Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh region is a mountainous and heavily forested area located at the edge of Eastern Europe and Asia. Nagorno-Karabakh is the heart of a decades-long fight between the two countries that escalated into a war when the Soviet Union collapsed; in fact, it’s the longest running conflict in post-Soviet Eurasia. The region is internationally recognized as Azerbaijan, but ethnic Armenians control the area and claim independence. The Armenians reject Azerbaijani rule and have been running their own government since the 1990s, when Azerbaijan forces were forced out in war.

In the early 1990s, a war killed 30,000 people and displaced 1 million. Armenia gained control of Nagorno-Karabakh and several surrounding territories.

In 1994, fighting ceased with Armenian forces having control of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts. Azerbaijanis fled Armenia and the controlled territories, and Armenians left their homes in Azerbaijan.

April 2016: Azerbaijan begins the biggest offensive attack since the 1994 ceasefire. Hundreds die on both sides. Azerbaijan claims control over strategic hilltops.

2017: Azerbaijan carries out missile strikes against Armenian defensive positions.

Mid-2020: Azerbaijani forces try to cross into the Armenian side. Pro-war protests sweep through Azerbaijan after a direct hit killed several officers. This escalation is the deadliest since 2016.
August 2020: Turkey pledges full support to Azerbaijan’s efforts.

September 2020: Azerbaijan initiates a full-scale offensive along the Line of Contact, labeled it a “counter-attack”.

October 2020: a ceasefire is agreed upon but quickly violated by Azerbaijani shelling.

October 2020: Azerbaijan uses internationally banned chemical weapons against the state of Artsakh.

August 2022: Azerbaijan attempted to breach the line of contact in northern Nagorno-Karabakh, igniting clashes once more.

September 2022: large scale clashes erupt on the border. Azerbaijan used artillery, mortar, attack drones, and small arms; and then made no statement about an announced ceasefire.

292 incidents have been reported along the Line of Contact from January 2015 to September 2020 (this excludes a two week period in April 2016, in which the fighting could not be tracked).

Both sides blame the other for this recent uptick in fighting, which has happened on the border, in Nagorno-Karabakh, and within Armenia, a notable escalation. However, analysts believe Azerbaijan has initiated this to test Russia’s ability and willingness to come to Armenia’s aid. Russia has close ties with both countries. Recently, Armenia has called on Russia to implement the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CTSO) charter. Similar to NATO, it states that an aggression against one is an aggression against all.

This continuing conflict has caused hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides, and is of particular international concern due to the area’s gas and oil pipelines that are crucial for world markets. The fighting could escalate farther into a war, which would drag in Russia,
Turkey, and other countries with alliances. Nagorno-Karabakh has the potential to be a large-scale disaster.
Resources:


https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer

https://www.npr.org/2022/09/19/1123515328/armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-explained
