAP, Orta Koridor ve Bakü-Tiflis-Kars Demiryolu arabuluculuğu destekleyen jeoekonomik kapasite vakaları; Kalkınma Yolu ise sonuçları henüz gözlenemeyen ileriye dönük bir vaka olarak incelenmiştir. Bulgular, jeoekonomik kaynakların tek başına arabuluculuk başarısı üretmediğini; ancak operasyonel vazgeçilmezlik, kurumsallaşmış iletişim, tekrarlanan koordinasyon ve uygulama kapasitesi üzerinden diplomatik erişimi güçlendirebildiğini göstermektedir. En güçlü doğrudan kanıt Karadeniz Tahıl Girişimi'nde görülürken, diğer vakalar destekleyici ve bağlama bağlı mekanizmalara ilişkin daha sınırlı kanıt sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arabuluculuk, Jeoekonomi, Türk Dış Politikası, Stratejik Bağlantısallık, Orta Koridor, Karadeniz Tahıl Girişimi.

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Türkiye's International Mediation Capacity from a Geoeconomic Perspective: An Analysis of Strategic Connectivity and International Dispute Resolution

Abstract

The growing role of economic instruments in foreign policy requires a more systematic examination of the relationship between geoeconomic resources and international mediation capacity. This study asks through which mechanisms, and within what limits, Türkiye's energy, transport, and connectivity assets may support its capacity to mediate. It does not treat infrastructure projects as mediation initiatives. Instead, it distinguishes direct mediation, diplomatic facilitation, and structural capacity that may enable mediation. The qualitative comparative design combines document analysis with a structured comparison of five cases. The Black Sea Grain Initiative is examined as a direct mediation case; TANAP, the Middle Corridor, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway as cases of mediation-enabling geoeconomic capacity; and the Development Road as a prospective case whose diplomatic outcomes cannot yet be observed. The findings indicate that geoeconomic resources do not independently produce mediation success. They may nevertheless strengthen diplomatic access through operational indispensability, institutionalized communication, repeated coordination, and implementation capacity. Direct evidence is strongest in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, whereas the infrastructure cases provide more limited evidence of supportive and context-dependent mechanisms. The study therefore presents geoeconomic capacity as a facilitating rather than necessary or sufficient condition of mediation.

Keywords: Mediation, Geoeconomics, Turkish Foreign Policy, Strategic Connectivity, Middle Corridor, Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, states have increasingly used trade, finance, energy, technology, and infrastructure to pursue strategic objectives. This shift has made geoeconomics central to debates about contemporary statecraft (Luttwak, 1990; Blackwill & Harris, 2016). Connectivity is now relevant not only to economic growth but also to security, resilience, and diplomatic influence. Energy pipelines, railways, ports, and logistics corridors create cross-border relationships whose political effects may extend beyond the movement of commodities.

International mediation scholarship, by contrast, has mainly explained outcomes through the characteristics of the conflict, the consent and incentives of the parties, the mediator's status and strategy, and the wider international environment (Touval & Zartman, 1985; Bercovitch, 1996; Kleiboer, 1996; Bercovitch & Gartner, 2009). These explanations remain indispensable. Yet they devote less systematic attention to the material and institutional resources that may allow a mediator to convene parties, provide an acceptable venue, sustain communication, or help implement an agreement. The relationship between geoeconomic centrality and mediation capacity therefore remains theoretically underdeveloped.

Türkiye provides a useful setting in which to investigate this relationship. It has institutionalized a visible mediation policy, including the Mediation for Peace initiative launched with Finland at the United Nations in 2010, while also occupying a central position in Eurasian energy and transport networks (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye [MFA Türkiye], n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The Black Sea Grain Initiative further demonstrated that diplomatic access may interact with geography, maritime governance, logistics, and implementation arrangements. At the same time, projects such as TANAP, the Middle Corridor, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) Railway, and the Development Road are

infrastructure or connectivity initiatives rather than mediation processes. Treating all of them as equivalent forms of mediation would stretch the concept beyond its established meaning.

Accordingly, this study asks two questions. First, through which observable mechanisms can geoeconomic resources support Türkiye's international mediation capacity? Second, how does the strength of evidence for those mechanisms vary between a direct mediation case and cases of energy or transport connectivity? The central argument is deliberately conditional: geoeconomic capacity is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for effective mediation. It is a facilitating or conditioning resource whose diplomatic value depends on party consent, conflict ripeness, the mediator's credibility, institutional partners, and the practical relevance of the asset to the dispute.

The study makes three contributions. First, it connects mediation research with the literature on geoeconomics without redefining infrastructure as mediation. Second, it specifies four mechanisms operational indispensability, institutionalized communication, interest alignment through repeated interaction, and implementation capacity through which connectivity may support diplomatic access. Third, it contributes to middle-power research by showing how material networks can complement coalition-building and multilateral diplomacy, while also acknowledging that economic dependence may constrain neutrality or generate competing interests (Cooper et al., 1993; Jordaan, 2003).

Methodologically, the article uses qualitative document analysis and structured, focused comparison. The cases are not presented as a representative sample of all Turkish mediation activity. They are selected to provide variation in function and evidentiary status: the Black Sea Grain Initiative is a direct mediation case with an observable agreement and implementation mechanism; TANAP, the Middle Corridor, and BTK are completed or operating connectivity

arrangements that may create enabling conditions; and the Development Road is an ongoing project included to examine the limits of prospective claims. This design reduces, but cannot eliminate, the selection bias that would result from examining only a successful mediation episode.

The remainder of the article is organized into six sections. The first reviews the mediation, geoeconomics, and middle-power literatures. The second defines the conceptual boundaries of mediation capacity and develops the causal mechanisms of the Geoeconomic Mediation Model. The third explains case selection, document collection, coding, operationalization, and limitations. The fourth presents the five case analyses and a cross-case comparison. The fifth discusses theoretical implications, alternative explanations, and transferability. The final section summarizes the contributions and offers policy and research recommendations.

International Mediation: Actors, Resources, and Context

International mediation is a non-binding process in which a third party assists disputants in managing or resolving a conflict without imposing a settlement (Touval & Zartman, 1985; Vuković, 2014). It is analytically distinct from adjudication, arbitration, and coercive intervention because its authority ultimately depends on the parties' consent. Mediators may provide communication, formulate proposals, manage procedures, supply information, offer incentives, or assist implementation. Both agency and context therefore shape their effectiveness.

Early and contemporary research identifies several recurring determinants of mediation outcomes. These include the nature and intensity of the dispute, the parties' readiness to negotiate, power asymmetries, the mediator's rank and relationship with the parties, the selected strategy, and the international environment (Bercovitch & Houston, 1993; Bercovitch, 1996; Kleiboer, 1996). This literature also complicates the assumption that an entirely disinterested

mediator is always more effective. A mediator with interests, resources, or close relations may possess greater access and leverage, although these same ties can undermine perceptions of fairness. Mediation capacity is thus not reducible to neutrality; it combines acceptance, access, procedural skill, resources, and the ability to sustain a process.

Research on Türkiye emphasizes diplomatic activism, multilateralism, humanitarian diplomacy, and its aspiration to act as a bridge or middle power. Türkiye's establishment of the UN Group of Friends of Mediation with Finland, its role in mediation capacity-building, and its initiatives across neighbouring regions have created an institutional basis for this policy (Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2011; Güner, 2015; MFA Türkiye, n.d.-a). However, this literature generally treats diplomatic practice and economic connectivity as separate fields. It says less about when a transport corridor, energy relationship, or logistical role becomes relevant to a specific mediation process.

Geoeconomics, Economic Statecraft, and Connectivity

Luttwak (1990) used geoeconomics to describe the continuation of interstate rivalry through the grammar of commerce. Blackwill and Harris (2016) subsequently defined geoeconomics as the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests and to produce geopolitical outcomes. Sanctions, trade policy, investment, aid, energy, and finance are central to this literature. Farrell and Newman (2019) add a network perspective, showing how asymmetric positions in global systems can generate influence through control over hubs and flows.

Connectivity broadens this agenda beyond coercion. Transport corridors, pipelines, ports, and logistics platforms can alter the geography of interdependence, create new institutional routines, and redistribute strategic relevance (Wigell et al., 2018). Their effects are not automatically cooperative. Infrastructure can create common

interests, but it can also generate dependency, competition, exclusion, or vulnerability. The analytical task is therefore to identify the mechanism and the conditions under which a geoeconomic asset supports diplomacy rather than infer a peaceful effect from connectivity alone.

The Turkish-language literature offers important sectoral evidence. Studies of TANAP emphasize its role in Türkiye-Azerbaijan energy relations and European supply diversification (Erdoğan, 2017). Research on the Middle Corridor and BTK examines multimodal connectivity, logistics performance, and route diversification, particularly after the Russia-Ukraine War (Tümenbatur, 2021; Cengiz, 2023). These studies demonstrate the strategic relevance of infrastructure, but they generally do not test whether such projects cause successful mediation. Their contribution to the present study is therefore evidentiary and contextual rather than proof of a direct causal effect.

Middle Powers and the Missing Link

Middle power scholarship commonly associates such states with multilateralism, coalition building, niche diplomacy, and bridge building (Cooper et al., 1993; Jordaan, 2003). These behavioural strategies are especially relevant when a state lacks the material dominance of a great power but has sufficient resources and diplomatic reach to shape specific issues. Türkiye's mediation initiatives fit this pattern, yet its role also depends on material and geographic assets that conventional behavioural definitions may understate.

The missing link across these literatures concerns how geoeconomic resources enter the mediation process. Mediation studies recognize that resources and prior relationships matter, but usually do not disaggregate the contribution of infrastructure centrality. Geoeconomic studies explain influence and dependence, but seldom examine non coercive conflict-management functions. Middle

power studies emphasize diplomatic behaviour, while material networks are often treated as background conditions. Bringing these strands together can therefore clarify a narrower question: not whether connectivity is peacebuilding in itself, but whether it can improve access, convening power, communication, and implementation in a particular mediation context.

Theoretical Framework

A Problem-Driven and Analytically Eclectic Position

The study adopts a problem driven form of analytical eclecticism. This approach combines mechanisms drawn from different research traditions when a complex empirical problem cannot be adequately captured by a single paradigm (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010). Realist and geoeconomic perspectives direct attention to location, material capabilities, strategic interests, and asymmetric dependence. Liberal approaches illuminate how repeated interaction, institutions, and interdependence can reduce transaction costs and stabilize expectations (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Constructivist insights highlight legitimacy, role recognition, trust, and the social acceptance of a mediator.

These perspectives are used as complementary lenses rather than as a synthetic grand theory. The framework does not claim that economic interdependence necessarily produces peace, that material leverage guarantees consent, or that a recognized mediator can disregard strategic interests. It instead identifies a set of mechanisms whose operation must be demonstrated within each case.

Conceptual Boundaries: Mediation and Mediation-Enabling Capacity

Three concepts must be separated. Direct mediation refers to an accepted third party's active participation in a specific dispute through communication, negotiation design, proposal-making, or implementation support. Diplomatic facilitation refers to good offices, venue provision, message transmission, or procedural assistance that may fall short of a fully developed mediation role.

Mediation-enabling capacity refers to background resources and relationships that can improve a state's ability to obtain access, convene actors, maintain a process, or implement an arrangement.

This distinction is crucial for the cases examined here. The Black Sea Grain Initiative is a direct mediation and facilitation case because Türkiye and the United Nations helped negotiate and implement a specific arrangement between Russia and Ukraine. TANAP, the Middle Corridor, BTK, and the Development Road are not mediation initiatives. They are cases through which the study evaluates whether cross-border infrastructure creates communication channels, institutional routines, strategic relevance, or implementation assets that may support mediation in a separate political crisis.

Mediation capacity is consequently defined as the combination of accepted diplomatic access, procedural competence, convening capacity, and practical ability to support implementation. Goeconomic capacity is defined as the ability to derive strategic relevance from cross-border economic assets, flows, and institutionalized connectivity. In the model, goeconomic capacity is a facilitating or conditioning variable. It is not necessary, because states without comparable infrastructure can mediate; it is not sufficient, because parties may reject the mediator or lack incentives to settle.

Causal Mechanisms

The first mechanism is operational indispensability. A state may acquire diplomatic relevance when an agreement requires access to territory, transport nodes, maritime passages, technical facilities, or regulatory authority under its control. Operational relevance does not compel the parties to accept mediation, but it can make the state a practical partner in designing or implementing an arrangement.

The second mechanism is institutionalized communication. Pipelines and corridors require repeated ministerial, regulatory,

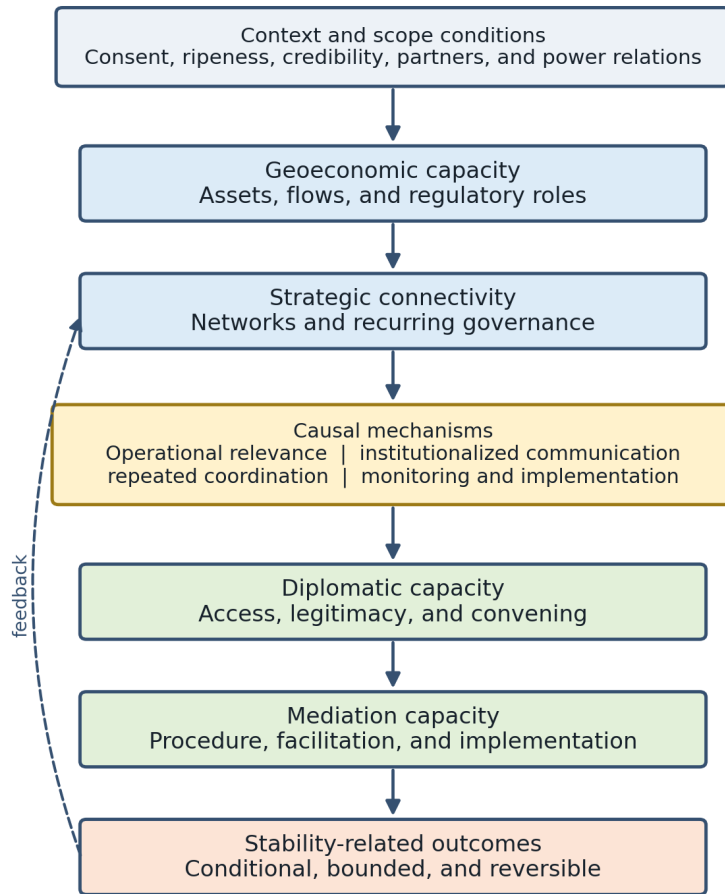
customs, security, and technical coordination. These interactions generate contact points and working relationships that may remain available during political tension. The mechanism is not trust in a psychological sense; its observable foundation is the presence of repeated, rule-bound coordination and functioning joint arrangements.

The third mechanism is interest alignment through repeated interaction. Shared infrastructure creates stakes in continuity, predictability, and crisis management. These interests can raise the cost of diplomatic breakdown and encourage actors to preserve communication. Yet interdependence may be asymmetric, and a party may use its position coercively. Evidence of shared infrastructure must therefore be paired with evidence that actors continued coordination or sought mutually acceptable procedures.

The fourth mechanism is implementation and monitoring capacity. Mediation is more credible when proposed arrangements can be monitored and operationalized. Logistics facilities, inspection mechanisms, energy governance, and transport coordination can provide technical capacity. In the Black Sea case, this mechanism is directly observable in the Joint Coordination Centre. In the infrastructure cases, it is only an enabling potential unless connected to a specific dispute resolution process.

Analytical Model and Scope Conditions

The revised Geoeconomic Mediation Model links five analytical dimensions: geoeconomic capacity, strategic connectivity, diplomatic capacity, mediation capacity, and stability related outcomes. Trust building is treated as a mechanism reflected in repeated coordination, accepted procedures, and predictable implementation rather than as an independently observable outcome. Geostrategic location is a contextual endowment that must be converted into usable capacity through investment, institutions, and governance.



Goeconomic capacity is facilitating, not necessary or sufficient.

Figure 1. Goeconomic Mediation Model

The model is probabilistic and contains feedback rather than a deterministic linear chain. Strategic connectivity can strengthen diplomatic access, while successful cooperation can also deepen connectivity. Mediation outcomes remain conditioned by conflict ripeness, party consent, mediator credibility, institutional partners, and wider power politics. The expected empirical pattern is therefore modest: where goeconomic assets are directly relevant to a dispute

and embedded in repeated coordination, they should increase the mediator's practical relevance and implementation capacity. Where that connection is absent, the evidence should support only a structural or prospective claim.

Research Method

Research Design and Case-Selection Logic

The study uses an interpretive qualitative design combining document analysis with a structured, focused comparison (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; George & Bennett, 2005; Yin, 2018). It seeks to assess the plausibility of specified mechanisms rather than estimate an average causal effect. Each case is examined through the same questions: What is the status and function of the project or initiative? Which geoeconomic asset is observable? What institutional relationships does it create? Is there direct evidence connecting the asset to diplomatic access or mediation? What alternative explanation or limitation qualifies the inference?

Purposive case selection creates a risk of selection bias, especially if only visible successes are examined. The design addresses this concern in three ways. First, it separates one direct mediation case from three operating infrastructure cases and one prospective case. Second, it does not code the four infrastructure projects as mediation successes. Third, it includes the Development Road precisely because its outcomes are incomplete; the case reveals how easily anticipated benefits can be mistaken for observed effects.

The cases are therefore analytically diverse rather than statistically representative. The Black Sea Grain Initiative is an outcome-bearing case in which an agreement, an accepted Turkish-UN role, and an implementation body are observable. TANAP provides an energy-connectivity case; the Middle Corridor provides a multimodal network case; BTK isolates a specific rail component within that network; and the Development Road provides an under-implementation case in a different regional setting. This variation

allows the model to be evaluated across direct, enabling, and prospective functions.

Document Collection and Source Evaluation

Document analysis followed an explicit four stage procedure consistent with Bowen (2009). First, a source universe was defined around official documents and institutional records from the United Nations, Türkiye's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Directorate of Communications, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, the European Commission, the World Bank, and the Food and Agriculture Organization, supplemented by peer-reviewed research and academic books. Second, sources were located through combinations of English and Turkish terms including "mediation," "Mediation for Peace," "Black Sea Grain Initiative," "Joint Coordination Centre," "TANAP," "Middle Corridor/Orta Koridor," "Baku-Tbilisi-Kars/Bakü-Tiflis-Kars," "Development Road/Kalkınma Yolu," "connectivity," and "energy diplomacy."

Third, documents were included when they directly addressed a case's legal or institutional status, participating actors, operational design, outputs, or relationship to the analytical dimensions. Sources were excluded when they merely repeated promotional claims, lacked identifiable institutional provenance, or addressed infrastructure without relevance to the research questions. Fourth, factual claims were triangulated where possible across an official Turkish source, a multilateral or international institutional source, and academic research. Official policy texts were treated as evidence of stated policy and institutional action, not as neutral proof of diplomatic effectiveness.

The evidentiary base is purposive rather than exhaustive. Public documents are especially strong for formal mandates, agreements, project status, and observable outputs, but weaker for private bargaining, actor perceptions, and failed initiatives. The analysis therefore distinguishes documented facts, mechanism based

inference, and prospective claims in both the case narratives and the comparison table.

Operationalization and Coding

The five dimensions were translated into qualitative indicators before cross case comparison. The indicators are not numerical scores. They serve as a codebook for identifying comparable evidence and preventing descriptive project information from being treated automatically as proof of mediation.

Dimension	Observable indicators	Evidence rule and caution
Diplomatic capacity	Accepted access to relevant actors; formal mediation or facilitation role, multilateral experience; sustained official communication.	Access and activity must be documented; visibility alone is insufficient.
Goeconomic capacity	Dispute-relevant infrastructure, transit or regulatory role; cross-border energy, trade, transport, or logistics assets.	An asset is not mediation; relevance to a diplomatic process must be shown.
Strategic connectivity	Multimodal links; recurring cross-border governance; customs, regulatory, ministerial, or technical coordination.	Physical connection without functioning institutions is weak evidence.
Trust-building mechanism	Repeated interaction; accepted procedures; continuity of working-level contact; predictable implementation.	Official references to trust are coded as claims unless behaviour corroborates them.
Mediation capacity	Accepted third-party role; convening or procedural contribution; message transmission; monitoring or implementation support.	Direct evidence requires a specific dispute or negotiated arrangement.
Stability-related outcomes	Continuity of flows; reduced disruption; functioning cooperation; resilience or bounded humanitarian/economic effects.	Regional peace is not inferred from a project or short-term agreement.

Table 1. Operationalization of the Goeconomic Mediation Model

Coding proceeded in three stages. In the first stage, documents were coded deductively using the indicators in Table 1. In the second, evidence was classified as direct, supportive, or prospective. Direct

evidence required an accepted role in a specific mediation or implementation process. Supportive evidence showed institutionalized relationships or operational assets without a demonstrated mediation outcome. Prospective evidence referred to mechanisms whose results had not yet occurred. In the third stage, within case findings were compared across the five cases to identify common mechanisms, differences, and rival explanations.

Validity, Alternative Explanations, and Limitations

The design has four principal limitations. First, confidential diplomacy restricts access to bargaining records and actor perceptions. Public evidence may overrepresent successful or officially endorsed initiatives and underreport failure, disagreement, or coercion. Second, official infrastructure documents often use aspirational language about peace, trust, or regional integration. Such language is coded as a policy claim unless corroborated by institutional behaviour or an observable outcome.

Third, the single country and purposive design cannot establish that geoeconomic capacity caused mediation success. Diplomatic balancing, the parties' own incentives, the role of the United Nations, the Montreux legal framework, conflict ripeness, and broader power relations are plausible alternative explanations in the Black Sea case. In the other cases, there is no direct mediation outcome to explain. The analysis therefore uses cautious formulations such as "supports," "is consistent with," or "creates an enabling condition" rather than deterministic causal language.

Fourth, the Development Road remains under implementation. Its inclusion is justified not as proof of regional stabilization but as a test of the model's prospective boundary. Future interviews with diplomats, project officials, and disputing parties; process tracing based on declassified records; network analysis of institutional ties; and quantitative measures of connectivity and diplomatic interaction would improve validity.

Findings and Analysis

The Institutional Development of Türkiye's Mediation Policy

Türkiye's mediation policy became more institutionalized during the 2000s. The clearest multilateral expression was the Mediation for Peace initiative launched with Finland at the United Nations on 24 September 2010. Türkiye also supported successive UN General Assembly resolutions on strengthening mediation and contributed to mediation capacity-building in the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 2011, 2012, 2014; MFA Türkiye, n.d.-a). These activities provide evidence of diplomatic capacity independent of the infrastructure cases.

This institutional record matters because it prevents the model from attributing Türkiye's mediation role to geography alone. Diplomatic experience, maintained contacts, multilateral legitimacy, and issue specific expertise preceded the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The relevant question is therefore whether geoeconomic assets complemented this diplomatic base in particular circumstances.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative: Direct Mediation and Implementation Capacity

Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 disrupted maritime exports from Ukrainian ports and intensified risks to global food security. Ukraine and the Russian Federation were major suppliers of grains, oilseeds, and fertilizers, and the interruption of Black Sea trade created particular vulnerability for import dependent states (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2022). Türkiye maintained high-level communication with both belligerents while cooperating with the United Nations.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative was signed in Istanbul on 22 July 2022 by Türkiye, Ukraine, the Russian Federation, and the United Nations. It established procedures for the safe export of foodstuffs and fertilizer from designated Ukrainian ports. A Joint Coordination Centre (JCC) was created in Istanbul with representatives of all four

parties, and inspection teams operated under the agreed mechanism (United Nations, 2022). During the life of the initiative, 32.9 million metric tons of food commodities were transported through 1,004 voyages (United Nations, 2023).

This case provides the strongest evidence for the proposed mechanisms. Türkiye's diplomatic access was essential to convening and communication, but operational factors also mattered. Its location on the Black Sea, authority and responsibilities regarding the Turkish Straits under the Montreux Convention, port and inspection capacity, and ability to host the JCC made it a practical implementation partner. The asset dispute connection was therefore direct: the proposed agreement concerned maritime exports that necessarily moved through a geography and regulatory environment in which Türkiye was relevant.

The JCC provides observable evidence of institutionalized communication and monitoring capacity. Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish, and UN representatives worked within a common procedure despite the continuation of the war. This arrangement did not demonstrate interpersonal trust or resolve the underlying conflict. It did, however, create bounded procedural predictability around a specific issue. The case therefore supports a narrower inference: geoeconomic and logistical relevance strengthened Türkiye's ability to contribute to implementation once the parties consented to the arrangement.

A counterfactual plausibility probe helps delimit the claim. Without Türkiye's communication with both parties, the agreement would have been more difficult to negotiate. Without its operational position in the Black Sea-Straits system and its capacity to host inspection and coordination, Türkiye would have offered less distinctive implementation value. Yet neither factor alone was sufficient. The parties faced food-market, commercial, and reputational incentives; the United Nations supplied legitimacy and

co-mediation; and Russia ultimately declined to continue the initiative in July 2023. Termination demonstrates the model's limit: connectivity and implementation assets cannot overcome withdrawal of consent.

TANAP: Energy Connectivity as a Supportive, Not Direct, Mediation Resource

The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline is the central segment of the Southern Gas Corridor across Türkiye. Together with the South Caucasus Pipeline and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline, it connects Azerbaijani gas from the Shah Deniz field to Türkiye and European markets. The corridor entered full operation in December 2020 and has become part of the European Union's strategy of supply-route diversification (European Commission, n.d.). Turkish scholarship similarly emphasizes TANAP's significance for Türkiye-Azerbaijan energy relations and Türkiye's strategic role in European energy security (Erdoğan, 2017).

TANAP is not a mediation process. Its relevance lies in the repeated regulatory, commercial, technical, and political coordination required among Azerbaijan, Georgia, Türkiye, the European Union, and downstream actors. Such coordination institutionalizes contacts and raises the diplomatic value of continuity. In terms of the model, TANAP provides supportive evidence for institutionalized communication and strategic relevance.

The causal link to mediation nevertheless remains indirect. Public documents show long-term energy cooperation and a shared interest in secure flows, but they do not establish that TANAP produced a particular mediation outcome. Energy centrality may widen access and make Türkiye a relevant interlocutor, yet it can also create dependence, commercial interests, and reputational constraints that complicate perceptions of neutrality. TANAP should therefore be interpreted as part of a stock of mediation-enabling capacity, not as evidence of geoeconomic mediation or successful conflict resolution.

The Middle Corridor: Networked Coordination and Route Diversification

The Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor is a multimodal network connecting China and Central Asia to Europe through the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye. It combines rail, road, port, ferry, customs, and logistics arrangements. The World Bank describes it not only as a potential China-Europe route but also as a regional corridor whose effectiveness depends on coordination, digitalization, logistics reform, and investment across participating states (World Bank, 2023). Turkish research likewise highlights the role of multimodal rail and logistics infrastructure in strengthening the corridor's continuity (Tümenbatur, 2021; Cengiz, 2023).

The corridor's relevance to mediation capacity arises from networked governance rather than from a discrete diplomatic settlement. Cross-border transport requires recurring contacts among ministries, customs authorities, rail operators, ports, and regional organizations. Türkiye's Ministry of Foreign Affairs identifies agreements on combined freight transport, port cooperation, customs simplification, and ministerial coordination as elements of its connectivity policy (MFA Türkiye, n.d.-b). These arrangements create observable institutional channels that may remain useful during geopolitical disruption.

Route diversification after shocks to the northern Eurasian route has also increased the corridor's strategic visibility. This does not prove that Türkiye's political influence rose in every issue area. It does suggest that states and firms have stronger incentives to maintain technical dialogue with actors located along the route. In the model, the evidence is therefore supportive: the Middle Corridor strengthens Türkiye's convening environment and communication density, but no specific mediation outcome can be attributed to it.

The case also reveals countervailing factors. The corridor crosses multiple jurisdictions and modes of transport, and its performance depends on infrastructure quality, customs harmonization, port

capacity, financing, and coordination beyond Türkiye's control (World Bank, 2023). Network centrality can thus produce expectations that exceed operational capacity. Diplomatic relevance is likely to be greatest where Türkiye can provide a concrete coordination function, and weaker where bottlenecks or competing routes limit its practical contribution.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway: A Specific Institutional Link within the Middle Corridor

The BTK Railway, inaugurated on 30 October 2017, links Türkiye, Georgia, and Azerbaijan and forms a core rail component of the Middle Corridor. It connects with Türkiye's wider rail and port infrastructure and supports overland freight between Asia and Europe (MFA Türkiye, n.d.-b). Academic work treats BTK as an important element in establishing an uninterrupted rail connection and in structuring logistics choices along the Middle Corridor (Tümenbatur, 2021).

Analytically, BTK is examined separately from the wider Middle Corridor because it allows a more specific assessment of institutionalized coordination. The railway requires schedule coordination, border and customs procedures, technical standards, infrastructure maintenance, and sustained trilateral political support. These are observable forms of repeated interaction. They may preserve communication among Türkiye, Georgia, and Azerbaijan and provide practical agendas even when political issues are contested.

The evidence again stops short of direct mediation. BTK has contributed to transport integration and to Türkiye's geoeconomic position, but the available documents do not show that the railway caused acceptance of Türkiye as a mediator in a particular conflict. Its contribution is better understood as relationship infrastructure: it creates recurring technical and political interactions that can support, but cannot substitute for, diplomacy. Moreover, the railway's effect

depends on actual utilization, capacity, border efficiency, and the broader security environment. A physical line without reliable governance would offer limited diplomatic value.

The Development Road: A Prospective and Boundary-Testing Case

The Development Road is designed to connect Iraq's Grand Faw Port to Türkiye through approximately 1,200 kilometres of rail and road infrastructure, with onward access to Europe. On 22 April 2024, Türkiye, Iraq, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates signed a quadripartite memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the project (Directorate of Communications of the Republic of Türkiye, 2024). The project combines transport, investment, logistics, and regional economic integration.

The case is relevant because it has already produced a multilateral coordination framework and a shared infrastructure agenda. Türkiye and Iraq must address border connections, security, financing, technical standards, and governance; Qatar and the United Arab Emirates add investment and regional participation. These arrangements are consistent with the institutionalized-communication mechanism.

However, the project remains under implementation, and no mediation outcome can be observed. Claims that the Development Road will create peace or transform regional diplomacy are therefore prospective. Security conditions in Iraq, financing, domestic and regional political disputes, route competition, and local distributional concerns may delay or reshape the project. The case is included to prevent the framework from selecting only completed initiatives and to demonstrate that institutional promise is not equivalent to causal evidence.

At most, the Development Road may create future mediation-enabling capacity if it produces durable joint institutions, regular coordination, and credible implementation benefits. Whether those resources translate into diplomatic access during an actual dispute

requires later observation. The case therefore receives the weakest evidentiary classification in the comparison

Case	Diplomatic capacity	Geoeconomic capacity	Strategic connectivity	Trust/coordination evidence	Stability-related outcome	Mediation link and limit
Black Sea Grain Initiative	Accepted Turkish-UN role; access to Russia and Ukraine.	Black Sea-Straits position; ports, inspections, logistics.	Maritime export corridor and Istanbul JCC.	Common procedures and joint teams despite war.	32.9m metric tons exported; bounded food-market effect.	Direct/strongest. Consent and UN role were indispensable; initiative ended in 2023.
TANAP	Energy diplomacy and long-term relations with Azerbaijan/EU actors.	Pipeline transit and supply-diversification role.	Southern Gas Corridor governance and operations.	Repeated technical, commercial, and political coordination.	Continuity/diversification, not a conflict-resolution outcome.	Supportive/indirect. No specific mediation outcome; interests may constrain neutrality.
Middle Corridor	Ministerial and multilateral transport engagement.	Eurasian multimodal network position.	Ports, rail, road, customs, and logistics links.	Recurring cross-border and regulatory coordination.	Route diversification and potential resilience.	Supportive/indirect. Coordination exists, but causal effect on mediation is unobserved.
Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway	Sustained trilateral political support.	Rail link connecting Türkiye, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.	Core rail component of the Middle Corridor.	Schedules, standards, customs, maintenance, border coordination.	Transport integration; dependent on use and governance.	Supportive/indirect. Relationship infrastructure, not mediation.
Development Road	Quadripartite framework with Iraq, Qatar, and UAE.	Planned Faw-Türkiye rail and road corridor.	Proposed Gulf-Iraq-Türkiye-Europe connection.	MoU and emerging coordination; implementation incomplete.	No observed stability outcome.	Prospective/weakest. Security, finance, politics, and completion remain uncertain.

Table 2. Structured Comparison of the Five Case

The comparison demonstrates a clear evidentiary gradient. The Black Sea Grain Initiative combines accepted third-party involvement, dispute-relevant geography, a formal coordination body, and measurable implementation. It therefore supports a direct mechanism-based inference. TANAP, the Middle Corridor, and BTK show repeated cross-border coordination and strategic relevance, but the link to mediation remains supportive and indirect. The Development Road shows institutional intent but not completed infrastructure or mediation effects.

Across the cases, the most plausible common mechanism is not economic leverage in a coercive sense. It is the creation of contact, practical relevance, and implementation capacity. The evidence is strongest when an asset is directly connected to the problem being negotiated and when the parties establish a common procedure. It weakens as the analysis moves from an observed dispute to general infrastructure or future potential.

Discussion

Main Findings and Theoretical Implications

The findings refine the original expectation that geoeconomic capacity strengthens mediation. The relationship exists most convincingly when three conditions coincide: Türkiye has accepted diplomatic access to the parties; a geoeconomic or logistical asset is directly relevant to the issue; and the parties consent to an institutional mechanism that uses that asset. The Black Sea Grain Initiative meets these conditions. The other four cases demonstrate background relationships and capabilities but not mediation outcomes.

For mediation scholarship, the study adds specificity to the general claim that mediator resources matter. Material resources become diplomatically useful through identifiable mechanisms: venue and access, operational indispensability, regular contact, and implementation support. This formulation avoids treating every economically connected state as a mediator. It also shows why resources may create both opportunities and constraints. Close energy or trade ties can increase access, but they can also create interests that affect perceptions of impartiality.

For middle-power scholarship, the results suggest that niche diplomacy is partly embedded in networks. Behavioural strategies such as coalition-building and multilateralism remain central, but a middle power may gain issue-specific influence when it occupies a useful node in energy, transport, or logistical systems. This extends, rather than replaces, behavioural accounts of middle-power diplomacy (Cooper et al., 1993; Jordaan, 2003).

For economic statecraft, the analysis highlights a non-coercive dimension. Geoeconomic assets are often studied as instruments of pressure or asymmetric dependence. The cases examined here show that the same networks may also support facilitation and implementation. This is not an inherently peaceful effect: whether the network enables cooperation or coercion depends on governance, distributional interests, and the parties' strategic choices.

For regional integration research, the findings counsel against assuming that infrastructure automatically produces stability. Corridors can support repeated coordination and create constituencies for continuity, but they can also generate disputes over routes, financing, sovereignty, and unequal gains. Stability-related outcomes should therefore be measured through sustained cooperation, functioning procedures, and crisis resilience rather than inferred from project announcements.

Rival Explanations and Counterfactual Limits

The Black Sea Grain Initiative can also be explained by Türkiye's diplomatic balancing, its relations with Russia and Ukraine, the parties' commercial incentives, global concern over food prices, the UN's legitimacy, and the specific legal geography of the Straits. The study does not exclude these explanations. Its claim is configurational: diplomatic access and international partnership interacted with operational geography and implementation capacity. Removing any one factor would likely have reduced, but not necessarily eliminated, the chance of agreement.

The initiative's termination is equally important. It shows that a mediator's resources cannot preserve an arrangement when a party withdraws consent and the broader conflict remains unresolved. The outcome was substantial

but bounded: food exports resumed for a period, while the war continued. Sustainable regional stability should therefore be treated as a possible downstream outcome, not as an observed result of every mediation effort.

The infrastructure cases generate even weaker counterfactual leverage. It is not possible to observe how Türkiye's diplomacy would have developed in the absence of TANAP, the Middle Corridor, or BTK, and public documents rarely reveal whether officials used those projects in private bargaining. The study accordingly treats them as plausibility probes for enabling mechanisms rather than causal tests.

Transferability and Scope

The model may be relevant to other middle powers whose diplomatic roles intersect with issue-specific material networks. Norway's energy position and peace diplomacy, Qatar's aviation and energy networks, Indonesia's maritime centrality, Brazil's regional economic weight, or South Korea's technological and financial ties could provide comparative cases. Transferability should not be presumed. The model is most likely to apply where a state has relations with opposing parties, possesses a dispute-relevant asset, and can embed that asset in an accepted multilateral or technical process.

Where the asset is unrelated to the dispute, dependence is highly coercive, or the mediator lacks credibility, geoeconomic capacity may have little positive effect. Comparative studies should therefore include failed mediation, rejected mediators, and cases in which infrastructure intensified rivalry.

Methodological Implications and Remaining Limitations

Future testing requires evidence closer to the bargaining process. Elite interviews could assess whether officials considered energy or transport ties when selecting Türkiye as an interlocutor. Process tracing could identify whether technical contacts were activated during crises. Social-network analysis could measure changes in institutional centrality, while event data could compare connectivity with mediation attempts across

states and time. Paired comparisons between successful and failed initiatives would reduce outcome-based selection bias.

This study remains limited by public-source dependence, the absence of interviews, and unequal evidence across cases. Its conceptual contribution is therefore stronger than its ability to estimate causal magnitude. The revised model should be understood as a set of testable propositions and observable implications, not a definitive causal law.

Conclusion

This study examined how Türkiye's geoeconomic resources may support international mediation capacity without conflating infrastructure with mediation itself. The evidence shows that connectivity does not automatically produce conflict resolution. Its diplomatic contribution depends on mechanisms and context. Operational relevance, institutionalized communication, repeated coordination, and implementation capacity can complement diplomatic access, but they cannot replace party consent, mediator credibility, or conflict ripeness.

The five cases provide different levels of support. The Black Sea Grain Initiative offers direct evidence because Türkiye and the United Nations facilitated a specific agreement and operated an implementation mechanism in Istanbul. TANAP, the Middle Corridor, and BTK show how cross-border projects can institutionalize relationships and increase strategic relevance, but they do not demonstrate a direct mediation effect. The Development Road remains prospective and underscores the need to separate intended benefits from observed outcomes.

The theoretical contribution is threefold. First, the article positions geoeconomic capacity as a facilitating, not necessary or sufficient, condition of mediation. Second, it introduces an evidentiary distinction between direct mediation, supportive mediation-enabling capacity, and prospective capacity. Third, it extends middle-power and economic-statecraft research by identifying the non-coercive, implementation-oriented functions of material networks while retaining attention to asymmetry and strategic interest.

Policy Recommendations

1. Türkiye should connect connectivity diplomacy with formal mediation capacity-building. Transport, energy, customs, and foreign-policy institutions need standing channels through which technical expertise can be mobilized when a dispute has an operational dimension.
2. Multilateral legitimacy should remain central. The Black Sea case shows the value of combining Türkiye's access and logistical capacity with the United Nations' legitimacy. Similar initiatives should use accepted international or regional partners where this improves consent and accountability.
3. Policymakers should avoid presenting infrastructure projects as peace projects before outcomes are observable. Monitoring frameworks should distinguish project completion, institutional cooperation, crisis resilience, and actual dispute-resolution effects.
4. Connectivity projects should incorporate transparent governance, equitable benefit-sharing, and dispute-settlement procedures. These features are more likely to support predictable cooperation than infrastructure investment alone.
5. Mediation strategy should include risk assessment. Energy and trade ties may increase access but may also produce dependence, perceived bias, or exposure to coercion. Diplomatic planning should explicitly evaluate these countervailing effects.

Future Research

Future research should test three questions. Under what conditions do disputants select a geoeconomically central state as mediator? Which types of network position improve implementation rather than merely access? When does interdependence undermine neutrality or create coercive leverage? Comparative work could pair Türkiye with Qatar, Norway, Indonesia, Brazil, or South Korea and include both successful and failed mediation attempts.

Mixed-method designs would be especially valuable. Interviews and archival research can identify mechanisms inside negotiations; network analysis can measure institutional centrality; and quantitative studies can compare trade, energy, transport, and diplomatic-event data. Longitudinal research on the Development Road should assess whether its coordination structures survive implementation challenges and whether they are later activated in regional crisis management.

In conclusion, Türkiye's experience indicates that mediation capacity is best understood as a configuration of diplomacy, legitimacy, issue-specific relevance, and implementation resources. A geoeconomic perspective adds explanatory value when it is tied to observable mechanisms and bounded claims. It becomes misleading when infrastructure is treated as mediation or when strategic connectivity is assumed to generate peace on its own.

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