

## Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has recently spiked into a major issue in the Caucasus region, with possible ramifications for the larger international community. In this article, we explain the origins of the issue between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the 1994 ceasefire and the role of the various international players on this escalating issue, for the [UPSC exam](#) IR segment.

### Nagorno-Karabakh Region



Nagorno-Karabakh region is a mountainous land-locked region in the South Caucasus. It is a forested region and geographically lies within the boundary of Azerbaijan.

- The region is also called Artsakh (chiefly by Armenians).
- *South Caucasus or Transcaucasia is a region on the southern Caucasus Mountains on the border of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. It roughly comprises of the modern countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia.*
- Nagorno-Karabakh lies in the mountainous range of Karabakh.
- Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognised as a part of Azerbaijan, although it is ruled by the Republic of Artsakh (formerly known as the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh).
- The Republic of Artsakh is autonomous but controlled by Armenia.
- The major ethnic group of the region is Armenian.

### Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Origin

The root of the problem lies in the manner in which the Soviet authorities under Joseph Stalin divided the area after the Red Army conquered it in the 1920s.

- The Soviets had placed the majority-Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan. The region was an autonomous oblast within Soviet Azerbaijan.
- The present conflict arose in the 1980s when the USSR started collapsing.
- Nationalist forces on both sides started using Nagorno-Karabakh as a rallying point.
- In 1991, the ethnic Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave declared independence.
- Armenia supported this move of the ethnic Armenians and war broke out between Azerbaijan and the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- The war went on till 1994 when a ceasefire was brokered with the help of Russia. Many people were killed and displaced during this war.
- By this time, however, Azerbaijani forces were driven out of the enclave and also from large swathes of the surrounding area. Currently, much of the area is occupied by Armenian militias.
- Even though the region is self-governed by the Armenians, it is not recognised as an independent nation by any country (not even Armenia) and the [United Nations](#).
- Armenia supports the region militarily and economically.
- A ceasefire violation occurred in 2016 when the Azerbaijani forces clashed with the Artsakh Defence Army backed by Armenian forces.

## Recent Clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh

The region once again rose to the limelight when on 27th September 2020, both Azerbaijan and Armenia reported to have inflicted losses on one another in the region.

- Some reports say that the clashes were possibly a fallout of Azerbaijan's bid to reclaim some territories occupied by separatist Armenians.
- Both sides declared martial law.
- Earlier this year, the government of Nagorno-Karabakh organised an election which was seen as a provocation by the government of Azerbaijan.
- In July 2020, there were clashes between the two leading to the loss of a dozen lives.
- The current crisis is garnering worldwide attention because of the involvement of international and regional heavyweights in the region.
- Turkey declared unconditional support for Muslim-majority Azerbaijan.
  - The reason for this is, apart from the cultural ties (both Turkey and Azerbaijan are Turkic countries), Turkey has had tensions with Armenia over other issues as well.
  - Turkey doesn't recognise the 1915 Armenian genocide and this has been a bone of contention between the two countries.
    - The 1915 Armenian genocide refers to the systematic mass murder and expulsion of ethnic Armenians from Turkey and adjoining areas by the Ottoman government between 1914 and 1923.
    - The current establishment in Turkey doesn't acknowledge this genocide, either denying the events that took place then or claiming that they were justified at that time.
  - Armenia has also alleged that Turkey has supplied Azerbaijan with Syrian fighters and has also downed a plane. These allegations are denied by both Turkey and Azerbaijan.
- Russia, the dominant power in the area, maintains close ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, providing military and financial help to both countries.
  - However, its ties with Armenia can be considered closer since Armenia hosts a Russian military base and is part of the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union.
- Another significance of the region is its part in the energy trade.
  - The pipelines connecting Azerbaijan with Turkey are vital for the European Union's oil and natural gas supply — and pass close to Nagorno-Karabakh.

- Fighting continues in the region with both sides reporting civilian casualties and international players calling for a ceasefire. As of 8 October 2020, Russia, France and the US hold talks in Geneva.

## Minsk Group

The Minsk Group or the OSCE Minsk Group was established in 1992 by the Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE, now Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)) to envisage a peaceful, negotiated resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

- It is co-chaired by France, Russia and the USA.
- Permanent members of the group:
  - Azerbaijan
  - Armenia
  - Belarus
  - Germany
  - Italy
  - Sweden
  - Finland
  - Turkey
  - OSCE Troika on a rotating basis
- One of the criticisms of the group is that although it is supposed to be neutral, it is co-chaired by the US, Russia and France - all countries with huge Armenian diasporas. Because of this reason, the group is said to be soft on Armenia. Despite the UN's calls for Armenian forces to withdraw, the Minsk Group does not actively endorse an Armenian withdrawal from the region.
- It is also said that apart from mere lip-service in the form of calls for a ceasefire and the condemnation of the clashes between both sides, the group does nothing substantial to find a lasting solution to the crisis.