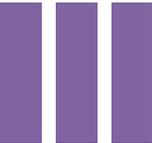# Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Today

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

16.10.2024

The way to the second war in N-K

- One of the longest-standing conflicts in the post-Soviet space.

  - The conflict extended beyond Nagorno-Karabakh, with **7 adjacent regions of Azerbaijan** (Aghdam, Fizuli, Jebrail, Zangelan, Kubatli, Lachin, and Kelbajar) falling under Armenian control.

- **Russia's Role Post-War**:

  - Russia adopted a **balancing policy**, aiming to maintain influence over both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

  - **Armenia's Strategic Alignment**:

    - Hosted a **Russian military base** and border troops.

    - Joined the **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)** and the **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)**.

The way to the second war in N-K

The Ukraine crisis in 2014 heightened tensions between Russia and the West, transforming the former Soviet space into a geopolitical battlefield between these powers.

Azerbaijan's Strategy:
•Since the early 2000s, President Aliyev has strengthened ties with Russia as part of a strategic effort to regain control over Nagorno-Karabakh.
- Large-scale arms purchases from Russia, totaling approximately $5 billion.
- Launch of joint economic initiatives, such as the **North-South International Transport Corridor** (connecting India with Northern Europe through Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia).
- Establishment of the **Russia-Iran-Azerbaijan energy corridor**, enhancing regional cooperation.

Russia's Role: Moscow saw an opportunity to mediate between Armenia and Azerbaijan, seeking to solidify its influence in both countries while maintaining a dominant presence in the region.
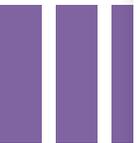
The 2013 Russian "Lavrov Plan" Initiative

- **Proposal Overview**:The **Lavrov Plan** aimed to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by returning the **security zone** (territories outside the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region) to Azerbaijan.
- **Key Provisions**:
    - Immediate return of **5 regions**: Aghdam, Fizuli, Jebrail, Zangelan, and Kubatli to Azerbaijan.
    - Return of **2 regions**: Lachin and Kelbajar within a year, while maintaining a land corridor connecting Karabakh to Armenia.
    - Deployment of **Russian peacekeepers** along the new line of contact.
- **Russia's Strategic Goals**:Russia sought to increase its influence over Azerbaijan through the deployment of peacekeepers.
- At the same time, Armenia's dependence on Russia would grow, solidifying Russia's control in the region

Armenian and Azerbaijani Responses & Shifts Post-Velvet Revolution

- **Initial Reactions**: Both Armenia and Azerbaijan were cautious:
  - **Azerbaijan**: President Aliyev was reluctant to allow the return of Russian troops after the last Russian soldiers had left in 2012.
  - **Armenia**: Armenians demanded recognition of Artsakh's independence or unification with Armenia in exchange for returning the 7 regions.
- **Post-2018 Shifts**:After the **Velvet Revolution of 2018**, the new Armenian leadership under **Nikol Pashinyan** rejected all pre-revolutionary negotiation frameworks, including the Lavrov Plan.
- **Deterioration of Armenia-Russia Relations**: Overt anti-Russian actions by Pashinyan's government significantly weakened the Armenia-Russia relationship, altering the regional power balance

The Velvet Revolution: A Shift in Armenian Society

Discontent with the Prior Government:
•Armenian society was frustrated by **corruption**, **favoritism**, excessive bureaucracy, and the dominance of a wealthy elite.
•These issues led to **limited opportunities** for social advancement and dissatisfaction among various social groups.
Unified Social Movements:
•The Revolution brought together diverse segments, including **young activists**, **students**, and **rural residents**.
•**Pashinyan's leadership**: His clear communication and focus on challenging the political establishment (led by Sargsyan and the Republican Party) resonated with the people.
•Key goals: Reducing the influence of entrenched elites, fostering economic growth, promoting **rule of law**, and ensuring **equal opportunities**.
A Democratic Shift:
•The Velvet Revolution marked a significant transition towards **democracy** in an otherwise authoritarian setting.
•The Revolution's legitimacy was rooted in shared values and objectives across civil society, spanning cultural, economic, professional, and civic domains.
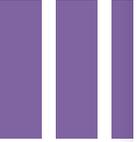
Skirmishes in N-K

- In the years preceding 2014 total fatalities averaged 20–30 (2012 was the worst year, with 34 fatalities reported), and in several years the number of non-combat-related deaths exceeded those resulting from enemy action.

- Three trends converged to alter this situation: i**ncreasing military capabilities on both sides, changing military intent, and the marginalization of negotiations.**

- Both sides' **military capabilities have substantially increased over years** in terms of the scale, sophistication and range of their arsenals. As a proportion of GDP, Armenia and Azerbaijan have emerged as the biggest military spenders in the post-Soviet space bar Russia.

- Globally, both countries have featured in the top 10 militarized states since 2011; moreover, they are the only pair of states within the top 10 engaged in active conflict with each other.

The Four days war 2-5 April 2016

- **Skirmishes Intensifying Since 2014**:
  - Following the Nuclear Summit in Washington D.C., violence along the Line of Contact escalated significantly.
  - Skirmishes since 2014 signaled the onset of larger conflicts.
- **Heavy Use of Weaponry**:
  - Both sides employed tanks, heavy artillery, rocket launchers, and limited air power.
  - Civilian areas were shelled during the fighting, causing significant damage and casualties.
- **Strategic Shifts**:
  - **Armenia**: Armenian Deputy Defense Minister **David Tonoian** announced a shift from "static defense" to an active deterrence strategy in response to the August 2014 skirmishes.
  - **Azerbaijan**: Retired Azerbaijani Colonel **Shair Ramaldanov** stated that the goal of the April 2016 conflict was to protect civilian settlements, particularly around **Lele Tepe** and **Talish**.
- **Outcome of the April Conflict**:
  - Azerbaijan seized a small piece of territory during the fighting.
  - The conflict resulted in several hundred deaths.

░░░	territory controlled by Armenians
——	front line
☙	areas of serious clashes between 2 and 5 April

The Second Karabakh War

Nagorno-Karabakh's Outdated Military:

•Relied on **1980s-1990s technology**.

•Employed older tanks, lacked modern dynamic defense systems, and had almost no drones.

Azerbaijan's Modernized Military:

•Benefited from a **quarter-century of preparation** and oil revenues to buy modern weaponry.

•Azerbaijan received **direct support from Turkey**, which helped in planning military operations and providing arms.

•Key asset: **Bayraktar TB2 drones** with high-precision missile and bomb capabilities, giving Azerbaijan air superiority.

Air Superiority and Impact on the War:

•Azerbaijan dominated the airspace throughout the war, quickly neutralizing Karabakh's Soviet-era anti-aircraft systems.

•In the early days of the war, Azerbaijan destroyed **anti-aircraft guns, radars, and missile systems**, including parts of the S-300 and Tor missile systems.

•Drones continued to decimate Karabakh's military hardware, including **tanks, armed personnel carriers, and artillery**.
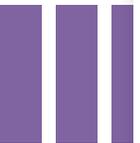
The Second Karabakh War: A Turning Point

- **Timeline**: The war, lasting **forty-four days** from **27 September to 10 November 2020**, resulted in significant casualties and geopolitical shifts.
- **Human Toll**: Thousands of soldiers from both **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan** lost their lives in the conflict.
- **End of the Status Quo**:
- The war abruptly ended the **status quo** in the Karabakh conflict that had been in place since the First Karabakh War ended in 1994.
- **Geopolitical Impact**:
- The war **reformatted the geopolitical configuration** of the **South Caucasus**, introducing new power dynamics in the region.

Escalation of conflict

- **Location**:
- Fighting erupted along the **northern border** in the Armenian region of **Tavush** and the Azerbaijani region of **Tovuz**.
- **Tactics**:
- Both sides used **shelling** and **drone attacks** during the clashes.
- More than a dozen people were killed, including 15 soldiers, with **one Azerbaijani civilian killed** and **one Armenian civilian wounded** from a drone attack.
- **Unclear Trigger**:
- The specific cause of the fighting remains unclear, with both Armenia and Azerbaijan blaming each other for the escalation.
- **Statements and Strategic Aims**:
- **Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov** (Azerbaijan) claimed the goal was to "prevent provocations and reduce the impact of enemy gun positions on Azerbaijani communities."
- Azerbaijan faced tactical disadvantages along the frontline, leading to higher casualties.
- **Strategic Context**:
- The **April 2016 offensive** aimed to strengthen Azerbaijan's positions, with limited success in the north around **Seysulan/Talish** but greater success capturing the **Lele Tepe heights**, giving Azerbaijan a better tactical advantage.
- **Psychological Impact**:
- The limited success of the April 2016 events provided a **psychological boost** for both the Azerbaijani leadership and public.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN
ARMENIA AND **AZERBAIJAN**

RUSSIA

GEORGIA

July 12-13 clashes

Tavush region

2 Dondar Gushchu

Berd 1 ● Chinari

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

● Baku

TURKEY

❂ Yerevan

Berdzor/Lacin —

● — Stepanakert/Xankandi

CASPIAN SEA

● — Naxcivan

IRAN

July 12-13, 2020
Azerbaijani troops shelled the city of **Berd**[1] in the north of Armenia after accusing Yerevan of a shelling attack on the border village of **Dondar Gushchu**[2].

Armenia and **Azerbaijan** have been locked in a conflict over Azerbaijan's breakaway region of **Nagorno-Karabakh** since 1988.

Nagorno-Karabakh region
Azerbaijani-controlled territory
Armenian-occupied territory

Source: Media reports

RadioFreeEurope
RadioLiberty
RFE/RL Graphics

GEORGIA

Tbilisi ☆

Chinari   Dondar Gushchu

RUSSIA
Dagestan

CASPIAN
SEA

Berd

Ganja ◉

AZERBAIJAN

July 2020 clashes

ARMENIA

*Shahumian
Claimed by NGR
Controlled by Azer.*

Former Nagorno-
Karabakh
Autonomous Oblast,
1923-1991

Bakou ☆

Yerevan ☆

*Lachin
Corridor*

Stepanakert ✦

TURKEY

Autonomous Republic
of Nakhchivan (Azer.)

IRAN

'**Nagorno-Karabakh Republic**' de facto government.
Internationally recognized as Azerbaijani territory,
held by Armenian military since 1994 ceasefire.

Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

Approximate areas of battles, 27- 28 September 2020

Armenian-controlled territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh

10 km

Talysh

Murovdag

AZERBAIJAN

Vardenis

Mardakert (Agdere)

Kalbajar

Azerbaijan-controlled territories

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Stepanakert (Khankendi)

Fuzuli region

Jabrayil region

GEORGIA

RUSSIA

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

TURKEY

ARMENIA

IRAN

50 km

IRAN

Google
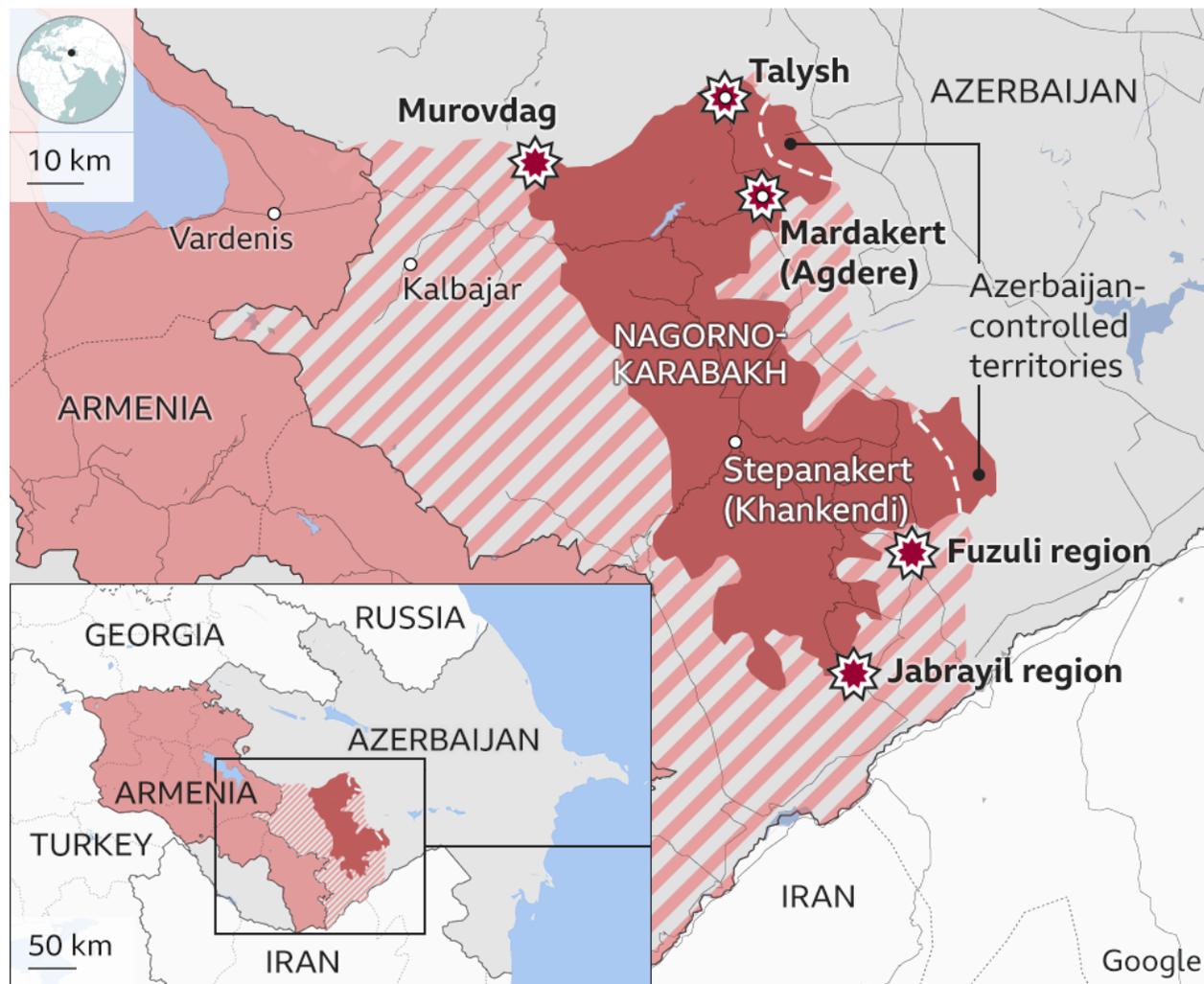
Source: BBC

BBC

Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

Legend:
- ▮ (orange) Areas regained by Azerbaijan since 27 September
- ▮ (purple) Azerbaijan-controlled territories
- ▨ (pink hatched) Armenian-controlled territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh
- ✦ Approximate areas of ongoing fighting

Map labels:
Mingachevir, Ganja, Murovdag, Talish, Barda, Madagiz (Sugovushan), Terter, Mardakert (Aghdara), AZERBAIJAN, Vardenis, NAGORNO-KARABAKH, Kalbajar, Aghdam, Aghjabadi, Stepanakert (Khankendi), Martuni (Khojavand), Shusha (Shushi), ARMENIA, Lachin, Fuzuli, Hadrut, Gubadli, Jabrayil, Zangilan, IRAN

Inset map: RUSSIA, GEORGIA, AZERBAIJAN, ARMENIA, TURKEY, IRAN
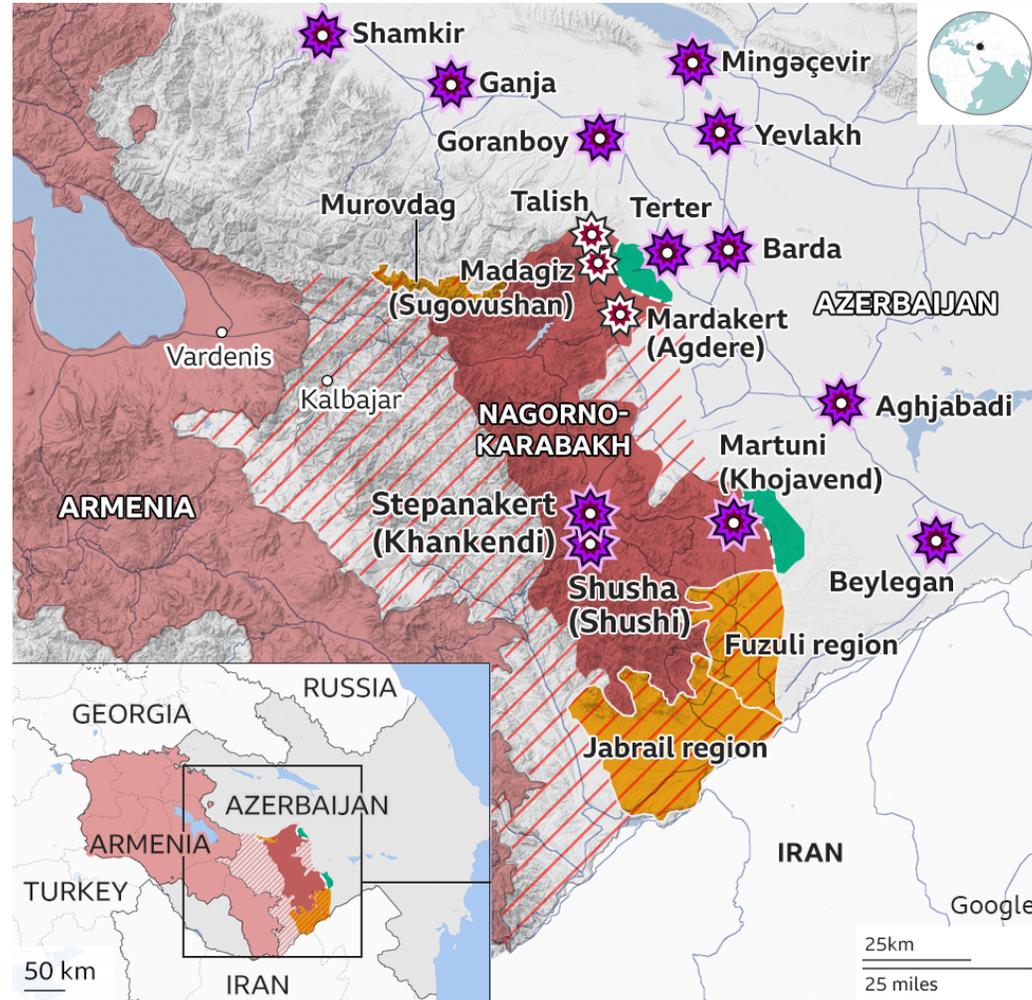
50 km   25km

Google

Source: BBC, 27 October 2020

BBC

Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

- ✦ Approximate areas of battles
- ✦ Cities and towns that have experienced shelling
- 🟧 Areas of active combat
- 🟩 Azerbaijan-controlled territories
- ⬛ Armenian-controlled territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh
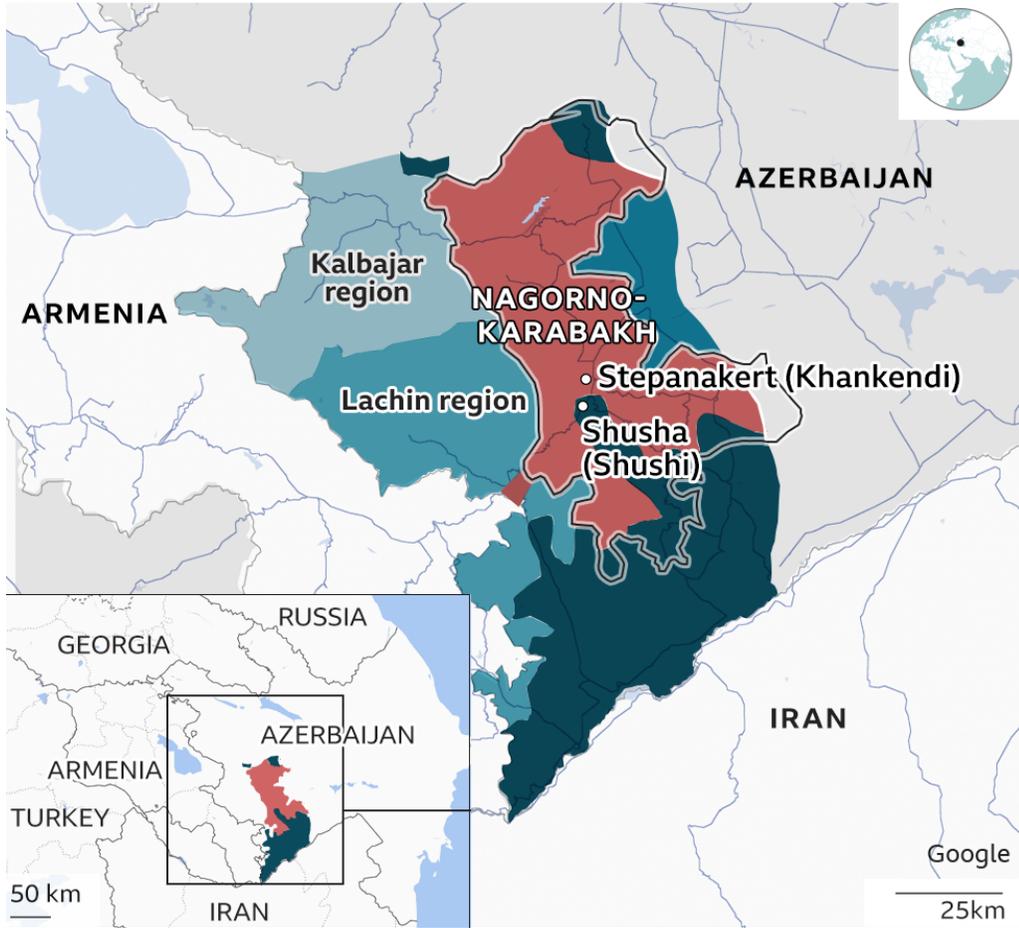

Source: BBC

BBC

Ceasefire Agreement: November 10, 2020

- **Ceasefire Agreement: November 10, 2020**
- **Parties Involved**:
  - A ceasefire agreement was signed between **Russia**, **Azerbaijan**, and **Armenia** to halt hostilities in **Nagorno-Karabakh**.
- **Russian Peacekeepers Deployment**:
  - Along the **Nagorno-Karabakh Line of Contact** and the **Lachin Corridor**, **1,960 Russian peacekeepers** were deployed.
  - **Equipment**: 90 armored personnel carriers, 380 units of vehicles, and special equipment were mobilized to monitor the ceasefire.
- **Joint Russia-Turkey Ceasefire Monitoring Center**
- **November 11, 2020**: Russian and Turkish defense ministers signed a memorandum to establish a **joint monitoring center**.
  - The center is located in **Azerbaijan** and is responsible for collecting, verifying, and addressing complaints regarding the ceasefire.
  - Its purpose is to ensure the **enforcement of the ceasefire** and address any violations of the agreements.

AZERBAIJAN

DASHKASAN

TERTER

VARDENIS

YEREVAN

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Karvachar/
Kelbadjar

Akna/Agdam

ARMENIA

Stepanakert/
Khankendi

Martuni/Khojavend

Shushi/
Shusha

Berdzor/
Lachin

NAKHCHIVAN
AUTONOMOUS
REPUBLIC
(AZERBAIJAN)

Sanasar/Qubadli

Djrakan/Jabrayil

IRAN

Kovsakan/Zangelan

Sources:
- text of the statement of Russia, Azerbaijan,
  Armenia on the cessation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh;
- Ministry of Defence of Azerbaijan;
- Ministry of Defence of Armenia;
- map of Nagorno-Karabakh (Wikipedia/Nagorno-Karabakh
  Autonomous Oblast map);
- map of regions in Azerbaijan (http://ru.president.az/regions)

Armenian-controlled territories

Areas regained by Azerbaijan in the period from September 20 to November 10, 2020

Territories ceded to Azerbaijan by agreement

Borders of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic according to the 1991 declaration of independence

Lachin corridor

Armenia-Azerbaijan peace deal

- Armenian forces to withdraw by 15 Nov
- Armenian forces to withdraw by 1 Dec
- Armenian forces to withdraw by 20 Nov
- Areas regained by Azerbaijan in the war
- Area of deployment for Russian peacekeepers

AZERBAIJAN

ARMENIA

Kalbajar region

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Lachin region

Stepanakert (Khankendi)

Shusha (Shushi)

IRAN

RUSSIA

GEORGIA

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

TURKEY

IRAN

50 km

25km

Google

BBC

Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation

1. A complete ceasefire and all hostilities in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are announced from 00:00 hours Moscow time on November 10, 2020. The Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, hereinafter referred to as the Parties, stop at their positions.

2. Aghdam region is returned to the Republic of Azerbaijan until November 20, 2020.

3. Along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor, a peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation is deployed in the amount of 1,960 servicemen with small arms, 90 armed personnel carriers, 380 units of automobile and special equipment.

4. The peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation is being deployed in parallel with the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces. The duration of the stay of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation is 5 years with automatic extension for the next 5-year periods, if none of the Parties declares 6 months before the expiration of the period of intention to terminate the application of this provision.

Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation

5. In order to increase the effectiveness of control over the implementation of the agreements by the Parties to the conflict, a peacekeeping center is being deployed to control the ceasefire.
6. The Republic of Armenia will return the Kelbajar region to the Republic of Azerbaijan by November 15, 2020, and the Lachin region by December 1, 2020. The Lachin corridor (5 km wide), which will ensure the connection between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia and at the same time will not affect the city of Shusha, remains under the control of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation.
By agreement of the Parties, a plan for the construction of a new route along the Lachin corridor will be determined in the next three years, providing communication between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, with the subsequent redeployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent to protect this route.
The Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees the safety of traffic along the Lachin corridor of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions.
7. Internally displaced persons and refugees return to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent areas under the control of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.
8. The exchange of prisoners of war, hostages and other detained persons and bodies of the dead is carried out.
9. All economic and transport links in the region are unblocked. The Republic of Armenia guarantees the safety of transport links between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic with the aim of organizing the unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions. Control over transport communication is carried out by the bodies of the Border Guard Service of the FSB of Russia.

Return of Territories and Armenia's Dilemma

- **Territorial Concessions**:
- The return of **5 regions adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh** could have been more beneficial for Armenia, according to Armenian Prime Minister **Nikol Pashinyan**. However, Armenian society was not prepared to accept such a concession.
- **Pashinyan's Reflections**:
- **"This is a big setback for us, a big catastrophe, a big mourning for the lost lives. (...) We fell, but we did not slide into the abyss, we made the decision to stop in time. Otherwise, our condition would be much worse. Lessons must be learned, this can help the future development of our country."**

Protests in Yerevan against the Peace Agreement

Protesters' Reaction:
•Following the signing of the peace agreement with Azerbaijan, **Yerevan residents** expressed strong dissatisfaction, storming the **Armenian government building** in protest.
Call for Resignation:
•The protesters demanded the resignation of **Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan**, holding him responsible for the unfavorable terms of the agreement.
Violence During the Protests:
•Protesters attacked and severely beat the **Speaker of the Armenian Parliament**, **Ararat Mirzoyan**, in a display of anger and frustration.
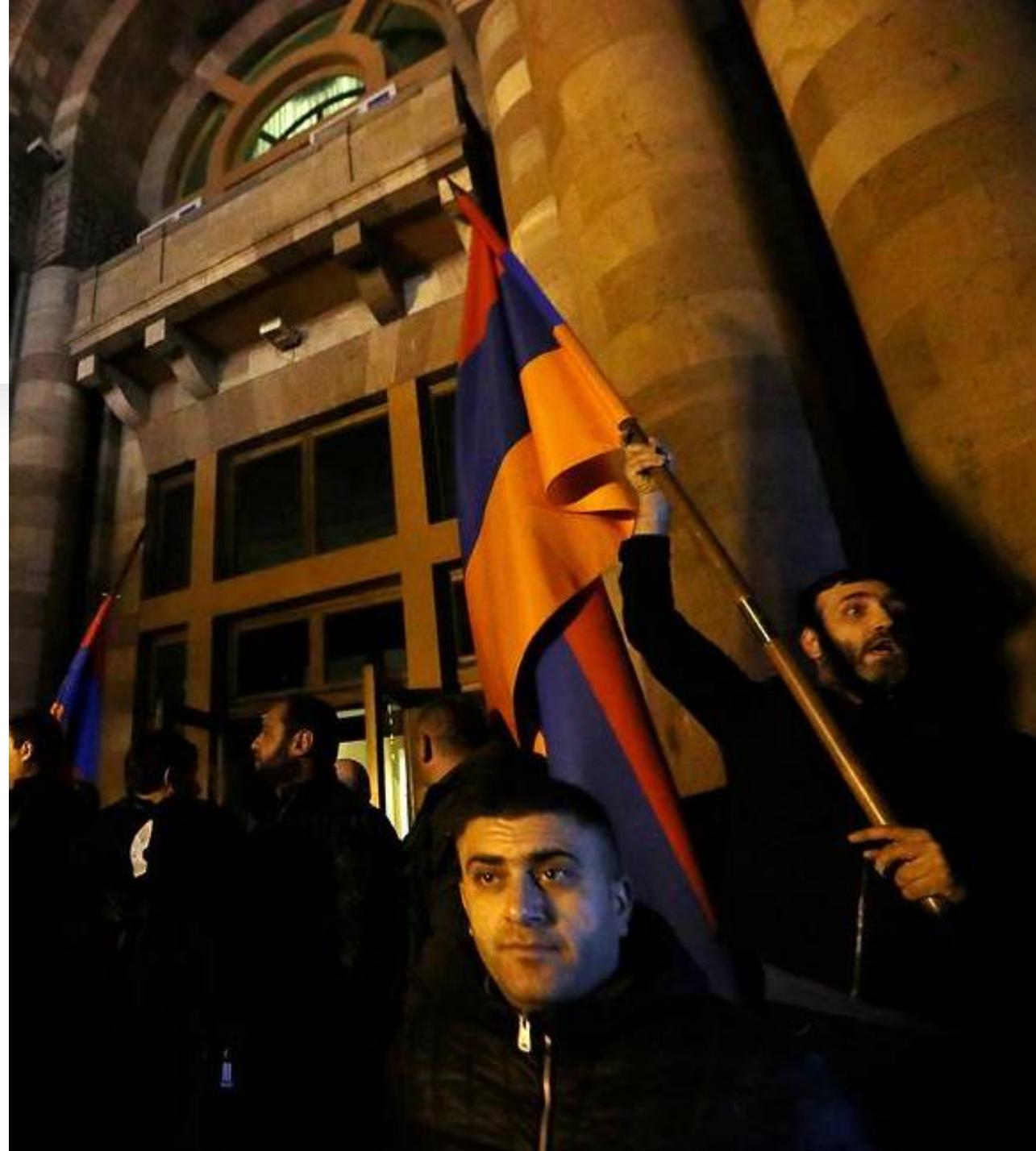
Azerbaijan's Alliance with Turkey:
Azerbaijan's strategic partnership with Turkey was key to its success in the war.
Turkey provided drones, military expertise, and planning assistance, directly influencing the war's outcome.
Hedging Foreign Policy:
Azerbaijan balanced relations with both Russia and Turkey, skillfully avoiding direct confrontation with Moscow while securing military support from Ankara.
Russia maintained a neutral stance during most of the war but later played a diplomatic role, brokering the ceasefire and deploying peacekeepers.

Strategic Context and Alliances

Azerbaijan's Military Superiority

Military Modernization:Azerbaijan had heavily invested in modern military technology, using revenues from its oil sector.

Key acquisitions: Drones from Turkey (Bayraktar TB2) and Israel, which were essential in striking Armenian defenses.

Revolution in Warfare:Azerbaijan's drones neutralized Armenian artillery and air defense, providing a significant tactical advantage and reducing the need for direct confrontation on the ground

Armenia's Military Deficiencies

Outdated Equipment: Armenia relied on Soviet-era equipment, which was outdated compared to Azerbaijan's modernized forces.

Armenia's military strategy was defensive, but its outdated technology made it vulnerable to Azerbaijan's drone and artillery strikes.

Strategic Miscalculations: Armenia underestimated Azerbaijan's capacity for a full-scale offensive and over-relied on its historical success in the First Karabakh War

Operational Tactics

Southern Offensive:Azerbaijan's ground offensive focused on the southern regions of Nagorno-Karabakh, particularly the **Horadiz Gorge**.

This provided Azerbaijan with easier terrain for moving troops and equipment, leading to the capture of key positions like **Shushi**, which marked a turning point in the war.

Terrain Advantage:Azerbaijan capitalized on favorable terrain and superior logistics, enabling faster troop movements and better supply lines

Role of external actors

Turkey's Military Support:Turkey's direct military support, especially through the use of drones, and its experience from conflicts in Syria and Libya helped Azerbaijan strategize effectively.

Russia's Peacekeeping and Mediation:Russia played a critical role after the conflict, brokering the ceasefire and deploying peacekeepers to stabilize the situation.

Although Russia was a traditional ally of Armenia, it remained neutral during the conflict, maintaining its influence by mediating post-war negotiations.

The role of Russia and Turkey

Turkey's Role in the Conflict
Unconditional Support for Azerbaijan:
•Since the fighting began, Turkey has declared its **unconditional support** for Azerbaijan.
•Turkey is suspected of providing various forms of **military assistance**, including **highly regarded Turkish drones**.
Accusations of Direct Involvement:
•**Yerevan accused Turkey** of shooting down an Armenian **SU-25 aircraft** on 29 September, which Turkey denied.
•There are **unconfirmed reports** that Turkey has mobilized **Syrian mercenaries** to fight alongside Azerbaijan, but no firm evidence has been presented.

Russia's Complicated Role
Contradictory Roles:
•Russia has **bilateral ties** with Armenia and provides **security guarantees** through the **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)**, but these guarantees do not extend to the conflict zone in Nagorno-Karabakh, recognized internationally as part of Azerbaijan.
•Moscow supplies **weapons to both sides** and serves as one of the co-chairs of the **Minsk Group**, mediating the conflict.
Strained Relations with Armenia:
•Russia's relationship with Armenia's new leader, **Nikol Pashinyan** (since 2018), is **uneasy**.
•In the 1990s, Russia failed to deploy **peacekeeping forces** on the ground in Nagorno-Karabakh, limiting its direct involvement in the conflict.

A renewed conflcit on September 19-20th, 2023

Initiation of Operation:
•Azerbaijan launched a **significant military operation** in Nagorno-Karabakh, declaring an **evacuation** of ethnic Armenians from what is considered a perilous zone.

Escalation of Conflict:
•The operation has escalated tensions and raised the risk of a **full-scale war** in the region.

Baku's Announcement:
•The **Azerbaijani Defense Ministry** announced the initiation of **"local anti-terrorist activities"** to counter what they described as provocations in the territory.

On the Ground Reports:
•Reports and videos from the region show **intense shelling and gunfire**.
•**Stepanakert**, the unrecognized state's capital, experienced **air raid sirens**, signaling the severity of the situation.

An endgame in Karabakh?

- **Azerbaijan's Military Victory**:
  - Azerbaijan claimed a **military triumph**, while Armenia accused Azerbaijan of pursuing **ethnic cleansing policies** in the region.

- **Lachin Corridor Blockade**:
  - This offensive followed a **nine-month blockade** of the **Lachin Corridor**, the only route linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. The blockade led to severe shortages of **food, fuel, and medicine**.
  - In August 2023, the **UN** declared a **humanitarian crisis** in the area.

- **Shifts in Regional Alliances**:
  - In the wake of **Russia's invasion of Ukraine**, Armenia began focusing more on building ties with **Western nations**.
  - Meanwhile, Azerbaijan's shared **land border** and **authoritarian governance** model with Russia made it a more attractive partner for Moscow.

- **Regional Implications**:
  - The **dissolution of Nagorno-Karabakh** could have far-reaching consequences for the South Caucasus.
  - A peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan would mark a new era in the region, likely reducing **Russia's influence** and increasing **Turkey's presence**.