

Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

IREn5019 No War, No Peace: Frozen Conflicts in the Caucasus
Mgr. Zinaida Bechná, Ph.D.

21.9.2022

Structure

Introduction

Stages of conflict

Phase A: From Latent conflict to Escalation

Phase B: Trigger events – emergence of sporadic clashes.

Phase C: Frozen conflict

Peace negotiations

Stages of conflict

The 19th century: confrontations between Armenia and Azerbaijan started.

Clashes in 1905 resulted into indiscriminate mutual massacres in 1907.

Armenian genocide by Ottoman Empire 1915.

“The South Caucasus Confederation” 1918-1920 were turbulent, marked with armed conflict and violence.

Soviet period no large scale violence.

Why did Stalin give Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan?



Stalin wanted to pit the ethnic groups in the South Caucasus regions against each other.

„Divide and rule“ principle

Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was placed within Azerbaijan SSR.

Stalin made concessions to Azerbaijan SSR because of its economic importance, specifically its oil resources.

Ethnic map of N-K in 1989

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH AUTONOMOUS OBLAST IN 1989



MAP 1



SOURCES: Heritage Foundation research based on information from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Leaders Discuss Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict; Kerry Expresses 'Strong Concern,'" September 5, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-/26567727.html> (accessed January 5, 2015), and SOCAR Romania, "The Global Scale of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic," <http://www.socar.ro/en/SOCAR-AZERBAIJAN> (accessed January 5, 2015).

Conflict phases

- Escalation modes and level of violence in N-K
- First, the **latent conflict from 1988 to 1992**, characterized by a low intensity of violence (phase A).
- Second phase, **full-scale war from 1992 to 1994**: after a high number of victims, the conflict ended in stalemate (phase B).
- Third, the so-called **“frozen” stage** with high potential to re-escalate to violent confrontation in the future (phase C): from 1994 to 2014.

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- At the first glance, the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict in the latent phase looks like a typical example **of a secessionist conflict**. Historical arguments, emotional appeals were constructed in favor of this goal.
- The cornerstone of Azerbaijan national identity until 1988 was not the Karabakh issue, but the significance to unify “north” and “south” Azerbaijan. This claim was raised in December 1989 during the **demonstration of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan close to Soviet-Iranian border in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic** .
- The Karabakh issue changed the political discourse in Azerbaijan and after Sumgait events in February 1988 the events took unpredictable path of one of the bloodiest conflict in the South Caucasus, which has not been resolved yet.

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- With the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, Azerbaijani national identity emphasized the significance of preservation of **territorial integrity** in order to strengthen national unity.
- Armenians used the issue of **genocide and victimization of nation** as a paradigm for strengthening national identity.
- Armed conflict was derived from a clash of interests between Armenia's and Azerbaijan's “shadow” business.
- Three major issues** determined the spiral of escalation.

1. First demands against *environmental pollution*



Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- First, demands to **close nuclear plant in Armenia**, which led to the two demonstrations in 1987. Demands **against environmental pollution** were related to the protection of homeland and national heritage.
- 350 intellectuals send a letter to Kremlin about devastating consequences of environmental issue in Armenia, which threated the **physical existence of this nation**.
- This letter stated that “Armenia’s cancer rate had quadrupled between 1965 and 1985, while cases of abnormal births, leukemia, and mental retardation had likewise soared. ” Furthermore, a literary journal “Karoun” publishes some statistics about poisoned air condition in the city Hraztan due to the cement factory, which generated almost 280 thousand tons of dust and smoke.
- „shut down Nairit so the Armenia people will survive!“

2. Karabakh Committee: status of N-K



“

3. “Miatsoum” (unification) and “struggle to the end”



Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- **Karabakh Committee** composed by **nationalist intellectuals** organized demonstration in 1998 calling for “one nation one republic,” “unification” and “struggle to the end”.
- The leader of Karabakh Committee did not raise such issues as criticizing Communist government for corruption or initiation of political reforms. It was more convenient **to mobilized masses for struggle against pan-Turkism rather than proposing a strategy for initiation political reforms.**
- It meant that unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia was the cover to achieve political goals.

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- **Series demonstrations about environmental issues paved a way to nationalist movement.**
- At this early age of activism two types of national elites were created.
- 1) nationalist leaders (mostly intellectuals) and 2) the Communist elites. They compete each other for power and control over particular territories. Separation of Nagorno-Karabakh meant dissolution of the country.
- **Mass mobilization in Yerevan and Stepanakert was not anti-Soviet, but was hostile towards Azerbaijan. Ethnic irredentism merged with the political reforms and national survival.**

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- The Nagorno-Karabakh question represents a combination of:
 - First, the essentialization of **collective historical memories** and the victimization of the Armenian national consciousness are the result of the 1915 Genocide by the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in the perception of a permanent threat stemming from Turkey and its “kin brother nation,” Azerbaijan.
 - Second, a **demographic shift** and the forced migration of the Armenian population intensified the issue of physical survival and the identity crisis of the Armenian nation. In the words of the president of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, “The inclusion of NK within the borders of the Azeri SSSR put the Armenian people on the verge of extinction“
 - Historical injustice, fear of ethnic extinction, depopulation, and oppression of the Armenian population contributed to the struggle against Azerbaijani rule over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.**

Phase A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- **Azerbaijani national identity** was heavily influenced by the powers that ruled them for many centuries. Unlike Armenians, whose threat perception and vulnerability emphasized their uniqueness and isolation in the region, Azerbaijanis have emphasized their belonging to and affinity with bigger communities: Turkic and Muslim.

- The cornerstone of Azerbaijani national identity until 1988 was not the Karabakh issue, but the significance to **unify “north” and “south” Azerbaijan**. This claim was raised in **December 1989 during the demonstration of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan close to the Soviet-Iranian border in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic**.

Phase B: Trigger Events – Emergence of Sporadic Clashes

- Nationalist demonstrations – transfer Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia.
 - 1988- Nagorno-Karabakh - referendum to unify with Armenia.
 - The first cases of mass violence were **recorded in Sumgait**, February 1988 - 32 dead (26 Armenians and 6 Azeri) during three days 27-29 February.
 - The month of November was one of the great refugees flows. According to unofficial sources, around 180'000 Armenians had left Azerbaijan, and 160'000 Azeri had left Armenia by the end of the month.
- Levon Ter-Petrosian, the head of the Karabakh Committee and the president of Armenia, believed that the Sumgait events “turned the constitutional process to physical clashes... Until then, we believed that if the Soviet Union was going towards democratization those questions had to be opened.” According to this view, the Sumgait was not planned by the Kremlin, as it took three days for Moscow to intervene.

Phaze B: Trigger Events – Emergence of Sporadic Clashes

- Other influential leaders of the Karabakh Movement, Vazgen Manukyan and Ashot Manucharyan, believe that external parties organized the events in Sumgait.
- The idea that the KGB got involved in the escalation of the conflict between Armenians and Azeris is maintained by some Azerbaijani political leaders, as, for example, by Isa Gambar, the leader of the Azerbaijani Musavat Party.
- According to this view, the Sumgait pogrom was supported by Moscow in order to overcome the democratization of Armenia: “The government is genuinely scared of our unity... They just wanted to intimidate us to stop the demonstrations from happening. They thought it was all being directed from somewhere... they just could not imagine that half a million people would interrupt the day-to-day business of their lives to express their bitterness at how they had been treated.”
- Sumgait converted past trauma into immediate threat.**
- The genocide provided the most suitable framework through which the events could be portrayed. For Armenians, the Sumgait pogrom was a continuation of genocide by Turks.

Phaze B: Trigger Events – Emergence of Sporadic Clashes

- The violence in Sumgait was followed by other events leading to the gradual transformation of conflict to its armed phase.
- The next tragic event took place in Ganja, the second largest city in Azerbaijan. It resulted in the next wave of refugee flows of Armenians.
- The situation escalated further in January, when the opposition in Baku organized a demonstration against the government calling for more radical measures in the Karabakh issue. This resulted in the intervention by the Soviets in Baku.
- “**Black January**” caused a victimization of Azerbaijani consciousness, as did the Sumgait events to Armenians. In the aftermath, more than 100 people died and over 1,000 were wounded.

Phase B: Trigger Events – Emergence of Sporadic Clashes

- On 12 January 1989 - 'special government administration' in Karabakh - direct control from Moscow. Moscow approved 400 million rubles to improve industrial, housing, and educational capacities in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) reacted with rail blockades in order to block any special assistance from Moscow. This had a huge impact on the evolution of Armenian attitudes towards Azerbaijan.
- Sporadic clashes became frequent by the first months of 1991.
- On 2 September 1991 - independent republic of Nagorno Karabakh.
- During Autumn, Azerbaijani forces moved to counter Nagorno Karabakh's declaration of Independence.
- Operation "**Ring**" to deter Armenians from their major demand: unification with Armenia
- **1992-1994 full - scale war.**

Violent Stage

- Starting with 1991, we can trace the offensive strategies by the Armenian side.
- **Radicalization of guerrilla activities** between the two nations were also intensified. Over 10 000 people were deported to Armenia on the pretext of self-defense.
- “Bandits blocked roads between Azerbaijani villages, established military posts on the highway leading from Khanlar to Kelbajar, and blew up water pipes supplying Ganja with drinking water. Their unpunished activity was a direct threat for the activity of Western Azerbaijan with more than one million inhabitants.

Violent Stage: Khojaly massacres

- Full-scale war broke out in February 1992. The city of **Khodjaly** saw one of the bloodiest massacres during which 636 people died.
- The Khojaly massacre had sincere consequences for the Azerbaijani population. President Ayaz Mutallibov was forced to leave office, which contributed to the instability in Baku.



Violent Stage

- After the victory in Khodjaly, which ensured an air corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, the next step was to **secure Shusha**, which would ensure a land connection and end the blockade imposed by Azerbaijan.
- After two days of violence, there were 57 victims on the Armenian side and almost 200 on the Azerbaijani side.
- The next step in this struggle was to resolve logistical problems in order to supply the Armenian troops. In this regard, the occupation of the **Lachin Corridor** had particular significance. Without much confrontation, it was soon abandoned by Azerbaijani forces.

Images of War



Guerillas in Nagorno-Karabakh.



Source: TASS



Consequences of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The human sufferings included 25 000-30 000 people dead, 250 000-350 000 refugees from Azerbaijan in Armenia, and 750 000-1 000 000 refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from Armenia, Karabakh and occupied Azerbaijani territories in Azerbaijan.

UN passed 4 resolutions on the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, immediate withdrawal of all occupation forces from the occupied regions and immediate cessation of military activities.

Armenia denied to comply with the demands.

Phaze C: Frozen conflict

- Skirmishes, low intensity violence, and shooting across front lines have increased, leading to a growing arms race, accompanied by political propaganda, threats, and plans of war.
- Conflict involves: regular clashes and confrontation supported by international actors.
- The Bishkek protocol signed in May 1994:
 - 1. to grant a wide range of autonomy to N-K, while maintaining sovereignty of Azerbaijan.
 - 2. measures to guarantee the security of N-K,
 - 3. Armenian withdrawal from the occupied territories in Azerbaijan,
 - 4. special measures for the Lachin corridor to link N-K with Armenia
 - 5. to make arrangements between Azerbaijan and Armenia so that at least the major portion of the refugees on both sides may return to their homes,
 - 6. the international community to support economic reconstruction of both nations.

Peace negotiations

The OSCE Minsk group: two-step approach

1. all Armenian forces to withdraw from Azerbaijan land except N-K
2. start negotiations on the final status of N-K.

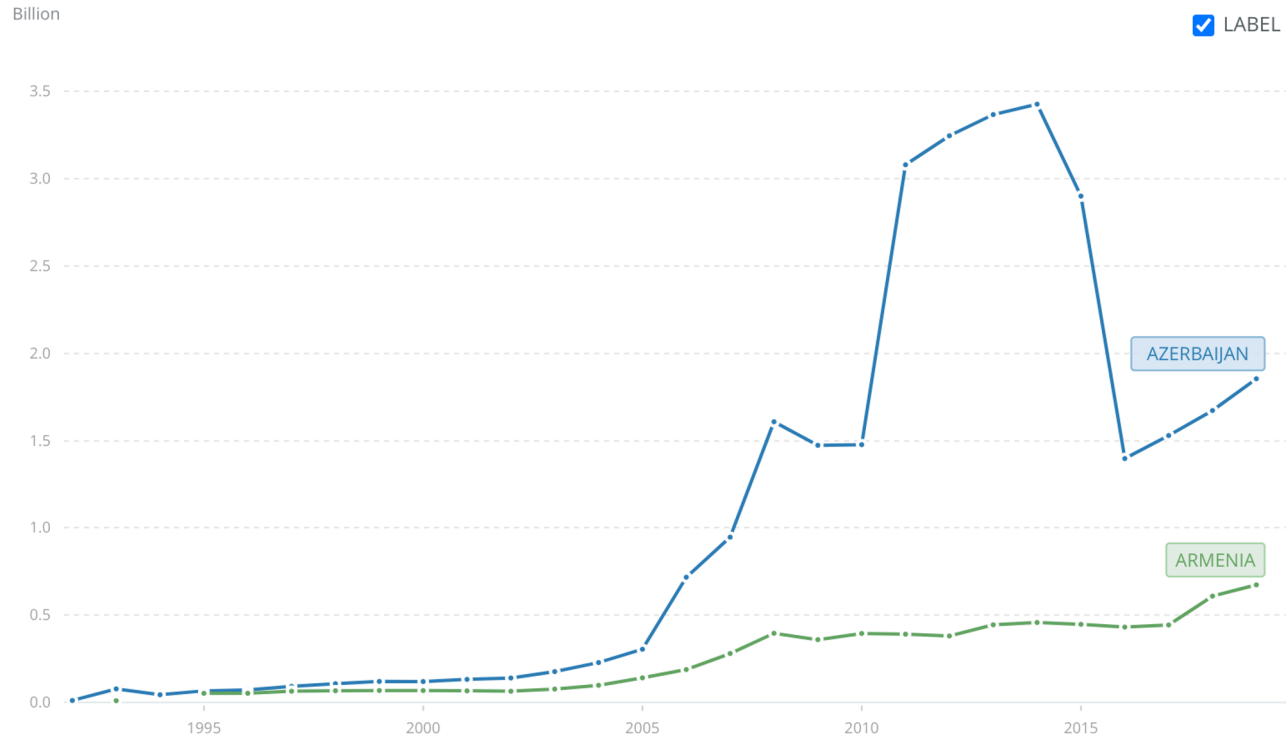
Armenian, Azerbaijani Presidents Agree On Preamble To 'Madrid Principles, Sochi 2010.



Sochi 2011



Azerbaijan and Armenian military expenditures



Literature:

Thomas De Waal (2013): "Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War", New York University Press, NY, London.

Geukjian, O., (2016): "*Ethnicity, nationalism and conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the legacy of Soviet nationalities policy.*" Routledge.

Yamskov, A.N., (1991): " Ethnic conflict in the Transcaucasus: The case of Nagorno-Karabakh, " *Theory and society*, pp.631-660.