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Azerbaijan and Armenia: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

In autumn 2020, a six-week war in the South Caucasus reshaped the dynamics of a decades-old conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The dispute centers on the predominantly Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh (or Mountainous Karabakh, also known in Armenian as Artsakh) and surrounding territories internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. The war has resulted in Azerbaijani control over much of the territory it lost to Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh forces during previous fighting in the 1990s, including a portion of Nagorno-Karabakh and almost all of the surrounding territories. Armenians have retained control over the remaining territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, including the urban center of Stepanakert. A cease-fire agreement mediated by the Russian Federation introduced about 2,000 Russian troops into the conflict zone to serve as peacekeeping forces and to guarantee the security of a land corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The local and regional consequences of the autumn 2020 war continue to unfold. The war led to more than 6,000 combat deaths and more than 150 civilian deaths. It also displaced tens of thousands of people, although many have returned. In addition, the Azerbaijani government now is considering how to resettle hundreds of thousands of people who were displaced from the conflict zone in the 1990s, which will require major demining and construction efforts. The 2020 war did not resolve the disputed political status of Nagorno-Karabakh, and it upended a long-standing international conflict resolution framework that emerged after the 1990s conflict. It also led to political turmoil in Armenia and strengthened the government of Azerbaijan. The 2020 war also may increase the influence of regional powers Russia and Turkey, and potentially Iran.

Long-standing U.S. policy over several Administrations has been to facilitate a resolution to the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict that would achieve a negotiated settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh's political status, peaceably restore Azerbaijani control over territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, and provide security for residents of and returnees to the conflict zone. In response to the cease-fire agreement, the U.S. Department of State noted that "ending the recent fighting is only the first step toward achieving a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict."

Many Members of Congress issued statements in response to the outbreak of armed conflict. In October 2020, three related resolutions were introduced in the House (H.Res. 1165, H.Res. 1196, and H.Res. 1203) and one related resolution was introduced in the Senate (S.Res. 754). The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260, Division W, Title VI, §615), requires the Director of National Intelligence to submit to the congressional intelligence committees an assessment regarding tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, "including with respect to the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region."

U.S. assistance has sought to mitigate the effects of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, including through demining assistance. The United States has adhered to a principle of parity with regard to Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance for Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Department of Defense has provided separate capacity-building assistance to Azerbaijan for border and maritime security. Since 2001, an annually renewable presidential waiver to Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act (P.L. 102-511; 22 U.S.C. 5812 note) has enabled the provision of U.S. military aid and other foreign assistance to Azerbaijan; without the waiver, Section 907 would prohibit most bilateral assistance to Azerbaijan unless the President determined Azerbaijan had made "demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh."

The autumn 2020 war heightened awareness of the danger of mines and new unexploded ordnance in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone and of other humanitarian challenges. In November 2020, the State Department indicated it would provide \$5 million in humanitarian assistance "to assist people affected by the recent fighting." Prior to the conflict, several Members of Congress had supported a continuation of demining assistance. Some Members have called for the provision of new assistance related to the conflict and for a review of U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan and the Section 907 waiver. In the 117th Congress, Members of Congress may address immediate and longer-term consequences of the 2020 war, including assistance needs, the future of international mediation efforts, and changes in regional power dynamics.

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Cory Welt

Specialist in Russian and European Affairs

Andrew S. Bowen

Analyst in Russian and European Affairs

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Introduction

In autumn 2020, a six-week war fundamentally reshaped the dynamics of a decades-old conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh (or Mountainous Karabakh, also known in Armenian as Artsakh) and surrounding territories internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan.¹ Many observers assess that the autumn 2020 war began as an Azerbaijani offensive to retake at least some territories Azerbaijan lost to Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces in the early 1990s, after the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, of which Azerbaijan and Armenia were both part). For the United States, the war and its aftermath raise policy issues regarding relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, post-conflict assistance and settlement efforts, and regional power shifts and dynamics between NATO ally Turkey and Russia (as well as, potentially, neighboring Iran).

During fighting from September to November 2020, Azerbaijani forces captured territory—eventually including the strategically located town of Shusha (in Armenian, Shushi)—through several advances. Poised to attack Nagorno-Karabakh’s urban center of Stepanakert (in Azerbaijani, Khankendi), Azerbaijan ceased offensive operations after Armenia agreed to a cease-fire agreement mediated by the Russian Federation. The agreement obliged Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces to withdraw from additional territories they had controlled since the 1990s and introduced about 2,000 Russian troops into the conflict zone as peacekeeping forces.

The autumn 2020 war was a short but brutal conflict that ultimately did not resolve the disputed political status of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the war’s local and regional consequences continue to unfold. The conflict led to the deaths of at least a few thousand armed personnel on each side and dozens of civilians. Azerbaijan recovered territories that had been lost to it for more than a quarter of a century, and the Azerbaijani government has promised to make the investments necessary to enable hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis displaced in the 1990s to return to the region. Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh have gained a new sense of insecurity, tempered by the presence of Russian forces, and many remain displaced. A new balance of power exists between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and regional powers Russia and Turkey have increased their influence.

This report focuses on the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, the autumn 2020 war, and related U.S. policy. It first provides brief historical background and then discusses the post-1994 conflict resolution process and the relationships of Azerbaijan and Armenia with regional powers Russia and Turkey. In addition, the report provides analysis of the autumn 2020 war, the November 2020 cease-fire agreement, and the war’s domestic impact in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The report then discusses U.S. responses to the war, longer-term U.S. policy toward the conflict, and the role of Congress.

For a map of Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone prior to the 2020 war, see **Figure 1**. For a more detailed map of the conflict zone prior to the 2020 war, see **Figure 2**. For a map of the November 2020 cease-fire boundaries, see **Figure 3**.

Background

Azerbaijan and Armenia are located in the South Caucasus region, together with neighboring Georgia. The South Caucasus is a region between the Black and Caspian Seas that is separated from Russia by the Greater Caucasus mountain range and also borders Iran and Turkey (see **Figure 1**). Azerbaijanis and Armenians historically have intermixed but have distinct ethnic and

¹ This report uses the term *Nagorno-Karabakh*, except where other terms are included in direct quotations.

religious identities (Azerbaijanis are mostly Muslim, Armenians mostly Christian), and they have fought bitter conflicts in the past.

The political and demographic history of Nagorno-Karabakh is fiercely contested. The region's majority ethnic Armenian population claims a dominant historical presence in Nagorno-Karabakh. In the latter half of the 18th century, the region became the center of the larger Karabakh khanate, a semi-independent Turkic (early Azerbaijani) principality formally subordinated to Iran before it was conquered by the Russian Empire in the early 19th century. By 1832, according to one scholar of the region, Armenians "constituted an overwhelming majority of the population" in the highland territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and made up about one-third of the population in the larger territory that was previously part of the former Karabakh khanate.²

Figure I. Armenia and Azerbaijan
(line of control prior to the 2020 war)



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), using data from the U.S. Department of State, ESRI, Garmin, and ArcWorld. Boundaries are not necessarily authoritative.

Azerbaijanis and Armenians fought for control over Nagorno-Karabakh and other territories during a brief period of independence after Russia's 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Azerbaijan and Armenia were incorporated into the USSR in 1920-1922 as constituent republics. Over the objection of Armenian Bolsheviks, Nagorno-Karabakh was assigned to Soviet Azerbaijan in 1921 and was formally established and demarcated in 1923. As part of the USSR through 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh was officially an autonomous region (*oblast*) within Soviet Azerbaijan. According to a 1989 census, the region had a population of 189,000 (77% Armenian, 22% Azerbaijani).

Conflict arose in 1988, after the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh sought to transfer jurisdiction of the region to Soviet Armenia. Soviet authorities declined to redraw the borders, but the effort and ensuing mass mobilization and violent clashes sparked conflict between the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, supported by Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The struggle led to violence and the displacement of Armenians and Azerbaijanis outside Nagorno-Karabakh. The conflict further escalated in 1991, as the Soviet government sought to counter moves toward

² George A. Bournoutian, trans., *Two Chronicles on the History of Karabagh* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004), p. 24 (n. 1).

independence by Armenia and Azerbaijan, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence from Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan abolished Nagorno-Karabakh's autonomous status.

After the December 1991 dissolution of the USSR, Armenian and Azerbaijani armed forces fought directly, with Azerbaijani forces suffering several major defeats. Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a cease-fire in May 1994, leaving Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces in control of most of Nagorno-Karabakh and several surrounding territories, in total representing about 14% of Azerbaijan's land area. Observers estimate the conflict resulted in around 20,000 deaths and more than 1 million displaced persons. The displaced included about 500,000 Azerbaijanis from areas surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh and the region itself, about 185,000 Azerbaijanis from Armenia, and more than 350,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan.³

In 1993, the United Nations Security Council passed four resolutions concerning the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict. In addition to calling for a cessation of hostilities, the resolutions "reaffirm[ed] the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Azerbaijani Republic and of all other States in the region," as well as the "inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory." The resolutions called for "the withdrawal of occupying forces" from "recently occupied areas" of Azerbaijan.⁴

Conflict Resolution Process

To facilitate peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia, several countries under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) established the Minsk Group in 1994, with the United States, France, and Russia serving as co-chair countries.⁵ Since 2007, the Minsk Group co-chairs have framed their settlement efforts on the basis of six "Basic Principles for the Peaceful Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict" (also known as the *Madrid Principles*).⁶ The principles are as follows:

1. Return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control
2. An interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance
3. A corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh
4. Future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of popular will
5. The right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence

³ Ethnic Kurds and Russians in Armenia and Azerbaijan also were displaced. Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York: NYU Press, 2013, revised and updated edition), pp. 327-328.

⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 822 (1993), April 30, 1993; UNSCR 853 (1993), July 29, 1993; UNSCR 874 (1993), October 14, 1993; UNSCR 884 (1993), November 12, 1993. Resolution texts are available at <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/13508.htm>.

⁵ The Minsk Group was formed on the basis of a grouping of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) member states designated in 1992 to be participants in a "Minsk Conference" that was never held. According to the OSCE, permanent members of the Minsk Group include, together with the co-chairs, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, and Turkey, as well as the OSCE's current chairing state, together with the previous and succeeding chairs. OSCE, "OSCE Minsk Group," at <https://www.osce.org/mg>; Thomas de Waal, "Remaking the Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Process," *Survival*, vol. 52, no. 4 (August 2010), pp. 159-176.

⁶ OSCE, "Statement by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chair Countries," July 10, 2009.

6. International security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation

Armenia and Azerbaijan conducted negotiations on the basis of these principles, but they achieved little progress toward settlement. Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh leaders sought to achieve a negotiated resolution that would ensure Nagorno-Karabakh's separation from Azerbaijan, whether as an independent state or united with Armenia. They viewed territories around Nagorno-Karabakh occupied by Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces as a buffer zone and a bargaining chip for negotiations concerning Nagorno-Karabakh's final status. In recent years, many Armenians expressed support for the permanent retention of these territories, in which an estimated 17,000 of Nagorno-Karabakh's 147,000 residents had settled.⁷

Azerbaijani leaders insisted on Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and on Azerbaijanis' right to return to their homes. They also said Azerbaijan was prepared to use force to retake territories, if this could not be achieved through negotiations. Although Azerbaijani authorities claimed sovereignty over both Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding regions, they emphasized the importance of first returning the surrounding territories to Azerbaijan and occasionally suggested a resolution to the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh could be deferred.⁸

Since the 1994 cease-fire until 2016, observers estimate that dozens of troops and civilians on both sides were killed each year along the dividing "line of contact," which was more than 150 miles long, as well as along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border.⁹ In April 2016, a serious round of hostilities occurred over a three-day period; the fighting resulted in at least 200 reported casualties and in Azerbaijan gaining control of two strategic heights in previously Armenian-held territory.¹⁰ Russian mediation helped to establish a new cease-fire agreement.

Conflict Resolution Efforts in 2018 and 2019

In 2018, a change of government in Armenia gave rise to new efforts to address the long-simmering conflict. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan became Armenia's first leader in 20 years who is not originally from Nagorno-Karabakh.¹¹ After Pashinyan came to power as the head of a popular democratic movement, some observers were hopeful that Armenia and Azerbaijan could be encouraged to initiate new efforts to resolve the conflict or, at least, to reduce tensions. The United States, Russia, and France, as co-chairs of the Minsk Group, expressed renewed interest in engagement and welcomed both governments' willingness to take "concrete measures to prepare the populations for peace."¹² Observers noted a decline of cease-fire violations and casualties, and Armenia and Azerbaijan reportedly replaced military forces with

⁷ For details, see International Crisis Group (ICG), *Digging Out of Deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh*, December 20, 2019. Hereinafter, ICG, *Digging Out of Deadlock*.

⁸ ICG, *Digging Out of Deadlock*.

⁹ See, for example, ICG, *Armenia and Azerbaijan: A Season of Risks*, September 26, 2013; Emil Sanamyan, "Armenian-Azerbaijani Attrition War Escalates," *Armenian Weekly*, January 14, 2016; U.S. Department of State, "Background Briefing on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," May 16, 2016.

¹⁰ Official reports indicated the fighting led to around 200 casualties. A U.S. State Department official estimated there had been 350 casualties. U.S. Department of State, "Background Briefing on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," May 16, 2016; ICG, *Nagorno-Karabakh's Gathering War Clouds*, June 1, 2017.

¹¹ Before 2018, the presidency was Armenia's most powerful political position. Former Presidents Robert Kocharyan (1998-2008) and Serzh Sargsyan (2008-2018), both originally from Nagorno-Karabakh, played leading roles in Nagorno-Karabakh's independence movement.

¹² OSCE, "Press Statement by the Co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group," January 6, 2019.

civilian security forces along parts of their international border.¹³ Many observers, however, were skeptical that a new conflict resolution effort could succeed.

Like most Armenian politicians, Pashinyan has expressed firm support for Nagorno-Karabakh's separation from Azerbaijan. The day after he became prime minister, Pashinyan visited Nagorno-Karabakh and called for the inclusion of local authorities in peace talks.¹⁴ In August 2019, Pashinyan visited Nagorno-Karabakh, where he declared that the region "is Armenia—period."¹⁵ The Azerbaijani government said it would defend its claims to the region and rejected Armenia's proposal to include Nagorno-Karabakh authorities in talks.

In March 2019, Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev held an official meeting facilitated by the Minsk Group co-chairs.¹⁶ A joint statement issued by the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers and the heads of delegation of the Minsk Group co-chairs (hereinafter, *Minsk co-chairs*) stated that the presidents "exchanged views about several key issues of the settlement process and ideas of substance [and] recommitted to strengthening the cease-fire and improving the mechanism for direct communication."¹⁷

In a September 2019 meeting with the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers, the Minsk co-chairs "noted the positive effects of the sides' efforts to minimize violence during the summer period, including the use of the existing direct communication links." The Minsk co-chairs "encouraged the sides to minimize the use of rhetoric that is inflammatory or prejudges the outcome of negotiations."¹⁸

In December 2019, the Minsk co-chairs took "positive note of the relatively low level of violence along the Line of Contact and international border and credit[ed] the sides for utilizing fully the direct communication links between them to reduce the risk of escalation."¹⁹ Despite expectations, however, tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia worsened in 2020, leading to a brief border skirmish in July and to the autumn war, which caught many observers by surprise.

Relations with Russia and Turkey

Regional powers Russia and Turkey have played complex roles in the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict. The historical and current ties of Armenia and Azerbaijan with both countries are detailed in the following sections.

Russia

Russia has strong security and economic ties to Armenia. Many observers contend that Armenia has retained such ties to Russia due to a widespread belief in Armenia that only Russia can provide security guarantees against Azerbaijan and Turkey, with which Armenians have a

¹³ Ilgar Gurbanov, "Karabakh Peace Talks Break Down as Azerbaijan and Armenia Operate at Cross-Purposes," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 4, 2019.

¹⁴ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, "Armenia's Pashinian Calls for Karabakh Leaders' Involvement in Peace Talks," May 9, 2018.

¹⁵ Joshua Kucera, "Pashinyan Calls for Unification Between Armenia and Karabakh," *Eurasianet*, August 6, 2019.

¹⁶ Before this meeting, the two presidents had met informally three times on the sidelines of international meetings.

¹⁷ OSCE, "Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group," March 29, 2019.

¹⁸ OSCE, "Press Statement by the Co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group," September 25, 2019.

¹⁹ OSCE, "Joint Statement by the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chair Countries," December 5, 2019.

traumatic and difficult history (see “Turkey,” below). At the same time, many Armenians have questioned Russia’s reliability as a security guarantor and economic partner. After Armenia’s 2018 change in government, the country’s political leadership pursued democracy and governance reforms that put a new strain on its relationship with Russia.

Russia guarantees Armenia’s security through collective and bilateral treaties. Both countries are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Member states of the CSTO commit to defend the territorial integrity of other CSTO members in the event of aggression. Russia and Armenia also have a bilateral agreement that commits Russian troops stationed in Armenia to provide for Armenia’s security.²⁰ These commitments do not officially extend to Nagorno-Karabakh, however. Prior to the autumn 2020 conflict, observers debated whether and under what circumstances Russia would intervene overtly if hostilities were to resume.²¹

Russia maintains a military presence in Armenia at the 102nd military base, located in Gyumri. The base is estimated to house around 3,000-4,000 soldiers in one motor rifle brigade (consisting of three motor rifle battalions and one tank battalion), one squadron of Mig-29 multi-role fighters, air defense systems, and various attack and transport helicopters.²² Although the base is not equipped with Russia’s latest frontline equipment, it represents a significant force for Armenia’s territorial defense. In 2016, Russia and Armenia concluded an agreement to host a joint air defense network that integrates Russia’s capabilities in the region.²³

Azerbaijan and Russia also have maintained good relations. Since the 1990s, Azerbaijan has been led by authoritarian governments that have sought to maintain independence from Russia. At the same time, these governments have sought Moscow’s support to balance domestic and international pressures.

Russia is a major military supplier to both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both countries primarily operate Russian and upgraded Soviet-era equipment, including tanks and artillery. Prior to the autumn 2020 war, Russia allegedly pursued a policy of parity so neither side would gain a significant advantage over the other. In doing so, Russia balanced Azerbaijan’s purchases of advanced weaponry by providing Armenia with weapons and military equipment at subsidized prices and through loans. Russia has provided Armenia with advanced capabilities, such as the 9K720 Iskander-M short-range ballistic missile and SU-30SM fighters.²⁴ In recent years, Russia apparently has been unwilling to provide Azerbaijan with its most advanced weaponry, causing Azerbaijan to diversify its arms purchases away from Russia and toward other international suppliers.²⁵

²⁰ *RFE/RL*, “Russia, Armenia Sign Extended Defense Pact,” August 19, 2010; Azad Garibov, “Pashinyan Tries to Leverage Armenia’s CSTO Membership Against Azerbaijan,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, December 13, 2019.

²¹ See, for example, *RFE/RL*, “Russian-Armenian Defense Pact ‘Will Prevent New War in Karabakh,’” August 18, 2010; Joshua Kucera, “Azerbaijan: Russia Stopped U.S. from ‘Breaking Armenia’s Resistance’ in 2016,” *Eurasianet*, July 14, 2017.

²² International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2020*, February 13, 2020, p. 208. Hereinafter, IISS, *Military Balance*.

²³ Reuters, “Armenia Ratifies Agreement on Joint Air-Defense System with Russia,” June 30, 2016.

²⁴ These advanced systems played little role in the 2020 war. Observers suggest the Armenian government may have been concerned about escalating the conflict and, possibly, did not have missiles to arm its SU-30SM fighters. Eduard Abrahamyan, “Armenia’s New Ballistic Missiles Will Shake Up the Neighborhood,” *National Interest*, October 12, 2016; Eduard Abrahamyan, “Russian Loan Allows Armenia to Upgrade Military Capabilities,” *CACI Analyst*, January 8, 2018; *Massis Post*, “Armenia’s Air Force Equipped with State-of-the-Art Sukhoi Su-30SM Fighter Jets,” December 27, 2019.

²⁵ Dylan Malyasov, “Azerbaijan Unveils Newest Artillery Systems During Large-Scale Military Exercises,” *Defence*

Turkey

Turkey is Azerbaijan's most important strategic partner, and the two countries share close ethnic and linguistic ties. In support of Azerbaijan, Turkey shut its land border with Armenia in 1993, leaving Armenia with land access to Georgia in the north and Iran in the south.

Turkey-Armenia relations are further strained by a dispute over the World War I-era internal deportation and mass killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, which Armenia recognizes as genocide but the Turkish government does not. In 2019, the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate agreed to separate resolutions expressing their sense that it is the policy of the United States "to commemorate the Armenian Genocide through official recognition and remembrance" (H.Res. 296, S.Res. 150).²⁶

Turkish authorities frequently have stated that Armenian withdrawal from Azerbaijani territories is a condition for normalization of relations. In 2009, Armenia and Turkey launched a process of rapprochement to reopen their land border and restore diplomatic relations. Partly due to Azerbaijan's influence on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, however, Turkey's parliament did not ratify the agreed protocols. The Armenian government also faced domestic opposition to the protocols and, in the absence of Turkish ratification, eventually suspended its efforts in the rapprochement process.²⁷ Armenia officially canceled the protocols in 2018.²⁸ Now that Armenian forces have withdrawn from Azerbaijani territories, some observers have speculated about the impact of the 2020 war on Turkish-Armenian relations.²⁹

Autumn 2020 War

On September 27, 2020, major new fighting erupted between Azerbaijan and Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces defending Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁰ In previous months, political tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan had increased.³¹ Between July 12 and July 16, 2020, Armenia and Azerbaijan exchanged artillery fire along their border, some 185 miles north of Nagorno-Karabakh. Although it is unclear what precisely sparked the July conflict, some analysts believe the events reflected an unintended escalation rather than a premeditated action.³² The conflict

Blog, September 18, 2017; Ilgar Gurbanov, "Azerbaijan's Acquisitions of New Missile Systems from Belarus and Israel: The Domestic and Regional Context," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 19, 2018; Ilgar Gurbanov, "Military Procurements on Armenia's and Azerbaijan's Defense Agendas," *CACI Analyst*, March 27, 2019.

²⁶ For more on U.S. policy and congressional action on this issue, see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

²⁷ For more, see David L. Phillips, *Diplomatic History: The Turkey-Armenia Protocols*, Institute for the Study of Human Rights (Columbia University), March 2012.

²⁸ *RFE/RL*, "Armenia Scrapping Protocols to Normalize Relations with Turkey," March 1, 2018.

²⁹ News.am, "Thomas de Waal: Karabakh Agreement Is Humiliating for the Armenian Side," November 11, 2020; Kemal Kirisci and Behlul Ozkan, "After Russia's Nagorno-Karabakh Ceasefire, Could Turkey Step Up Next for a Lasting Peace?," *Just Security*, November 16, 2020.

³⁰ Prior to the onset of fighting, Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh forces (also known as the Artsakh Defense Army) reportedly totaled around 60,000-65,000 troops (including an estimated 18,000-20,000 troops from Nagorno-Karabakh). While nominally independent, Nagorno-Karabakh forces reportedly have operated as a branch of the Armenian military under a combined command-and-control system. Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh forces are equipped with Soviet/Russian tanks, artillery, missile, and anti-tank capabilities. Eduard Abrahamyan, "Russian Loan Allows Armenia to Upgrade Military Capabilities," *CACI Analyst*, January 8, 2018; IISS, *Military Balance*, pp. 183, 186.

³¹ Laurence Broers, "Armenia and Azerbaijan's Season of Symbolic Offensives," Chatham House, June 18, 2020.

³² Max Seddon, "Hostilities Escalate Between Azerbaijan and Armenia," *Financial Times*, July 19, 2020; ICG,

officially resulted in the deaths of at least 17 military personnel (12 Azerbaijani, 5 Armenian) and 1 Azerbaijani civilian.³³

The July 2020 clashes led to greater talk of war in Azerbaijan and of determined resistance in Armenia. In Azerbaijan, tens of thousands of protestors called on the government to react with greater force; after some protestors temporarily occupied Azerbaijan's parliament, protests were forcibly dispersed.³⁴ On July 16, Azerbaijani President Aliyev criticized Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov, a long-standing participant in conflict negotiations, for alleged passivity and replaced him with then-Minister of Education Jeyhun Bayramov, a novice diplomat.³⁵ In Armenia, Prime Minister Pashinyan called to further strengthen "the common security system" of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and said "the Azerbaijani myth that its army can defeat the Armenian army, and thus Armenia and Artsakh should make concessions, has vanished."³⁶

After the July 2020 clashes, tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan persisted. In July, Azerbaijani officials began to criticize Russian military transport flights to Armenia they alleged were arms deliveries. Russian authorities denied these allegations, arguing that flights from Russia conveyed construction equipment for Russia's military base in Armenia.³⁷ In August, Azerbaijan conducted large-scale military exercises with Turkey, which had expressed strong support for Azerbaijan during the July clashes.³⁸ Turkey reportedly also sold Azerbaijan more than \$120 million worth of military equipment in the first nine months of 2020.³⁹ In August and September, Azerbaijan and Armenia accused each other of instigating various cross-border incidents.⁴⁰

Many observers assess that the autumn 2020 war began as an Azerbaijani offensive to retake at least some territories Azerbaijan lost to Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces in the early 1990s (see "Background").⁴¹ Azerbaijani officials initially stated that the offensive began in response to

Preventing a Bloody Harvest on Armenia-Azerbaijan State Border, July 24, 2020; Neil Hauer, "Armenia and Azerbaijan Are at War Again—and Not in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Foreign Policy*, August 24, 2020 (hereinafter, Hauer, "Armenia and Azerbaijan at War Again").

³³ Avet Demourian, "Armenia-Azerbaijan Border Fighting Escalates; 16 Killed," *Washington Post*, July 17, 2020; Hauer, "Armenia and Azerbaijan at War Again."

³⁴ *Eurasianet*, "Pro-War Azerbaijani Protestors Break into Parliament," July 15, 2020.

³⁵ Joshua Kucera, "Azerbaijan Fires Foreign Minister," *Eurasianet*, July 16, 2020.

³⁶ *Lragir*, "July Victories Took Us to New Level of Resilience: PM Pashinyan," July 23, 2020.

³⁷ Reuters, "Azerbaijan Accuses Moscow of Arming Armenia Since July Clashes," August 29, 2020; Rahim Rahimov, "Azerbaijani President Rebukes Putin over Russian Military Cargo Deliveries to Armenia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 11, 2020.

³⁸ Vasif Huseynov, "Azerbaijan, Turkey Hold Large-Scale Military Drills Amidst Escalation of Tensions with Armenia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 14, 2020.

³⁹ Purchases included Bayraktar TB2 drones, which can be armed with MAM laser-guided smart munitions. Can Kasapoglu, "Turkey's Heavy 'Tiger' Rocket Spotted in Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Exclave," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, May 18, 2020; Sebastien Roblin, "Turkish Drones over Nagorno-Karabakh—and Other Updates from a Day-Old War," *Forbes*, September 28, 2020; Ece Toksabay, "Turkish Arms Sales to Azerbaijan Surged Before Nagorno-Karabakh Fighting," Reuters, October 14, 2020.

⁴⁰ *Hetq*, "Armenia Condemns Azerbaijan's 'Degrading' Treatment of Armenian Army Officer," August 27, 2020; *Asbarez*, "Soldier Killed by Azerbaijani Forces in Armenia," September 16, 2020; Akbar Mammadov, "Azerbaijani Serviceman Killed in Armenian Attack on Border," *Azemews*, September 21, 2020; Vasif Huseynov, "Another War on the Horizon in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict?," *Euractiv*, September 22, 2020.

⁴¹ Sebastien Roblin, "Tanks Ablaze as Azerbaijani Forces Attack Armenian Troops in Disputed Nagorno-Karabakh," *Forbes*, September 27, 2020; Michael Kofman and Leonid Nersisyan, "The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Two Weeks In," *War on the Rocks*, October 14, 2020 (hereinafter, Kofman and Nersisyan, "Second Nagorno-Karabakh War").

Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh fire, although it is not clear what evidence exists for this claim.⁴² Over six weeks, Azerbaijan's armed forces gradually made inroads against Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh positions in territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh and, eventually, within Nagorno-Karabakh itself.⁴³

The war was seen by many regional observers to have demonstrated Azerbaijan's qualitative military advantage over Armenia, due in part to an extensive military buildup over the last decade. Purchases of advanced weapons systems improved Azerbaijan's reconnaissance and precision-strike capabilities, which may have contributed to a growth in Azerbaijani military confidence. During the war, Azerbaijan relied heavily on the use of drones, including equipment purchased from Turkey and Israel, to identify, target, and attack Armenian defensive positions and armored units.⁴⁴ Air defenses in Nagorno-Karabakh mainly consisted of older Soviet or Russian systems, which were largely ineffective against newer Azerbaijani drones. Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces suffered heavy armored equipment losses and were unable to coordinate reserves for launching counterattacks against Azerbaijani forces.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, they were able to repulse initial Azerbaijani advances in mountainous terrain in the northern part of Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴⁶

Throughout October 2020, Azerbaijani mechanized units made significant headway in the southern lowlands between Nagorno-Karabakh (a largely mountainous territory) and Iran. Azerbaijani forces took territory in the regions of Fuzuli, Jabrayil, and Zangilan and eventually secured Azerbaijan's entire border with Iran (for maps, see **Figure 2** and **Figure 3**). Fighting also was reported in the southern part of Nagorno-Karabakh, around the town of Hadrut.⁴⁷ Azerbaijani forces then attempted to capture Lachin, a town strategically situated along the road connecting Armenia with Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh's urban center. After heavy fighting, Armenian counterattacks and artillery repulsed Azerbaijani units.⁴⁸

⁴² Vasif Huseynov, "Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict Ignites Again in Karabakh," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 28, 2020.

⁴³ Ann M. Simmons, "Azerbaijan Makes Gains in Conflict with Armenia, Setting Back Peace Efforts," *Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2020.

⁴⁴ Reporting suggests Azerbaijan benefited from Turkish military advice, which was critical for the effective use of drones and precision artillery strikes. Azerbaijan also has used armed drones and loitering munitions (commonly referred to as *kamikaze drones*) purchased from Israel. Seth J. Frantzman, "Israeli Drones in Azerbaijan Raise Questions on Use in the Battlefield," *Jerusalem Post*, October 1, 2020; Mike Eckel, "Drone Wars: In Nagorno-Karabakh, the Future of Warfare Is Now," *RFE/RL*, October 9, 2020; Fuad Shahbazov, "Tactical Reasons Behind Military Breakthrough in Karabakh Conflict," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, November 3, 2020; Ron Synovitz, "Technology, Tactics, and Turkish Advice Lead Azerbaijan to Victory in Nagorno-Karabakh," *RFE/RL*, November 13, 2020 (hereinafter, Synovitz, "Technology, Tactics and Turkish Advice").

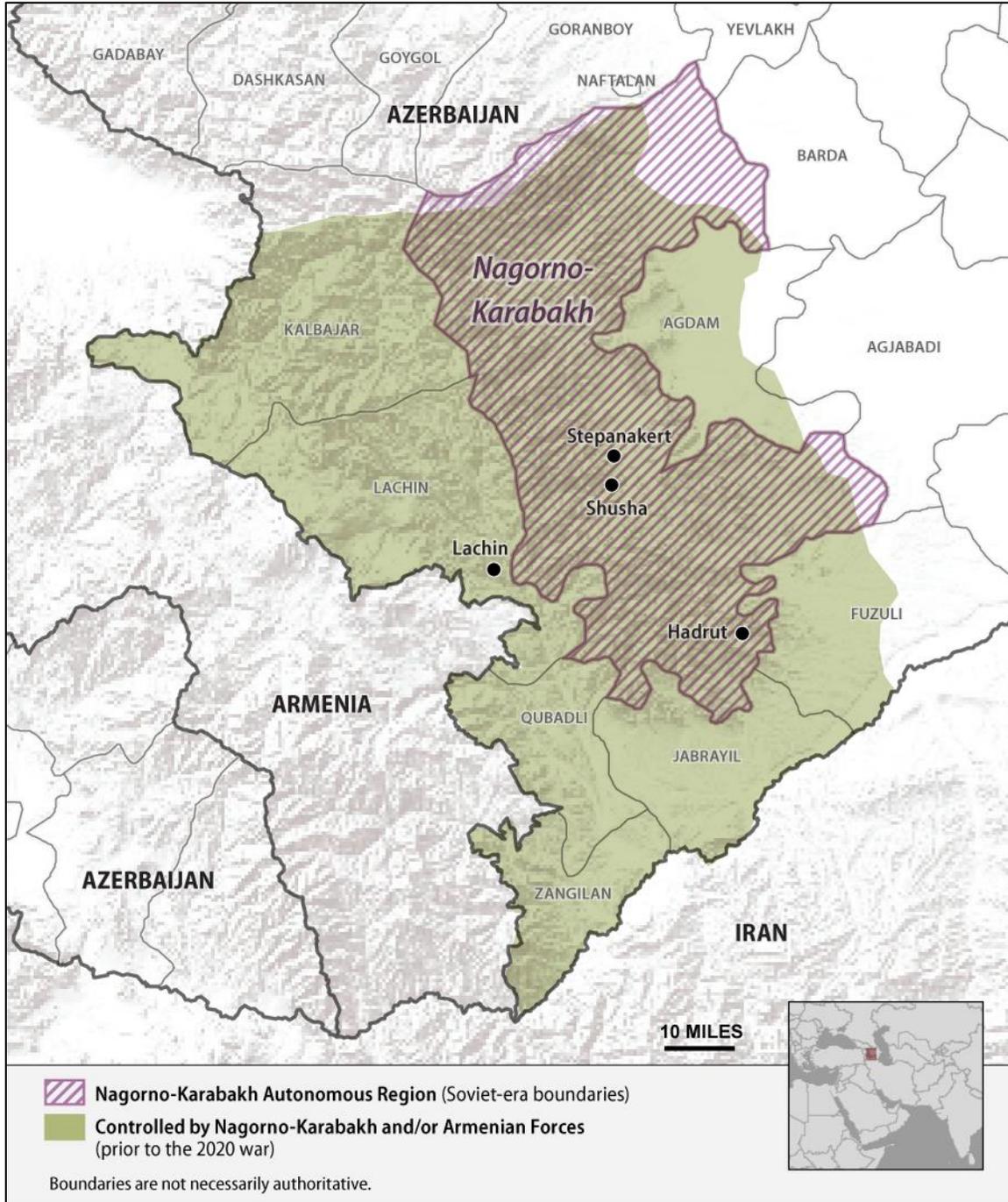
⁴⁵ Jack Watling, "The Key to Armenia's Tank Losses: The Sensors, Not the Shooters," *RUSI Defence Systems*, October 6, 2020; Michael Kofman, "Armenia's Military Position in Nagorno-Karabakh Grows Precarious," *Eurasianet*, October 24, 2020; Robyn Dixon, "Azerbaijan's Drones Owned the Battlefield in Nagorno-Karabakh—and Showed the Future of Warfare," *Washington Post*, November 11, 2020.

⁴⁶ Kofman and Nersisyan, "Second Nagorno-Karabakh War"; Henry Foy, "Drones and Missiles Tilt War with Armenia in Azerbaijan's Favor," *Financial Times*, October 28, 2020.

⁴⁷ Dimitri Avaliani, "Karabakh: The Battle for Hadrut and Why It's Important," *JAM News*, October 12, 2020; Joshua Kucera, "Azerbaijan Continues Advance Deeper into Armenian-Held Territory," *Eurasianet*, October 21, 2020; Nvard Hovhannisyian and Naila Bagirova, "Armenia Says Karabakh Forces Quit Town as U.S.-Backed Ceasefire Appears to Fail," Reuters, October 27, 2020.

⁴⁸ Robin Paxton and Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber, "Stick or Twist? Azerbaijan Looks to Drive Home Nagorno-Karabakh Gains," Reuters, October 30, 2020; Dmitry Kuznets, "The Battle for Shusha: Fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh Has Reached a Turning Point. Here Are the Most Recent Developments in the Conflict Zone," *Meduza*, November 6, 2020.

Figure 2. Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Zone
(line of control prior to the 2020 war)



Source: CRS, using data from the U.S. Department of State, ESRI, Garmin, and ArcWorld.

After failing to capture Lachin, Azerbaijan focused on capturing Shusha. In addition to its historical and cultural importance, Shusha is strategically important due to its position on the highway linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh and overlooking much of the region, including Stepanakert. Using a combined arms approach that included special forces and light infantry, supported by armored units and precision artillery and drone strikes, Azerbaijani forces advanced

in the surrounding ravines and mountains. Despite heavy Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh resistance, Azerbaijan captured Shusha on or around November 8, 2020.⁴⁹

The capture of Shusha weakened the Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh military position and imperiled the security of the population in Nagorno-Karabakh. As of November 2, 2020, Armenian officials indicated that 90,000 people (out of an estimated 147,000) had fled Nagorno-Karabakh.⁵⁰ As the fight for Shusha was occurring, video footage purported to show heavy civilian vehicle traffic leaving Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia.⁵¹ By the start of December 2020, reports indicated more than 25,000 people had returned to their homes in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁵² In addition, Azerbaijani officials reported that about 40,000 Azerbaijanis living near the conflict zone had been temporarily displaced during the war.⁵³

Media and nongovernmental organizations reported the shelling of population centers in Nagorno-Karabakh (including Stepanakert) and areas of Azerbaijan outside the conflict zone (including the cities of Ganja and Barda), resulting in at least dozens of civilian casualties.⁵⁴ Armenians and observers reported incidents of civilian killings by Azerbaijani forces as they took territory within Nagorno-Karabakh, and reports of the killing of prisoners emerged on both sides.⁵⁵ In December 2020, Azerbaijani authorities arrested four soldiers on suspicion of “inadmissible” war crimes and said that “individuals who have committed similar violations will be brought to justice.”⁵⁶ Based on official statements and reports, the 2020 war led to more than 6,000 combat deaths (about 3,360 Armenians and 2,820 Azerbaijanis) and more than 150 civilian deaths.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Ron Synovitz, “Azerbaijani Forces Close in on Nagorno-Karabakh’s ‘Unassailable’ Mountain Fortress City,” *RFE/RL*, November 5, 2020; Paul Goble, “Shusha Once Again Key to War and Peace Between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, November 12, 2020; Synovitz, “Technology, Tactics and Turkish Advice.”

⁵⁰ As of December 9, 2020, the Migration Service of Armenia reported a total of 90,640 displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Bachelet Warns of Possible War Crimes as Attacks Continue in Populated Areas,” press release, November 2, 2020; International Organization for Migration, “Migration Service of Armenia Registered Arrivals of Displaced Population, Armenia – Round 3,” December 11, 2020.

⁵¹ Joshua Kucera, “Fears of Civilian Exodus Rise as Azerbaijan Advances in Karabakh,” *Eurasianet*, November 8, 2020.

⁵² Andrew Connelly, “Nagorno-Karabakh Refugees See Little Chance of Returning Home After Peace Deal,” November 30, 2020; Associated Press, “Azerbaijan Fully Reclaims Lands Around Nagorno-Karabakh,” December 1, 2020.

⁵³ OHCHR, “Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Bachelet Warns of Possible War Crimes as Attacks Continue in Populated Areas,” press release, November 2, 2020.

⁵⁴ Neil Hauer, “Nagorno-Karabakh: Sirens, Shelling, and Shelters in Stepanakert,” *Al Jazeera*, October 16, 2020; *Guardian*, “Nagorno-Karabakh: Azerbaijan Says 12 Civilians Killed by Shelling in Ganja,” October 17, 2020; Amnesty International, “Armenia/Azerbaijan: First Confirmed Use of Cluster Munitions by Armenia ‘Cruel and Reckless,’” October 29, 2020; Human Rights Watch, “Azerbaijan: Unlawful Strikes in Nagorno-Karabakh,” December 11, 2020; Human Rights Watch, “Armenia: Unlawful Rocket, Missile Strikes on Azerbaijan,” December 11, 2020.

⁵⁵ Robin Fabbro, “Evidence Mounts of War Crimes in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *OC Media*, October 16, 2020; Olesya Vartanyan (ICG), @Olesya_vArt, Twitter, November 8, 2020, at https://twitter.com/Olesya_vArt/status/1325414667460751360; Amnesty International, “Armenia/Azerbaijan: Decapitation and War Crimes in Gruesome Videos Must Be Urgently Investigated,” December 10, 2020.

⁵⁶ *Al Jazeera*, “Baku to Probe Alleged War Crimes by Both Azerbaijan, Armenia,” November 25, 2020; *RFE/RL*, “Azerbaijani Soldiers Arrested for Desecration, Vandalism During Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” December 14, 2020.

⁵⁷ Avet Demourian, “Armenia: Tens of Thousands Rally to Demand PM’s Resignation,” December 5, 2020; Azernews, “Civilian Death Toll in Armenian Attacks Reaches 100,” December 8, 2020; APA.az, “Azerbaijani MoD: 2,823 Servicemen Martyred in Patriotic War Buried,” December 28, 2020; PanArmenian.net, “Armenia: Bodies of 3,360 Soldiers Killed in Karabakh War Examined So Far,” January 5, 2021.

Role of Turkey

Azerbaijan's offensive received strong diplomatic support from Turkey, which also supplied drones Azerbaijan used on the battlefield.⁵⁸ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has long supported Azerbaijani demands that Armenian forces withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding territories. On September 28, 2020, President Erdogan reportedly said that Azerbaijan had to "take matters into its own hands" given the failure of international conflict resolution efforts and that Turkey would continue to support Azerbaijan "with all its resources and heart."⁵⁹ Erdogan said, "permanent peace ... will only be possible if Armenia leaves the Azerbaijani lands it has been occupying."⁶⁰

Armenia alleged Turkey helped recruit and dispatch an unknown number of Syrian mercenaries to assist Azerbaijan's military.⁶¹ Social media posts and interviews with family members of fighters killed in the conflict appeared to support Armenia's claim.⁶² Turkey, in turn, accused Armenia of recruiting Kurdish militants for assistance but did not provide specific evidence in support of this claim.⁶³

On September 29, Armenian officials alleged a Turkish F-16 fighter jet departing from Azerbaijani airspace shot down an Armenian Su-25 fighter jet in Armenian airspace. Turkey said the allegation was "absolutely untrue," and Azerbaijan also denied the claim.⁶⁴ Open-source satellite imagery and reporting documented the presence of six Turkish F-16 fighters at Gabala, inside Azerbaijan, although no reporting has concluded these planes were involved in the fighting.⁶⁵

Turkey's growing influence in the region raises questions about the evolving Turkey-Russia dynamic, which includes elements of rivalry and cooperation. This dynamic operates within a broader setting that encompasses ongoing conflicts in Libya and Syria, Russian arms sales to

⁵⁸ Andrew E. Kramer, "Fighting Between Armenia and Azerbaijan Risks Drawing in Bigger Powers," *New York Times*, September 28, 2020. Also see CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

⁵⁹ Reuters, "Turkey's Erdogan Says Armenia Must Withdraw from Azeri Lands," September 28, 2020.

⁶⁰ Reuters, "Turkey Cool to U.S., Russia, France Ceasefire Effort in Nagorno-Karabakh," October 1, 2020; *Daily Sabah*, "Turkey Sides with Azerbaijan Against Armenia's Occupation, Erdogan Says," October 1, 2020.

⁶¹ Turkey's military has developed significant influence among Syrian militia fighters who oppose the regime of Syrian President Bashar al Asad. The Turkish military reportedly recruited mercenaries to assist Azerbaijan, having reportedly done something similar in Libya's civil war. Kareem Fahim and Zakaria Zakaria, "These Syrian Militiamen Were Foes in Their Civil War. Now They Are Battling Each Other in Libya," *Washington Post*, June 25, 2020; Elizabeth Tsurkov, "The Syrian Mercenaries Fighting Foreign Wars for Russia and Turkey," *New York Review of Books*, October 16, 2020.

⁶² Bethan McKernan, "Syrian Rebel Fighters Prepare to Deploy to Azerbaijan in Sign of Turkey's Ambition," *Guardian*, September 28, 2020; Kareem Fahim, Isabelle Khurshudyan, and Zakaria Zakaria, "Deaths of Syrian Mercenaries Show How Turkey, Russia Could Get Sucked into Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Washington Post*, October 14, 2020; Ron Synovitz, "Are Syrian Mercenaries Helping Azerbaijan Fight for Nagorno-Karabakh?" *RFE/RL*, October 15, 2020; Ed Butler, "The Syrian Mercenaries Used as 'Cannon Fodder' in Nagorno-Karabakh," *BBC News*, December 9, 2020.

⁶³ *Middle East Monitor*, "Turkey: Armenia Transports Hundreds of PKK Militants to Fight Azerbaijan," September 30, 2020.

⁶⁴ Associated Press, "Armenia, Azerbaijan Conflict Escalates; Turkey Calls Allegation of Downing Jet 'Absolutely Untrue,'" September 29, 2020.

⁶⁵ Joseph Trevithick, "Turkey's Forward Deployed F-16s in Azerbaijan Have Moved to a New Base," *The Drive*, October 26, 2020.

Turkey, Turkey's growing hard-power projection, and Turkish cooperation with Ukraine. This dynamic could have implications for U.S. relations with both NATO ally Turkey and Russia.⁶⁶

Role of Russia

Officially, Russia adopted a neutral stance on the autumn 2020 conflict prior to facilitating the agreement of November 9, 2020. On October 7, 2020, Russian presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia's security commitments to Armenia via its membership in the CSTO "do not extend to Karabakh."⁶⁷ Russian officials called for cease-fire and stabilization talks, including through discussions with Turkish counterparts.⁶⁸ On October 29, 2020, Russian President Vladimir Putin said a "long-term settlement [lies] in finding a balance of interests that would suit both sides.... Everyone has their own truth. There are no simple solutions, since the knot is tied in a very complicated way."⁶⁹

On November 9, 2020, Azerbaijani forces shot down a Russian Mi-24 helicopter inside Armenia, near Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan exclave located west of Armenia, killing two and wounding one. The helicopter reportedly was escorting a Russian military convoy from Russia's 102nd military base in Gyumri, Armenia. Azerbaijan quickly issued an apology and promised an investigation into the matter.⁷⁰

November 2020 Agreement

On November 9, 2020, Azerbaijani President Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan, and Russian President Putin issued a joint statement that several media reports referred to as a cease-fire or peace agreement.⁷¹ As of January 2021, the agreement appears to have halted the war.

If implemented in full, the November 9 agreement would secure—and extend—substantial territorial gains for Azerbaijan while ostensibly retaining security for and Armenian control over reduced territory within Nagorno-Karabakh. One major immediate consequence of the agreement was the deployment to the conflict zone of Russian forces to serve as a peacekeeping contingent.

⁶⁶ CRS Report R41368, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas; CRS Insight IN11557, *Turkey: U.S. Sanctions Under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

⁶⁷ *Moscow Times*, "Russia's Security Guarantees for Armenia Don't Extend to Karabakh, Putin Says," October 7, 2020.

⁶⁸ *Al Jazeera*, "Armenia-Azerbaijan Clashes: How the World Reacted," September 27, 2020.

⁶⁹ TASS Russian News Agency (TASS), "'Balance of Interests': Putin's Formula for Settling Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," October 29, 2020.

⁷⁰ Andrew E. Kramer, "Azerbaijan Apologizes for Downing Russian Helicopter, Killing Two," *New York Times*, November 9, 2020; *RFE/RL*, "Russian Military Helicopter Shot Down in Armenia Amid Karabakh Fighting," November 9, 2020; TASS, "Azerbaijan Apologizes for Shooting Down a Russian Military Helicopter in Armenia," November 9, 2020.

⁷¹ The agreement is available at President of Russia, "Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation," November 10, 2020. Prior to this agreement, three other cease-fire efforts had been attempted, including one on October 25 via U.S. mediation. Nailia Bagirova and Nvard Hovhannisyan, "U.S. Backed Truce Crumbles as Nagorno-Karabakh Fighting Resumes," Reuters, October 26, 2020.

Figure 3. Cease-Fire Agreement of November 9, 2020



Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Note: Map is unofficial. CRS is unable to verify the accuracy of indicated boundaries and areas of territorial control.

The November 9, 2020, agreement consists of nine points. In addition to a cease-fire and exchange of prisoners and the dead, the points include the following:

- Return of territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan's control
- Deployment of almost 2,000 Russian peacekeepers to the conflict zone
- Establishment of a peacekeeping center to monitor the cease-fire
- Withdrawal of Armenian forces from the region
- Maintenance of a land corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh
- Return of internally displaced persons and refugees

- Establishment of a land transport corridor across Armenia between the Azerbaijani mainland and the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan (located west of Armenia)

Regarding territorial control, the agreement states the opposing military forces are to remain at their current positions and Russian peacekeepers are to be deployed along the line of contact. In practice, this provision has allowed Azerbaijan to retain its wartime gains both around and within Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition, the agreement required Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces to withdraw from additional territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh (specifically, the Kalbajar, Lachin, and Agdam regions).⁷² The withdrawal of Armenian forces from these regions has been accompanied by the departure of tens of thousands of ethnic Armenian residents from longtime settlements in the southern part of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as from territories outside the region that Armenians have settled in since the end of the war in the 1990s.⁷³ Armenian civilians reportedly destroyed homes and other structures to prevent them from falling under Azerbaijani control.⁷⁴

The declaration does not explicitly address the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh or its official boundaries. Some observers contend the declaration replicates at least some of the long-standing basic principles that for years have formed the basis of negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia via the facilitation of the Minsk Group.⁷⁵ Other elements of these principles were not replicated. A fundamental aspect of the basic principles is that they are considered as a single package, to include agreement on “the future determination of the final legal status” of Nagorno-Karabakh and guarantees for the region’s security and self-governance; these latter points are not elements of the November 9, 2020, agreement. In addition, the basic principles assumed an international peacekeeping mission, not an exclusively Russian one.

Per the November 9, 2020, agreement, Russia reportedly has deployed at least 1,960 soldiers, 90 armored personnel carriers, and 380 vehicles and special equipment in a peacekeeping contingent to the conflict zone.⁷⁶ These forces are said to be from Russia’s 15th Separate Motor Rifle Brigade, which is Russia’s designated peacekeeping unit. Russia is deploying observation posts along the cease-fire line and in the Lachin corridor to monitor the truce, ensure residents’ safety, and provide security for transit between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian peacekeepers also have secured some historic Armenian churches and other cultural centers.⁷⁷ The agreement provides for a peacekeeping center in Azerbaijan (outside the conflict zone) to monitor

⁷² Armenia was to hand over Kelbajar by November 15, 2020; Agdam by November 20; and Lachin by December 1. Azerbaijan agreed to extend the deadline for Armenia to withdraw from Kelbajar until November 25 in response to requests from Armenia. *RFE/RL*, “Azerbaijan Extends Deadline for Armenia to Withdraw from Key District Under Karabakh Truce,” November 15, 2020; Joshua Kucera, “After Days of Chaos, Armenia and Azerbaijan Delay Territory Handover,” *Eurasianet*, November 15, 2020; Naira Nalbandian, “Armenian Troop Withdrawals Completed,” *RFE/RL*, December 1, 2020.

⁷³ Adrian Hartrick, “Karabakh’s Latest Cycle of Displacement,” *Eurasianet*, November 14, 2020.

⁷⁴ Reuters, “Armenians Set Fire to Homes Before Handing Village over to Azerbaijan,” November 14, 2020; Andy Heil, “For Displaced Azerbaijanis, Truce Reawakens ‘Dream’ of Returning Home,” *RFE/RL*, November 16, 2020.

⁷⁵ Matthew Bryza, “Azerbaijan-Armenia Peace Deal Could Be the Diplomatic Breakthrough the Region Needs,” Atlantic Council, November 11, 2020.

⁷⁶ Denis Dmitriev, “Here’s What Russia Had Pledged (and Risked) with Peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Meduza*, November 10, 2020; TASS, “Russian Peacekeepers Outposts, Headquarters Deployed to Karabakh—Defense Ministry,” November 15, 2020; Raja Abdulrahim and Ann M. Simmons, “Russia’s Role in Enforcing Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh Stirrs Hopes, Bitterness,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 28, 2020.

⁷⁷ Daria Litvinova, “Russian Peacekeepers Deploy to Secure Nagorno-Karabakh Truce,” Associated Press, November 10, 2020; Thomas de Waal, “Now Comes a Karabakh War over Cultural Heritage,” *Eurasianet*, November 16, 2020.

implementation of the cease-fire; reports indicate the center is to be jointly staffed by Russian and Turkish forces.⁷⁸ Additionally, Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Border Troops are to guarantee free movement between Azerbaijan and its exclave of Nakhichevan, located west of Armenia, although it is not known when this provision is to come into effect.⁷⁹

Since the cease-fire, periodic clashes between Azerbaijani and Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces have been reported. These clashes have resulted in some casualties and the detention of military personnel. The sides also have carried out prisoner exchanges.⁸⁰

Impact of the War in Armenia and Azerbaijan

The cease-fire agreement led to political turmoil in Armenia. In announcing the agreement, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan said it was “unspeakably painful for me personally and for our people” but the decision was based on “an in-depth analysis of the military situation and the assessment of the people who know the situation best.” Pashinyan said that although “this is not a victory,... this should become the start of the era of our national unification and rebirth.”⁸¹ The leader of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Arayik Harutyunyan, confirmed his consent to the agreement.⁸²

After the November 9, 2020, agreement was announced, protestors in Armenia attacked government buildings and temporarily occupied the Armenian parliament. Parliamentary Chairman Ararat Mirzoyan reportedly was pulled from his car and beaten, leading to his hospitalization (two people were arrested and charged with assault).⁸³ Protestors and opposition politicians called for Pashinyan’s resignation.

On November 14, 2020, the former head of Armenia’s National Security Service (currently an opposition politician) was arrested “on suspicion of usurping power and preparing the assassination” of Pashinyan.⁸⁴ Armenia’s ministers of foreign affairs, defense, and economy resigned. Armenian President Armen Sarkissian urged the government to call snap elections (Armenia’s presidency is mainly a ceremonial position).⁸⁵ Protests calling for Pashinyan’s resignation and new elections continued through December 2020.

In Azerbaijan, support for the military operation and the Azerbaijani government has been high, with the outcome sparking mass celebrations. Upon signing the November 9, 2020, agreement, Azerbaijani President Aliyev called it “our glorious victory” and said, “our people’s 30-year

⁷⁸ Suzan Fraser, “Turkish Parliament Approves Peacekeepers for Azerbaijan,” Associated Press, November 17, 2020.

⁷⁹ Pavel Felgenhauer, “The Karabakh War Ends as Russian Troops Move In,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, November 12, 2020; bne IntelliNews, “Azerbaijan’s Aliyev Calls on Armenia, Russia, Turkey and Iran to Assist in Creating Nakhchivan Land Corridor,” December 2, 2020.

⁸⁰ *RFE/RL*, “Azerbaijan, Armenia Swap Prisoners as Part of Nagorno-Karabakh Truce Deal,” December 14, 2020; *RFE/RL*, “Dozens of Armenian Soldiers ‘Captured’ in Nagorno-Karabakh Raid,” December 16, 2020.

⁸¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, “Military Aggression of Azerbaijan: Chronicle of Developments 10.11.2020,” November 10, 2020, at https://www.mfa.am/en/awaa_chr/2020/11/10/w_nk_2020/10641.

⁸² Gohar Hakobyan, “Arayik Harutyunyan: ‘If Military Operations Continued, We Would Have Lost All of Artsakh,’” *Aravot*, November 10, 2020.

⁸³ Ani Meljumyan and Joshua Kucera, “Armenian Government Under Attack Following War Defeat,” *Eurasianet*, November 10, 2020.

⁸⁴ *RFE/RL*, “Armenian Opposition Leader Detained, Accused of Plotting to Kill PM Pashinian,” November 14, 2020.

⁸⁵ *RFE/RL*, “Armenian President Calls for Snap Elections as Government Faces Mounting Pressure over Karabakh Deal,” November 17, 2020.

longing will come to an end.”⁸⁶ After the war, some debate in Azerbaijan focused on the question of whether Azerbaijan’s armed forces prematurely ceased their offensive.⁸⁷

Families displaced from territories in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in the 1990s might have the possibility to return home. A mass return of Azerbaijanis likely would require major investments. Towns and settlements in the conflict zone are in various states of destruction or disrepair, and mines and unexploded ordnance pose risks to return.⁸⁸

U.S. Responses

The United States, as a Minsk Group co-chair, has sought to facilitate a resolution to the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict that achieves a negotiated settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh’s political status, peaceably restores Azerbaijani control over territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, and provides security for residents of and returnees to the conflict zone.

The Trump Administration made several efforts to halt the fighting in autumn 2020 and to restart negotiations. On September 27, 2020, the U.S. Department of State expressed “alarm” at “reports of large scale military action along the Line of Contact” and “condemn[ed] in the strongest terms this escalation of violence.”⁸⁹ The statement noted that Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun held discussions with the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan and urged an immediate cessation of hostilities. The statement also noted that “participation in the escalating violence by external parties would be deeply unhelpful and only exacerbate regional tensions.” In a September 27 press briefing, President Trump responded to a question on the conflict. He noted that “we have a lot of good relationships in that area. We’ll see if we can stop it.”⁹⁰

On October 1, President Trump joined the presidents of Russia and France to issue a trilateral statement “condemn[ing] in the strongest terms the recent escalation of violence along the Line of Contact in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone.”⁹¹ The statement called for “an immediate cessation of hostilities between the relevant military forces” and “on the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to commit without delay to resuming substantive negotiations, in good faith and without preconditions.”

On October 23, U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo met in Washington, DC, with the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in separate meetings. The Department of State said Secretary Pompeo “emphasized the need to end the violence and protect civilians” and “stressed

⁸⁶ President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation,” November 10, 2020, at <https://en.president.az/articles/45924>.

⁸⁷ Cavid Aga, @cavidaga, Twitter, November 16, 2020, at <https://twitter.com/cavidaga/status/1328253342850670592>.

⁸⁸ Anton Troianovski and Carlotta Gall, “After War Between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Peace Sees Winners and Losers Swap Places,” *New York Times*, November 16, 2020; Andy Heil, “For Displaced Azerbaijanis, Truce Reawakens ‘Dream’ of Returning Home,” *RFE/RL*, November 16, 2020; ICG, *Improving Prospects for Peace After the Nagorno-Karabakh War*, December 22, 2020.

⁸⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Escalation of Violence Between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” September 27, 2020.

⁹⁰ White House, “Remarks by President Trump in Press Briefing,” September 27, 2020.

⁹¹ On October 5, 2020, U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and the Russian and French ministers of foreign affairs issued another trilateral statement condemning the escalation of violence and calling attacks targeting civilian centers “an unacceptable threat to the stability of the region.” See “Statement of the Presidents of the Russian Federation, the United States of America and the French Republic on Nagorno-Karabakh,” October 1, 2020, available at <https://www.elysee.fr/en/all-actualities>; U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement Calling for a Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh,” October 5, 2020.

the importance of the sides entering substantive negotiations.”⁹² The governments of the United States, Armenia, and Azerbaijan then issued a joint statement indicating that the United States “facilitated intensive negotiations ... to move Armenia and Azerbaijan closer to a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.”⁹³ President Trump congratulated the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders for agreeing to a U.S.-brokered cease-fire, stating that “many lives will be saved” (the cease-fire, like two previous ones, did not hold).⁹⁴

On October 30, 2020, the Minsk Group co-chairs met with the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Geneva, Switzerland, where they agreed to a number of measures. Both sides agreed, for example, not to deliberately target civilian populations, to facilitate the recovery and exchange of remains, and to prepare for an exchange of prisoners of war.⁹⁵

In response to the November 9, 2020, agreement, Secretary Pompeo issued a statement that “the United States welcomes the cessation of active hostilities” and that “ending the recent fighting is only the first step toward achieving a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.” The statement indicated the United States would provide \$5 million in humanitarian assistance “to assist people affected by the recent fighting.”⁹⁶ U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE James Gilmore said, “we are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation on the ground ... [and] urge the sides to avoid actions that could result in the resumption of violence ... [and to] take advantage of the cessation of violence to build a lasting peace.”⁹⁷

Congressional Response

Several Members of the 116th Congress issued statements in response to the autumn 2020 outbreak of armed conflict. On September 29, 2020, for example, the then-chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs issued a statement calling “on leaders in Azerbaijan and Armenia to take concrete steps to de-escalate the situation, end hostilities, and refrain from seizing territory across the line of contact.” He also stated that “the influence of external actors such as Turkey recklessly meddling in the conflict is troubling. The international community *must* remain committed to the peace process.”⁹⁸

On October 1, 2020, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and three other Senators issued a statement calling on both countries to “immediately cease the violence and return to the [OSCE] Minsk Group to negotiate a peaceful end to this decades-long disagreement.” The statement also called on “regional powers” to “end their aggressive escalatory actions and channel their efforts into bringing all parties to the negotiating table.”⁹⁹

⁹² U.S. Department of State, “Secretary Pompeo’s Meetings with Armenian Foreign Minister Mnatsakanyan and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Bayramov,” October 23, 2020.

⁹³ U.S. Department of State, “U.S.-Armenia-Azerbaijan Joint Statement,” October 25, 2020.

⁹⁴ Donald J. Trump, @realDonaldTrump, Twitter, October 25, 2020.

⁹⁵ OSCE, “Press Statement by the Co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group,” October 30, 2020.

⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State, “The United States Welcomes Cessation of Hostilities Between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Announces New Assistance to Respond to the Nagorno-Karabakh Humanitarian Emergency,” November 17, 2020.

⁹⁷ U.S. Mission to the OSCE, “Statement on the Conflict in and Around Nagorno Karabakh,” November 12, 2020.

⁹⁸ House Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Engel Statement on Eruption of Fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh,” September 29, 2020.

⁹⁹ Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Risch, Rubio, Portman, Johnson: Armenia and Azerbaijan Must Immediately Cease Violence,” October 1, 2020.

Also on October 1, 2020, a group of 49 Members of the House wrote to Secretary of State Pompeo “to express our deep concern with Azerbaijan’s renewed aggression against Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) and the rising possibility of a wider conflict with Armenia.” The letter asked the Administration to “use all available diplomatic tools to reduce tensions, end the fighting, and restrain Azerbaijan from further offensive actions.”¹⁰⁰

In October 2020, during the 116th Congress, three related resolutions were introduced in the House and one related resolution was introduced in the Senate.

- H.Res. 1165, introduced October 1, 2020 (with 112 cosponsors), would have “condemn[ed] Azerbaijan’s military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh and denounce[d] Turkish interference in the conflict.”
- H.Res. 1196, introduced October 16, 2020 (with two cosponsors), would have “call[ed] for an end to escalating violence in the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, for each side to return to the peace process, and for external parties to cease their support for an interference in the conflict.”
- H.Res. 1203, introduced October 23, 2020 (with 42 cosponsors), would have “support[ed] the Republic of Artsakh at all levels of civil society and government and recognize[d] the people of Artsakh’s inalienable right to self-determination.”
- S.Res. 754, introduced October 22, 2020 (with 13 co-sponsors), would have “request[ed] information on the Government of Azerbaijan’s human rights practices.”

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260, Division W, Title VI, §615), requires the Director of National Intelligence to submit to the congressional intelligence committees an assessment regarding tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, “including with respect to the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.”

Several Members of Congress previously expressed support for a set of three measures to strengthen the cease-fire regime in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone known as the Royce-Engel proposals. In 2015, then-Chairman Ed Royce and then-Ranking Member Eliot Engel of the House Foreign Affairs Committee proposed an agreement to (1) refrain from deploying snipers along the line of contact, (2) allow the OSCE to install advanced monitoring equipment, and (3) deploy additional OSCE observers along the line of contact.¹⁰¹

Related U.S. Assistance

Enacted in 1992, Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act (P.L. 102-511) prohibited most bilateral assistance to Azerbaijan unless the President determines Azerbaijan has made “demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.” The United States also withheld military assistance to Armenia, reflecting a policy of “evenhandedness” toward the two countries.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Congressman Adam Schiff, “Schiff, Pallone, Speier and 46 Bipartisan Members Urge Secretary of State to Help Reduce Tensions Between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” press release, October 1, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Armenian Assembly of America, “85 Members of Congress Sign Royce-Engel Letter to Ambassador Warlick,” press release, October 28, 2015.

¹⁰² U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Assistance to Armenia—Fiscal Year 2002,” June 6, 2002, at <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/11027.htm>.

In October 2001, Congress enacted an annually renewable presidential waiver (in P.L. 107-115; 22 U.S.C. 5812 note) that enabled the United States to begin providing military assistance to Azerbaijan and, hence, to Armenia. Since then, the United States has adhered to a principle of parity with regard to Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance for Azerbaijan and Armenia.¹⁰³ The United States appears to have last provided FMF to Armenia and Azerbaijan in FY2017 (\$1 million each that year).

The principle of parity has not applied to all forms of military assistance. In FY2018 and FY2019, the United States provided at least \$26.9 million in obligated assistance to Azerbaijan under the Department of Defense's "Section 333" (global train-and-equip) authority to help build Azerbaijan's capacity for southern border (i.e., Iran) and Caspian Sea maritime security operations.¹⁰⁴

From FY1998 to FY2019, the United States provided about \$50 million in humanitarian assistance for the Nagorno-Karabakh region through implementing partners "in support of demining, shelter, water, microfinance, and health interventions."¹⁰⁵ The United States also has supported conflict-related confidence-building activities in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Demining

In 2017, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reported that in recent years, humanitarian assistance for Nagorno-Karabakh had focused "on the life-saving clearance of minefields and contaminated battle areas, which continue to pose humanitarian risks and impede the safe and effective use of this land."¹⁰⁶ In total, the United States has provided more than \$17 million in assistance for demining in Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁰⁷ The United States has not provided assistance for demining in regions of Azerbaijan located outside of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In 2019, HALO Trust, a nongovernmental organization, began a new survey that uncovered additional minefields within Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁰⁸ In an April 2019 budget hearing, then-USAID Administrator Mark Green responded affirmatively to the question of whether USAID was "committed to completing the clearance of landmines and unexploded ordnances within the traditional boundaries" of Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁰⁹ Subsequently, some Members of Congress and media reports indicated the State Department and USAID did not intend to request new funding for demining of newly surveyed minefields.¹¹⁰ It remains to be seen how the autumn 2020

¹⁰³ In 2011, Congress recommended that parity also apply to International Military Education and Training programs. U.S. Congress, Conference Committee, *Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2012*, conference report to accompany H.R. 2055, 112th Cong., 1st sess., H.Rept. 112-331 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2011), p. 1346.

¹⁰⁴ In past years, the Department of Defense also has used cooperative threat reduction and train-and-equip funds to support Azerbaijan's capacity to conduct maritime nonproliferation and counterterrorism operations. Data available via the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Foreign Aid Explorer, at <https://explorer.usaid.gov>.

¹⁰⁵ USAID, "Fact Sheet: Humanitarian Assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh," October 2017; CRS communication with USAID.

¹⁰⁶ USAID, "Fact Sheet: Humanitarian Assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh," October 2017.

¹⁰⁷ USAID, "Fact Sheet: Humanitarian Assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh," October 2017; CRS communication with USAID.

¹⁰⁸ Joshua Kucera, "U.S. Ends Funding for Karabakh Demining," *Eurasianet*, March 19, 2020.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *FY2020 Foreign Assistance Budget and Policy Priorities*, hearings, 116th Congress, 1st sess., April 9, 2019, p. 59.

¹¹⁰ U.S. Congressman T. J. Cox, "Reps. T. J. Cox and Brad Sherman Lead Letter to USAID Urging Administrator Green to Continue Funding for Demining Programs in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh)," press release, August 6, 2019;

conflict, which has led to new risks of unexploded ordnance, could affect consideration of related U.S. assistance.

Congressional Action on Assistance

In FY2020, consistent with previous statements, the Senate Appropriations Committee stated that the committee “remains concerned with the protracted conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.”¹¹¹ The committee directed the State Department and USAID to “consult with the Committee on programs that can further create conditions for resolution of the conflict and help address the humanitarian needs for all victims of the conflict.” The conference report to accompany the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 116-92) stated, “the conferees underscore the importance of preventing further violence and making progress toward a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.”¹¹²

Before the war, many Members of Congress expressed support for new demining and other humanitarian assistance for Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as for a suspension of U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan.¹¹³ The House-passed version of the FY2021 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill (H.R. 7608) included an offset amendment that would increase the Economic Support Fund by \$1.4 million and reduce educational and cultural exchange programs by the same amount. This amendment was reported by the Rules Committee as intended “to fund USAID’s demining program in Nagorno-Karabakh.”¹¹⁴ The amendment was not incorporated in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260).

The autumn 2020 war has raised awareness of the danger of mines and unexploded ordnance in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone and of other humanitarian challenges. Some Members have called for the provision of new assistance related to the conflict and for a review of U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan and the Section 907 waiver.

Outlook

Local and regional consequences of the autumn 2020 war continue to unfold. Many Armenians are newly displaced, including many who are permitted to return but unsure if they can safely do so. In Azerbaijan, the government is contemplating the return of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis displaced from the conflict zone in the 1990s. The war did not resolve the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh, however, and it upended the long-standing OSCE Minsk Group conflict resolution framework. The war has led to political turmoil in Armenia and has

Joshua Kucera, “U.S. Ends Funding for Karabakh Demining,” *Eurasianet*, March 19, 2020.

¹¹¹ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Appropriations, *Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill, 2020*, report to accompany S. 2583, 116th Cong., 1st Sess., S.Rept. 116-126 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2019), p. 128.

¹¹² U.S. Congress, Conference Committee, *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020*, conference report to accompany S. 1790, 116th Cong., 1st sess., H.Rept. 116-333 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2019), p. 1418.

¹¹³ See, for example, U.S. Congressman T. J. Cox, “Reps. T. J. Cox and Brad Sherman Lead Letter to USAID Urging Administrator Green to Continue Funding for Demining Programs in Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh),” press release, August 6, 2019; *Asbarez*, “75 Lawmakers Call on Congress to Save Artsakh Aid,” March 11, 2020; and U.S. Senator Bob Menendez, “Menendez Leads Colleagues in Calling for Support of Humanitarian Projects in Nagorno-Karabakh,” press release, April 27, 2020.

¹¹⁴ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Rules, Summary of Amendment 49 (version 2), Division A, in “H.R. 7608 - State, Foreign Operations, Agriculture, Rural Development, Interior, Environment, Military Construction, and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2021,” at <https://rules.house.gov/bill/116/hr-7608>.

strengthened the government of Azerbaijan. It also may increase the influence of regional powers Russia and Turkey.

In the 117th Congress, Members of Congress may address issues related to the aftermath of the autumn 2020 war. In seeking to influence or shape U.S. policy toward Azerbaijan and Armenia, Members of Congress may consider the following questions:

- What are the prospects for renewed fighting? Will Azerbaijan, Armenia, and local populations respect the cease-fire agreement and accept the sustained presence of Russian peacekeepers in the conflict zone?
- What are the prospects for the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons to all areas of the conflict zone?
- What are the prospects for Minsk Group or other international mediation efforts to resolve outstanding issues, including the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh? What role should the United States play in these efforts?
- Should the United States provide new targeted aid to assist victims of the autumn 2020 war and efforts to remove mines and unexploded ordnance? Should Congress reconsider the types and amounts of assistance the U.S. government provides to Armenia and Azerbaijan? Should Congress consider how the war might affect the Section 907 prohibition on aid to Azerbaijan and the waiver that enables assistance?
- How will Russia's new military presence in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone affect Russia's regional power and influence?
- How will the war and its aftermath impact Turkey's regional power and influence, including with regard to its relationship with Azerbaijan as a key weapons supplier (alongside Israel) and its interactions with Russia? Under what circumstances might Turkey renew efforts to normalize relations with Armenia, given that Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces have withdrawn from much of the conflict zone? How would Armenia respond to such efforts?
- With Azerbaijan now in control of its full border with Iran, how will Azerbaijan's relations with Iran and Iran's minority Azerbaijani population develop?

Author Information

Cory Welt
Specialist in Russian and European Affairs

Andrew S. Bowen
Analyst in Russian and European Affairs

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