



Mediating the Armenia-Azerbaijan Border and Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

UN Security Council - Background Guide

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Introduction

The Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan are the two countries in the Caucasus mountains that became independent in 1991 during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Armenia borders Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran, and Georgia, while Azerbaijan borders Armenia, Georgia, Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Both countries are practically landlocked and have no access to international waters, which makes them especially dependent on the influence of their powerful regional neighbours. Also, Azerbaijan possesses an exclave province of Nakhichevan, which is separated from Azerbaijan by Armenian territory.

The key to understanding conflicts in the post-Soviet Caucasus, including conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh region, is the ethnic and religious composition of these lands, which often do not correspond to the international borders. One of such regions is the Nagorno-Karabakh province, which is an internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan populated by a vast majority of ethnic Armenians. Recently, the instability caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union has reignited the ethnic tensions in the region that progressed into a full-scale war in 1992-1994 that ended up in de-facto independence of Nagorno-Karabakh (which became the Republic of Artsakh) from Azerbaijan. The conflict mostly remained in its frozen state until the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, which resulted in another significant rise in violence. As of 2023, the conflict has expanded its territory from Nagorno-Karabakh province to the Armenia-Azerbaijan international border and there is no peaceful resolution in sight.

This is a very difficult conflict for the international community to resolve that involves issues of human rights, autonomy, rights of self-determination, and territorial integrity. Similar to the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Kurdish question or uncountable ethnic conflicts on the African continent, there is no right solution that will satisfy interests of all sides of these ethnic and

religious conflicts. Furthermore, the conflict is complicated by involvement of regional powers, such as Turkey, Russia, and Iran, which pursue their own interests and often hinder unfavorable peace efforts. If the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan should prevail, then why was Serbian integrity violated by NATO's intervention to allow Kosovo's de-facto independence (and possible integration into Albania)? If people's rights for self-determination are of greater importance, then why are the Kurdish people, spread across 4 countries, prevented from creating their own national state? Do borders define the extent of people or do people define the extent of their borders?

As part of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the delegates will need to ask themselves these questions and try to find a suitable resolution to this never-ending conflict that will ensure minimal discontent on all the sides.

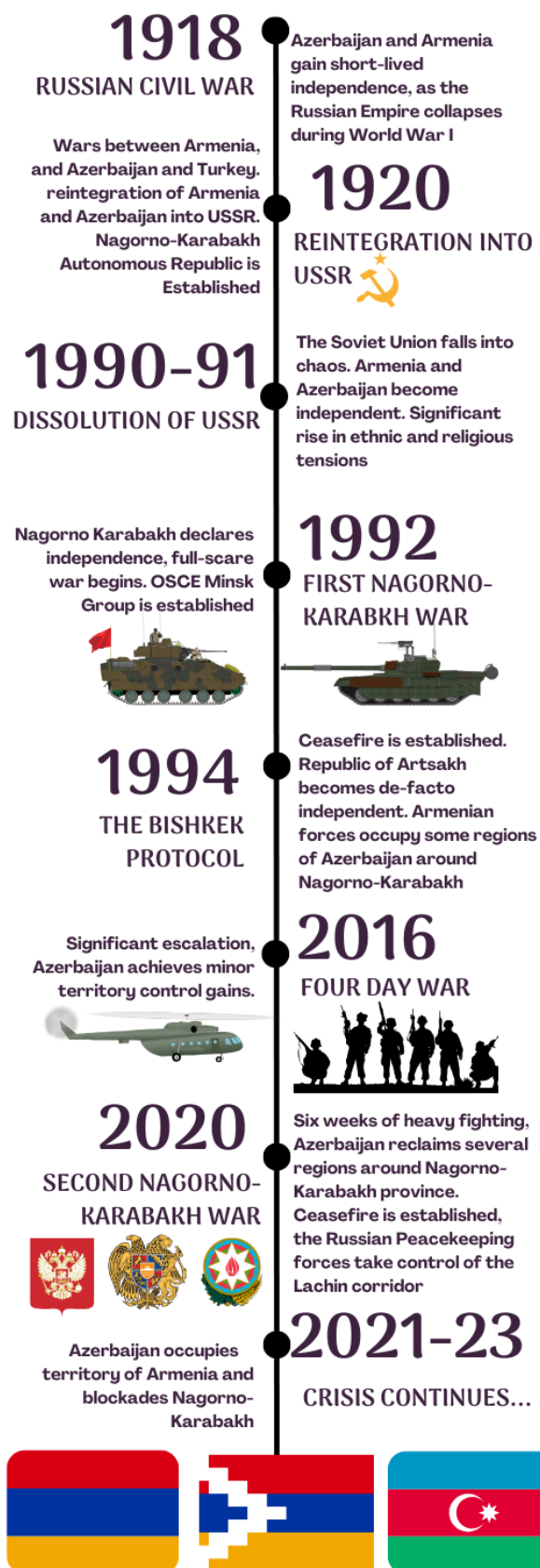


Background

The Caucasus region has been ruled by many prominent countries, the recent of which include the Ottoman and Russian Empires. Both empires practiced altering ethnic and religious composition of important regions to ensure that significant part of population was loyal to the central government, ranging from voluntary resettlement programs and additional “taxes on faith” to mass forced migration. During the second half of the 19th century, Russo-Turkish Wars of 1877-1788 in the Caucasus and the efforts of Russian imperial administration have sparked mass migration of ethnic Armenians from the Ottoman Empire into the Russian-controlled Caucasus shifting the balance between Christian Armenians and Muslim Azerbaijanis in the southern regions in favour of the Armenians. These events can be seen as the beginning of contemporary Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict¹.

The conflict intensified during the World War I (1914-1918), the subsequent Russian Civil War (1918-1920) and the Armenian Genocide, an ethnic cleansing campaign conducted by the Ottoman

TIMELINE



¹ <https://karabakh.org/conflict/historical-background/historical-backg>

authorities against local Armenians (as many as 1.2 million killed). Both Armenia and Azerbaijan gained their short-lived independence in 1918 and fought a war against each other until the end of Russian Civil War and subsequent reintegration of these republics in the new Soviet state for another 70 years.

The federative nature of the USSR required the national government to formalize the borders of the republics and distribute authority between them, which is a hard problem in this diverse multiethnic region. To address this question, the Soviet government has granted the Nagorno-Karabakh province a status of Autonomous Region with high degree of autonomy (e.g., Armenian as an official language, self-government) as part of the Azerbaijan SSR, which was suitable for both sides, but the conflict remained on the level of communal violence. Yet, this Soviet solution has been effective for maintaining relative peace for almost 70 years.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 has left the region without a powerful stabilizing intermediary and the conflict between mostly Christian Armenians and mostly Muslim Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh province of Azerbaijan progressed into a full-scale war in early 1992, as local Armenians launched their uprisings and proclaimed their independent Republic of Artsakh with future goal of integrating into the newly established Republic of Armenia. The uprising was supported by volunteers from the Armenia proper, as well as serious intervention of the Armenian state, including supplying military equipment and sending officers. In 1992 the OSCE Minsk Group was established to mediate the conflict, which was co-chaired by France, Russian Federation, and the United States, but, however, was later criticized for its ineffectiveness. By 1994 Armenians took full control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region and nearby provinces called “the Lachin Corridor” connecting Artsakh to the Republic of Armenia and the Bishkek Protocol instated a ceasefire in the region. The region became de-facto

independent and integrated into the Republic of Armenia, while still being internationally recognized as territory of Azerbaijan.

The following decades saw gradual rearmament of Azerbaijan, which was made possible by profitable oil exports. Major ceasefire violations happened in 2008 and 2016, while both sides accused each other of the escalation. Minor ceasefire violations happened every couple of years. The end of the armistice was marked by a new offensive operation launched by Azerbaijan in 2020, which became known as the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. While lasting only 44 days it has been as deadly as the entire First Nagorno-Karabakh War. The fighting involved substantial use of heavy equipment and modern military technology, like unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Despite heavy losses, the Azerbaijani military achieved a breakthrough and was 15 kilometres (9 miles) away from the capital city of Nagorno-Karabakh region². A ceasefire agreement was reached on 9 November 2020, with the mediation of the Russian Federation.

Overall, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War has ended in Azerbaijan's victory, with Azerbaijan reclaiming large territory, including southern districts of Nagorno-Karabakh and areas surrounding it. It was also agreed that Armenians will give up all Azerbaijani territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, excluding the Lachin corridor, which became monitored by the Russian peacekeepers to ensure the safety of transport communication of Nagorno-Karabakh region with Armenia proper. While the Republic of Artsakh continued its existence on the unoccupied lands, its military supply lines are severed, and its defense capability is in question.

The tensions between the Republic of Armenia and Republic of Azerbaijan continued, as the conflict spilled over to the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in 2021. Several clashes occurred, as Azerbaijani forces have taken control of internationally recognized Armenian territory. Despite the small scale of these skirmishes, the situation remains difficult because it is now Armenian

² <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>

territory being occupied, including heights around a crucial highway connecting Yerevan to the southern regions of Armenia, and neither Russian Federation nor European Union have managed to force the sides to mutual respect of territorial integrity. Furthermore, the ceasefire agreements were violated in 2022, when Azerbaijan effectively blockaded the Nagorno-Karabakh province by cutting off access to the Lachin Corridor³. Neither side is satisfied with the current situation and, therefore, it is apparent that the conflict will continue in the upcoming years of global instability. A new war is imminent.

³ <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict>

Past Efforts

The UN Security Council has taken an active role in the beginning of the conflict and passed for resolutions on the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh war:⁴

- **Resolution 822 (30 April 1993)** – UNSC expresses concern at the rising tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, acknowledges the violation of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, reaffirms its support of preservation of international borders. UNSC demands the cessation of hostilities, urges for negotiations of a lasting ceasefire, and calls for humanitarian support efforts to help the civilian population.
- **Resolution 853 (29 July 1993)** – UNSC reaffirms its previous resolutions, condemns the continuation of hostilities and continued seizure of Azerbaijani territory. UN Security Council also supports the mediation efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group, urges the UN members to avoid supplying military equipment to the region and requests Armenia to influence the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh region.
- **Resolution 874 (14 October 1993)** – the previous resolutions are reaffirmed; UNSC supports the CSCE monitoring missions and recently established ceasefire brokered by the OSCE Minsk Group and calls for withdrawal of forces from the region.
- **Resolution 884 (12 November 1993)** – UNSC reaffirms its previous resolutions, condemns the violations of a recently established ceasefire, urges parties to comply with the reached agreements of ceasefire and withdrawal of forces from the region, and demands regional states to refrain from intervention.

Overall, the United Nations Security Council does not mention Republic of Armenia as a contestant and violator of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, while reiterating that it is the local

⁴ <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/13508.htm>

Armenian forces of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. However, the UNSC recognizes Armenia's influence on the local Armenian forces and urges it to ensure their compliance with the ceasefire agreements. Regarding the solutions to this conflict, UNSC has numerously called for deoccupation of non-Nagorno-Karabakh provinces of Azerbaijan, however, it has not proposed any solutions regarding Nagorno-Karabakh itself.

The United Nations Security Council had a limited role in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. As the crisis continued, Republic of Armenia requested an urgent UNSC session on 20 December 2022, when Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin transport corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and refused all demands of the Russian peacekeepers to clear to corridor, which violated the 2020 ceasefire agreements⁵. France, the United Kingdom, India, Russian Federation, and others have voiced their concerns about the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, due to internal disagreements, the UN Security Council has failed to pass a resolution on this issue. Recently, Republic of Armenia has requested another UNSC emergency meeting due to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh region, which is effectively blockaded by the Azerbaijani military. This session happened on 16 August 2023, during which the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) has confirmed that it had no access to Nagorno-Karabakh since 14 June⁶. In response, Azerbaijan has made a refuting a statement, reiterated their position on undisputable sovereignty over Azerbaijani territory, and demanded Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh to disarm and stop usage of radio electronic-warfare equipment.

⁵ <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15154.doc.htm>

⁶ <https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick/meetings/2023>

While UNSC has not yet addressed the unfolding Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, the International Court of Justice (ICJ)⁷ has ruled against Azerbaijan's blocking of the Lachin Corridor and ordered Azerbaijan to ensure free movement in this region. As of August 2023, Azerbaijan has failed to comply with this decision. Other international organizations, such as the European Union and the OSCE, have numerously called for an end to hostilities and peaceful negotiations, yet, avoided condemning a particular side of the conflict and limited their involvement to humanitarian support and mediation.

⁷ <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1g/k1qcavpb5j>

Conclusion

The Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia-Azerbaijan border conflict is a prime example of how the United Nations system lacks the ability of resolving complex international issues. Such ethnic and religious conflicts result in contradiction of different principles of international law, like national rights of self-determination, territorial integrity and sovereignty. Only recently, as the Azerbaijani forces have trespassed the internationally recognized Armenian border, the conflict legally transformed from an internal conflict in Azerbaijan to a multinational conflict. Yet, this has only further complicated this crisis.

The actions of Russian Federation, which is trying to preserve its influence by remaining a major intermediary force, are crucial in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia and Armenia are allied through the Collective Security Treaty Organization defensive pact, however, Russia and CSTO failed to act, when internationally recognized Armenian territory was occupied by Azerbaijan in 2021. Overall, Russian government struggles to take a side in this conflict or enforce an armistice, considering its large Armenian and Azerbaijan diasporas, and friendly relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Russian peace efforts are sabotaged by this indecisiveness, as well as the increasing Turkish military and political support to Azerbaijan, which decreases Russian influence on Azerbaijan.

While Russia has the major role in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace talks, several other countries have tried to mediate this conflict in the recent years. The United States have numerously called for de-escalation and peaceful negotiations, condemning any new violence and foreign involvement in the conflict. Some U.S. politicians, like Nancy Pelosi and Jackie Speier advocate for official condemnation of Azerbaijan's actions and support of Armenia, however, the U.S. establishment has no definite agreement on its position. In comparison, France

is a notably active EU participant that has officially condemned Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin corridor and called for compliance with ICJ decision⁸.

One major issue that prevents a common consensus between major diplomatic actors is the ongoing military conflict between Ukraine and Russia. While in 1992-1994 period France, Russia and the United States acted together as part of the OSCE Minsk Group, the severe deterioration of relations between Russia and the United States and NATO in recent years hinders any possible joined approach to this question. It might be even speculated that this condition was one of the indirect causes that led Azerbaijan to escalate the situation in 2022-2023 period, as the international community is unlikely to organize a proper response to such escalation.

Overall, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia and Republic of Artsakh is a very complicated issue to resolve. The region became an entanglement of political and economic interests of different major regional powers that advance their agendas, and, as the regional stability is challenged by the conflict in Ukraine, the peaceful resolution seems impossible. The delegates of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) must make an effort to design an enduring peaceful solution that will take into account interests of all participants.

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<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/azerbaijan/news/article/armenia-azerbaijan-blockade-of-the-lachin-corridor-27-07-23>