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## Armenian-Azerbaijan Conflict: History and Modern Threats

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## **Introduction**

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh has persisted for decades, shaping the socio-political landscape of the South Caucasus. The roots of the conflict can be traced back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Tensions have escalated in recent years, leading to significant displacement and highlighting the complexities surrounding the dispute. This article explores the modern dynamics of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, including its historical backdrop, external influences, negotiation efforts, and impact on regional and sub-regional levels. The focus is on recent developments and Azerbaijan's demands from Armenia.

## **Historical Context**

The Nagorno-Karabakh region, located within Azerbaijan but predominantly populated by ethnic Armenians, became a focal point of contention following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Armenian majority sought independence or union with Armenia, triggering a violent conflict that resulted in thousands of casualties and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

External actors have had a significant impact on the conflict, either inflaming or defusing it. Russia, Turkey, and Iran, among others, have vested interests in the region and often support one side over the other. Russia, in particular, has maintained a delicate balance by selling arms to both Armenia and Azerbaijan while positioning itself as a mediator. Turkey's unwavering support for Azerbaijan adds another layer of complexity, fueling tensions and hindering diplomatic efforts.

## **Negotiation History**

Numerous attempts at negotiation have been made over the years, including through the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States. However, a lasting resolution has remained elusive, with sporadic flare-ups of violence underscoring the fragility of the

situation. The failure of past negotiations has bred a sense of distrust and skepticism among the parties involved.

### **Early Negotiations: The 1990s**

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was precipitated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. In 1992, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) established the Minsk Group, which was co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States, to facilitate negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Minsk Group's efforts culminated in the 1994 ceasefire agreement, which effectively halted active hostilities but failed to address the underlying grievances.

### **First Steps Toward Peace: The 2000s.**

In the early 2000s, Armenia and Azerbaijan engaged in direct talks under the auspices of the Minsk Group, renewing diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. Although the Key West talks in 2001 and subsequent meetings in Prague and Paris raised hopes for a breakthrough, disagreements over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the return of occupied territories thwarted progress. Despite these setbacks, confidence-building measures were implemented, such as people-to-people exchanges and humanitarian initiatives.

### **The Mediation of the Minsk Group: 2010s**

Throughout the 2010s, the Minsk Group continued its mediation efforts, but with limited success. The Co-Chairs proposed various peace plans, including the Madrid Principles, which outlined a step-by-step approach to resolving the conflict. However, fundamental disagreements persisted, particularly regarding the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the return of territories surrounding the region. Furthermore, the negotiation process was further complicated by the escalation of violence in 2016 during the Four-Day War.

### **Escalation and Stalemate: Recent Years**

In recent years, tensions have dangerously escalated, culminating in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. The outbreak of hostilities highlighted the failure of previous negotiation efforts to adequately address the root causes of the conflict. Despite the

ceasefire brokered by Russia in November 2020, sporadic clashes have continued, further eroding trust between the parties.

### **November 9 Agreement and the Aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

After the intense fighting in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia brokered the November 9 agreement to halt the violence and establish a ceasefire. The agreement, signed on November 9, 2020, stipulated the cessation of hostilities and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers to oversee the region.

Despite the ceasefire agreement, the situation on the ground remained precarious. During the conflict, Azerbaijan made significant military advances that altered the territorial landscape. Armenian forces were forced to withdraw from several areas in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result, Azerbaijan gained control over key strategic locations, including the city of Shusha, which is a major cultural and historical center for Armenians.

The November 9 agreement led to the forcible displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, which sparked a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions. Reports have emerged of widespread atrocities, including instances of ethnic cleansing and destruction of Armenian cultural heritage sites. Azerbaijan's closure of the Lachin corridor, a vital lifeline for the region, has further exacerbated the humanitarian situation, leaving thousands of people stranded without access to essential supplies such as food, water, and medical aid.

Although Russia acted as a mediator and guarantor of the ceasefire agreement, it was unable to fully resolve the underlying tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The November 9 agreement temporarily halted the violence but failed to address the root causes of the conflict, leaving unresolved issues such as the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the return of displaced persons. As a result, the region remains uncertain, with the possibility of renewed violence.

### **Contemporary Developments and Azerbaijan's Demands**

In recent years, Azerbaijan has intensified its efforts to reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh, employing both diplomatic maneuvers and military action. The events of September 2023 marked a significant escalation, as Azerbaijan forcibly displaced over 100,000 Armenians from the region, drawing condemnation from the international community. Azerbaijan's

demands from Armenia have become increasingly assertive, including the recognition of its territorial integrity and the return of occupied territories.

### **Forcible Displacement and Humanitarian Crisis**

The forcible displacement of Armenian civilians from Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023 exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation. Thousands were uprooted from their homes, facing uncertain futures and limited access to essential services. The displacement underscored the urgent need for a peaceful resolution and highlighted the vulnerability of civilians caught in the crossfire of geopolitical rivalries.

### **The Future of Armenia and Azerbaijan**

The future of Armenia and Azerbaijan is uncertain due to persistent tensions and unresolved territorial disputes. Azerbaijan's demands for corridors and new territories from Armenia add complexity to the already intricate geopolitical landscape. Azerbaijan's insistence on securing corridors through Armenian territory, particularly in the Syunik region, poses a significant threat to Armenia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. These demands raise concerns about potential encroachments on Armenian territory and the displacement of local populations. Furthermore, Azerbaijan's aspirations for control over new territories worsen existing grievances and fuel apprehensions about future conflicts. In this uncertain environment, several scenarios for the future relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan emerge.

One possibility is that tension will continue and sporadic outbreaks of violence will occur due to unresolved territorial disputes and deep-seated animosities. This scenario could further destabilize the region, exacerbating humanitarian crises and hindering economic development.

Alternatively, diplomatic efforts could lead to a gradual normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, facilitated by international mediation and confidence-building measures. This situation would necessitate compromises from both parties and a readiness to participate in productive discussions to tackle shared concerns and discover mutually agreeable solutions.

Another possibility would be a significant change in regional dynamics, driven by changes in the geopolitical landscape and the emergence of new alliances. This scenario may result in Armenia and Azerbaijan reevaluating their strategic objectives and adjusting their relationship in reaction to changing regional and global patterns.



Ultimately, the future of Armenia and Azerbaijan hinges on their ability to navigate complex geopolitical challenges, address long-standing grievances, and chart a path toward peaceful coexistence. While the road ahead may be fraught with uncertainty, concerted diplomatic efforts and a commitment to dialogue offer hope for a more stable and prosperous future for both countries and the wider South Caucasus region.

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