

Global Conflict Tracker

Recent Developments

Nagorno-Karabakh—the border region claimed by both Armenia and Azerbaijan—is at risk of renewed hostilities due to the failure of mediation efforts, increased militarization, and frequent cease-fire violations. In October 2017, under the auspices of the Minsk Group, an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-led mediation group, the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan [met in Geneva](#), beginning a [series of talks](#) on a possible settlement of the conflict.

Over the past several years, artillery shelling and minor skirmishes between Azerbaijani and Armenian troops have caused hundreds of deaths. Early April 2016 witnessed the [most intense fighting](#) since 1994, killing [dozens](#) and producing more than three hundred [casualties](#). After four days the two sides announced that they had agreed on another [cease-fire](#). Following that outbreak of violence, both Azerbaijan and Armenia have claimed that soldiers were [killed in clashes](#) throughout [2017](#).

Background

In the 1920's, the Soviet government established the [Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region](#)—where 95 percent of the population is ethnically Armenian—within Azerbaijan. Under Bolshevik rule, fighting between the two countries was kept in check, but as the Soviet Union began to [collapse](#), so did its grip on Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 1988, Nagorno-Karabakh legislature passed a resolution to join Armenia despite the fact that the region was legally within Azerbaijan's borders. As the Soviet Union was dissolving in 1991, the autonomous region officially declared independence. War erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region, leaving roughly [30,000](#)

[casualties](#) and hundreds of thousands of [refugees](#). By 1993, Armenia controlled Nagorno-Karabakh and occupied 20 percent of the surrounding Azerbaijani territory. In 1994, Russia brokered a cease-fire which has remained in place since.

Nagorno-Karabakh has been a frozen conflict for more than a decade, but [tensions](#) have remained high since a breakdown in talks that followed the April 2016 violence, with repeated ceasefire violations. Negotiation and mediation efforts, primarily led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) [Minsk Group](#), have failed to produce a permanent solution to the conflict. The Minsk Group was created in 1994 to address the dispute and is co-chaired by the United States, Russia, and France. The co-chairs organize summits between the leaders of the two countries and hold individual meetings. The group has successfully negotiated cease-fires, but the territorial issues remain as intractable as ever.

Because Azerbaijani and ethnic Armenian military forces are positioned close to each other and have little to no communication, there is a high risk that inadvertent military action could lead to an escalation of the conflict. The two sides also have domestic political interests that could cause their respective leaders to launch an attack.

Concerns

Without successful mediation efforts, cease-fire violations and renewed tensions threaten to reignite a military conflict between the countries and destabilize the South Caucasus region. This could also disrupt oil and gas exports from the region, since Azerbaijan, which produces more than [850,000 barrels of oil](#) per day, is a significant oil and gas exporter to Europe and Central Asia. Russia has [promised](#) to defend Armenia, Turkey has [pledged](#) to support Azerbaijan, and Iran has a [large Azeri minority](#), which

could escalate a crisis and entangle actors involved.