

SECURITY COUNCIL

Research Reports

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Forum: Security Council

Issue: Building peace in Nagorno-Karabakh

Student Officers : Hussien El Feky

Position : Security Council (Chair)

Introduction

Nagorno-Karabakh, a landlocked mountainous region within Azerbaijan, has been the subject of a long-standing territorial dispute between Azerbaijan and its ethnic Armenian majority. Following decades of ceasefires punctuated by sporadic clashes and upsurges of violence, the conflict reached a critical point in September 2023 when Azerbaijan launched a lightning offensive, reclaiming control over the region .

The roots of the conflict date back to the 19th century, when Nagorno-Karabakh was part of the Russian empire and populated by both Christian Armenians and Turkic Azeris. During the Soviet era, the region was established as the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, despite its ethnic Armenian majority . As the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence, leading to a full-scale war between Armenia and Azerbaijan that resulted in roughly 30,000 casualties and hundreds of thousands of refugees.

By 1994, Armenia had gained control of Nagorno-Karabakh and occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan's geographic area. A ceasefire was brokered by Russia, leaving Nagorno-Karabakh de facto independent but heavily reliant on Armenia . The conflict remained frozen for nearly three decades, punctuated by intermittent clashes, until Azerbaijan's decisive offensive in September 2023 that ended the region's de facto independence .

Definition of Key Terms

Nagorno-Karabakh

Nagorno-Karabakh is a landlocked region internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but predominantly populated by ethnic Armenians. The area has been at the centre of a protracted conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, particularly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, when it declared independence, leading to armed conflict.

Artsakh

Artsakh is the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh, which has been used by the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh. This name reflects the region's historical and cultural ties to Armenia. The Republic of Artsakh operated as a de facto independent state supported by Armenia, although it was not recognized by any UN member states.

Ceasefire

A ceasefire refers to a temporary stoppage of fighting, which has been brokered multiple times in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, most notably in 1994 after the First Karabakh War. Ceasefires have often been fragile, with violations occurring frequently, leading to renewed hostilities and tensions between the two nations.

Ethnic Cleansing

Ethnic cleansing is a term used to describe the systematic removal or extermination of an ethnic group from a particular area. In the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, allegations of ethnic cleansing have arisen, particularly following Azerbaijan's military operations aimed at regaining control over the region, leading to the mass exodus of ethnic Armenians.

Reintegration

Reintegration refers to the process of re-establishing control over a territory and its population. Following Azerbaijan's military offensive in September 2023, the government announced plans to reintegrate Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan, promising economic development and stability for the remaining population. This term highlights the challenges of governance and social cohesion in a region marked by deep ethnic divisions.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is the primary state involved in the conflict, as Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognized as part of its territory. The Azerbaijani government has sought to reclaim control over the region, which has a predominantly ethnic Armenian population. In recent years, Azerbaijan has launched military offensives, notably in 2020 and again in 2023, to assert its territorial claims and eliminate what it describes as illegal Armenian armed groups in the region. The Azerbaijani government has received support from Turkey, which has provided military assistance and political backing, further complicating the dynamics of the conflict.

Armenia

Armenia has been a crucial player in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, historically supporting the ethnic Armenian population in the region. While Armenia has not officially recognized Nagorno-Karabakh's independence, it has acted as its main military and financial backer, especially during periods of conflict. The Armenian government views the defence of Nagorno-Karabakh as essential to protecting its national interests and the rights of ethnic Armenians. However, Armenia's influence has been challenged by Azerbaijan's recent military successes and the shifting geopolitical landscape, particularly following Russia's diminished role in the region due to its focus on the Ukraine conflict.

Russia

Russia has traditionally acted as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, often brokering ceasefires and peace agreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Following the 2020 war, Russia deployed peacekeepers to the region to maintain stability and oversee the ceasefire. However, Russia's influence has waned in recent years, particularly due to its involvement in Ukraine, which has allowed other regional powers like Turkey and Iran to assert their interests more aggressively. While Russia continues to support Armenia diplomatically, its ability to enforce peace or provide military support has been questioned, leading to a more complex and volatile situation in Nagorno-Karabakh .

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE has been a key mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since the early 1990s. It established the Minsk Group, which includes countries like the United States, Russia, and France, to facilitate negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The OSCE's role is crucial in attempting to mediate a peaceful resolution to the conflict, though its efforts have often been hampered by the deep-seated animosities between the parties involved and frequent violations of ceasefires.

Timeline of Events

- 1923 The Soviet Union establishes the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, despite its ethnic Armenian majority.
- 1988 The regional legislature of Nagorno-Karabakh passes a resolution to join Armenia, leading to rising tensions and ethnic violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.
- 1991 With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh declares independence, prompting a full-scale war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- 1992 The First Nagorno-Karabakh War occurs, resulting in approximately 30,000 deaths and significant territorial gains for Armenian forces, who occupy Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas.
- 1994 A Russian-brokered ceasefire is signed, establishing a fragile peace and leaving Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenian control but internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan.
- 2016 Clashes erupt along the line of contact, resulting in significant casualties and demonstrating the volatility of the ceasefire.
- 2020 The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War breaks out, with Azerbaijan launching a major offensive. The conflict lasts for six weeks, resulting in thousands of deaths and significant territorial losses for Armenia. A ceasefire is brokered by Russia, leading to the deployment of Russian peacekeepers.

2022	Renewed fighting occurs, marking the most significant escalation since the 2020 war, with casualties reported on both sides.
2023	Azerbaijan launches a rapid offensive, overwhelming Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. The majority of the ethnic Armenian population flees the region amid fears of Azerbaijani rule.
2024	The self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh is officially dissolved as Azerbaijan reasserts control over the region, marking the end of its de facto independence.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Security Council resolution 822 (1993)

United Nations Security Council resolution 822 was adopted unanimously on 30 April 1993. After expressing concern at the deterioration of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the subsequent escalation of armed hostilities and deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the region, the Council demanded the immediate cessation of hostilities and the immediate withdrawal of Armenian occupying forces in the Kalbajar district near Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan.

Security Council resolution 853 (1993)

In United Nations Security Council resolution 853, adopted unanimously on 29 July 1993, after reaffirming Resolution 822 (1993), the Council expressed its concern at the deteriorating relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and condemned the seizure of the district of Agdam and other areas of Azerbaijan, demanding a complete withdrawal from the areas by Armenians.^[1]

Minsk Group Initiatives

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) established the Minsk Group in 1992 to mediate the conflict. Comprising co-chairs from the United States, Russia, and France, the group has attempted to facilitate negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the years. Despite numerous meetings and proposals, the Minsk Group has struggled to produce a lasting resolution, with both sides often accusing each other of ceasefire violations and failing to engage constructively in peace talks.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

2020 Ceasefire and Post-War Diplomacy

the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, which resulted in substantial territorial gains for Azerbaijan, a ceasefire was brokered by Russia on November 9, 2020. This agreement included the deployment of Russian peacekeepers and established the Lachin corridor for humanitarian access. Despite this temporary resolution, the underlying issues remained unresolved, leading to periodic skirmishes and renewed tensions. In September 2023, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive to regain control over Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in a humanitarian crisis and prompting further calls for international diplomatic engagement to address the situation and protect civilians

1994 Ceasefire Agreement

A significant milestone was the ceasefire brokered by Russia in May 1994, which effectively ended the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. This agreement established a fragile peace, allowing Armenia to maintain control over Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas. However, the ceasefire did not resolve the underlying territorial disputes, and subsequent diplomatic efforts, including those by the Minsk Group, failed to produce a lasting political solution

Possible Solutions

1. Enhancing international diplomatic missions
2. Local governance of the native people
3. Demilitarising the region

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