

General Assembly 4

The question of peace and stability in the Nagorno-Karabakh Region

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Introduction

A phenomenon that has marked warfare and conflicts in the 20th century is definitely the rising nationalistic and ethnic-centric worldview that was established in this century. The yearning for independence, sovereignty and freedom is something that many ethnic groups had, and it plays a more important role than ever before. Especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a force that had been repressing nationalistic feelings and ideals, many former countries that used to be part of this Union strove for national sovereignty. Among these countries were Azerbaijan and Armenia, two freshly established nations. Both of these nations claimed the same piece of land; The Nagorno-Karabakh region. The dispute between these countries over this culturally and economically valuable piece of land is what formed the base for this conflict. But how do you solve a conflict where geographic and ethnic issues collide? In this research report we will be diving into the multiple causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, look into the geopolitical affairs considering this dispute and hopefully, we will find a way to patch this torn-apart piece of land up.

Definition of Key Terms

Ethnic cleansing

Defining the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ is often found quite difficult because there is no universally accepted definition of the term. Ethnic cleansing can be understood, in the words of Bell-Fialkoff, as

'the expulsion of an "undesirable" population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these'.

Ceasefire

A ceasefire is the stoppage of war, where all participating sides agree to suspend aggressive or hostile actions towards one another. The goal of a ceasefire is often to stop fighting, or suspend fighting while there are diplomatic mediations being held on a topic or conflict.

Bufferzone

Often established between battling nations, a buffer zone is a neutral zone between two or more nations. There are multiple reasons why such a zone can be established, such as for nature preservation or to prevent violence between nations or certain groups. An example of such a zone is the UN-buffer zone established between the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. This zone was established by the UN as an effort to prevent any more violent conflicts from erupting between the two opposing nations.

Nagorno-Karabakh

The Nagorno-Karabakh region is a region located in Azerbaijan. Geographically speaking, this region is landlocked and covers the southeastern range of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains. The population consists of both ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijani's.(*Image source: Wikipedia)*



General Overview

Roots of the issue

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a conflict that dates back ages: Even in the fourth century B.C. there had been a conflict between the opposing nations, as Armenians claimed the region to be theirs, although the area was very much aligned with the kingdoms lying at the East, that is what became the Azeri-population areas. Throughout history there have been many incidents considering this region, but in this research report we will consider that this issue started three years before 1991, just before the countries of Azerbaijan and Armenia gained independence after the waiving of the Soviet Union. Understanding the difficult and intertwined history of both nations is crucial for understanding the dynamic between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

During the Soviet Union

Due to the newly introduced *Glasnost* which advocated for a more open ruling atmosphere in the Soviet Union, more and more sporadic nationalistic incidents were happening across the Eastern Bloc, including in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In August 1987, a petition prepared by the Armenian academy of sciences gained thousands of signatures supporting their request to hand the Nagorno-Karabakh region to the Armenian SSR (Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic). This request was however not accepted, and the region continued to stay under Azerbaijani rule.

Following some violent incidents towards the native Azeri's of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, a stream of Azeri refugees fled to Azerbaijan hoping to find shelter. In total, approximately 700,000 Azerbaijani refugees have fled the area during the conflict.

Post-soviet incidents

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, their policies together with their influence collapsed partly. The war over Karabakh of 1991-94 began as an ethnic cleansing campaign against Karabakh Armenians and ethnic Armenians living in the Azerbaijani cities of Baku and Sumgait. With the Armenians resisting, many residents of the area were forced to flee their homes. These incidents connected the first more geographically oriented conflict with a conflict between ethnic identities.

The first Nagorno-Karabakh War

This war took place between 1988 and 1994. During this war there were many atrocities committed by both the Armenian and Azerbaijani side. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan declared their independence followed by Armenia declaring independence and claiming the Nagorno-Karabakh region as theirs. An armed conflict erupted in 1992, and this is also regarded as a dark turning point of the war. Azerbaijan captured multiple Armenian districts outside of Nagorno-Karabakh, however the war ended in 1994 with Armenia successfully taking over the Nagorno-Karabakh region together with some other Azerbaijani regions. During The Bishkek Protocol, a conference organised by Russia, a ceasefire was signed by both parties. This marked the end of The First Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

The second war started only recently, on the morning of 27 September with an Azerbaijani offense. Because the area has both mountainous and non-mountainous land, the fighting was mostly drawn to the more flat area's. Turkey supported Azerbaijan with military help, whereas Armenia was supported by Russia, as they both are part of the military alliance CSTO. The war only lasted for 44 days and was, not surprisingly, won by Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is three times larger, three times more populous, and four times richer than Armenia. Moreover, Azerbaijan is an important oil and gas exporter. These factors make Azerbaijan a prominent party on a global level.

The aftermath and future

The conflict between the two nations was brought to an end with the signing of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement, where both parties agreed to a ceasefire. On top of that, both parties agreed to return occupied regions to each other, and a group of Russian peacekeepers were sent out to the Nagorno-Karabakh region to ensure that Armenian citizens are protected against Azerbaijani forces. The decision of signing this agreement, however, sparked many heated debates in Armenia, with some even going so far as assaulting members of parliament and marking the prime minister a 'traitor'.

The decision of deploying Russian troops is also something that has to be taken into account considering Russia's growing influence over this region. All information surrounding the geopolitical stakes of the Russian Federation will be covered in the 'parties involved' section.

The 'Third' Nagorno-Karabakh war

Again, following an offence by the Azerbaijani military, the beginning of the 'Third' Nagorno-Karabakh war was marked. As the Russian peacekeepers were off to war with Ukraine, a window of opportunity had opened itself for Azerbaijan. With the intention of stripping the region of its Armenian influence, Azerbaijani forces started an alleged ethnic cleansing programme. The conflict has caused a humanitarian crisis and mass exodus of ethnic Armenians from the territory. Azerbaijan has rejected accusations of ethnic-cleansing in the region. This so-called 'Third' war has not yet ended in a ceasefire or a peace-agreement, making it one of the many still active conflicts in the world.

Resources

The stakes were, besides ethnic pride, also high because of the many valuable resources found in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The region contains gold and copper deposits, making it a valuable piece of land. Furthermore, around 25% of all water in Azerbaijan has been supplied by stillwater sources in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Also, plans to expand Azerbaijani trade routes can finally be finished because of the newfound connections between Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey.

Oil and gas

Azerbaijan has many resources, such as oil and gas. Azerbaijan's primary route for oil exports is the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which accounts for around 80% of the country's oil exports, and runs via Georgia and on to the Turkish Mediterranean coast. It has a capacity of 1.2 million barrels per day, or more than 1% of global oil supplies. Furthermore, Azerbaijan exports 6.6 bcm of natural gas to Europe in each month. This again shows how Azerbaijan can achieve such a prominent status on the international stage in contrast to Armenia.

Major Parties Involved

Azerbaijan

The conflict has of course started because of territorial disputes between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Approximately 5,400 Azerbaijanis live in the region. The second War was started because of an Azerbaijani military offence, and they eventually emerged as the clear victor of the war, as Azerbaijan gained all of Nagorno-Karabakh following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement. The non-Armenian population (some 500,000 people) was expelled from those districts, or fled them, during the first war.

Armenia

Armenia is one of the two disputing nations. Responsible for the First war, Armenia has been trying to declare the Nagorno-Karabakh Region autonomous. This however, has not been successful as it has not been internationally recognised. Armenia has currently lost the territory of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and with that also lost many natural resources. The Armenian population mostly lived in the highlands of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, in contrast to the Azerbaijani's who mostly lived in the lowlands.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation, formerly known as the Soviet Union, used to occupy the Nagorno-Karabakh region, what was formerly described as an Soviet Oblast. The Russian Federation has played a significant role in both of the peace negotiations surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In hope of regaining their political and military influence, Russia has tried to get involved with the conflict. This can partially be seen in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement, where it is stated that Russia is allowed to place peacekeeper troops in Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia has historically aligned itself with Armenia, mostly because of their ethnic and cultural similarities, in stark contrast with the christian-muslim hostility towards Azerbaijan.

Minsk Group

The Minsk group is nowadays known as a military group of mercenaries. The group, formed under the OSCE, was mostly known for their military action. Surprisingly, the Minsk group was actually responsible for negotiating peace between the opposing nations. This group was responsible for the

ceasefire of 1994. Due to their possible 'bias' in favour of Armenia, as it was a part of the OSCE, Azerbaijan detested their influence and was quite sceptical about their role in negotiating peace.

Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh

The republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Artsakh, was relatively short lived and unsuccessful in gaining international recognition. Following the events of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war, the republic of Artsakh lost its sovereignty after it was occupied by Azerbaijani forces. The republic existed from 1991 until 2023.

OSCE

The OSCE group is a military alliance between countries such as Russia and Armenia. The OSCE-group had a diplomatic role, mostly through the MINSK group negotiations. The group did not in any way take action with any military force. All member countries of the OSCE group can be viewed here.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
March 18, 1988	Armenian citizens vote on the unification of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, but was rejected by the Soviet Union
August 30 & September 21, 1991	Both Azerbaijan and Armenia declare independence respectively
May 12, 1994	The Bishkek protocol was signed by the fighting countries
September 27, 2020	The second Nagorno-Karabakh war starts
November 10, 2020	Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement was signed by all parties including the Russian Federation
September 19, 2023	Azerbaijani military forces launch an offensive on the Nagorno-Karabakh region

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement, 10 November 2020
- Resolution number 822, 30 April 1993
- (European Parliament) Resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh, 20 January 2021
- United Nations General Assembly Resolution 62/243, "The Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan'', 14 march 2008
- ICJ provisional measures (2021–2023)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There have been two major solutions regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, both proposed as a result of the atrocious Nagorno-Karabakh wars:

Bishkek Protocol

In the Bishkek Protocol, Russia, formerly known as the Soviet Union, proposed a ceasefire. Nagorno Karabakh was occupied by Armenia at the time, thus liberating the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijani rule. The ceasefire eventually proved to be unsuccessful, as tensions rose and small-scale conflicts kept happening. On top of this, the Bishkek protocol was nothing but a temporary solution for the conflict. And of course, eventually the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war broke out: Proving again that the ceasefire was nothing but a temporary solution for an age-old conflict.

2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement

Following the Russian negotiations, the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement was signed by both fighting parties. Just like the first solution, it worked partially as it only relieved international tensions for a short time. Armenians were left dissatisfied with the outcome, even so much that some started rebelling against not only the decision of the government to sign the ceasefire, but against the government as a whole. The ceasefire also did not prevent Azerbaijan from attacking the Nagorno

Karabakh region in one last offense (*see The'Third' Nagorno-Karabakh War*) to ensure that all political ties with Armenia were severed.

Why didn't the solutions work?

The main reason for the failure of both the ceasefire agreements is because it did not offer a permanent solution, rather a more temporary one. Both parties were left dissatisfied, which only made the tensions between the countries rise more and more. Furthermore,

Possible Solutions

For the first solution, we have to go back to the original state of the region, before the first disputes started. Because both ethnic groups are originally divided into low-and highlanders, dividing the region based on the original ethnic borders could be a possibility. With the Azerbaijanis in the lowlands, and the Armenians in the highlands, a solution where both parties claim their ethnic grounds. This way, none of the parties end up with nothing, and the chance of a new conflict erupting is lowered significantly. The only downside to this solution is that it would take a lot of time to establish who the 'ethnic' owner of the land is. Furthermore, establishing a so-called UN buffer zone such as in Cyprus can also reduce the risk of further escalation between both ethnic groups.

Furthermore, establishing the Nagorno-Karabakh region as an autonomous sovereign state is also a possibility. In the newly established state, both Azerbaijanis ánd Armenians could live alongside each other. For this solution to work however, both parties need to de-influence their own population to prevent any disputes from happening. This solution is a high-risk-high-reward approach, as even a small incident might ignite a large-scale civil war in the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh.

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