

# Research report

Forum: Security Council

Issue: The question of the ongoing  
Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

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## Introduction

This research report aims to provide the delegates of LmunA 2022's Security Council with a clear image of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Nagorno-Karabakh contention is an ongoing territorial conflict between the states of Armenia and Azerbaijan located in the South Caucasus. The conflict has deep ethnic, religious, and historical roots, having gone unresolved since before both countries declared independence from the Soviet Union. The issue stems from ethnic Karabakh Armenians demanding to transfer Karabakh from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia back when the Soviet Union was unified. However, the issue reignited recently when other member states intervened and provided military aid. This reignition caused the deaths of many military lives and hundreds of civilians on both sides.

Furthermore, over 4,000 civilians were reported missing. Along with the Azerbaijani military force and its allies', Armenia surrendered, resulting in a recent ceasefire. This meant that the territory was reclaimed by Azerbaijan, forcing thousands of ethnic Armenians out of their homes to move into Armenian borders. However, since the surrender, many protests have taken place on the streets of Armenia calling for the President to step down as they believe that the Nagorno-Karabakh region should be part of Armenia and that the nation should have done more to protect the area. This may lead to further conflicts in the future, though perhaps with the expertise of the members of the LmunA 2022's Security Council the conflict can be de-escalated and peace can return to Transcaucasia. The discussion in the committee will centre around the measures that can be taken to ease the contention, provide humanitarian and economic aid, and essentially achieve a peaceful solution regarding the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh that involves member nations' values and acceptance.

## Definitions of key terms

### **South Caucasus, Transcaucasia, and Transcaucasus**

The South Caucasus, also known as Transcaucasia, or Transcaucasus is a geographical region consisting of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. It lies on the border of Eastern Europe and Western Asia and to the south of the Caucasus Mountains.

### **Autonomous Oblast (AO)**

An autonomous oblast is a former Soviet Union administrative division established for certain "smaller" nations and distinguished by the following features: they were granted autonomy within a union republic or, in the RSFSR, within a krai; they had a lower status than an autonomous republic, and they had a different titular nation than their union republic/krai.

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## **Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO)**

“Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast” or “NKAO” simply refers to the autonomous oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is an autonomous oblast within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

## **2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Ceasefire agreement**

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Ceasefire agreement is an armistice agreement that ended the Nagorno-Karabakh war. It was signed on the 9th of November by Aliyev, the president of Azerbaijan, Pashinyan, the Prime Minister of Pashinyan, and Putin, the president of Russia. The agreement ended all hostilities in the Nagorno Karabakh region.

## **The Lachin Corridor**

The Lachin Corridor is a mountain road that links Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the path is under the control of Russian peacekeeping forces under the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh armistice agreement. The agreement states, “The Republic of Armenia shall return [...] the Lachin District by 1 December [2020]. The Lachin corridor (5 km (3.1 mi) wide), which will provide access from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia and bypass the town of Shusha, shall remain under the control of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation.”

## **Glasnost**

The policy of more open consultative administration and broader transmission of information in the former Soviet Union was established by leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985.

## General overview

Nagorno-Karabakh is a semi-autonomous region that lies entirely within Azerbaijan's borders and is internationally recognised as such (Fig. 1).

However, the territory itself is heavily populated and controlled by ethnic Armenians, and the majority of the area surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh are all lands under the Armenian military's control (shown in orange). After the fall of the Russian empire in 1918, both countries tried to claim the territory. However, upon the formation of the Soviet Union, both countries were forced to draw new borders, officially pronouncing Nagorno-Karabakh as a part of the Azerbaijani republic despite its dense Armenian population.

The ethnic Armenian residents of the region frequently asked to join the Armenian republic but were denied. This led to an eventual coup. In the late 1980s, the Soviet Union announced a new policy called 'glasnost' that gave its people more political freedom. Glasnost gave ethnic Armenians the freedom to pass a referendum to leave the Azerbaijan republic, and so reviving the old conflict which was followed by violence. After the Soviet Union fell, both countries declared independence, allowing a war to commence. After three years of violence, Armenia won and a ceasefire was signed in 1994, freezing the conflict. The deal was later impeded by Russia, who did not agree to send Russian troops. Rather, Russia, the USA, and France tried to lead an international group to find a permanent solution to the conflict. Unfortunately, this only escalated the conflict, and Azerbaijan claimed Nagorno-Karabakh as rightfully belonging to the nation. Upon resistance, they, with the help of Turkey's weaponized drones launched the Azerbaijani military, pushing Armenian forces back. By the first few weeks of the new conflict, the Azerbaijani military had already recaptured the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert. This forced hundreds of ethnic Armenians to leave their homes. Not shortly after, Armenia surrendered and signed the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Ceasefire Agreement. However, momentarily after the Prime Minister of Armenia made this decision he faced severe backlash where the people of Armenia took to the streets and protested against the government in favour of ceding the region from Azerbaijan. This could lead to further conflicts in the future.



Figure 1. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nagorno-Karabakh\\_conflict\\_map\\_%28pre-2020%29.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nagorno-Karabakh_conflict_map_%28pre-2020%29.png). Accessed 25 June 2022

## Major parties involved

### *Armenia*

As the semi-autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh lies between Armenia and Azerbaijan, both nations play large roles in the conflict. Armenia's involvement is direct; the nation firmly believes that though Nagorno-Karabakh is officially within Russia's borders, due to its ethnic Armenian population majority, the land should be a part of Armenia. Moreover, Armenians believe that the land holds a lot of historical and religious significance to them, partly because the region has many medieval Armenian churches. During the time of the Soviet Union, after the glasnost policy was introduced, the Karabakh Armenians demanded that the region should be transferred from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia. Since then, each Armenian president has tried to claim the region. It is important to note that not only is the government of Armenia involved in the conflict but the population itself is engaged. For example, after the surrender of Armenia, mobs swarmed the Armenian capital to demand the resignation of their Prime Minister as the citizens of Armenia believed that he was not doing enough to fight on behalf of the ethnic Karabakh Armenians.

### *Azerbaijan*

Much like the Armenian population, Azerbaijanis are also deeply invested in contention. As during the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh was internationally recognised as Azeri land, Azerbaijan claims that despite what the ethnic Armenians want, the land is still rightfully theirs and should be inhabited by Azerbaijanis. Further, Azerbaijanis also claim to have historical ties to the land as a large and important Azerbaijani town, the citadel of Shusha, was founded right in the middle of the territory. Though economic reasons are unconfirmed, Azerbaijan's fierce protectiveness over the region could be due to its richness of natural resources. Nagorno-Karabakh is rich in precious and semi-precious metals such as gold, copper, and other natural resources. Moreover, the Azeri president, Ilham Aliyev, stated in August 2021 that Azerbaijan was indeed the country that started the conflict by taking military action first.

### *Turkey*

Azerbaijan's 2020 offensive received strong diplomatic support from Turkey by supplying weaponized drones which Azerbaijan used on the battlefield. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish president, has consistently supported Azerbaijan's demand that Armenian soldiers leave Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding territories. On September 28, 2020, President Erdogan reportedly stated that, given the failure of international conflict resolution attempts, Azerbaijan must "take matters into its own hands," and that Turkey will continue to assist Azerbaijan "with all its resources and heart." and that

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"Permanent peace... would only be possible if Armenia leaves the Azerbaijani areas it has been occupying," Erdogan added. Furthermore, due to Turkey and Azerbaijan's strong economic, military, cultural, and linguistic ties, Erdogan is well known for saying that the countries are "one nation, two states".

#### *Russia*

Russia has a large economic interest in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Most Azerbaijani arms purchases are supplied by Russia and they have a big share in Armenia's key economic sectors as well as privileged market access. This is why officially, Russia assumed a neutral stance on the 2020 conflict by facilitating the ceasefire agreement. Non-resolution gives Russia a bigger influence in the region. On October 7, 2020, Russian presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that Russia's security responsibilities to Armenia through CSTO membership "do not extend to Karabakh." 67 Russian officials have urged for a cease-fire and stabilisation talks, including with Turkish colleagues. On October 29, 2020, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that a "long-term settlement [lies] in striking a balance of interests that would suit all parties... There are no straightforward answers because the knot is knotted in such a sophisticated manner."

#### *OSCE Minsk Group*

The OSCE Minsk group is an establishment under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The group was formed by several countries with the intention to facilitate peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Since 2007, the co-chairs of the foundation, the United States, France and Russia, have framed their settlement efforts on the basis of six "Basic Principles for the Peaceful Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict" (also known as the Madrid Principles). The principles are as follows:

1. Return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control
2. An interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance
3. A corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh
4. Future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of popular will
5. The right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence

#### *European Partnership for peaceful settlement of the Conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK)*

The EPNK is a European civil society initiative that was founded to support the transformation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through a range of peacebuilding efforts. They seek to work with local partners in the South Caucasus on programmes and projects. Their main focuses are media initiatives to avoid the spread of propaganda and to rather provide balanced media coverage, reducing barriers to

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conflict resolution. They also aim to strengthen the capacity of Conflict-Affected Groups to engage in conflict resolution processes and facilitate an inclusive and effective public policy environment in support of a negotiated settlement.

## Timeline of Key Events

- 1921 Nagorno-Karabakh is declared an autonomous region within the Soviet Azerbaijan. The ethnic Armenians, constituting 94% of the enclave's Population, contest the decision. The Soviet Union manage the Armenian-Azeri tensions.
- 1987 Mikhail Gorbachev, former president of the Soviet Union, reforms (glasnost) embolden the Karabakh Armenians, leading to mass demonstrations. Demonstrators demand the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with the Soviet Union. The protests rattle Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and the Kremlin.
- 1988 Pogroms are initiated. The Armenian authorities within Nagorno-Karabakh formally request the region's transfer to Soviet Armenia. An anti-Armenian violence in the Soviet Azeri city of Sumgait claims at least 30 lives and triggers an exodus of Armenians from Azerbaijan. Months following the pogrom, Armenians are attacked in Kirovabad, Azerbaijan.
- 1990 As new waves of anti-Armenian violence emerge in Baku, Mikhail Gorbachev sends in 26,000 troops to quell the Azerbaijani pro-independence movement. Around 100 Azeris are killed.
- 1991 The USSR collapsed and Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent nations. Azerbaijan abolishes Nagorno-Karabakh's autonomous status, fearing that the ethnic Armenian population will endanger the Azeri minority. In September, Armenian authorities declare Karabakh's independence.
- 1991-1994 Tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalate into a war. In 1992, the the massacre of Azeri civilians in Khojali causes outrage. The conflict killed approximately 30,000 people and creates about 350,000 Armenian refugees as as well as approximately 600,000 Azeri internally displaced people.
- 1994 A ceasefire is signed. Armenian forces gain the upper hand, holding around 13% of Azeri territory. This territory included Nagorno-Karabakh and a buffer zone around it, linking Karabakh to Armenia (Figure 1). The UN calls on Armenian

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forces to withdraw and the OSCE begins years of mediation efforts.

- 1998                   The former president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrossian, resigns after his council rejects a proposed peace deal on Karabakh. He is succeeded by a string of leaders who take a harder line on concessions to Azerbaijan.
- 2001                   Azeri President Heydar Aliyev and Armenian President Robert Kocharian come close to a peace deal after a conference at Key West, Florida but fail to sell the proposal to their respective populations.
- 2011                   Russian president Dmitri Medvedev fails to secure an agreement for a peace plan in Kazan, Russia.
- Sept. 2020           Mass explosions in Nagorno-Karabakh, thousands are killed, both nations accuse the other of bombing civilian areas in the region.
- Nov. 2020           A ceasefire is signed. Armenia surrenders and Azerbaijan declares victory. Russia sends a peacekeeping contingent of 1,960.
- May, 2021           A border crisis is declared when Azerbaijani soldiers cross several kilometres into Armenia in the provinces of Syunik and Gegharkunik. Azerbaijan has not withdrawn its troops from internationally recognised Armenian territory despite calls to do so by the European Parliament, the United States, and France (two of the three Co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group)
- July, 2021           The crisis escalates, and violence erupts on the Armenia-Nakhchivan border. The clashes spread to the Gegar-Kalbajar area, with casualties being reported from both sides.
- Nov, 2021           A joint statement by the Chair of the Delegation for relations with the South Caucasus, Marina Kaljurand, The European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Nagorno-Karabakh and that of Azerbaijan called the military operation launched by Azerbaijan on 16 November 2021 the worst violation to date since the 2020 ceasefire agreement.

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

One of the most significant attempts to solve the conflict was the creation of the OSCE Minsk group and their settlement efforts that are based upon the Madrid Principles. This initiative encouraged Armenia and Azerbaijan to conduct negotiations on the bases of the principles, which up till now has achieved little progress towards the settlement. However, since June 2013 the OSCE has been more proactive; they have been arranging meetings with the foreign ministers of both Azerbaijan and Armenia, who expressed their commitment to reduce tensions and create conditions for a meeting at the highest levels later that year. Other attempts to solve the issue were the peace and ceasefire treaties signed and encouraged by Russia, America, and France. However, little else has been done to ease the conflict.

## Possible solutions

*Create trust to bridge the two nations and come to a peaceful solution.*

The mutual distrust between Azerbaijani and Armenian people is frequently mentioned as an obstacle, if not the primary impediment, to resolving the war. The battle is discussed in nationalist rhetoric and with the use of enemy imagery in the media and general discourse. Negative propaganda and antagonistic narratives are being fed to future generations. Either side demonstrates its case with historical facts and sees the opposing side's historical narrative as a fraud. Furthermore, it is strongly anchored in terrible historical experiences that are kept alive through public debate. As a result, the fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh is inextricably linked to both Azerbaijan's and Armenia's professed national identities. The mutual distrust and negative propaganda which connects the conflict to the projected national identity make it almost impossible to reach a conflict solution. *Finding initiatives to create trust between the two nations would better the situation and urge the countries to come together.*

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### *Provide coverage of peace negotiations*

The mass protests and the voice of the public are a few of the main reasons for the violence in Nagorno-Karabakh. Though the Minsk Group and other initiatives make peaceful efforts to resolve the conflict as there is no reliable coverage, neither party knows of the measures taken to chase peace. The closed conversations are a distinct aspect of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks. Closed conversations are a significant aspect of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks. Furthermore, the Minsk Group has no spokesman, and much more than yearly remarks from the Co-Chair governments are not disseminated to the public eye. Although the Madrid Principles are an exception in this sense, only six of the (said) 14 principles are public. The secrecy is believed to have resulted in a lack of public understanding that its leaders are negotiating over this problem; bad media coverage of the OSCE Minsk Group; disinformation, insecurity, and mutual distrust. Combating misinformation and providing the public with reliable and recent coverage of peace negotiations could ease tensions between the two nations.

### *Take notice of the residents and authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh*

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began when the ethnic Armenians voted to become a part of Soviet Armenia. This makes it essential for the UN and respective member states to not neglect engagement with de facto authorities and residents of Nagorno-Karabakh. More efforts should be made to communicate to Baku that such engagement is essential to ensure any future peace deals. Furthermore, many ethnic Armenians fear that a deal will result in full Azerbaijani control of the enclave, forcing them to leave their homes. By providing post-war support to the population of Nagorno-Karabakh we can try to minimise humanitarian damage, however, this must be carefully managed as Baku views any engagement with Nagorno-Karabakh's de facto authorities as undermining its claim to the territory.

## Further reading

<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R46651.pdf>

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