

Security Council



Forum	Security Council
Issue:	The question of the Nagorno Karabakh region
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Position:	President

Introduction

The Caucasus are a strategically important mountainous region in south-east Europe where for centuries, Christian, Muslim, and Persian influences have competed for control. The region has been an ethnic tinderbox for over a century and after 3 failed ceasefires, war erupted in late September 2020. This war ended with a Azerbaijan's victory and was followed by a ceasefire on November 9th which left much to desire regarding sustainable peace planning.

The primary focus of this research report is unpacking the extremely complex foundations of the Nagorno-Karabakh war and the intricate responses of stakeholders and mediators. Combining these two focal points will allow the Security Council to make informed decisions on a sustainable, long-term peace plan for the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Definition of Key Terms

Pogroms

Pogroms are a mob attack, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the persons and property of a religious, racial, or national minority. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh war this refers to the murder, rape and rioting during and before the First Nagorno Karabakh, particularly during the Sumgait and Baku Pogroms. These Pogroms are considered an extension of the Armenian Genocide in 1915 in the Armenian national conscious and are memorialized on the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day.



Operation Ring

Operation Ring was a series of atrocities and gross human rights violations over 8 days where Soviet forces went out to seize weapons of Armenian “Bandits”. Effectively, it was perceived as a method of intimidating the Armenian populace into giving up their movement for unification.

An Armenian economist, Filaret Berikyan, recounted mutilations “too repulsive to describe” in Getashen, a target of Operation Ring. His personal account reported 20 days, some of whom had been scalped. Similarly, the director of the Yerevan office of the Armenian Assembly of America reported seeing a refugee from the fighting in a Armenian district of Azerbaijan “whose scalp had been cut 180 degree around, from ear to ear” (Los Angeles Times May 8th 1991).

The Deputy Defense Minister claimed that Soviet soldiers are:

“struggling not against the innocent population but against gunmen, seizing illegally obtained weapons, including those captured as a result of criminal attacks on depots of the Transcaucasus Military District.”

On the contrary, Armenian leaders claimed that the forces of Operation Ring were trying to neutralize lawfully regulated militia of a sovereign Soviet republic.

General Overview

History

Soviet Era

The present-day conflicts in the Caucasus have their roots in the Sovietization of Transcaucasia which took place in the early 1920s after Imperial Russia acquired the region from Persia a century earlier through the treaties of Golestān (Gulistan, 1813) and Turkmenchay (Torkmānchāy, 1828). Tax surveys performed by Imperial Russia in 1845 concluded that almost two-thirds of Karabakh were Azeri, however, the mountainous districts were almost exclusively populated by Armenians. The surveys failed to recognize that the majority of Azeri in Karabakh lived a nomadic lifestyle and spent the summers in Nagorno-Karabakh’s highlands. The surveys, conducted during the winter, did not support



the claim of Azerbaijani herdsmen to the lands they also typically populated, skewing known data on the distribution of minorities at the time. This was further exaggerated by the Russian authorities' partiality to the Christian Armenians over the Azerbaijanis, whose linguistic and religious ties to the Ottoman Empire made them unfavourable. At the hand of Russian policy, the population of Armenians grew considerably over the 19th century, while simultaneously, more and more Muslims left for Iran and Turkey, reversing the demographic change that the Turkic Karabakh Khanate had brought. This formed the foundation for the simmering ethnic tension that would later erupt into two lethal wars in the coming century.

Joseph Stalin and the Caucasian Bureau (Kavburo) established the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region as part of the divide-and-rule policy in the region after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917. This separation of the Armenian majority from the Armenian state was in part, a concession to Turkey, which feared a strong Armenian state. Although the Armenian-majority region enjoyed relative autonomy, it was an Oblast of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (S.S.R) and was severed from the Armenian S.S.R by the Karabakh Mountain Range. In the years after the revolution, Azerbaijani emigration continued and by 1926, the Oblast was 94% Armenian. Subsequently, the anti-nomadic collectivization campaigns in the 1930s further diminished the seasonal Azerbaijani presence. Thus, the Nagorno-Karabakh region became an enclave of Christian Armenians surrounded by Turkic Azeris.

The autonomous region experienced excessive Azerbaijani interference and although autonomous regions in the Soviet Union theoretically experienced broad cultural and linguistic freedom, Azeri officials limited the exchange of information, cultural and academic, with Yerevan, the Armenian capital. The situation worsened and the Armenian birth-rate dropped finally resulting in the Azerbaijani population creeping up from the 6% in 1926, to 25% by 1979. This massive demographic shift furthered the friction which led to the escalation of rhetoric by political leaders. Simultaneously, the *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms allowed for more space for political leaders and civilians alike to express their dissent.

The cultural, economic, and linguistic freedom demanded by the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh eventually soared to protests for full reunification. When the ethnic Armenians in the autonomous region, backed by Armenia, vied for transfer to Armenian jurisdiction in 1988 through a referendum, the demand was swiftly and harshly opposed by



the Azerbaijan SSR and the Soviet Union which placed the region under martial law in the winter of 1988. When the fighting grew fiercer, the Soviets lifted the martial law without a concrete peace plan which further allowed the situation to spiral out of control.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the ethnic antagonisms, already inflamed from the previous separatist movement was set ablaze. When Karabakh declared its independence a short two months after, the conflict was escalated to a full-scale war.

First Nagorno-Karabakh War

The majority of the military equipment left behind by the Soviets fell into Azeri hands, conversely, Armenians possessed greater manpower and the larger share of former Soviet officers. Amid the horrific reports of ethnic cleansing and massacres committed by both sides, an estimated 15,000 – 20,000 lives were lost, including civilians, and up to a million were displaced, most of which were Azeris. Notably, Azerbaijani authorities incited pogroms against Armenians in Sumgait (February to March 1988), Kirovabad (November 1988), and Baku (January to February 1990) which resulted in horrific abuses against civilians, hundreds of deaths and destruction of infrastructure, homes and businesses.

After a devastating earthquake in December 1988 which killed 25,000 people, calls for Karabakh to transfer to Armenia briefly subsided. During the chaos of the earthquake all members of the Karabakh Committee and the future president of Armenia were jailed by Moscow officials. This polarized relations between Armenians and the Kremlin and faith was lost in Gorbachev. The further atrocities targeting Armenians such as Operation Ring further worsened relations with Russia.

The Karabakh Armenian forces claimed control over much of southwestern Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh territory. The enclave of ethnic Armenians was now connected to the Armenian state. With Armenia now controlling the narrow strips of land to the west and south, the unrecognized state gained access to the outside world and the ability to trade with Armenia and Iran. The Armenians gained 14% of their former territory and expanded their borders to their present locations.



Post-1994 Ceasefire

The Minsk Group, named after an unrealized peace conference in Minsk, Belarus, arose in early 1994: a peace committee lead by Russia. On May 12, 1994, a ceasefire was signed by Azerbaijan and Armenia. However, a treaty was never signed and the status of the mountainous Nagorno-Karabakh region remained unresolved and disputed.



Figure 1: Change in NK borders post-1994 ceasefire

The primary opposition to the OSCE's status-determination efforts was Azerbaijan's fixation on "territorial integrity". Azerbaijan maintained that the region's indigenous Armenian population were "occupying" the land. As previously explored, this claim is extremely complex and throughout history, the demographics of this region have fluctuated immensely. Azerbaijan routinely referenced the four United Nations Security Council resolutions that took Azerbaijan as the center of discourse surrounding the conflict. These resolutions, although calling for the withdrawal of ethnic Armenian forces, never charged Armenia with occupation. Most importantly, the resolutions did not contest Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenians right to self-determination. Furthermore, the resolution's call for a withdrawal of troops applied as much to Azerbaijani forces as Armenian forces. Hence, the widely documented restrictions of water, electricity, gas and humanitarian relief was in Azerbaijan's siege of Stepankert, was in clear violation of the UN Security Council resolutions.

In 2008, Turkey and Azerbaijan vied for a U.N. General Assembly Resolution which reaffirmed language such as "occupation" and the preservation of "territorial integrity". However, these efforts were rejected by the OSCE Minsk Group's co-chairs Russia, France and the United States. The Security Council resolutions urged for the adherence to the

Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) which explicitly called for the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh's elected authorities in negotiations.

Azerbaijan's routinely refused anything less than full sovereignty of the region which made the OSCE's mission close to impossible. Security-building measures and other forms of peace facilitation were rejected by Azerbaijan which it saw as consolidating the alleged occupation by Armenia. On the other hand, Armenia would accept nothing less than full self-determination given that the history of genocidal violence and persecution of the Armenian people has characterized this conflict spanning over a century. The inability to resolve the tensions and the reluctance to start peace-building measures on a shaky foundation is what set up this frozen conflict for another full scale war three decades later.

2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War

On the 27th of September 2020, Azerbaijan armed by Turkey launched an offensive with the goal of reclaiming the less mountainous districts of southern Nagorno-Karabakh. The use of drones, long-range heavy artillery and missile strikes as well as the use of state propaganda and online information warfare set the tone for the forty-four day war. The United Nations called on both side to de-escalate the tensions and three failed ceasefires were broked by Russia, France and the United States. Both states declared martial law limiting freedom of speech. In particular, Azerbaijan passed a law in October 2020 prohibiting negative coverage on the situation on the front. Furthermore, restrictions were reported on the work of international journalist in Azerbaijan.



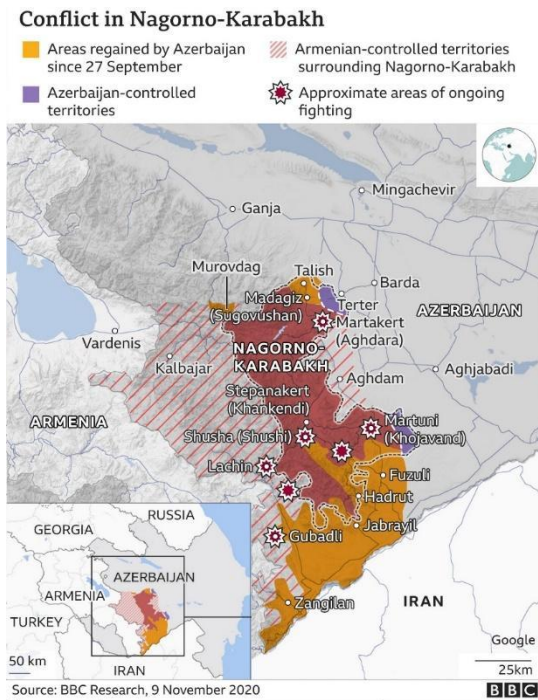


Figure 2: Map explaining Nagorno-Karabakh conflict 2020

Subsequent to the capture of Shusha, the second-largest and culturally important settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh, a ceasefire – for all intents and purposes, a surrender, was signed between the President of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Russia ending all hostilities on the 10th of November 2020 at exactly midnight Moscow time. The President of Artsakh also agreed to end hostilities despite not being included in the negotiations. About 2,000 Russian soldiers have been deployed to act as peacekeeping forces and uphold the ceasefire.

Ceasefire and Aftermath

The ceasefire signed on the 10th of November, Azerbaijan will maintain jurisdiction over the areas of Nagorno-Karabakh taken in the conflict. Furthermore, Armenia agreed to withdraw from several adjacent areas.





Figure 3: Protestors at the Armenian Government Headquarters

Protestors stormed the Yerevan government headquarters and the Armenian parliament accusing the government of betrayal. They maintained that fighting should have continued, despite the devastating losses the Armenians were suffering. The leadership of the enclave, however, admitted that the loss of Stepankert was practically unavoidable.

In April this year, a military trophy park was opened in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital displaying helmets of Armenian soldiers and dehumanizing wax figures. Later, in June a monument of an 'iron fist' was erected in Hadrut, a town previously inhabited by Armenians, commemorating the Azerbaijan's victory. These moves further contribute to Azerbaijan's declaration that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is resolved and a future for a self-ruling Nagorno-Karabakh is impossible.

Major Parties Involved

Azerbaijan

The peace agreement after the successful recapturing of Nagorno-Karabakh was widely celebrated in Azerbaijan. The 27th of September and 10 November were declared Memorial Day and Victory Day by Azerbaijan, although the latter was changed as it overlapped with Ataturk's Memorial Day in Turkey. Azerbaijan's primary goal is to internationally solidify their claim to Nagorno-Karabakh and avoid claims of self-determination by the Republic of Artsakh and deter any movement from Armenia to reclaim the land. Aside from this, Azerbaijan is currently focused on restoring cultural sites, infrastructure damaged



during the war, and charging Armenian Prisoners of War (POW) with criminal charges. Azerbaijan has publicly ruled out the possibility of an autonomous Nagorno-Karabakh and instead vies for the idea of “cultural autonomy”, where ethnic Armenians can observe cultural traditions, use their language in schools and have some poorly defined representation in their region’s local self-government.

One of the primary reasons why Azerbaijan likely does not truly aim to integrate Nagorno-Karabakh is that the process would require democratization in Azerbaijan, the expansion of the public sphere and changes in the antagonistic rhetoric surrounding national identity.

Armenia

Since the end of the fighting in November, Armenia has been swooped into a political crisis. After angry mobs stormed the government buildings, there were snap elections on the 20th of June 2021. The OSCE assessed the elections as “marred by increasingly inflammatory rhetoric”. This rhetoric quite aptly exemplifies the propaganda and nationalistic rhetoric employed by both sides in the war which has done little to de-polarize the two nations. Nagorno-Karabakh dominated the campaign as politicians scramble to assign blame for wartime losses and make promises for the future. Many wanted closer to achieve a guarantee of security through creating closer ties with Russia. Currently, Yerevan demands independence for the region, within its Soviet-era borders.



OSCE Minsk Group

The OSCE Minsk Group has been the primary drive behind peacekeeping efforts in the region for the last thirty years. As a result of the repeated failures to negotiate sustainable and meaningful treaties in Nagorno-Karabakh the Minsk Group has faced a lot of criticism. The Minsk Group has also further been fractured by Russia's brokering of the 9 November ceasefire which fellow co-chairs, France and the United States, considered more a "deal" than a proper foundation for peace.

Often the Nagorno-Karabakh is framed in terms of "why did the Minsk Group fail?" Many attribute this to the Minsk Group being a unipolar artifact in a multipolar world. Despite OSCE's continued efforts to negotiate a peaceful solution in the region, no concrete action towards a peace plan has been established and Nagorno-Karabakh status is no closer to being resolved than it was in 1994.

Non-Aligned Movement

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) consists of the nations that are not formally aligned with or against any major power block. Currently, the President of Azerbaijan is the chairman of NAM. On the 19th of October 2020 at the request of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, Russia, the United States, and France, the UN Security Council held closed consultations on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It was reported that non-permanent members of the UN SC who are also members of the NAM violated the silence procedure twice during the consultations, insisting on the inclusion of a reference to previous UN Security Council resolutions on the issue.

As discussed in the section *Post-1994 Ceasefire*, the continuous reference to language in the 1993 SC Resolutions on the Nagorno-Karabakh war are used politically by Azerbaijan to maintain "territorial integrity and reaffirm the claim that the region's indigenous Armenian population are "occupying" the land. Following the persistent efforts of the member states of the NAM, the draft statement prepared by Russia and France was formally withdrawn. As a result of this, the Azerbaijani President thanked Niger, Tunisia, Vietnam, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for their "fair position".



Turkey

Turkey has been increasingly involved in the conflicts in near by regions over the last couple years, successfully tilting the outcome in its favour. Notably, its involvement in Syria Civil which allowed for a territorial gain along its southern border. Furthermore, Turkey's troops helped change the tide of the Civil War in Libya in 2020, hoping to gain stable access to valuable natural gas deposits in the Mediterranean. In August 2020, Turkey held joint military exercise with Azerbaijan, a country populated primarily by an ethnic Turkic people whose language is very similar to Turkish. Furthermore, Turkey's supply of weapons to Azerbaijan dramatically surged, including advanced drones. It is thought that Turkey's primary reason for supporting Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is to extend its sphere of influence and marginalizing Russia's long-standing influence in the region.

Additionally, Erdogan has criticized the failed activities of the OSCE Minsk Group as "stalling tactics" that stand in the way of a diplomatic solution. Turkey dismissed the joint demands from France, Russia and the United States calling for a ceasefire. Furthermore, subsequent to Canada's freezing of military exports to Turkey as a result of Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Turkey accused Canada of a "double standard" considering they did not impose any form of sanctions on Saudi Arabia which is involved in the war in Yemen.

Russia

Russia's primary goal in the Nagorno-Karabakh is that of a mediator as its role as co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group dictates. Russia has a military base in Armenia and supported them in the war in 1988. The OSCE treaty envisages Russia's military support given that Armenia is attacked – but Nagorno-Karabakh and other Azerbaijani regions seized during the 1998 Nagorno-Karabakh war are not internationally recognized as Armenian and were hence not defended by the Russian army.

Simultaneously, Russia has strong ties to Azerbaijan, despite it being openly backed by Turkey, a NATO member. Russia has been accused of trading arms with both Azerbaijan and Armenia.





Syria

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has made allegations against Azerbaijan for employing Syrian mercenaries during the war. On the other side, claims have been made that Kurdish militia from Syria and Iraq have been employed on the Armenian side, alongside members of the ethnic Armenian diaspora. Both sides have denied such third-party involvement. Additionally, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has reported use of mercenaries on both sides and calls for their withdrawal.

China

China, although not directly involved in the conflict stands as one of the greatest winners of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. The Chinese Belt and Road initiative benefits from a second route to Europe in the South Caucasus that bypasses Russia.

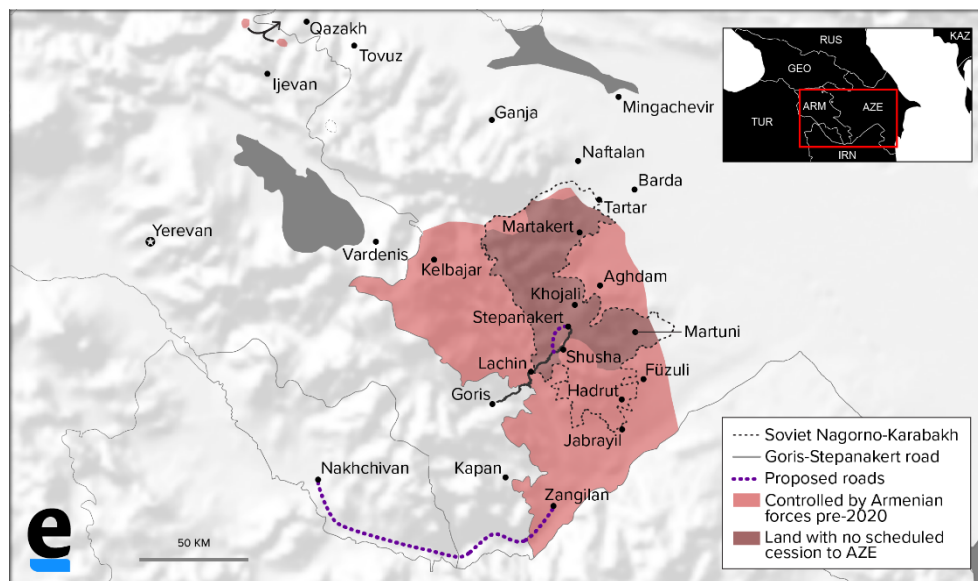


Figure 4: Proposed Road to Europe

China has never shown any particular interest in contesting Russia's security role in the former Soviet Union. Instead, China would like to see the South Caucasus begin to resemble Central Asia: a region with cultural ties to Russia yet wide open to Chinese business. China's focus on trade and investment allows it to benefit from the volatile caucuses. Azerbaijan is unhappy to see Russian troops on their territory which gives Beijing



more room to manoeuvre and gives it leverage over Iran, which stands to be isolated from trade as a result of this new proposed corridor.

France

France, as one of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group takes upon itself the responsibility to work towards negotiating solutions to the conflict, particularly in relation to the future status of the region. Furthermore, France prioritizes the guarantee of safe return for displaced peoples during the conflict. There have been calls for France to rescind its position on the Minsk Group due to its repeated failed efforts. The deputy director at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs said the following on the topic:

"The Minsk Group, as it was created, is dead. Whether we like it or not, Vladimir Putin played a masterful game and the Turks also scored"

A resolution was passed in the Senate recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh as independent, however, the French foreign ministry emphasized that the recognition by the Senate did not reflect French policy, in efforts to reinstate France's neutral status, which is quintessential to its position as mediator. A caucus expert, Thomas van der Waal, said the following about France's position in the Minsk Group

"France should seriously consider renouncing its co-chair position in favour of another European country or an EU-wide position. It has held the position for 23 years, and a country like Germany or Sweden — having more balanced relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan — would almost certainly be able to deliver more."

Despite the criticism, France continues to vie for further support of Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, particularly on the humanitarian front and takes its role in the Minsk Group seriously, aiming to bolster its own international profile. France has also been stipulated to be acting in a national capacity to keep the European Union out of the mediation process.

United States

The United States, as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group is a primary mediator and facilitator of diplomatic dialogue in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Following the violence in



2020, the then presidential nominee Joe Biden called for the de-escalation of the situation but also tweeted explicitly that Turkey, its NATO ally, should stay out of the conflict.

Furthermore, in a statement to the OSCE the United States reemphasizes that lasting peace cannot be achieved through military means and a sustainable, long-term resolution “must be based on the principles of the Helsinki Final Act: non-use or threat of force, territorial integrity, and the self-determination and equal rights of peoples”.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom, not member to the OSCE Minsk Group, has a fairly neutral position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In a document published by the UK parliament, it describes the role of the United Kingdom as follows:

[The United Kingdom's] absence from the Minsk Group... should be used to its advantage as it may allow it to explore different avenues with the sides which can support and complement the main negotiating process."

In this same document the following solutions to the Nagorno-Karabakh were discussed. “The suggestion was made to us by a member of the Azerbaijan Government that intervention from the West might be the only way to compel the parties to come to an agreement. The alternative was the continuation of the uneasy ceasefire for many years to come.” The UK parliament and Monument Oil and Gas have repeatedly stated that there is an intent for the UK to take a more active role in the diplomacy surrounding the issue than it does now. There is also a historic perception in Armenia that the United Kingdom has favoured Azerbaijan related to the greater commercial involvement by major British companies in Azerbaijan as opposed to Armenia.

The United Kingdom is in a unique position where both Armenia and Azerbaijan consider it neutral and friendly and can work to strike a balance in voices of the OSCE Minsk Group and the NAM.

Estonia

The Foreign Minister of Estonia has expressed on multiple occasions that they will take an active role in the consultations to discuss the developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The Estonian minister reported the following: "I call on the parties



to immediately stop hostilities and take all possible measures to avoid further escalation of the situation". "The use of violence to settle difference deserves condemnation. It is important that the parties immediately stop hostilities and begin peaceful settlement of differences.". On the 13th of October there were reported to be marches in Tallin by the Armenian community in support of Artsakh.



India

Aside from India's concerns for regional peace and security, India has close ties to both France and Turkey, the two NATO allies currently at odds in this conflict, and Azerbaijan and Armenian themselves. The North-South international transport corridor stretches from Mumbai to Chabahar via Azerbaijan to Moscow. Fostering diplomatic relationships with both Russia and Moscow are crucial for India's connectivity plans. On the other hand, in 2019, subsequent to Prime Minister Modi's meeting with Armenia's Prime Minister on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Modi tweeted:

"Held extensive deliberations with PM Nikol Pashinyan. We talked about expanding India-Armenia cooperation in aspects relating to technology, pharmaceuticals and agro-based industries."

The Ministry of External Affairs reported: "India is concerned over the situation which threatens regional peace and security. We reiterate the need for the sides to cease the hostilities immediately, keep restraint and take all possible steps to maintain peace at the border. India believes any lasting resolution to the conflict can only be achieved peacefully through diplomatic negotiation.". This statement summarizes India's policy on the conflict quite aptly, emphasizing the need for regional stability and calls to multilateral negotiation efforts.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
1813 - 1828	Treaties of Gulistan, Russian acquisition of the Caucasus
1917	Bolshevik Revolution, Azerbaijan SSR and Armenian SSR established
February 20 th 1988	Nagorno-Karabakh referendum for self determination
Feb 1998 - May 1994	First Nagorno-Karabakh War
Feb – Mar 1998	Sumgait Pogrom
November 1988	Kirovabad Pogrom
Jan – Feb 1990	Baku Pogrom (Black January)
1991	Collapse of the Soviet Union
Sep 27 – Nov 9 2020	Second Nagorno-Karabakh War





UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Security Council Resolution on First Nagorno-Karabakh war, 12 November 1993 (S/RES/884)
- Cease-fire Agreement, May 12th 1994
- Helsinki Principles, CSCE Council, March 24th 1992
- OSCE Minsk Group, Madrid Document, November 2007
- Cease-fire Agreement, 10 November 2020
- Memorandum of understanding on a Joint Turkish-Russian Center, November 11th 2020
- Moscow Agreement on Economic and Transport Infrastructure, Russia-Armenia Railway, 11th January 2021

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The deal brokered by Russia has temporarily stopped the fighting but can by no means be considered a solid peace plan. Currently, both sides are digging new trenches and building fortifications – closer than ever to civilian settlements. “Meanwhile, Russia’s peacekeepers have found themselves mediating disputes over mundane matters from access to water to stray cows, without a clear mandate for how to handle tensions along the front” (Crisis Group).

Russia’s strategy so far has been to delay discussions on the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh to make room for other discussions, primarily on the economic situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan. This would not only help rebuild a measure of trust between the two nations but would also decrease the burden of post-war rebuilding efforts.

On the contrary, Armenia and Azerbaijan have both been doubling down on the rhetoric about the status. Azerbaijan has ruled out any possibility of a self-rule for the de facto entity and Armenia demands independence. This has created a diplomatic deadlock where neither party is ready to hold substantive discussions about the status.



While Armenia has been consumed by a domestic political crisis, Azerbaijan declares the issue resolved. Their plan is to gradually integrate the rest of the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh but have yet to stipulate any plan what to do with the Russian peacekeepers. Additionally, most public figures in Azerbaijan want to see the region isolated and call for tough controls on communication between the region and Armenia and the Artsakh official's contact with diplomats and international organizations. There have even been talks of curbing all foreign material support, saying that this would create true dependence of local Armenians on the Azerbaijan state.

International diplomacy is in a likewise deadlock. The OSCE Minsk Group has managed the peace process in Nagorno-Karabakh for decades and recently, Russia has taken a leading role in this. France and the U.S. both backed the Russia-brokered 9 November ceasefire statement. Since the ceasefire, the Minsk Group has struggled to resume its mediatory role. Turkey, who despite having had a very large role in the conflict, has little to no involvement in the mediation efforts. Turkish officials report that Ankara would prefer greater Western involvement in diplomacy, humanitarian aid for displaced populations. "The West is absent", noted another Turkish official. This quite directly contradicts Azerbaijan's talks to isolate the region from international diplomacy to create greater dependency of the ethnic Armenians on the Azerbaijan state.

The international community, especially Russia has been deeply frustrated by the horse trading over humanitarian aid. In the months since the war, they have failed to settle even the most immediate post-war questions, such as the release of prisoners of war, to marking mined areas and allowing for international aid organizations to have access to the conflict zones. Even UNESCO access to cultural heritage sites has become a political bargaining chip. After great pressure from Russia, EU leaders and US officials, Azerbaijan has finally released a handful of prisoners of war calling them "terrorists" and "saboteurs". In exchange, Azerbaijan wants maps of location of mines in areas that were previously under Armenian troop's control. Both Armenia and the de facto Republic of Artsakh claim that they do not have such maps.

In essence, the November 9 ceasefire ended the conflict but did very little to tackle the main underlying issues such as the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, lack of access to humanitarian aid, the chaos surrounding rebuilding efforts, a plan for the Russian peacekeepers. A peace plan is absolutely necessary because, despite Azerbaijan's



declaration that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is resolved, the festering conflicts at hand could very well cause another full scale war in the region without proper peace efforts.

Possible Solutions

The ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan does not suffice as a sustainable long term peace plan. The following points are quintessential to bringing a measure of security and stability to both sides:

- A clear mandate for Russian peacekeepers
- Regular communication channel for resolving urgent disputes
- Access for international aid organizations to the Armenian populated areas of Nagorno-Karabakh
- Guarantee of safe return of displaced persons during the conflict
- Ensuring front lines do not get too close to residential areas
- Returning of prisoners of war
- Demining efforts
- The future of the of the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The final point on this list is the driver of the conflict at hand and cannot be simply decided one way or another by the Security Council. However, what is necessary is for a better understanding of Azerbaijan's plans for "cultural autonomy" within the region and in how far that respects the Armenian populations right to self-determination. This could come in many forms, the framework for a democratic referendum, an outline for Armenian participation in Azerbaijani local government, or a formalization of the intent behind providing "cultural autonomy" to ethnic Armenians.

It is important to emphasize a tunnelled focus on the future of the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region will not be conducive to solving daily disputes, which are in essence, the disruptive factor in bilateral negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is also important to consider that reducing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to a "territorial dispute" may be convenient but fundamentally misdiagnoses the problem and is not



beneficial towards lasting peacebuilding. Dismissing the Armenian people's right to self-determination and legitimizing Azerbaijan's attempts to advance its position through ethnic cleansing is potentially the worst case scenario. Therefore, a comprehensive look on improving stability in the region is the only way forward.

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