



Ensuring a Lasting Peace Between Azerbaijan and Armenia

by Brandon Fischer
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Introduction

The border dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region poses a threat to the stability of other surrounding regions. Although a current ceasefire brokered by France in coordination with Russia and the United States currently exists, both sides show no intentions of creating a lasting peace.¹ The conflict is among the world's most deadly unresolved issues, and for over thirty years among the most difficult for the international community.

Major fighting between the nations started again on 27 September 2020 and ended on 10 November 2020, shocking the world with its intensity and use of new technology. This most recent major fighting left 2,738 Azerbaijani soldiers and 2,424 Armenian soldiers dead. This conflict also left 143 civilians dead, and tens of thousands of civilians displaced. The true number of casualties is still disputed as both sides show reluctance to show the full extent of the damage.²



The Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh before the fighting in 2020.



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Human Rights Watch and many other observers accused both Armenia and Azerbaijan of human rights violations including severe mistreatment of civilians and prisoners of war.

The killing continues. Cross border shooting and artillery attacks remain common place. Both sides show little regard to the ceasefire. Skirmishes and attacks continue to this date. As

it stands, it is extremely likely for another large conflict to break out if there is not a more solid peace established between the countries. Neither nation is willing to give up their claim over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. No outside power wants to intervene militarily, or risk further destabilize the already unstable region. These issues make any effort to mediate a lasting peace a herculean challenge.

Background



Originating in the 1920's, this conflict's roots exist within the formation of the Soviet Union. The drawing of borders within the Soviet Union caused the formation of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. The Nagorno-Karabakh region contained a 95 percent ethnically Armenian population, while existing within the borders of Azerbaijan.³ This naturally caused citizens within this

autonomous region to want to secede from Azerbaijan to Armenia, but this was prevented by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union continued to prevent any larger disputes from happening while it remained a world superpower, but over the years as the power of the Soviet Union began to wane, so did its grasp over its territories.

While there was a general desire within the Nagorno-Karabakh region to secede from Azerbaijan, this was not expressed solidly until 1988, where the Nagorno-Karabakh legislature signed a resolution stating it would secede to join Armenia. The Soviet Union, while weakened, was still able to prevent this from escalating into a full conflict, but the writing was on the wall. In 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Nagorno-Karabakh region officially seceded to Armenia.⁴

This instigated a military conflict that raged on until 1994, when a Russian brokered cease-fire stopped the fighting. The conflict left 30,000 soldiers dead and Armenia in control of the contested region. This situation persisted, despite routine border fighting, until 2020, when full-scale fighting began anew.



Nagorno-Karabakh after the fighting in 2020, showing gains by Azerbaijan, which gain practical control, except Armenia's Lachin corridor.

Azerbaijan seized some of the territories it had lost to Armenia, gaining control of much of the land surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. The outcome was a shock to the Armenian public, causing civil unrest and popular demands—ignored by the government—to continue the fighting. These tensions led to Armenians occupying their parliament and attacking government buildings on 9 November 2020.⁵

Current Situation

As it stands, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is in a delicate balance that, without intervention, will most likely escalate into another war. The reasons for this delicate balance originate in a

general desire from larger powers to remain neutral within this situation.



Turkish-supplied drone used by Azerbaijan in 2020

The ceasefire that currently stops both nations from escalating into a full war has already been



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demonstrated as weak by both sides continued skirmishing. The most notable skirmishes happened on 14 May and 28 July 2021.

The international organization which negotiated this ceasefire, the 54-member Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), remains active in trying to create a lasting peace treaty that works for both sides and has often been referred to by the UN when addressing how to resolve the conflict.⁶



Russian supplied rockets used by Armenia in 2020

Armenia in response to the increasing tensions has requested the deployment of Russian troops at the border adjoining Azerbaijan.⁷ It is important to note the existence of the Collective Security Treaty Organization which binds Russia into a defense pact with Armenia. The desire to increase its own defense displays the fragile situation that exists domestically. After the loss to Azerbaijan, a large portion of the citizens and military officials are displeased with the current Armenian government. The Armenian army officially called for the current Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, to resign. Even insinuating that this call for resignation “was not made under any pressure”, and while Nikol Pashinyan’s party won the most recent election, it does not remove the displeasure of many individuals within Armenia with the standing government.⁸ An upheaval of the current government, could result in one more favorable to reigniting conflict with Azerbaijan.

Role of the United Nations

The United Nations exists to try and maintain peace mostly through encouraging dialogue between nations. This conflict is not an exception to this rule, as the UN has not taken a side on this issue. They rather have encouraged Armenia and Azerbaijan to try and work out a peace treaty that would provide a permanent solution to this problem. They continue to reference the OSCE Minsk group as the organization through which Armenia and Azerbaijan should try and create a permanent solution. They also continue to supply humanitarian aid to all victims of the conflict through organizations such as the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).⁹ In recent words, the Secretary General has urged both Armenia and Azerbaijan to allow for humanitarian assistance to be distributed undisturbed, as aid workers face harassment from troops within the area.

Landmark UN Resolutions

An important fact to note within this issue is that the United Nations has not made any resolutions on the conflict since 1993. In resolution 62/243, from 1993, the UN demanded that Armenia withdraw their troops immediately from Azerbaijan.¹⁰ This sets an important precedent that the UN will not intervene in fighting over the Nagorno-Karabakh territory, but if either nation begins to invade territories outside that area, it will try to intervene. Besides this, there exists no other resolutions on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Security Council has repeatedly discussed the conflict, but always informally, usually through *Aria*-style meetings. These allow airing of views only. Russia can veto any resolution that does not support its regional interests,



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effectively preventing Security Council action that is balanced and treats both sides equally.

In response, the OSCE Minsk group was created to find peace-formulas that do not require action by the UN. Unable to act itself, the Security Council has supported this as the forum to help resolve the conflict. In addition, many members of the Security Council have been vocal in their desire to remain neutral on the issue. A lasting solution requires finding a formula acceptable to all sides, overcoming these jams.

Country and Bloc Positions

China holds a position of neutrality on the issue. They view both Azerbaijan and Armenia as friendly partners, and want the conflict to end as quickly and peacefully as possible. China's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Wang Wenbin stated, "Maintaining Peace and Stability in the region serves in the interest of all parties, including Armenia and Azerbaijan."¹¹ They have not directly intervened in the conflict and have shown no intent to do so.

The European Union: The EU is not directly involved in the conflict, but has great influence with the promise of EU membership for both states. EU membership would require both to greatly enhance civil rights for their people, accept rule of law, and establish strong democracies. It would wean their dependence on Russia. Neither country currently is a top candidate for EU membership, because of their remoteness, poverty, and in Azerbaijan's case, lack of democracy. In lieu of EU membership, its diplomats have been very active promoting peace formulas both sides can accept.

France has sought to end the conflict through their continued involvement as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk group. Much like other member states, France does not take sides on this issue and wishes for an adherence to the ceasefire that

was negotiated by the OSCE. Macron has also commented on Turkey within this issue calling their political statements "reckless and dangerous."¹²

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): The UN's dominant voting bloc faces difficult issues in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The NAM stresses national self-determination above all, which might favor Armenia, since Nagorno-Karabakh is overwhelmingly Armenian in population. But conflicts between smaller states always is difficult for the NAM, which prefers issues pitting post-colonial states against their former colonial masters. The easiest way for the NAM to deal with the issue would be to declare its Member States free to vote their consciousness on this issue.

Russia is the dominant foreign actor. Russia has throughout the entire conflict refused to take any sides. This can be traced to the strong and friendly relations it has with both former-Soviet nations, as they not only supply many military supplies to both nations, but also continue to have strong diplomatic ties. Russia also currently has 2000 troops within the Nagorno-Karabakh territory as well as thousands more within an Armenian military base. Russia continues to try and take on the role of mediator and maintain neutrality on the situation. Russia also co-chairs the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which has overseen most of the talks for peace so far.¹³

Turkey poses as the most partisan country on this issue. They continue to oppose Armenia and support Azerbaijan diplomatically and militarily, helping train the Azerbaijani military and supplying military equipment to Azerbaijan. They continue to assert they will back any effort by the Azerbaijan government to keep or take back the Nagorno-Karabakh territory.¹⁴

The United Kingdom wishes for an end to the conflict through peaceful dialogue. They have also led the effort to provide humanitarian aid to



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victims of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. They were the first nation to pledge money for victims of the conflict, having assigned one million pounds for food and medicine. In addition, they also most recently pledged half a million pounds for demining efforts in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.¹⁵

The United States is diplomatically neutral on the issue. It works for a lasting peace formula, and continues to urge both nations to come to a more permanent solution. It largely tries to do this through its membership as a co-chair of the OSCE.¹⁶ But the US Congress tends to support Armenia, reflecting the outspoken advocacy of America's Armenian minority, and especially strong force in California, Massachusetts and Rhode Island politics. Armenia also has won support based on sympathy for the suffering of the Armenian people in the 1915-17 genocide, which killed at least 600,000 Armenians at the hands of Turkish rulers.

Some Possible Proposals for Action

The UN has always had a focus on maintaining peace especially through dialogue, only resorting to other methods when compromises between nations appear impossible to achieve. The situation in Azerbaijan and Armenia is no different, with most of the member states involved explicitly expressing their desire for a solution which requires minimal intervention. As the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh becomes more tense, it is evident that a solution which may be more "on the ground" is necessary to try and permanently resolve the conflict. The UN has many ways it could achieve this. Member State delegates are free to develop their own approaches. Some possibilities include:

Sanctions: The Security Council possesses the unique power within the UN to levy sanctions on nations that they believe to be directly

harming the international community. Sanctions directly punish nations and can prevent them from acquiring military supplies or other items with which they can wage war. While Sanctions do hold immense power, the implementation of them can be a struggle. For one thing,

The UN does hold direct power over its member states, meaning that any resolution which would call for sanctions is merely a recommendation of imposing sanctions to other nations. Another issue with sanctions is also the type of sanction introduced. Comprehensive sanctions (those which target all of a country's economy) often hurt the poorest citizens of a country the most rather than the intended effect of hurting the government. This usually ends up in mass starvations, decreased stability, and thousands of deaths.¹⁷

Sanctions would also be hard to introduce if they target Armenia *OR* Azerbaijan. This is due to the fact that any partisan resolution would have to not be vetoed by any of the permanent member states of the Security Council, which when considering the continued desire to remain neutral by all of them, would be very unlikely. All of these issues with sanctions do not make them an unviable solution, it just means that the implementation of sanctions would have to overcome all of these issues.

Peacekeeping Mission: Another unique power the Security Council possesses is that of being able to establish a UN peacekeeping missions to oversee territories and strengthen adherence to ceasefires, international, and humanitarian law. However, just like sanctions, successfully creating and implementing a peacekeeping mission comes with a myriad of issues. For one thing, any resolution which creates a peacekeeping mission must pass through the Security Council with a unanimous vote. Funding would have to be agreed and neutral troops—acceptable to both sides—would have to be identified.



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Even if a peacekeeping mission were to pass, the logistical challenges present another hurdle for a mission to come to fruition. Issues such as what the defined objective, details, and size of the mission have to be addressed within any resolution calling for the introduction of peacekeepers into any territory. The General Assembly also has to approve the budget and amount of resources given to the peacekeeping mission, as detailed in the resolution.¹⁸

Despite these problems, peacekeeping can be effective as a neutral force in order to enforce a ceasefire. This is especially useful given how the current conflict could be resolved through outside intervention, which would maintain adherence to the current existing framework with the OSCE.¹⁹

Russia, which controls its current ‘peacekeeping’ operations between the two, is unlikely to support peacekeeping if it brings in foreign forces. Armenia also might be opposed, since it relies on Russian support. Azerbaijan could be more supportive, though.

Humanitarian Aid: The baseline action which the Security Council could enact upon is that of supplying, or rather in this case helping Humanitarian Aid. While Humanitarian Aid may already be provided through The UN Refugee Agency, actually ensuring that this aid reaches those within Azerbaijan and Armenia is a different issue. This relates to peacekeepers, as the Security Council is the only committee with the distinct power to provide an actual force, which can protect aid workers within affected areas.

A resolution which focuses solely on protecting citizens may not face the same partisanship which other resolutions can, making humanitarian aid something extremely viable for the Security Council to pass. If humanitarian funding comes from the West, Russia might be highly supportive, so long as it has a say in how the funding is spent. Armenia and Azerbaijan also are likely to insist on control over the use of any foreign funds.

Holding a Summit: Another action which the Security Council can move to is to call for a Summit. This resolution provides a way for increased dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan with foreign input. What the objective of the summit would be would as well as who hosts it would have to exist within the resolution. More issues arise when considering the strained relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Getting either country, or their P5 allies, to agree to a summit resolution, let alone to agree on anything seems implausible unless there is strong pressure and economic or even military incentives from foreign allies. With the authority of the UN and a clear goal in mind, a Summit could be a viable option to increase dialogue between the two nations. A summit resolution would have to overcome opposition—and a likely veto—from Russia, which would oppose any measure that threatens to dilute its regional influence. Azerbaijan also might be opposed, since it won the most recent fighting, but Armenia is likely to be very supportive.



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