

Peacebuilding Commission

The question of the Nagorno Karabakh region



Forum	Peacebuilding Commission
Issue:	The question of the Nagorno-Karabakh region
Student Officer:	Kim Schnebbelie
Position:	Deputy Chair

Introduction

Nagorno-Karabakh is the landlocked region that lies within the Eurasian mountain range of Karabakh. It is located close to the Armenian and Azerbaijan border and is currently recognized as part of Azerbaijan despite its 95% majority of ethnic Armenians. Nagorno-Karabakh is a territory that holds cultural and religious importance for both Armenia and Azerbaijan which has historically led to sporadic clashes, which continue to this day.

For most of the 19th century it was ruled by the Russian Empire, yet when the empire fell in 1918, ethnic Armenians and Azeris formed new countries which caused tensions and violence around this territory. Shortly after, both nations found themselves under the control of the Soviet Union which reduced turmoil. New borders were drawn and Nagorno-Karabakh was made a semi-autonomous region in the Azerbaijan SSR - known as the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous oblast (NKAO). During the time of USSR rule, requests were made by Armenian-Karabakh to join the Armenian SSR, however, these efforts were declined. Demonstrations and multiple referendums starting in 1988 eventually led to the Declaration of Independence at the start of 1992.

The formation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic acted as a tipping point starting a war which would continue for two more years to come. During this war, over 30 thousand people would die and some 1 million people would be forcefully displaced. In 1994 a cease-fire agreement was signed, at this point Armenia occupied a significant territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Many called it a frozen conflict, although frequent small clashes continued and the hostility between the two countries remained.

Although the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk group (co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States) was created to lead and mediate negotiations between representatives of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Nagorno Karabakh, there were little results in forming a long-term peace plan.



In 2016, a four-day-long war took place, violating the ceasefire. It was a clear indication that the conflict remained and needed a long-lasting solution. In 2020, skirmishes broke out once again, this time Azerbaijan was backed up by Turkish military support. In total, this outbreak of violence killed over a thousand people. On November 8th, 2020 Azerbaijan captured the historic city of Shusha, resulting in Armenia's surrender. Currently, a small area of Nagorno-Karabakh remains under the control of ethnic Armenians and the new ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia initiated the release of 2000 Russian peacekeeping troops.

Nevertheless, tensions remain to this day. For example, in September 2022, there were Azerbaijani attacks on Armenia's mainland. Furthermore, in April 2023, Azerbaijan set up a checkpoint at the entrance of the corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. These incidents including the periodic killings of soldiers in disrupt peace and thus are a cause for concern.

Definition of Key Terms

Autonomous Oblast

Autonomous oblasts were administrative divisions created by the Soviet Union for multiple smaller nations. These nations were given autonomy within a union republic of the USSR and had a lower status than an autonomous republic. The region of Nagorno-Karabakh was given as an autonomous oblast to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

De facto state

De facto (which is Latin for “from the fact”) refers to what happens in reality or practice, rather than de jure (which is Latin for “from the law”). A de facto state is thus a country that fulfills the Montevideo criteria for statehood yet is not internationally recognized. The self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh is one such de facto state.

Ceasefire

A ceasefire is an agreement/truce between two or more conflicting parties to stop fighting in order to allow calm discussions about peace.

Lachin Corridor



The Lachin Corridor is a mountain road that links Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

General Overview

Past events and developments

Both Azerbaijan and Armenia were - shortly after the collapse of the Russian empire - taken under the control of the Soviet Union, who established the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast in 1923. In 1988 Nagorno-Karabakh passed a resolution declaring its intention to join the Republic of Armenia, this caused interethnic tension yet armed fighting was relatively controlled under Soviet rule. However, partly due to the implementation of Glasnost (a policy that gave the people in the USSR more political freedoms) the soviet union started to fall apart.

During the Soviet dissolution in 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence, this initiated the breakout of a full-fledged war. This war would lead to almost 30,000 deaths and would displace around 1 million people including 750,000 Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding districts. Near the end of the war, Armenia had gained control of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as 6 neighboring districts as can be seen on map 1. Soon after a cease-fire (The Bishkek Protocol) was brokered by Russia in 1994. It left Nagorno-Karabakh as a de facto state which strongly relied on Armenia's economic and military resources. Peace talks continued, mediated by the OSCE Minsk group founded in 1992 specifically for this conflict. Talks were mainly mediated by co-chairs Russia, USA, and France but efforts remained unsuccessful. (read more about this in the section "Previous attempt to solve the issue")

Early April 2016 marked the most intense armed conflict in the area since 1994. Initiated by Azerbaijan this 4-day war led to hundreds of casualties along the separation line. Both parties agreed to cease active hostilities even so, tensions remained high. It is important to mention that the period after 1944 marked a period of rapid economic growth for Azerbaijan due to its oil and gas reserves located offshore in the Caspian Sea. Western energy companies - most prominently BP- began investing billions into the oil infrastructure. Eventually, the Azerbaijani oil and gas industry created around 60% of the government's total budget, which provided them with funds for military resources.

In July 2020 (Amid skirmishes) Turkey opened its support to Azerbaijan. Turkey is a country that had increasingly intervened in conflicts around the region in order to tilt outcomes in its favor, in this case, the complicated relationship with Armenia due to the 1915 genocide and their conflicting

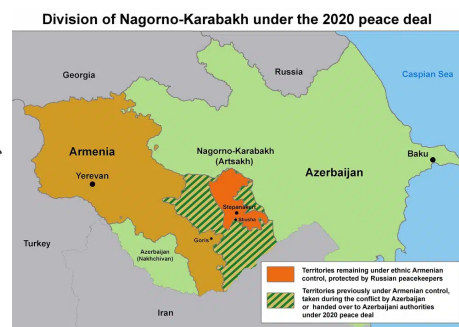


status with Russia led them to support Azerbaijan whose majority Azeri population is also a Turkic ethnic group. The supply of military equipment surged (Including advanced drones).

With recently gained strength Azerbaijan launched an offensive attack at the Azerbaijan-Nagorno-Karabakh border on September 27th 2020. This war would result in the death of more than seven-thousand soldiers and civilians and would cause the displacement of 91000 individuals from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Even though Armenia triggered a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) appeal to the Russians and the rest of the alliance for direct military assistance. It was refused as they proclaimed that Armenia's land itself was not under direct attack. On November 8 Azerbaijan won its biggest victory when capturing the historic city of Shusha. Armenia surrendered having now only control over a small reading of Nagorno-Karabakh. On November 9th Russia successfully brokered a deal which would be reinforced by Russian peacekeepers who would also monitor the newly established Lanchin corridor.



Map. 1 Division of territory after 1994



Map. 2 Division of territory after 2020

Current events/developments

Due to failed mediation attempts, increased militarization, and frequent violations of the ceasefire, it was not surprising when a two-day conflict started on September 13th 2022. Azerbaijan launched the initial attack right after the hugely successful Ukrainian counter-offensive on Russia - confident neither Russia nor the European Union (Due to recent Oil and gas agreements made) would step in. This 2-day armed conflict led to over a hundred deaths and forced the evacuation of more than 2700 civilians. Despite Russia being focused on its invasion of Ukraine, they still brokered a truce, yet less than a week later additional border clashes were reported.

In December 2022, activists from Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin corridor (with alleged state backing). As a result, residents of Nagorno-Karabakh had shortages in food, electricity, water, and



medical supplies. On April 23rd 2023, Azerbaijan set up a checkpoint at the entrance of the corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan says that they set up the checkpoint to prevent the transfer of weapons and ammunition, the entrance of terrorists as well as illicit trafficking of natural resources and cultural property. Nevertheless, the move has been criticised as a step closer to fully blocking the passage.

The US, EU, and Russia all hosted peace talks in May 2023, all of which led to “Clear progress towards peace”. Increased dialogue has now also been paired with a recent statement from Pashinyan (the Armenian Prime Minister). He said that his government recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh as the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, and with this called upon Azerbaijan to protect all ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and to acknowledge Armenian legal borders (UN). Although this is a good sign peace talks are still in progress, as many other terms need to be agreed upon. Meanwhile, the tense security situation remains.

Concerns and Obstacles

As of now there has been no successful agreement that consistently allows for the renewal of threats and skirmishes. In general, factors that have made the mediation process challenging include the fact that there is a profound distrust between Armenians and all Turkic-speaking Muslims due to the historic enmity being aggravated by the 1915 genocide. Furthermore, the negotiation processes are difficult to be effective when the mediators have an interest in the situation - it has been accused of being biased towards Armenia in the past couple of years.

Humanitarian concerns remain currently regarding issues such as the living situations of refugees and ill-treatment in detention centers and prisoners of war. Azerbaijan is now also being watched by the Human Rights Watch for undermining the freedom of expression of activists through the imprisonment of a couple of journalists. Current concerns also include the destabilization of the oil and gas export from Azerbaijan if an armed conflict were to arise once more. Lastly, the Russia - Ukraine war also warrants concern as it has already led to passivity in the peacekeeping forces eroding trust in Russia to act as a proper security guarantor.



Major Parties Involved

The Republic of Artsakh

The Republic of Artsakh also known as the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic is an independent de facto state within the territory of Azerbaijan. In 2022, it has a land area of 3170 sq km and a population of around 120,000 - the majority of which are ethnic Armenian. It is an Armenian separatist state which originally aimed to be separated from Azerbaijan and join Armenia.

Armenia

Armenia is the primary supporter of the de facto state of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Republic of Artsakh as it has a 95% ethnic Armenian population. It was thus Armenian separatists who were responsible for the establishment of Artsakh's independence. Furthermore, after the initial ending of the war in 1994, Armenian forces wholly asserted control over Nagorno-Karabakh and even other adjacent districts within the territory of Azerbaijan. Being sandwiched between Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia is situated geographically vulnerable as they are in conflict with both neighboring nations. Before 2020, Turkey had a closed border and no diplomatic relations with Armenia, mostly due to the tensions regarding the 1915 genocide. Although Armenia's military is currently weaker than that of Azerbaijan, it is allied with Russia. Nevertheless, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has and could continue to remove focus from providing aid in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is an active opponent of the unification of the ethnically Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. Azerbaijan is now defending Armenian Troops from gaining any more territory, However, has also continuously displayed efforts to try and regain territory. Azerbaijan has participated in peace talks yet publicly declared that Azerbaijan would never accept Karabakh's independence or integration with Armenia. They violated the ceasefire of 1994 multiple times and were on the offensive side during the 4-day war of 2016. As the oil and gas sales began to mount, the country began to grow exponentially wealthier. For 14 years between 2000 and 2014, it was known as the fastest-growing economy in the world. Hereafter, this wealthy petrol state consequently had the funds for military resources - as their oil and gas industry created around 60% of the government's total budget. Combined with increased support from Turkey they were able to invest in their military



and then initiate the 2020 war, in which they were regarded as victorious. After the 2020 war, they have now in 2022 attacked the Armenian border and in 2023 “blocked” the Lachin corridor.

Russia

Being a nearby nuclear superpower (and former overlord) Russia has leverage with both nations. As well as both Armenia and Russia being part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Russia has a defense pact with Armenia (this does not cover Nagorno-Karabakh). Now more than ever, Armenia is dependent on the support Russia promised. However, with Russia's preoccupation with their invasion of Ukraine, it has left a feeling of vulnerability rising in Armenia. This vulnerability was shown to be a genuine concern with Russia's inaction regarding the recent blockade. Its ties with Azerbaijan are more economic as the increase in wealth of Azerbaijan has allowed them to purchase military weapons from Russia. Besides this, Russia has played an active role in brokering and mediation over the past few years. Nonetheless, negotiated truces and ceasefires fail to be a long-term solution.

Turkey

In the past few years, Turkey has increasingly intervened in conflicts around the region in order to tilt outcomes in its favor. For example, in 2020, Turkish troops turned the tide of the Libyan civil war in favor of the government which is helping Turkey claim valuable natural gas deposits in the Mediterranean Sea. In 2020 when skirmishes broke out in Nagorno-Karabakh Turkey saw an opportunity and supported Azerbaijan - whose majority Azeri population is also a Turkic ethnic group. Turkey's supply of weaponry surged dramatically - supplying weaponry including but not limited to; F-16 fighter jets and drones. A year later Azerbaijan and Turkey signed a defense pact and held joint military drills. At the end of the 2020 war, the truce brokered was supposed to allow the movement of vehicles and people across Armenia Azerbaijan and the Naxcivanits exclave. Although as of now there has been no progress in the construction of such a line of transportation - this would allow Turkey easy access to Azerbaijan, potentially strengthening trade and access to oil reserves.

The United States of America

Along with Russia the US and France are Co-Chairs of the Minsk group of mediators that have been - for decades - trying to negotiate a settlement. Initially, the US was the primary backer of the new Azeri oil and gas pipeline routes, although their interest has lessened they are now, especially after the 2020 war the main mediators of the conflict.



France

France (although having expressed sympathy for Armenia) has limited leverage with Azerbaijan due to the fact that the European Union signed a deal to double the import of natural gas from Azerbaijan in the hopes to break Russia's grip on the global energy market.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
1918	The Russian empire fell and now Armenia and Azerbaijan formed new independent countries, tensions and violence built up surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh
1921	The Soviet Union authorities had control over the entire caucuses, Nagorno-Karabakh was made a semi-autonomous region in the Azerbaijan SSR.
1964	Karabakh-Armenians requested Nikita Khrushchev (leader of the USSR) to join the NKAO (Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous oblast) and all adjacent regions to be joined to Armenia SSR.
1986	Glasnost was introduced - a policy which opened up discussion on political and social issues within the soviet union
February 20th 1988	NKAO legislator requested to join Soviet Armenia
February 21st 1988	Large-scale demonstrations occurred in Yerevan to support the unification with Karabakh.
July 1988	The USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium formally rejected the NKAO Soviet's request
October 1988	Following the frequent interethnic clashes, many Azeri chose to flee from the NKAO and Armenia
June 1989	Mass demonstrations took place in Baku
January 1990	The soviet union declared a state of emergency in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Soviet troops were sent into Baku and killed 130 people when opening fire.
May 1991	Azerbaijani SWAT units (supported by the Soviet army) started uprooting and deporting Armenians from the north of the NKAO to Armenia which intensified sporadic fighting.
September 2nd 1991	Nagorno-Karabakh declared itself as an independent republic
1991	Both Azerbaijan and Armenia declared independence from the soviet union
February 1992	Karabakh Armenian forces killed most of the Azerbaijani population in the village of Xocali



April 1992	Azerbaijani forces entered the village of Maragha and killed around forty civilians
May 1992	Armenian forces took the important town of Susa and extended control over the Lachin corridor
June 1992	Azerbaijan offensive launched in Maedakert (northern Karabakh) displacing roughly 40,000 Armenians
1992	An 11-country Minsk group was created by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) with the aim of mediation.
September 1993	A temporary cease-fire was mediated by Russian envoy Vladimir Kazimirov
October 1993	Azerbaijan violated the cease-fire and Armenia repelled. Meanwhile, the UN security council adopted 4 UN resolutions, calling for halting the violence.
1994	Ceasefire was adopted and brokered by Russia. This mostly ended the violence, and peace talks and plans discussed hereafter achieved little, minor clashes still occurred.
April 2nd 2016	Azerbaijan initiated the largest offensive since 1994, starting a 4-day war (the exact number of casualties is uncertain)
July 2020	Turkey pledged full open support to Azerbaijan providing military equipment including Baratar tb2 drones
September 27th 2020	Azerbaijan initiated a full-scale offensive in Karabakh.
October 2020	Three US-mediated humanitarian cease-fires were agreed upon, all of which were immediately violated by Azerbaijan.
October 31st 2020	Azerbaijan used phosphorus weaponry which are internationally banned chemical weapons, inflicting environmental destruction
November 9th 2020	All involved parties signed a joint statement, ending the majority of the hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. This agreement included the act of deploying Russian peacekeeping troops along the Lanchin corridor and the line of contact.
September 2022	Azerbaijan attacked areas of Armenia's main land around 55 troops died on both sides - although there is now a cease-fire there are no demands from the troops to leave the land they are occupying.
December 2022	Activists from Azerbaijan blocked the corridor which led to shortages in gas, electricity, food, and medicine in the enclave.
April 2023	Azerbaijan set up a checkpoint at the entrance of the corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh



UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- 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 OCSE Minsk group - formerly known as the CSCE - has been the main forum leading mediation and negotiations. It is a group Co-Chair by Russia, the United States of America, and France. Other members besides Armenia and Azerbaijan include Belarus, Finland, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Turkey. Despite continuous efforts since its formation in 1992, it has been ineffective in finding a long-term solution to the conflict. In the late 90s, the Minsk group came up with three cohesive plans, all of which the parties in the war rejected.

The first proposal known as the “package deal” was brought forth on July 18th 1997. This proposal covered all aspects of the conflict with two agreements. The first agreement focused on resolving the conflict by peaceful means and the withdrawal of all armed forces. The second agreement dealt with the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. This proposal however was rejected by Armenia.

The second proposal known as the “Step by Step” proposal was put forward that same year on 19th September. It outlined a two-stage solution. The first stage would be the withdrawal of military forces from the area (beside the Lachin district) and taking immediate measures to open roads, power, trade, communication, and other links. The second stage which would happen hereafter the conflicting parties would continue to negotiate the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, Shusha, and Shaumyan with the help of the Minsk group. This however, was opposed by the Leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh as they believed the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh should be determined before military withdrawal.



On November 7th 1998 the “common state” proposal was published. It detailed the creation of a common state between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh - specifying agreements on all the impacted regions as well as specifying the halting of the armed conflict. Nonetheless, Azerbaijan strongly rejected it as they saw it as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. (To read more about the specifics of what was written in the proposals and why they were rejected click [here](#)). These rejected proposals led to the OSCE’s “Madrid Principles” for settling the conflict in which they would send out peacekeeping troops until an agreed settlement.

Ceasefires and mediations of the Minsk group continued and mostly helped to avoid the eruption of military combat, yet the absence of a settlement is the cause of the 2020 war and the reason that this is still an ongoing conflict. Although a lot has to do with historical mistrust between the two warring countries, faults in the methodology of the OCSE are apparent. Reasons for minimal achievements could include the fact that the Misks group has not specifically addressed the wider aims of the parties nor the historical components rooting the issue. Secondly, Turkey is not identified as an immediate party to the conflict and is instead seen as a mediator - this practically ignores their participation, especially in the 2020 war. Lastly, Azerbaijan has publicly accused the OSCE of being biased towards Armenia during the settlement process.

After armed fights in 2020, a final peace agreement was signed on the 9th of November to cease fire. Now In light of recent clashes and blockades in February 2023, the EU deployed a new civilian mission in Armenia (EUMA Armenia) and peace negotiations are actively being held in Washington (USA).

Possible Solutions

When looking into possible solutions to the decade-long conflict multiple aspects need to be covered. Firstly an agreement is needed to avoid periodic outbursts of violence and to maintain a long-term solution. Negotiations should however (to remain unbiased) not be mediated by parties that have a key role within the conflict itself (Russia) or have publicly announced support for one party (The United States). The EU could help to facilitate negotiation for any of the other 11 members of the Minsk group who are currently not Co-Chairs. These countries include Belarus, Finland, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Turkey.

Secondly, the Lachin Corridor is a vital passageway to ensure the safety of Nagorno-Karabakh inhabitants. In light of recent blockages is it vital that Russian Peacekeeping troops remain active in



the area of conflict. If issues arise they could be supported by ONSE troops. Additionally, when discussing the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, a primary concern should be the safety and well-being of the inhabitants. To ensure this, regular checkups should be conducted, to avoid ethnic discrimination or ill-treatment.

Another way of approaching a solution to the conflict could be by having a starting focus on humanitarian issues. This could include: ensuring all refugees/displaced people are safe and provided with basic needs, protecting the freedom of expression of activists on this issue, and ensuring all prisoners of war are returned to their nation of origin.

Lastly, addressing the historic mistrust between Armenians and Azerbaijan ethnic groups is vital as it would address the root of the conflict at hand. Dissolving mistrust and normalizing relations between the nations and their people can be done through joint memorial-building projects or a non-biased education system to educate future generations about the roots and nature of the conflict.

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