

General Assembly 4 – Special Political and Decolonisation

The situation in Nagorno - Karabakh



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Student Officer:	Ines Demargne
Position:	Chair

Introduction

Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Artsakh, is a landlocked region located in Eastern Europe/Eurasia, located near the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Legally recognised as part of the nation of Azerbaijan, it has an ethnic population of 95% Armenian, and after numerous demonstrations for a unification with Armenia in 1988, the region declared itself an independent state in January 1992, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. ("Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.") The ensuing conflict for the 4,400 km² of land reached its peak in the years until 1994, when a ceasefire and later a truce was negotiated. Several border skirmishes have raised the death toll to around 40,000 and hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced individuals are the result of the now-frozen conflict.

In 2016, rising tensions led to several violations of the ceasefire on both sides, and a breakdown of negotiations as a result. In 1994, the OSCE Minsk Group was created to lead negotiations and mediate between Azerbaijan and Armenia. It is co-chaired by France, Russia and the United States. (Snyder) Despite these efforts, little has been achieved and a peaceful, long-term solution has still not been found. Concerns for the escalation of the conflict surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh are high, as several major countries in the South Caucasus region are also involved. Armenia, backed by the Russian Federation, provides material and military support to Nagorno-Karabakh forces, while Azerbaijan, supported by Turkey, is a main oil and gas producer, producing around 800,000 barrels of oil per day, and exporting them to Europe and South Asia. (Snyder)

Definition of Key Terms

Nagorno-Karabakh



Nagorno-Karabakh is a landlocked region located in Eastern Europe/Eurasia. The territory covers 4,400 km² of land within Azerbaijan, characterised by towering mountain ranges and deserted steppe landscapes. (“Nagorno-Karabakh Profile.”) Although it has an ethnic population of 95% Armenian, the territory was given to Azerbaijan as an ‘autonomous oblast’ by the Soviet Union in 1924. After several decades of unrest this resulted in a declaration of independence by the region, whom named itself the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, or the Republic of Artsakh. The ensuing conflict over the disputed territory, mainly between Nagorno-Karabakh, its ally Armenia, and Azerbaijan, has resulted in around 40,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands of displaced individuals.

De facto

Something that is *de facto* exists by fact, but is not legal or recognised. (“Definition: De Facto.”) The self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh, which is the state that was declared independent in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, is a *de facto* state because it has not been recognised by any of the UN member states or the international community.

Autonomous Oblast

Autonomous oblasts were administrative divisions created by the Soviet Union for a number of smaller nations, which were given autonomy within the fifteen republics of the USSR. The region of Nagorno-Karabakh was given as an autonomous oblast to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. This decision from Stalin, although the territory was supposed to go to Armenia and had an ethnic population of 95% Armenian, was to placate Turkey, Azerbaijan being a Turkic country, so as to deter them from going against the USSR. It was also part of a ‘divide and rule’ policy that the Soviet Union established to keep local conflicts simmering just enough that no challenges would rise up against the Soviet rule. (Snyder) In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the conflict erupted again, both Armenia and Azerbaijan laying claim to the territory.

Separatism

Separatism is the advocacy of the separation of a particular group of people from a larger body on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or gender. (“Separatist.”) An individual, group or movement that adopts this is called (a) separatist. The region of Nagorno-Karabakh, or the state of the Republic of Artsakh, is an Armenian separatist state, as it wishes to separate from the country of Azerbaijan on the basis of ethnic differentiation and self-determination, as voted by a referendum in 1991 that decided the region would become an independent state.



Ceasefire

A ceasefire is an agreement, usually between two armies, to suspend fighting so as to initiate and hold peace talks. (“Definition: Ceasefire.”) In 1994, a ceasefire was brokered by Russia between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This ceasefire has transformed into a long-standing, unstable truce between the two nations, making the conflict a frozen one with tensions still able to escalate. The ceasefire was violated several times by both sides in 2016, where violence erupted across the border and caused around 30 deaths, some Armenian, others Azerbaijani.

General Overview

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan were conquered by the Red Army and came under the control of the Soviet Union in 1920. Overriding the initial decision to place the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenian rule, Stalin recognised the region as an autonomous oblast of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1923, hoping to improve relations with the Turks (as Azerbaijan has a majority-Turkic and majority-Shia Muslim population). (“World Facebook: Azerbaijan.”) This decision, although the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) had a 95% ethnically Armenian population, was also part of a ‘divide-and-rule’ policy the Soviet Union established, whereby Soviet rule was ensured through the constant simmering of local conflicts. (Snyder) Under the control of the USSR, the conflict was kept to a minimal level, although ethnic skirmishes were common in the region.

In February 1988, the local Soviet of the NKAO appealed to transfer the region to Armenia SSR, and demonstrations calling for the unification of the territory with Armenia continued throughout the next months with the Azerbaijani population fleeing as inter-ethnic clashes increased. In January 1990 the Soviet Union declared a state of emergency in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the border, and Soviet troops marched into Baku, opening fire and killing 130. (“Nagorno-Karabakh: Timeline Of The Long Road To Peace.”) However, the conflict only escalated as the USSR began to collapse, and the NKAO parliament proclaimed the establishment of an independent Nagorno-Karabakh state in September 1991. A referendum boycotted by the Azerbaijanis on the 10th of December 1991 approved the creation of an independent state and this was formally declared by the Nagorno-Karabakh parliament in January 1992. The conflict escalated into fully-fledged warfare in February 1992, when Karabakh Armenian forces massacred the population of the Azerbaijani village of Khojaly, killing 613, of which 106 were women and 63 children. (Kherimkhanov) Iran unsuccessfully tried to mediate a ceasefire, and in June 1992 the Azerbaijani army launched an



offensive against Armenians in northern Karabakh and the neighbouring Geranboi/Shaumian district, displacing some 40,000 Armenians. (“Nagorno-Karabakh: Timeline Of The Long Road To Peace.”) During the summer of 1992, the CSCE created the Minsk group to mediate and attempt to resolve the conflict. A ceasefire was finally negotiated by Russia in 1994, and has remained as a truce since. The early war of Nagorno-Karabakh caused an estimated 30,000 deaths, with the consequence of 350,000 refugees and approximately 600,000 internally displaced Azeri people. (“Nagorno Karabakh: Timeline.”) Armenia gained the upper hand, holding around 13% of Azeri territory, which includes the former territory of the NKAO and a buffer zone around that links it to the Armenian border (as



can be seen in the map below).

Source: *Map of Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*. 5 Sept. 2014. <https://www.rferl.org/a/nagorno-karabakh-/26567727.html>

During the two decades of relative peace until 2016, several efforts for negotiation were attempted. In August 1994, Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakh representatives met in Moscow to discuss a solution to the conflict, and while these failed to make substantial progress, the Minsk group proposed a new peace plan in May 1997, which was then rejected by Nagorno-Karabakh in August of the same year. (“Nagorno-Karabakh: Timeline Of The Long Road To Peace.”) Between October 1999 and July 2001 several peace talks were held between Armenian President Kocharian and Azerbaijani President Aliyev, sparking controversy in both countries and achieving little in return. In July-August 2003 the Defense Ministers from Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to ease tensions



between the two countries' armed forces after meeting on the border. However, President Aliyev declared in Paris in January 2003 that Azerbaijan would never accept Karabakh's independence or integration with Armenia, and in January 2005 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted Resolution 1416, which criticised Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory and contained references to ethnic cleansing. ("Nagorno-Karabakh: Timeline Of The Long Road To Peace.") On the 14th of March 2008 the UN General Assembly goes further by adopting Resolution 62/243, which "demands the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan".

Despite all these efforts, tensions still escalated on the 'line of contact', and violence erupted again on the 2nd of April 2016, lasting until the 5th of April; this succession of armed clashes was accurately dubbed the 'Four-day war'. Although both sides accused each other of launching military action, evidence points toward Azerbaijan having first violated the ceasefire in an attempt to gain more territory. An overall estimation of 350 deaths was made by senior member of the US State Department (the official claims of Armenia and Azerbaijan were very far apart), marking the most intense fighting seen in the region since 1994. (Jarosiewicz) Although the 'Four-day war' was very popular in Azerbaijan, who claimed to have regained 20,000 hectares of land, peace talks were announced to have resumed. (Snyder) Since then, a few minor incidents, most notably one in January 2018 where Armenian authorities reported the death of a 19-year-old Artsakh soldier by Azeri fire, have occurred. Nagorno-Karabakh talks began in Moscow this year in April, hosted by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and attended by Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers. Nevertheless, the situation on the 'line of contact' is still unstable and quite volatile, meaning violence could erupt at any time. A long-term solution, beneficial and accepted by both parties, remains to be found.

Major Parties Involved

Republic of Artsakh

The Republic of Artsakh, formerly the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, is a *de facto* independent state within the territory of Azerbaijan. The population is at 147,906 inhabitants as of 2019, and the region is governed by a unitary presidential republic, with Bako Sahakyan as president since September 2007. ("Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh).") As an Armenian separatist state, Artsakh originally wished to separate from Azerbaijan and join Armenia, but following Azeri resistance they voted with a referendum to become an independent state. Supported by Armenia, they currently occupy a



territory of 11,433 km², which consists of the original NKAO, followed by a buffer zone of occupied Azeri land, linking it to the Armenian border. Artsakh, although not officially recognised by any other nation, has so far, refused to compromise in any peace talks involving the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. () Armenia is their main supporter and ally, and as such, mostly speaks on their behalf in any international negotiations.

Armenia

Armenia is the main supporter for the *de facto* state of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Republic of Artsakh. The establishment of the independent state was due to Armenian separatists, and as such their troops occupy part of Azerbaijan's territory. They have so far ignored numerous Security Council Resolutions demanding the withdrawal of their armed forces. They have also been accused of genocide and ethnic cleansing in the region, as they are responsible for massacres such as the Kojaly village massacre in 1992, and the displacement of over 600,000 Azeri people from their lands. (Kherimkhanov) The country has expressed several times that they wish to continue peace talks with Azerbaijan over compromise for the territory, however they have also rejected numerous peace plans suggested by the OCSE Minsk group.

Armenia is geographically vulnerable as it is sandwiched between Turkey to the west and Azerbaijan to the east, both of whom it is in conflict with. (Snyder) Turkey almost invaded Armenia in 1993 in defence of Azerbaijan (since it is also a Turkic country), and has since then closed down its border with Armenia, effectively preventing an important trade route; Armenia also blames Turkey for the Armenian genocide of 1915. Additionally, Armenia is economically and militarily weaker than Azerbaijan, and it is only Russia's aid that prevents any invasion from Azerbaijan or its ally Turkey. (see Appendix A) Russia's involvement and support of Armenia prevents them from drifting too far into the Western orbit, as Russia could easily withdraw its troops stationed on the border to protect Armenia, effectively giving the green light for any military offensives by Turkey or Azerbaijan. (Snyder)

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan has repeatedly tried to prevent the unification of the ethnically Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, and this has led to the creation of the *de facto* independent state of Artsakh. Armenian Karabakh forces currently occupy around 13% of the total country, and as such



Azerbaijan is defending them from gaining any more territory, but also attacking to try and regain territory. Although the ceasefire has been violated by both sides numerous times, it was Azerbaijan who launched the military offensive first in April 2016, which resulted in intense four-day fighting on the border, the worst that has been seen since 1994. (Jarosiewicz) Numerous Security Council Resolutions have been passed, demanding the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azerbaijan, however Azerbaijan has often complained that the process is too slow and that UN action is ineffective. They have also accused Armenia of genocide and ethnic cleansing in the region.

They have participated in several peace talks with Armenia, however in January 2003 President Aliyev declared in Paris that Azerbaijan would never accept Karabakh's independence or integration with Armenia. ("Nagorno-Karabakh: Timeline Of The Long Road To Peace.") Being a Turkic country, they have the support of Turkey, who has closed down its border with Armenia, thus cutting off an important trade route. They also receive armament from Russia. Azerbaijanis seem to view the conflict in a positive light, as can be seen in April 2016 when celebrations were held after the 'Four-day war' because the government announced they had gained 20,000 hectares of land; it should also be noted that this served as a distraction from the country's economic troubles at the time. (Snyder) Azerbaijan is a major oil and gas exporter, producing around 80,000 barrels of oil a day, and exporting them to Europe and South Asia. ("EIA: Azerbaijan.") They were thus negatively affected by the decreasing oil prices. This could cause further issues if they continue to engage in the frozen conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation can be thought of as the main cause for the conflict, as it was their decision to give the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan in 1923 despite the overwhelming majority of Armenians in the region. ("Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.") Currently, Russia supplies armament to Arshakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan, further worsening the situation and leading them to profit off the sales of that. In Armenia, they have troops stationed along the border along Turkey and Azerbaijan to deter either from invading; this also serves their purposes as it prevents Armenia from drifting too far into the Western orbit, lest the Russians withdraw and give the green light for any attacks. (Snyder) The Russian Federation has repeatedly tried to strengthen their position in the region of South Caucasus, and as such has acted as mediator between both parties numerous times, most notably in 1994 when they negotiated the still-standing ceasefire. It is in their best interest to keep the conflict frozen as it is, so they can continue to profit from armament sales and maintain control in the South Caucasus region.



Turkey

Turkey lies to the west of Armenia. Azerbaijan, being a Turkic country, received support from Turkey in their claim for the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and their conflict with Armenia. In fact, Turkey would have invaded Armenia in 1993 in defence of Azerbaijan, but additional troops from Russia prevented it. Armenia also blames Turkey for the 1915 Armenian genocide. (Snyder) As such, Turkey's border with Armenia is shut down, which sandwiches vulnerable Armenia between both Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Date	Description of event
1923	The Soviet Union recognises the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous oblast of Azerbaijan RSS, overriding the initial decision to give it to Armenia
February 1988	The local Soviet of the NKAO appeals to transfer the territory from Azerbaijan RSS to Armenia RSS
1988	Mass demonstrations call for the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia
January 1990	Soviet Union calls for a state of emergency in NKAO and along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan; Soviet troops march into Baku, opening fire and killing 130
September 1991	NKAO parliament proclaims the establishment of an independent Nagorno-Karabakh state
December 10th, 1991	Referendum, boycotted by the Azerbaijanis, in Nagorno-Karabakh approves the creation of an independent state
January 1992	Nagorno-Karabakh parliament formally declares the region's independence



February 26th, 1992	Karabakh Armenian soldiers massacre the Azerbaijani village of Khojaly, killing 613, of which 106 were women and 63 children
February 1992	Iran unsuccessfully tries to mediate a ceasefire
June 1992	Azerbaijani army launches an offensive against Armenians in northern Karabakh and the neighbouring Geranboi/Shaumian district, displacing some 40,000 Armenians
Summer 1992	CSCE creates the Minsk group to mediate and attempt to resolve the conflict
May 12th, 1994	Ceasefire negotiated by Russia
August 1994	Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakh representatives meet in Moscow to discuss a solution to the conflict
May 1997	Minsk group proposes new peace plan
August 1997	Package' peace plan rejected by Nagorno-Karabakh
October 1999 - July 2001	Several peace talks held between Armenian President Kocharian and Azerbaijani President Aliyev, sparking controversy in both countries and achieving little in return
September 2002	Azerbaijani Foreign Minister criticises the UN Security Council for failing to seek Armenian compliance with its resolutions of 1993
January 2003	President Aliyev declares in Paris that Azerbaijan would never accept Karabakh's independence or integration with Armenia; Council of Europe Secretary-General criticises President Kocharian for a speech suggesting that Armenians and Azerbaijanis were "ethnically incompatible" and cannot live in the same state
July-August 2003	Defense Ministers from Armenia and Azerbaijan agree to ease tensions between the two countries' armed forces after meeting on the border
January 2005	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopts Resolution 1416, which criticises Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory and contains references to ethnic cleansing
March 14th, 2008	UN General Assembly adopts Resolution 62/243 which "demands the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan"
April 2nd - April 5th, 2016	Succession of armed clashes on the border of Nagorno-Karabakh dubbed 'Four-day war'; estimated 350 deaths, most intense fighting seen since 1994
July 5th, 2017	Azeri woman and child killed by Armenian shelling on Nagorno-Karabakh border



January 7th, 2018 Armenian authorities report that a 19-year-old Artsakh soldier was shot killed by Azeri fire

April 2019 Nagorno-Karabakh talks begin in Moscow

Timeline of Key Events

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations have attempted to resolve the conflict several times; listed below are relevant resolutions:

- Security Council Resolution 822, 30 April 1993 (S/RES/822)
- Security Council Resolution 853, 29 July 1993 (S/RES/853)
- Security Council Resolution 874, 14 October 1993 (S/RES/874)
- Security Council Resolution 884, 12 November 1993 (S/RES/884)
- The Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan, 14 March 2008 (A/RES/62/243)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The OSCE Minsk group has been the main forum for any negotiations and mediation between Artsakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Although helpful in promoting discussion of the conflict and arranging summits where representatives from each party could share their views, it has been ineffective in finding any long-term solution for the region. The problem lies in the fact that both Armenia and Azerbaijan which to resolve the conflict with favourable conditions, and this conditions are incompatible and contradictory: the Armenians will not withdraw their troops until Azerbaijan recognises Nagorno-Karabakh as independent, and Azerbaijan claims its complete territorial integrity and demands the immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from its territories. (Carley). Adding to this is the fact that Azerbaijan will not even recognise the Republic of Artsakh in any negotiations. The OSCE Minsk group has been criticised for also not taking into account the role of Russia in the



conflict, and instead keeping the country as one of the co-chairs of the group, as it would seem keeping the conflict frozen is in Russia's best interests to have control over the South Caucasus region. (Carley)

Furthermore, while the United Nations have taken action in the form of several Security Council resolutions demanding the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azeri soil, they have been stated as too slow and lenient in the process. ("Nagorno-Karabakh: Timeline Of The Long Road To Peace.") Azerbaijan continues to accuse Armenia of genocide and ethnic cleansing, which the United Nations has still not formally condemned. In September 2002, the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan even openly criticised the United Nations for failing to seek Armenian compliance with its resolutions of 1933 (demanding the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azeri soil); Armenia continues to ignore and reject these resolutions, proving that the United Nations is still powerless in the face of some nations.

Possible Solutions

A long-term solution benefitting both Armenia and Azerbaijan remains unseen as both parties demand conditions that are incompatible and contradictory. Furthermore, it seems mutual, historic mistrust between Armenians and Azeris, as well as the atrocities committed by both sides during the war, convinced either side that it is the people, and their ethnic differences, that is the problem, not the governments or the political powers in play. (Carley) The first step in resolving the conflict would thus be to dissolve this mistrust, by normalising relations between both countries and their peoples. This could include exchange programs, joint memorial-building projects to honour atrocities committed during the war, and education systems to educate future generations about the roots and nature of the conflict. It is ultimately the people who will be able to decide when they want the conflict to end; this can be seen in September 1997, when a peace plan submitted by the Minsk Group was accepted both by Armenia and Azerbaijan but controversy in Armenia forced the president to resign in February 1998, and the plan was ultimately rejected. ("Nagorno-Karabakh: Timeline Of The Long Road To Peace.")

Secondly, the mistrust between governments is also an issue. Another problem would be the negotiating process, as Nagorno-Karabakh is not allowed a place at the negotiating table because of Azeri objections. (Carley) Inviting the Republic of Artsakh into all future negotiations would help ease the tension (even without Azerbaijan having to formally recognise the country), and improving communication between the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan would reduce the risk of



misunderstanding and distrust leading to more conflict. Additionally, perhaps having an international armed force hold the border of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh would help preserve the ceasefire more effectively. Otherwise, severe consequences (e.g. economic or arms embargoes) could be put in place to punish any country who launches a military offensive, to ensure that no side is tempted to break the truce.

All these examples of small steps to take would immensely help in reducing the tension and volatility of the region. It could also build up to a future long-term solution, where the Armenian and Azeri people are not blinded by hatred for each other, and would realise that the conflict is beneficial for neither party. In the end, a permanent solution for the region will most likely be the withdrawal of Armenian troops from all occupied Azeri territory, in return for the recognition of an independent region (Nagorno-Karabakh) within Azerbaijan, self-governed by local Armenians. (Carley) This settlement recognises the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, while still taking into consideration the ethnic nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

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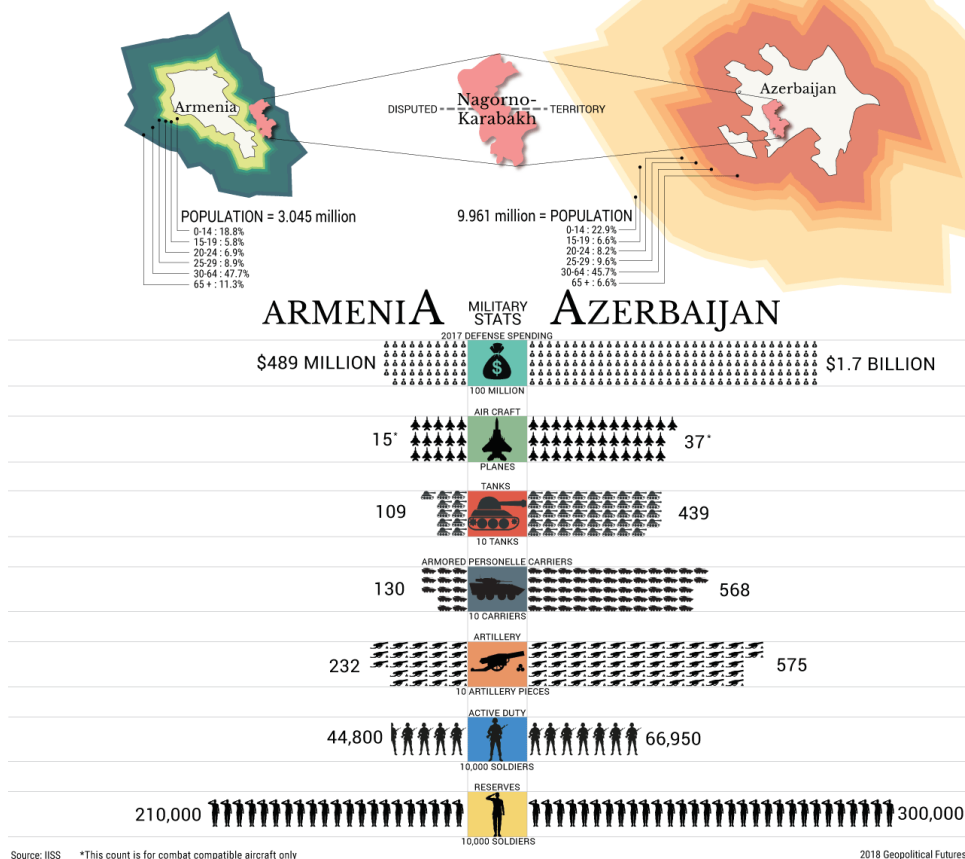
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Appendices

Appendix A

Disputed Territory of Nagorno-Karabakh

How Armenia's and Azerbaijan's militaries stack up



Source: (Snyder)

