

Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

IREn5019 No War, No Peace: Unresolved Conflicts in the Caucasus
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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

Nagorno-Karabakh



Karabakh - "black garden",,
"Nagorno-" is a Russian word
meaning "mountain",.

Status: de jure part of the Republic
of Azerbaijan, unilaterally declared
itself an independent republic in
1991

Capital: Stepanakert.

Area: 4,400 sq km

Main religion: Christianity

Languages spoken: Armenian,
Russian

Currency in use: Dram.

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

1. Phase A: Latent Conflict (1988–1992)

- **Nature of the Conflict:** This period is characterized by low-intensity violence. During this time, tensions escalated between the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations of Nagorno-Karabakh, with growing political mobilization but relatively limited violent outbreaks.
- The seeds of the conflict were sown with the rise of ethnic nationalism, political unrest, and protests, particularly after the 1988 decision of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast to secede from Azerbaijan and join Armenia. This latent phase involved sporadic clashes but did not yet escalate into full-scale war.

2. Phase B: Full-Scale War (1992–1994)

- **Nature of the Conflict:** This phase marks the transition from sporadic violence to an intense and large-scale war, with significant loss of life and territorial battles.
- The collapse of the Soviet Union exacerbated ethnic tensions, leading to full-scale war between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces over Nagorno-Karabakh. Between 1992 and 1994, the conflict intensified, resulting in tens of thousands of casualties and displacement of people from both sides. By 1994, the fighting ended in a ceasefire, which effectively left Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenian control, although it remained internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan.

3. Phase C: Frozen Conflict (1994–2014)

- **Nature of the Conflict:** After the ceasefire in 1994, the conflict entered a "frozen" phase, with the potential for re-escalation at any time. There were occasional flare-ups, but the situation remained largely in a stalemate.
- Although there were negotiations and international efforts to resolve the conflict peacefully, no formal peace agreement was reached. The region continued to experience occasional skirmishes, and the potential for renewed conflict remained high, contributing to a protracted state of unresolved tension.

The Origins of Phase A – Latent Conflict (1988–1992)

Soviet Legacy and Ethnic Tensions: The roots of the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh trace back to the decision made during the Soviet era, particularly in 1921 when Stalin placed Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly Armenian region, under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan. This decision fostered long-term dissatisfaction among Armenians, especially as Azerbaijan's policies towards the region were perceived as attempts at "Azerbaijanization."

Gradual Azerbaijanization: In the 1970s and 1980s, tensions escalated due to demographic policies by the Azerbaijani government, which sought to increase the Azerbaijani population in Nagorno-Karabakh. By 1989, Armenians still made up about 77% of the population, but Azerbaijani numbers had nearly doubled over two decades.

Political Mobilization: The emergence of nationalist movements like the Karabakh Committee in Armenia and Krunk in Nagorno-Karabakh galvanized Armenians to push for secession from Azerbaijan. Lobbying efforts in Moscow aimed to reverse what Armenians viewed as an illegitimate decision of Soviet leadership.

Initial Stages of Ethnic Polarization (1988–1990)

Escalation of Protests: The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh began shifting from latent dissatisfaction to active confrontation in the late 1980s. Armenians organized large-scale protests demanding the transfer of the region to Armenia. In response, Azerbaijani protests erupted in Baku, leading to growing polarization between the two ethnic groups.

Outbreak of Violence: Ethnic tensions flared into violence with the first significant bloodshed in 1988 when two Azerbaijanis were killed near Agdam, triggering pogroms in Sumgait, a city near Baku. The Sumgait pogroms, marked by brutal attacks on Armenians, were viewed as a turning point in the conflict. The Soviet authorities struggled to control the growing unrest.

Armed Mobilization: Both Armenians and Azerbaijanis began forming paramilitary groups in response to the increasing ethnic violence. Armenians, driven by memories of historical grievances, including the 1915 genocide, sought to protect their community, while Azerbaijanis reacted to the expulsion of Azerbaijani families from Armenian-populated areas

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

First Glance as a Secessionist Conflict:

- Initially, the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over Nagorno-Karabakh might seem like a typical **secessionist** conflict. This would involve a specific ethnic group (the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh) seeking to break away from the Azerbaijani state to either gain autonomy or join Armenia. Such secessionist movements often rely on **historical arguments and emotional appeals** that emphasize long-standing grievances, historical ties to the land, and cultural identity.

Azerbaijan's National Identity Prior to 1988:

- Before 1988, the **Nagorno-Karabakh issue** was not central to Azerbaijan's national identity. Instead, the focus of Azerbaijani national identity revolved around the concept of unifying "north" and "south" Azerbaijan. This refers to the idea of uniting the northern part of Azerbaijan (the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan) with the southern part (which is part of Iran).

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- This aspiration had roots in historical territorial divisions, as Azerbaijan was split between Russia (north) and Iran (south) in the 19th century. This theme was central to Azerbaijani nationalistic aspirations and was still prominent in **1989**, when the **Popular Front of Azerbaijan** raised the issue during demonstrations near the Soviet-Iranian border, specifically in the **Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic**, which borders Iran.

Shift in Political Discourse Post-1988:

- However, **after 1988**, the **Nagorno-Karabakh issue** began to dominate Azerbaijan's political discourse. The **Sumgait events of February 1988** were a major turning point. In these pogroms, Armenians in the city of Sumgait were violently attacked, leading to numerous deaths. This event, driven by ethnic tensions, marked the beginning of the violent phase of the conflict and set the stage for further bloodshed.
- The violence in Sumgait shocked both Armenian and Azerbaijani populations, and after these events, the conflict took an **unpredictable and violent turn**, ultimately becoming one of the bloodiest conflicts in the **South Caucasus** region. The reference to the conflict being unresolved highlights its protracted and ongoing nature, as the conflict remains a key geopolitical issue to this day.

First demands against *environmental pollution*



Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

Environmental Concerns as a National Issue

- The **demands to close the nuclear plant** in Armenia, leading to demonstrations in 1987, reveal how environmental concerns were intertwined with national identity and sovereignty. The movement wasn't just about environmental protection; it was linked to the defense of the homeland and Armenian national heritage.
- The late Soviet period saw an increase in environmental activism in several republics, including Armenia. Concerns about the environment, such as pollution and nuclear safety, became rallying points for broader movements of national identity and autonomy, especially as the Soviet government's decisions often overlooked local ecological and health impacts.

Intellectual Mobilization

- The involvement of **350 intellectuals** who sent a letter to the Kremlin about the devastating effects of pollution demonstrates how educated elites played a crucial role in politicizing environmental issues. They linked ecological damage to the physical survival of the Armenian people, presenting environmental degradation as an existential threat to the nation.
- Their letter pointed to alarming statistics: **cancer rates had quadrupled** between 1965 and 1985, and there was a surge in **abnormal births, leukemia, and mental retardation**. This rhetoric of environmental disaster underscored the urgency of their demands.

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

Specific Cases of Environmental Degradation

- One specific issue raised was the pollution in the city of **Hrazdan**, due to emissions from a **cement factory**. The factory was reported to produce **280,000 tons of dust and smoke**, significantly worsening air quality and contributing to public health problems.
- These environmental concerns were publicized in the literary journal “**Karoun**,” which published data that further fueled the movement.

Nuclear Concerns and Broader Movements

- The slogan "shut down Nairit so the Armenian people will survive!" reflects how industrial pollution and the nuclear plant became focal points of nationalist and environmental campaigns. The **Nairit chemical plant** and other industrial sites symbolized Soviet exploitation and disregard for local populations.
- These environmental protests were part of a broader movement in Armenia, where national issues and ecological activism were deeply intertwined. Environmental protection was not just about health but about ensuring the survival and autonomy of the Armenian people, who saw the environment as part of their national legacy.

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

The environmental activism of the late 1980s in Armenia was a significant element of the nationalistic movements that eventually contributed to the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The protests tied together **national identity, health, and ecological issues**, creating a powerful narrative of survival against both environmental degradation and political subjugation under Soviet rule.

Karabakh Committee: status of N-K



Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- **The Karabakh Committee and Nationalist Movements:**The **Karabakh Committee** was composed primarily of nationalist intellectuals and was formed in **1988**, shortly after the outbreak of ethnic tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh. These intellectuals played a pivotal role in channelling nationalist sentiments into organized demonstrations and political activism, notably calling for slogans such as "**one nation, one republic**" and "**unification**." The term "unification" referred to the goal of transferring Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijani control to Armenian jurisdiction .
- **Avoiding Political Reforms:** The **leaders of the Karabakh Committee** did not focus their efforts on criticizing the **Soviet Communist government** for issues like corruption or the lack of political reforms. Instead, they used the platform of ethnic nationalism and anti-Turkism as a way to rally popular support. This choice was deliberate: it was easier to mobilize people for the idea of fighting a perceived external enemy (in this case, Azerbaijan and its Turkic ties) rather than engaging in the complex and less emotionally charged process of pushing for systemic political reforms .
- **Nationalistic Goals and Political Mobilization:** Although the **Karabakh Committee's** overt goal was to secure the unification of **Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia**, this aspiration also served as a **cover for larger political ambitions**. By advocating for this nationalist cause, the Committee and its leaders were able to amass considerable political power, shaping the post-Soviet political landscape of Armenia. The broader implications of this movement were the consolidation of political control and the marginalization of Communist authorities .

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



Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

- **Series demonstrations about environmental issues paved a way to nationalist movement.** The demonstrations and political mobilization during this period led to the rise of two types of national elites:
 - **Nationalist Leaders (mostly intellectuals):** These leaders, often academics and intellectuals, spearheaded the movement for Armenian national rights, especially concerning Nagorno-Karabakh. They advocated for the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and pushed a strong nationalist agenda.
 - **Communist Elites:** These were the remaining members of the Soviet political structure who sought to maintain their influence and power. They often attempted to balance between national interests and loyalty to Moscow. The Communist elites, though increasingly unpopular, competed with nationalist leaders for control of the political landscape.

The Role of Nagorno-Karabakh and Ethnic Irredentism

- At this stage, the **mass mobilization** in Yerevan and Stepanakert (the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh) was **not primarily anti-Soviet** but was focused on hostility toward Azerbaijan. The movement called for the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly Armenian region, from Azerbaijan to Armenia. The separatist call for unification with Armenia symbolized a broader nationalist goal of ethnic unity and self-determination.
- This nationalist push merged with the larger political reforms taking place in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika, which allowed for increased freedom of expression. For Armenians, the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh became existential—part of a broader struggle for **national survival** and autonomy. The movement also gained momentum through appeals to **ethnic irredentism**, which sought to reclaim territory based on ethnic and historical claims.

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

Table 1 The Population of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region.

	Armenians		Azerbaijanis	
Years	Actual number	Population growth %	Actual number	Population growth %
1921	128,060		7,594	
1939	132,800	3.7	14,100	77.2
1959	110,100	-17.1	18,100	27.6
1970	121,100	10	27,200	51.1
1979	123,100	1.6	37,200	36.7

Source: Y. Mahmudov and K. Shukurov: *Garabagh - Real History, Facts, Documents* (Tahsil Publishing House 2005), 71.

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.**

Transition to Nationalism and Independence

- **Rise of the Pan-Armenian National Movement (PANM):** The PANM, born out of the Karabakh Committee, gained broad support for its nationalist agenda, advocating for Armenian sovereignty and the protection of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians.
- **Armenian Communist Party:** The ruling Armenian Communist Party found itself caught in the nationalist fervor, with many of its members outwardly supporting the PANM's efforts for Nagorno-Karabakh's unification.
- **Political Leadership:** The first Armenian president, **Levon Ter-Petrossian**, who emerged from the Karabakh Committee, took office as a strong advocate of the Armenian cause in Nagorno-Karabakh. He also played a crucial role in keeping various paramilitary groups under control, which had formed due to clashes on the border with Azerbaijan .
- **Economic Crisis:** The late 1980s and early 1990s saw Armenia plunge into economic hardship, exacerbated by the Azerbaijani blockade and the ongoing war in Nagorno-Karabakh.**Diaspora Support:** Armenian nationalism was further fueled by support from the Armenian diaspora, which provided financial backing and lobbied internationally for the Armenian cause.

The Breakdown of Soviet Authority and Escalation of Conflict (1990–1992)

Moscow's Inability to Control the Region: As the Soviet Union approached its collapse, Moscow's ability to manage the Nagorno-Karabakh situation deteriorated. Both Armenians and Azerbaijanis sought weapons and support from Soviet military units, further escalating the violence(Rethinking Peace and Co...)(Rethinking Peace and Co...).

Declaration of Independence by Armenians: In 1991, the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh unilaterally declared independence following a local referendum. The referendum, in which nearly all Armenian voters supported sovereignty, was not recognized by Azerbaijan or the international community.

End of the Latent Phase: By 1992, skirmishes between the two ethnic groups had escalated into a full-scale war. The Armenian forces had taken control of most of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the conflict was poised to enter the next phase of violent confrontation.

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

Azerbaijani National Identity and External Influences:

- Azerbaijani national identity has been shaped by the various powers that ruled the region for centuries, including Persian and later Russian imperial authorities. This influence created a complex identity structure, where Azerbaijanis often aligned themselves with broader, more powerful communities such as the Turkic and Muslim worlds.
- Unlike Armenians, who perceived themselves as a vulnerable and isolated community, with a strong sense of uniqueness in the Caucasus region, Azerbaijanis felt a sense of belonging to larger communities. Their identity was intertwined with a broader Turkic heritage and the shared Islamic faith (especially with other Muslim populations in the region). The historical context helped define this sense of community and provided a buffer against isolationist nationalism that marked Armenia.

Pre-1988 Focus: Unifying "North" and "South" Azerbaijan:

- Until the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became central in 1988, Azerbaijani national discourse was focused on another significant issue: the unification of **north** (Soviet-controlled) and **south** Azerbaijan, the latter of which remained part of Iran following the Russian-Persian wars of the 19th century. This division had created a national aspiration in Azerbaijan for reuniting the two territories, which was a cornerstone of national identity in the years leading up to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- This aspiration gained political momentum during the late 1980s. In **December 1989**, during a demonstration by the **Popular Front of Azerbaijan** near the **Soviet-Iranian border** in the **Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic**, this claim for unification was publicly raised. The demonstrations illustrated that the national consciousness of Azerbaijan at that time was directed at a broader territorial unity, particularly with the south, rather than focusing exclusively on Nagorno-Karabakh .

Phaze A: From Latent Conflict to Escalation

Shift in National Focus Post-1988:

- The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, however, shifted the Azerbaijani national focus significantly by 1988. The desire for territorial unification remained but became overshadowed by the ethnic and political conflict with Armenians over Nagorno-Karabakh, which became a critical issue for Azerbaijan's national identity. This resulted in a pivot from broader pan-Turkic ambitions to more immediate concerns regarding territorial integrity and ethnic conflict within Azerbaijan itself.

In sum, before 1988, Azerbaijani national identity was primarily centered around unifying divided Azerbaijani territories across the Soviet-Iranian border. However, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict dramatically shifted the national conversation, pushing the issue of territorial integrity and ethnic conflict to the forefront.

Political Mobilization and National Identity (Late 1980s)

Emergence of Tensions:

- As tensions over Nagorno-Karabakh grew, Azerbaijan entered a critical phase of identity formation.
- The conflict became a key issue in shaping Azerbaijani nationalism, particularly in response to Armenia's push for the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia.

Soviet Influence:

- Azerbaijan was still under Soviet control, and its leadership, under **Ayaz Mütəllibov**, largely deferred to Moscow for managing the growing crisis.
- Early on, Azerbaijan was reluctant to form its own autonomous military forces, relying on Soviet/Russian troops instead.

Ethnic Mobilization:

- Growing ethnic tensions between Azerbaijanis and Armenians were crucial in shaping political responses. However, these tensions also hindered unified state-building efforts in Azerbaijan.

Rise of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (APF)

Formation of the APF:

- The **Popular Front of Azerbaijan (APF)** emerged as a strong nationalist and anti-Communist movement during this period.
- It began organizing **protests** and **paramilitary groups** to address the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Conflict with Mütəllibov:

- The APF clashed with **President Ayaz Mütəllibov**, who favored working through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and was reluctant to escalate direct military responses.
- This political divide resulted in fragmented leadership and weakened efforts to form a national military force.

Internal Political Fragmentation:

- The rise of the APF highlighted the deepening divide in Azerbaijan's political scene, where nationalist forces and the Communist-aligned leadership were increasingly at odds.

Ethnic and Territorial Disputes

Growing Distrust of Moscow:

- As the conflict developed, many Azerbaijanis felt that **Moscow was biased in favor of Armenia**.
- This perception grew as Armenian forces made gains in Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijan faced setbacks.

Anti-Soviet Sentiment:

- Protests against Soviet involvement intensified, with many in Azerbaijan criticizing the Soviet government for not protecting Azerbaijani territorial integrity.
- The growing **anti-Soviet sentiment** added fuel to nationalist movements, including the APF.

Abolishment of Nagorno-Karabakh's Autonomy (1991):

- In response to growing Armenian demands for unification, Azerbaijan's government abolished the autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh in 1991.
- This legal move was seen as symbolic but failed to effectively change the situation on the ground.

Challenges in Asserting Control:

- Azerbaijan struggled to assert control over the disputed territory as **Armenian militias** and their supporters resisted.
- Political and military weakness, coupled with internal dissent, further undermined Azerbaijan's ability to manage the conflict.

Consequences of Political Instability

Delayed Military Development:

- Due to internal political fragmentation and reliance on Soviet/Russian forces, Azerbaijan was slow in developing its own military capabilities.
- This delay contributed to **early defeats** in the conflict, further weakening the government's standing.

Transition to Armed Conflict:

- By the early 1990s, as the **latent phase** of the conflict gave way to open hostilities, Azerbaijan found itself politically unstable and militarily underprepared.
- The early failures in addressing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict contributed to later challenges in securing Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

Phase B: Trigger Events – Emergence of Sporadic Clashes

1. Nationalist Demonstrations and Referendum:

- In **1988**, nationalist demonstrations calling for the **transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh** to Armenia intensified. The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh sought to unite with Armenia, expressing their desire for independence from Azerbaijan. This sentiment culminated in a **referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh** that overwhelmingly supported unification with Armenia.
- This was a major step in the conflict's escalation, as it challenged the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and directly opposed the policies of the Soviet authorities, who aimed to maintain the status quo.

2. Sumgait Pogrom (February 1988):

- The first major act of mass violence occurred in **Sumgait** (an industrial city near Baku) in **February 1988**, where violent pogroms were carried out against the Armenian population. Over the course of **three days (February 27-29)**, **32 people were killed**, including **26 Armenians** and **6 Azerbaijanis**.
- The **Sumgait events** shocked the public and marked the beginning of ethnic violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, creating an irreversible momentum toward greater conflict. The violence highlighted the fragility of ethnic relations in Azerbaijan and created widespread fear and uncertainty.

Phase B: Trigger Events – Emergence of Sporadic Clashes

3. Refugee Crisis:

- By **November 1988**, the ethnic violence had sparked one of the largest **refugee crises** in the region. According to unofficial sources, around **180,000 Armenians** had fled from Azerbaijan, while **160,000 Azerbaijanis** left Armenia. This mass displacement of populations reflected the deepening ethnic divide and the broader implications of the conflict, which extended beyond Nagorno-Karabakh to impact the entire Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in both republics.

4. Levon Ter-Petrosian's Perspective:

- **Levon Ter-Petrosian**, then the leader of the **Karabakh Committee** and future president of Armenia, believed that the **Sumgait events** fundamentally altered the dynamics of the conflict. He is quoted as saying that the violence "turned the constitutional process to physical clashes," meaning that before Sumgait, there was hope that these issues could be resolved through democratic and constitutional processes, especially with Gorbachev's reforms of **glasnost** and **perestroika**. However, the violent outbreak in Sumgait shifted the conflict from political negotiation to armed confrontation.
- Ter-Petrosian also believed that the **Sumgait pogrom** was **not orchestrated by the Kremlin**, noting that it took the Soviet authorities **three days to intervene**. This delay in response is often viewed as indicative of Moscow's inability or unwillingness to immediately manage the growing unrest in the Caucasus, which further contributed to the loss of faith in the Soviet system to maintain order or provide solutions.

Phase B: Trigger Events – Emergence of Sporadic Clashes

External Involvement Theories:

- **Vazgen Manukyan** and **Ashot Manucharyan**, both influential leaders in the **Karabakh Movement**, believed that the events in **Sumgait** were organized or influenced by **external parties**. This suggests a perception that the violence in Sumgait, rather than being purely a spontaneous outburst of ethnic hatred, might have been orchestrated or exacerbated by outside forces.
- There were claims, particularly within some Azerbaijani political circles, that the **KGB** had a hand in escalating the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. For example, **Isa Gambar**, leader of the Azerbaijani **Musavat Party**, alleged that the **KGB** and possibly **Moscow** supported or allowed the Sumgait pogrom to occur to derail Armenia's democratization and nationalist momentum. This theory suggests that Soviet authorities wanted to stifle the growing unity and national movements in Armenia by intimidating them.

Moscow's Role:

- According to this view, **Moscow** sought to create chaos and fear to disrupt the nationalist movements in Armenia. The claim here is that the Soviet authorities, seeing the **unity** of the Armenian people and their growing demands for independence, felt threatened and thus attempted to quash the demonstrations through fear and violence.
- Isa Gambar noted: "The government is genuinely scared of our unity... They just wanted to intimidate us to stop the demonstrations." This reflects the belief that the Soviet government could not comprehend the grassroots, large-scale mobilization happening in Armenia and assumed it had external instigators, possibly from the Armenian diaspora or other foreign influences.

Phase B: Trigger Events – Emergence of Sporadic Clashes

Armenian Interpretation of Sumgait:

- For **Armenians**, the **Sumgait pogrom** became a profound symbol of historical trauma. It was viewed not just as an isolated ethnic conflict but as a **continuation of the genocide** committed by the Turks against Armenians during World War I (1915). Armenians saw the violence as another chapter in a long history of persecution by Turkic peoples, reinforcing fears of annihilation and creating a sense of existential threat.
- **Sumgait** thus played a role in framing the narrative for Armenians, where the past genocide provided a framework to interpret and respond to the contemporary violence. The event solidified the perception among Armenians that they were again under threat of ethnic cleansing, which further radicalized and united Armenian society in defence of Nagorno-Karabakh and their broader national interests.

Transformation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict to Armed Phase

Sumgait Violence and its Aftermath

- The **Sumgait pogrom** in February 1988 marked the beginning of violent ethnic clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, setting the stage for an escalation from political conflict to armed confrontation.
- The violence in Sumgait was followed by further outbreaks of ethnic conflict, triggering a series of tragic events across Azerbaijan and the region.

Escalation in Ganja

- The next major incident occurred in **Ganja**, Azerbaijan's second-largest city. This event further worsened ethnic tensions and led to another **wave of Armenian refugees** fleeing Azerbaijan, deepening the humanitarian crisis.

Black January and Soviet Intervention

- In January 1990, the **opposition in Baku** organized large demonstrations demanding more radical measures in addressing the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. These protests reflected growing frustration with the government's handling of the conflict.
- The Soviet Union responded by sending troops to **Baku** in what became known as "**Black January**", resulting in a brutal crackdown on protesters.
- In the aftermath of Black January:
 - Over **100 people were killed** and more than **1,000 were wounded**.
 - The violence in Baku had a profound impact on Azerbaijani society, creating a sense of **victimization**, similar to how the **Sumgait pogrom** was perceived by Armenians.

Phase B: Special Government Administration and Rising Tensions (1989-1991)

Special Government Administration and Rising Tensions (1989-1991)

- **January 12, 1989:** The Soviet Union imposed **direct control from Moscow** over Nagorno-Karabakh through a “special government administration,” bypassing Azerbaijan's authority.
 - Moscow allocated **400 million rubles** to improve industrial, housing, and educational capacities in the region.
- **Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF):** Reacted by organizing **rail blockades** to prevent Moscow from providing support. This move contributed to the worsening of relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.
- By **1991**, sporadic **ethnic clashes** had increased in frequency, setting the stage for further escalation.

Declaration of Independence and Full-Scale War (1991-1994)

September 2, 1991: The Nagorno-Karabakh region declared itself an **independent republic**, further deepening the conflict.

In **Autumn 1991**, **Azerbaijani forces** launched military actions to counter Nagorno-Karabakh's independence declaration.

Operation "Ring": Azerbaijan initiated this operation to deter Armenian demands for unification with Armenia, but it failed to halt the conflict.

By **1992**, the conflict had escalated into a **full-scale war**, lasting until **1994**.

Violent Stage

Armenian Offensive Strategies in 1991:

- Starting in **1991**, the Armenian side began implementing **offensive strategies** as part of their efforts to secure Nagorno-Karabakh. These strategies were characterized by **guerrilla warfare** tactics, and involved a series of coordinated attacks designed to destabilize Azerbaijani-controlled areas and disrupt their supply lines.
- The **radicalization of guerrilla activities** between both Armenians and Azerbaijanis intensified during this period, as both sides increasingly resorted to armed confrontation to achieve their territorial aims.
- **Deportation and Displacement:**
- Over **10,000 Azerbaijanis** were **deported** from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, ostensibly on the grounds of "self-defense." This population displacement was part of a broader ethnic cleansing campaign that sought to secure the Armenian majority in disputed areas by forcibly removing Azerbaijani civilians.
- The deportations and displacement of Azerbaijanis significantly worsened ethnic tensions and fueled retaliatory actions from Azerbaijani forces.

Violent Stage II

Blockades and Sabotage:

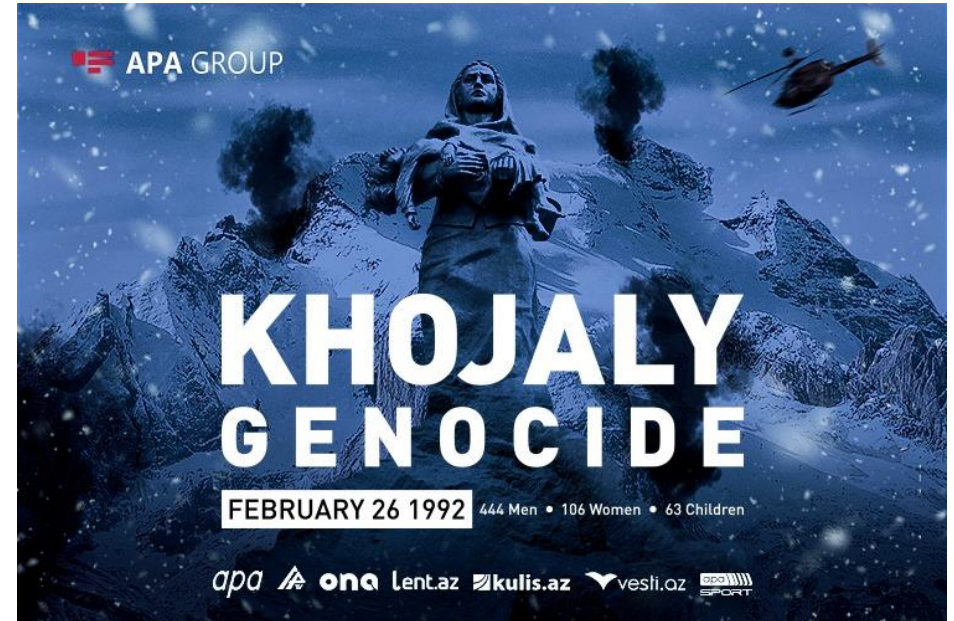
- **Armenian guerrilla groups** established **military posts** and blockaded key roads connecting **Azerbaijani villages**. One key example is the highway from **Khanlar** to **Kelbajar**, where Armenian forces blocked access to Azerbaijani villages.
- These groups also sabotaged infrastructure by **blowing up water pipes** supplying the Azerbaijani city of **Ganja** with drinking water. Such actions created a humanitarian crisis and directly threatened the functioning of **Western Azerbaijan**, home to more than one million inhabitants.
- These **guerrilla activities** not only created immediate military and humanitarian challenges for Azerbaijan but also contributed to an ongoing sense of insecurity and victimization.

In summary, the slide emphasizes the **escalation** of the conflict in 1991, with **offensive Armenian operations** intensifying through guerrilla tactics, deportations, and infrastructure sabotage. These actions played a major role in the lead-up to the full-scale war that erupted in 1992 .

Khodjaly Massacre and Political Consequences

Massacre at Khodjaly (February 1992):

- In **February 1992**, one of the most tragic events of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict took place in the town of **Khodjaly**.
- Armenian forces, supported by units of the **366th CIS regiment**, captured the town, resulting in the **deaths of 613 Azerbaijani civilians**, many of whom were women and children.
- The massacre was marked by extreme brutality, including reports of torture, rape, and mutilation. This incident became a symbol of Armenian aggression for Azerbaijanis and a rallying point for their mobilization against Armenians.



Political Fallout in Azerbaijan

The **Khodjaly massacre** had severe political repercussions in Azerbaijan. It discredited **President Ayaz Mutallibov**, whose regime was already under pressure due to military failures.

Mutallibov was **forced to resign** shortly after the massacre, amid accusations of incompetence and betrayal. The massacre exposed the weaknesses of Azerbaijan's military and government.

His resignation contributed to **instability in Baku**, creating a power vacuum that further complicated the Azerbaijani response to the conflict. After a brief return to power, Mutallibov was ousted again in May 1992, this time by forces led by the **Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF)**.

This massacre not only intensified the conflict but also led to significant political upheaval in Azerbaijan, undermining its leadership and fueling further instability during the early stages of the war.

Strategic Implications After Khodjaly

- The **Khodjaly Massacre** in February 1992 was a pivotal moment for the Armenian forces, ensuring the **control of an air corridor** between **Nagorno-Karabakh** and **Armenia**, a crucial lifeline for their military operations and supply chains.

Capture of Shusha and Securing Land Connectivity:

- After the **victory at Khodjaly**, the Armenian forces turned their attention to the city of **Shusha**, a historically significant town for both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Securing Shusha would further enhance Armenia's military advantage by creating a **land connection** between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, bypassing Azerbaijani-imposed blockades.
- After **two days of intense fighting**, the **Armenian forces** successfully captured Shusha, suffering **57 casualties**, while the Azerbaijani side lost around **200 soldiers and civilians**. This marked a critical victory for the Armenians.

Occupation of the Lachin Corridor

The next strategic goal was the **Lachin Corridor**, the only land route connecting Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh. Securing Lachin would resolve **logistical problems** and ensure a steady supply of troops and resources for Armenian forces.

The **Azerbaijani forces** abandoned the corridor **without significant resistance**, further consolidating Armenia's control over the region. The corridor played a vital role in sustaining the Armenian war effort throughout the conflict.

Images of War



Guerillas in Nagorno-Karabakh.



Source: TASS





**Over 1 million
displaced**

Consequences of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Humanitarian Impact and International Response

Human Suffering during the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict:

•Casualties:

- Estimated **25,000 to 30,000 people killed** as a result of the conflict.

•Refugees and Displacement:

- **250,000 to 350,000 Azerbaijani refugees** fled to Armenia.
- **750,000 to 1,000,000 refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**, including those displaced from Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and **occupied Azerbaijani territories**, sought shelter in Azerbaijan.
- Over 14% of Azerbaijan's territory, including Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas, was occupied by Armenian forces. These areas were ethnically cleansed of their Azerbaijani population during the conflict.

International Response and UN Resolutions:

- The **United Nations** passed **four resolutions** affirming the **territorial integrity of Azerbaijan**.

•These resolutions called for:

- The **immediate withdrawal** of occupying forces from the occupied regions.
- The **immediate cessation of military activities**.

- Armenia** did not comply with these UN demands, prolonging the conflict and its humanitarian consequences.

Consequences of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict II

Sovereign State Conflict: What began as an internal conflict turned into a full-scale international conflict between the sovereign states of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Regional Instability: The conflict drew in surrounding powers, particularly Russia, Iran, and Turkey, exacerbating regional tensions. Russian and Iranian support for Armenia, and Turkish backing of Azerbaijan, made the conflict a geopolitical struggle with international consequences.

Economic Devastation: Both Armenia and Azerbaijan suffered significant economic setbacks due to the war. Key industries and infrastructure were damaged or destroyed.

Negotiation Stalemates: The conflict remained unresolved, and despite international mediation, a peace agreement has yet to be reached. The continued occupation of Azerbaijani territories has hampered diplomatic relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Legacy of Mistrust: The conflict has entrenched a deep sense of mistrust and hostility between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, making long-term reconciliation and peace negotiations extremely challenging.

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.

Phaze C: Frozen conflict

Skirmishes and Propaganda: The period leading up to the Bishkek Protocol saw rising tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Both sides engaged in political propaganda, threats of war, and regular military clashes, often with the involvement of international players. Skirmishes across front lines became common as hostilities simmered but did not break into full-blown war.

Bishkek Protocol's Key Provisions:

1. The protocol proposed granting wide autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) while ensuring Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the region. This was a diplomatic attempt to create a balance between Armenian demands for self-determination and Azerbaijani claims over territorial integrity.
2. Security guarantees were proposed for N-K to prevent further military confrontations.
3. A key aspect was the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied Azerbaijani territories. This was in line with several UN resolutions, which demanded Armenian withdrawal from areas beyond N-K .

Phase C: Frozen conflict

Lachin Corridor: One of the most critical points in the Bishkek Protocol was securing the Lachin Corridor, a vital land connection linking N-K with Armenia. Control of this corridor ensured Armenia could provide supplies to N-K, vital for Armenian forces' logistical support. A proposed solution was international supervision to prevent further military exploitation of this route, maintaining the strategic balance .

Refugee Return and Economic Reconstruction: Another key goal of the protocol was to create arrangements between Azerbaijan and Armenia to facilitate the return of refugees displaced by the conflict. The international community was called upon to support economic reconstruction in both countries to heal the war-torn region .

This protocol was a crucial step in moving the conflict from active warfare towards a diplomatic resolution, though it did not bring an immediate end to hostilities.

Peace negotiations

OSCE Minsk Group Framework

- **Establishment:** The **OSCE Minsk Group** was created in 1992 by the **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe** (OSCE) to mediate the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- **Key Mediators:** The co-chairs of the Minsk Group are **Russia, France**, and the **United States**, representing the primary international efforts to resolve the conflict.
- **Two-Step Approach:**
 - **Step One: Armenian withdrawal from occupied Azerbaijani lands**, excluding Nagorno-Karabakh.
 - **Step Two: Negotiations on the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh**, focusing on reconciling Armenia's self-determination claims with Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.
- **Challenges:** Despite the Minsk Group's efforts, no comprehensive peace agreement was reached, as both sides remained entrenched in their positions regarding Nagorno-Karabakh's sovereignty.

Peace negotiations: Bishkek Protocol (May 1994)

1. **Background:** Signed in **May 1994**, this ceasefire agreement was mediated by **Russia** and facilitated by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). **Key Provisions:** **Ceasefire** between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces.
 2. **Security guarantees** for Nagorno-Karabakh.
 3. Withdrawal of Armenian forces from **occupied Azerbaijani territories**.
 4. Special measures to secure the **Lachin Corridor**, linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh.
 5. **Refugee return:** Facilitating the return of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs).
 6. **Economic Reconstruction:** International community support for rebuilding the war-affected regions.
- Outcome:** While the ceasefire held, many of the protocol's provisions, including Armenian withdrawal from occupied territories, were not implemented, leaving the core issues unresolved.

Peace negotiations: Madrid Principles (2007)

1. **Proposal by the OSCE Minsk Group:** The **Madrid Principles** aimed to create a roadmap for peace based on mutual compromises. **Core Elements:** Return of **seven occupied territories** surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan.
2. **Interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh**, providing security and self-governance.
3. Corridor connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia (Lachin Corridor).
4. A future **referendum** to determine Nagorno-Karabakh's final status.
5. The right of return for all **displaced persons** and refugees.
6. International **peacekeeping forces** to monitor the situation.

Stalemate: Both sides failed to agree on these terms, with Armenia concerned about losing control of the occupied territories and Azerbaijan rejecting a referendum on independence.

Peace negotiations: international efforts and limitations

- **Involvement of Other Powers:**
 - **Russia:** Played a dual role as both a mediator and a geopolitical actor with vested interests in the region.
 - **Turkey:** Supported Azerbaijan, adding complexity to negotiations.
 - **Iran:** Attempted to act as a regional mediator, though with limited success.
 - **UN Resolutions:** The UN passed four resolutions demanding Armenian withdrawal from occupied territories, but these were largely ignored.**Challenges to Peace:** Deep mistrust between Armenia and Azerbaijan.
 - Armenia's insistence on self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh.
 - Azerbaijan's firm stance on territorial integrity.
- Consequences:** The lack of progress in the peace talks left the region in a “frozen conflict” state until violence flared up again in subsequent years.

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



Sochi 2011



Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

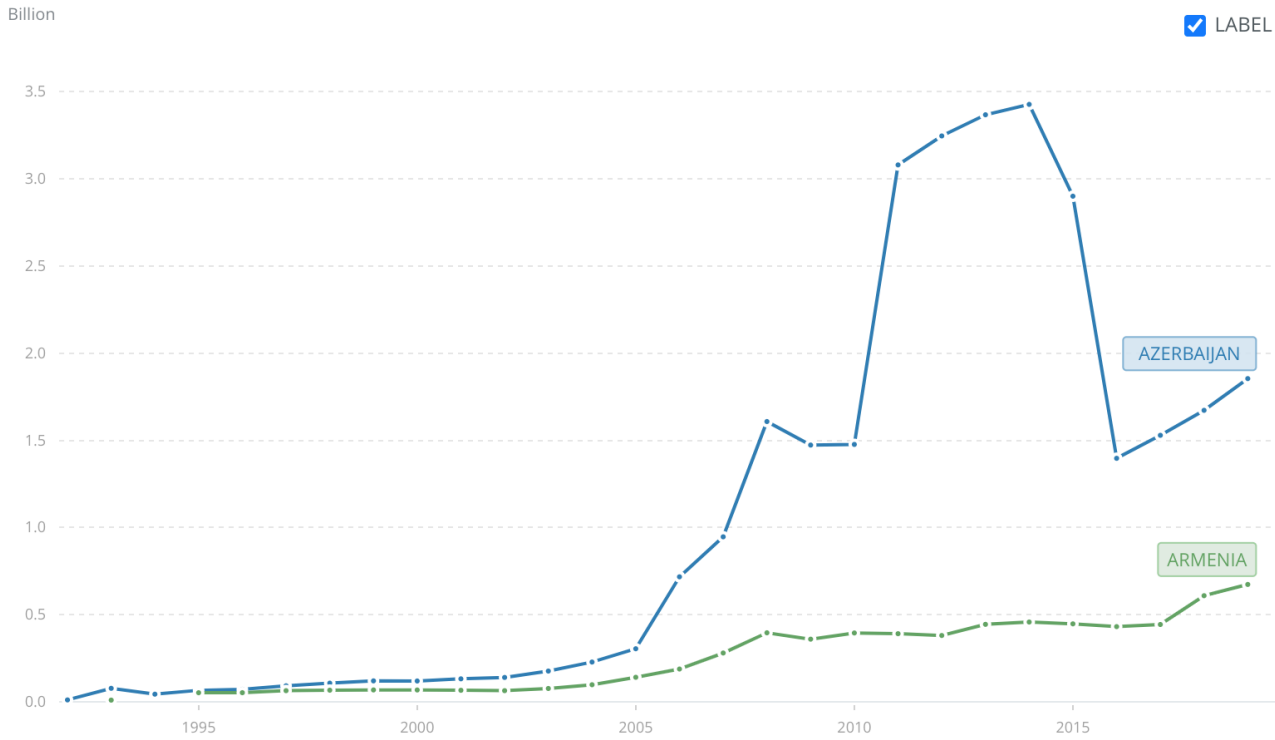
The possibility of war had been remaining on the agenda



Azerbaijan military budget from 2004 - 463 million USD to 3, 427 billion USD in 2014 and 1, 854 billion in 2019.

Armenia 673 million USD in 2019.

Azerbaijan and Armenian military expenditures





No end to conflict in sight

Both sides unwilling to make concessions
“Primordial” claims over territory by both sides.

The unsolved problem of what to do with refugees.

Continued fighting despite cease-fire
Russia claiming to uphold cease-fire while arming Armenia; U.S. making oil deals with Azerbaijan.

Building of oil pipelines likely to upset Armenia.

Suggested documantary

Places That Don't Exist: Nagorno Karabakh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTzMtfk3v80>