

## The Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

### What is the issue?

The breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus has been at the centre of three wars and multiple clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia,

### Where is Nagorno-Karabakh located?

- Nagorno-Karabakh is a landlocked, mountainous and forested region falling within the boundaries of Azerbaijan.
- Nagorno-Karabakh, called Artsakh in Armenian, hosts a predominantly ethnic Armenian population with an Azeri minority.
- It is located in the South Caucasus region, which straddles the border between eastern Europe and western Asia.
- It is roughly made up of modern-day Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.
- The capital of Nagorno-Karabakh is Stepanakert, with Susha being another major city in the region.



### How did the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh begin?

- Nagorno-Karabakh was once a part of the Armenian Kingdom and has been ruled by several empires such as the Ottomans, the Persians, and the Russians.
- Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia later became separate Republics, with the Azeris incorporating Nagorno-Karabakh into their Republic.
- The Soviets officially placed Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous Oblast (administrative region) in Azerbaijan's territory, despite the chiefly Armenian population.
- As Soviet power began to wane in the 1980s, the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh expressed a desire to become a part of Armenia, organising a vote for the same in 1988.
- With the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Armenian rebels in Nagorno-Karabakh declared it an independent territory, which was not recognised internationally.
- This led to an open war between Armenia and Azerbaijan where Armenia had taken control of

around 13% of Azerbaijan's territory.

- The war ended in 1994 when both countries entered into a ceasefire brokered by Russia but this could not prevent multiple flareups in the region.
- In 2016, a clash between the rebels and the Azerbaijani military transformed into a four-day war which led to a ceasefire.
- Fresh clashes erupted on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in 2020, which turned into a fierce six-week war in which Azeri forces took back territories including 40% of Nagorno-Karabakh.

## What about the peace talks organised by the Minsk Group?

*The Minsk Group was created by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to facilitate talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Group was co-chaired by Russia, the United States and France.*

- The Group came up with three peace proposals in the 1990s.
- **The package deal (1997)**- It envisaged simultaneous removal of Armenian forces from occupied areas and the determination of Nagorno-Karabakh's status but was rejected.
- **The step-by-step approach (1997)**- It suggested gradual steps starting with Armenian withdrawal, return of displaced refugees, and ending of hostilities followed by talks for a future resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue which was rejected too.
- **The common state proposal (1998)**- It would endow Nagorno-Karabakh with a separate passport, law enforcement and currency, but within Azerbaijan's internationally recognised borders.
- The entry of Azeri forces would be barred without Nagorno-Karabakh's approval and Armenian people of this region would also have the right to vote in Armenian elections.
- This was rejected as well.
- **The Madrid Principles**- The peace deal was followed by 2007, later modified in 2009.
- These principles proposed
  - Giving control of seven Karabakh districts to Azerbaijan
  - Self-governance to the region
  - A corridor link with Armenia
  - Giving the region's inhabitants an opportunity to express their will
  - Return of refugees
  - Setting up of a peacekeeping operation
- The Minsk Group held another meeting in Geneva in 2017 but it did not produce any concrete outcome.

## What about the role played by other countries?

- **Role of Turkey**- The conflict turned into a regional one in the years following the 2016 war, with the entry of Turkey.
- The Azeris and Turks share strong cultural and historical links as Azerbaijanis are a Turkic ethnic group of mixed heritage, speaking a language belonging to a branch of the Turkic family.
- In 2020, Turkey offered support to Azerbaijan in line with its foreign policy of expanding the interests to the former territories of the Ottoman empire.
- **Role of Russia**- Russia established small military outposts along the Armenian border and conducted a massive airstrike in Syria's Idlib region against Turkish-backed militants.

- In 2020, Russian President accepted the Azerbaijani victory and ensured that Azeri forces remain out of major Nagorno-Karabakh territories.

## Where do the current peace talks stand?

- With the efforts of the Minsk Group remaining largely unsuccessful, Baku saw an opportunity to introduce its own peace proposal, which calls for the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijani territory.
- The European Union has emerged as a potential peace broker by spearheading meetings between the leaders of both countries.
- Armenian President has been facing civilian unrest and protests wanting to oust him for agreeing to peace talks.
- Armenians are also asking Turkey, which has allied itself to Azerbaijan, to recognise the 1915 Armenian genocide.

### Reference

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/what-is-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-explained/article65459587.ece?homepage=true>

