

ISSUE DESCRIPTION

COMMITTEE Security Council
ISSUE Resolving the Conflict Between Azerbaijan and Armenia
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Introduction

The autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh was first established by the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Although 90% of the population belonged to the Armenian ethnic group, it still belonged to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the strain grew to such a level that a complete, two-year-old war broke out over the region. Having reached an agreement on ceasefire, the following 26 years were relatively peaceful, despite some minor provocations from the parties involved.

In 2020, everything had changed after serious violations of each other's territory from both sides and blaming the other country for their actions.

Since then, the relationship seems to have worsened, and the UN Security Council faces the problems of solving the issue and mediating between the countries daily.

Definition of Key Terms

Cease-fire, truce - In a warfare, an agreed end to hostilities, the cessation of arms, usually temporary.

Heavy weaponry- Heavy weapons that are too heavy for infantry to carry, for example, tanks and armoured vehicles.

Longer-range artillery - Large calibre weapons, such as cannons, howitzers, missile launchers, that are operated by crews.

Cross-border attacks - Violent clashes between two countries at the line of contact.

Mediation and negotiation - Intervening in a conflict, usually between two countries, in order to reach a peace agreement.

General Overview

In 1923, the Soviet Union (USSR) established the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) — home to a 95 percent ethnically Armenian population — within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. In spite of Armenian–Azerbaijani conflicts throughout the Soviet–era, fights were under relative control.

Nagorno-Karabakh’s autonomous regional legislature passed a resolution in 1988 declaring its intention to join the Republic of Armenia, despite its official location within Azerbaijan.

In 1991, after the attainment of statehood of the two new countries, Nagorno-Karabakh officially declared independence, and a full-scale war broke out between the two countries.

After Russia brokered a ceasefire in 1994, known as the Bishkek Protocol, Armenia occupied 20 percent of the surrounding Azerbaijani territory. The Protocol left Nagorno-Karabakh de facto independent with a self-proclaimed government in Stepanakert, however, it was still heavily reliant on close economic, political, and military ties with Armenia. Approximately 30,000 people were killed in that conflict and it generated hundreds of thousands of refugees.

The ceasefire brought neither full stability nor security to the region. Between 1994 and 2020, because of the use of attack drones, shelling and special operations, intermittent skirmishes flared along the border.

In 2016, encounters between Azerbaijan and Armenian-backed forces in Nagorno-Karabakh raged for four days, leading to hundreds of casualties from both sides, and although the parties agreed to cease hostilities, they kept blaming each other for violating the truce.

After a summer of cross-border attacks, heavy scrimmages broke out along the Azerbaijan-Nagorno-Karabakh border in late September 2020. More than seven thousand soldiers and civilians were killed, with hundreds more of Armenian and Azerbaijani soldiers wounded. Both countries rejected pressure from the United Nations, the United States and Russia to hold talks and end animosities, and instead pledged to continue fighting. The crisis escalated further when parties started to use longer-range artillery and other heavy weaponry. On 9th November, after indefinite failed attempts by the US, Russia and France to mediate a ceasefire, Russia finally brokered a deal, fortified by Russian peacekeepers, ending the six-week Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Azerbaijan regained most of the territory it lost two decades prior, leaving Armenia with only a portion of Karabakh.

In spite of the negotiation and mediation efforts led by the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which was created in 1994 and is led by Russia, the Us and France, the only success they could achieve through three decades is the intercession for the ceasefire.

The risk of military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is increasing due to the lack of peace talks and open communication between the involved parties and increased militarization along the line of contact.

Repeated contravention of the 2020 armistice escalated into a two-day conflict beginning on 13 September 2022—the most significant provocation since 2020. Azerbaijan made an assault on many locations inside Armenian terrain, which caused the evacuation of more than 2,700 civilians. Armenia and Azerbaijan have exchanged accusations of blame for inaugurating the attack. Russia took responsibility for the truce, although increased border confrontations were reported on 21 September, 23 September, and 28, September, less than one week after the armistice mediated by Russia.

In the following days, U.S. Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi visited Armenia with a congressional delegation — she became the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit the country. She prescribed the “illegal and deadly attacks by Azerbaijan,” which Azerbaijan denied as “Armenian propaganda”. Her sojourn is said to have disrupted U.S. and international diplomatic efforts to commence peace talks with Azerbaijan.

On 10 November, an Armenian soldier died after being critically wounded in a firefight along the eastern part of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border; both parties accused the other of inciting the violence during the ongoing peace conference. Russian President Vladimir Putin had visited Armenia on November 22 to discuss recent border clashes, among other issues, after Russia promoted a trilateral dialogue with Azerbaijan in late October.

On 12 December, a group of pro-governmental activists blocked the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia causing food and medication insufficiency. The E.U., the U.S. and other nations called on Baku to end the blockade.

Major Parties Involved

Russian Federation - Expresses concerns over the blocking of the Lachin Corridor, which resulted from disagreements on the development of ore deposits in the region. The country still wishes to keep its peacekeeping and mediator role in the region, but it cannot happen without the help, collaboration and response of the two parties involved. Having the major negotiator role is also important for Russia, because if it leads the peacekeeping-actions to success, it will demonstrate its clout over the region and Post-Soviet countries. The Russian Federation has organised regular contact with Armenia and Azerbaijan and, as a result, the supply of gas to Nagorno-Karabakh has been resumed, the Lachin Corridor has been partially reopened to traffic.

Republic of Azerbaijan - The country truly believes that Armenia only exploits the UN Security Council, and is concerned about Armenian propaganda towards the West. Also denies the role of the Government or protesting activists in blocking the Lachin corridor, claiming it only performs its duties to protect the route. Azerbaijan accused Armenia of refusing to fully withdraw its armed forces and to share the complete set of maps of the mines it placed in the other country. Instead, it has continued its illegal military activities for instance, on the line of contact, and planted new mines, resulting in fatalities of Azerbaijani people - as Baku believes.

Republic of Armenia - Blames the government of Azerbaijan for blocking the Lachin corridor and demands its re-opening. The country believes that systematic violence is used by the Azerbaijani authorities to subject the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to ethnic cleansing. Armenia expects that without strong accountability measures, including application of sanctions, Azerbaijan will continue to test the resilience and the determination of the international community and the Council.

United States of America - The United States called on Azerbaijan and others responsible for the Corridor's security, such as peacekeepers, to restore free movement, including for humanitarian and commercial use. Encouraged by the restoration of gas supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh, any attempts to cut essential services are unacceptable. Although the U.S. never declared it officially, with Nancy Pelosi's visit, it is clear whom the U. S. advocates.

The Republic of Türkiye - The conflict between Turkey and Armenia dates back decades, and until now, there was no strong diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Turkey and Armenia could soon make progress that is significant both for the stability of the Southern Caucasus and for economic development at these challenging times. In spite of these achievements, it is important to note that Turkey has given military aid to Azerbaijan several times. The Turkish media celebrated Azerbaijani advances, while Turkish politicians and commentators used the slogan "one nation, two states" referring to strong ties with Azerbaijan.

Timeline of Events

20 February 1988 - The extraordinary session of the NKAO Soviet of People's Deputies passed the resolution announcing its intention to join the Armenian SSR.

12 January 1989 - Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet authorised the NKAO Special Administration Committee (SAC), headed by A. Volsky, hence, the NKAO was removed from the administrative acquiescence of Azerbaijan.

1 December 1989 - The collective session of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR and the National Soviet of NKAO unanimously approved a resolution on re-unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

14 January 1991 - The Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR passed a resolution associating the Armenian-populated Shahoumian zone with the Kasum-Ismaïlov region of Azerbaijan, establishing the new Geranboy region.

22 September 1991 - Russian and Kazakhstan Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Nursultan Nazarbayev inspected Stepanakert with a conciliatory mission.

10 December 1991 - A vote on the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic took place. As a result, 99.89% of those who chose NKR autonomy.

26 January 1992 - The first serious loss of the Azerbaijani Army happened near an Armenian village of Karin-Tak. The achievement became a morale booster for further successful military operations by the Karabakh volunteer contingent against the Azerbaijani forces.

19 February 1992 - The Presidium of the NKR Supreme Council called the UN Secretary General and permanent member-states of the UN Security Council, deprecating the military aggression of Azerbaijan against NKR, and the use of "BM-21/Grad" missile-artillery assault on Stepanakert and other areas of NKR.

16 March 1992 - The Trilateral Teheran Communiqué (Iran, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), considering a one-week cease-fire in the conflict zone, was adopted.

14 April 1992 - Russian Foreign Minister sent a letter to the UN Secretary General on scenarios for the settlement of the Karabakh conflict.

20 April 1992 - The NKR Representation Office was authorised in the Republic of Armenia.

5 May 1992 - Russia advocated the creation of a Mediation Mission on the Karabakh agreement and expressed an eagerness to promote the mediation process under its aegis.

18 May 1992 - The NKR Self-Defense Forces led a successful procedure opening a humanitarian corridor through Lachin, connecting the NKR with Armenia.

19 September 1992 - The Sochi Agreement was signed by the defence authorities of Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia, calling for the cessation of arms for two months.

25 September 1992 - A military-technical protocol on the application of the Sochi Agreement was endorsed in Moscow.

5-8 January 1993 - A consultation between the personal representatives of the Presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, the United States, Turkey, and the Chairman of the CSCE Minsk Group, was held in Moscow in the diplomatic "5+1" format. Participants of the meeting approved a "calendar settlement". The NKR leadership refused Turkey's mediation due to the country's military and economic aid to Azerbaijan.

17 March - 6 April 1993 - A meeting in the "5+1" format was held in Geneva, where Azerbaijan refused to take part in conferences in this format.

30 April 1993 - The UN Security Council approved the Resolution 822, calling for the immediate cessation of all military and hostile activities, arrangement of connection to the region for all international organisations, continuation of mediations, and formation of CSCE peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone.

29 July 1993 - The Security Council passed Resolution 853 on Nagorno-Karabakh.

9-11 September 1993 - A conference of the CSCE Minsk Group took place in Moscow. Nagorno-Karabakh was recognised by the CSCE Minsk Group as an independent party to the conflict.

27 January 1994 - Russia proposed a three-week ceasefire beginning on February 1, 1994.

9-11 May 1994 - The Russian mediation team prepared a comprehensive cease-fire agreement. The defence authorities of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh signed the paper. The arrangement became effective on May 12, 1994.

25 November 2015 - Armenia confined 21 people, including women and Nagorno-Karabakh war veterans, and found hidden weapons at their apartments. They were accused of planning the assassination of officials.

2 April 2016 - Four days of intense fighting on the front lines raised fears of a full-scale war. Russia helped broker a truce between the warring parties on 5 April. Both sides accused each other of provoking the escalation in which more than 200 people died.

22-23 September 2016 - The Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia exchanged accusations at the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly. Both ministers also met separately with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs in New York to continue discussions on an arrangement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The parties discussed further steps that could establish an atmosphere for introducing negotiations that could lead to an agreement.

17 February 2017 - The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs met with Armenia and Azerbaijan's foreign ministers to discuss recent skirmishes along the borders, calling on parties to restrain from confrontation and to "prepare their population for peace and not for war".

11-12 July 2017 - Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian accused Azerbaijan of atrociousness against civilians during the April 2016 escalation. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev blamed Armenia for abuses against civilians in Alkhanli village in Fizuli district on 4 April.

April-May 2018 - President Serzh Sargsyan resigned during the largest protests in post-independence Armenia's history. Following Sargsyan's bid for premiership, On 26 April, the leader of the protests, Pashinyan was nominated by the opposition Yelk alliance to stand for interim prime minister in the May elections. Later, he became the new prime minister of Armenia.

16 January 2019 - Both sides' foreign ministers agreed to take concrete resolutions to prepare the people for peace and expressed their keenness to arrange the first official meeting of their leaders.

28 June 2019 - Yerevan and Baku released one prisoner each, who were transferred home with assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

18 May 2020 - The OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs held separate online meetings with Azerbaijan's foreign minister Elmar Mammadyarov and his Armenian counterpart Zohrab Mnatsakanyan while both sides held military exercises close to the frontlines. The talks focused on the situation in the region and the settlement process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Few other details were made public.

12 June 2021 - Armenia and Azerbaijan make a breakthrough deal on releasing 15 detainees and delivering information about mines.

12-16 July 2020 - At least 18 soldiers were killed in clashes at the Armenian, Azerbaijani border.

24 September 2021 - OSCE Minsk Group resumes mediation functions.

14 December 2021 - First-ever EU mediation of Azerbaijan-Armenia talks about restoring railway connections, supporting the resolving of border issues and offering economic aid to the parties.

8 March 2022 - Damage to pipeline causes gas crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh.

26 March 2022 - Baku gains control over Kartanglukh mountains in Nagorno-Karabakh.

3-4 August 2022 - Azerbaijan launches military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

13-14 September 2022 - A weak truce halted two days of fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia that left hundreds of soldiers dead along around a 200 km segment of the countries' shared border.

12 December 2022 – ongoing - A group of Azerbaijani pro-government activists have blocked the corridor connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, causing shortages of food and medication in the landlocked region. The blockade has continued despite the Russian, European Union, the U.S. and other countries' demands on Baku to lift it.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Due to the conflict's long-lasting escalation, there have been several attempts in order to make a peace agreement between the two countries. However, none of them succeeded, and the parties only agreed on short-term cease-fires, which were violated by both Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The first greatest endeavour of finding piece was definitely the formation of the CSCE Minsk group in 1993, and the arrangement between the belligerent countries in the following year.

Three other CSCE conferences have taken place in September 2016, February 2017 and in September 2020 conducive to establish a better relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Further remarkable verifications were regulated by the UN Security Council and General Assembly in 1993 and 1994 approving Resolution 822 and Resolution 853. Furthermore, the UN has called on the involved countries several times for the cessation of hostilities and for a lasting peace agreement.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

Due to the increased interest towards the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, there are many possible solutions how the warring countries and the mediators, such as the Russian Federation, the US, the CSCE Minsk Group and other countries, could solve the issue.

One of them, which is to be proposed by Azerbaijan, is granting all the rights of political and military supervision over the region Nagorno-Karabakh, although it would not be acceptable neither for Armenia, nor for the negotiating countries, due to the dissatisfaction of Yerevan.

In contrast to the previous resolution, the measures that would serve the interests of Yerevan are unifying the NKR and Armenia, but these arrangements would also provoke strong protest from Baku and the mediators.

Therefore, there are two other options, including the Declaration of Independence of Nagorno-Karabakh inside the geological territory of Azerbaijan but presumably later, this measure would lead to tensions along the borders.

Providing autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh inside the administrative district of Azerbaijan is also a feasible resolution that is important to be considered, and probably, this arrangement shall cause the least damage to the relationship between the countries in the future.

Bibliography:

Here you can find some statistical maps of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh with interpretations:

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

Here is an extended timeline of events:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1VPtj3c5wIOFRuGbwnbHJ4CCjLo4F7rRlrlQBv8iohhl/edit#gid=0>

An analysis about the current situation:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/world/europe/armenia-azerbaijan-russia-nagorno.html>

Here is a conspectus about one the latest session of the UN Security Council reviewing the issue of Lachin corridor:

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

An article about the relationship between Armenia and Turkey:

<https://ecfr.eu/publication/acts-of-normality-the-potential-for-turkey-armenia-rapprochement/>

Further articles explaining the background and the incidences of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan:

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

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/04/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-explained/>