

The 2024 Conference on the Caucasus Region

Caucasia—A Geographic Scene Setter

The Caucasus region, situated between the Black Sea to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east, represents a complex blend of physical geography that includes a rugged mountainous terrains, lowlands, and bodies of water. It is home to the Greater and Lesser Caucasus



Mountain ranges, which include some of Europe's highest peaks, such as Mount Elbrus, known to be the highest peak in Europe. The region is further characterized by varied climatic zones, from subtropical and humid areas along the western and northern peripheries to arid and semi-desert areas in the east and southeast.¹ This varied topography and climate influence biodiversity in the region, making it among the world's hotspots for endemism (species that are indigenous to one location).²

Agriculture plays a significant role in the socio-economic fabric of the Caucasus region. The varied landscapes and climates in the region allow for a wide variety of agricultural practices to take place. The mountainous areas of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are renowned for vineyards, where wine production is a crucial economic activity.³ Additionally, the region continues to maintain some traditional and sustainable farming systems, such as agropastoralism, where the landowner combines farming and grazing of livestock. The Caucasus region is also very rich in various natural resources, including significant reserves of oil, gas, coal, and various metals.⁴ Azerbaijan, in particular, has oil reserves that are crucial to its economy and are an important part of Europe's energy security strategy.⁵ Similarly, the Terek and Kura rivers' hydroelectric potential is sizable, with existing infrastructure for hydroelectric power even though there is room for expansion. Despite the wealth of natural resources, sustainable management remains a top concern due to the increasing pressure on these resources from population growth, economic development, and climate change. Finding a balance between human needs and environmental sustainability remains a challenge for the region.

State and Political Geography

Home to the countries of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in addition to the Russian administrative regions of North Caucasus, this region is known for its unique political geography throughout the

¹ "Climate zones of the Caucasus ecoregion." *Grida*. <https://www.grida.no/resources/7894>.

² "Hotspots and conservation gaps: an assessment of the Caucasus endemic plants." *Plant Biosystems*. 150(2), 379-385.

³ "The Caucasus: the birthplace of wine making!" *Globally Cool*. <https://globallycool.nl/2019/12/16/export-quality-management-training-wine-sector-georgia/>.

⁴ "Climate change and agricultural development: impacts and adaptation options for Armenia." *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change*, 18(5), 667-677.

⁵ "Azerbaijan energy profile." *International Energy Agency*. <https://www.iea.org/reports/azerbaijan-energy-profile/energy-security>.

course of history. The area has seen several shifts in regional dominance over the centuries, resulting in a complex mosaic of cultural, ethnic, and religious groups cohabiting within correlated sovereign territories.⁶ Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to enormous political and economic changes; the emergence of new nation-states in the region was marked by violent ethnic and border conflicts, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia.

In the modern geopolitical environment, the Caucasus region bears a strategic significance for global powers, particularly Russia, the United States, and the European Union. Russia considers it within its sphere of influence, indicated by its involvement in regional conflicts and efforts towards regional integration through initiatives like the Eurasian Economic Union.⁷ Conversely, the United States and the European Union have sought to pull the region westwards using mechanisms, such as the Eastern Partnership program, aimed at promoting democracy, economic integration, and securing alternative energy routes.⁸ Moreover, the region's position as an energy corridor, transporting oil and gas from the Caspian Sea to global markets, contributes to its geopolitical significance.

At the domestic level, the countries of the region reflect varying degrees of democratic governance. While Armenia saw a 'Velvet Revolution' in 2018 that provided a peaceful power transition and fostered hopes for a more democratic society, countries like Azerbaijan continue to experience authoritarian rule under President Ilham Aliyev.⁹ Georgia, on the other hand, has seen both periods of democratic reform and the retrenchment of authoritarianism. These varied political landscapes influence interactions between these countries and the international community, adding to the complexities of the region's political geography.

A History of Conflict

The expansionist ambitions of the Russian Empire towards the Caucasus region began in earnest in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Russo-Persian War (1804-1813) culminated in a defeat for Persia and the signing of the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813. The Treaty of Gulistan, often characterized as a turning point in Caucasian history, led to the recognition of Russian sovereignty over a large portion of the Caucasus region, including modern-day Georgia and a significant portion of Azerbaijan—marking the initiation of a shift in the power balance within the region.¹⁰

Despite attempts at implementing the Treaty of Gulistan, hostilities between Persia and Russia flared anew, leading to another war from 1826 to 1828, concluding with the “replacement” Treaty of Turkmenchay. This treaty compelled Persia to cede its remaining territories in the Southern Caucasus, including the areas that are currently recognized as parts of Armenia and Azerbaijan. In

⁶ German, T. C. "The Politics of the South Caucasus: national identities, conflict and Russian influence." *Federal Foreign Office, Berlin*.

⁷ "Russia's Stony Path in the South Caucasus." *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <https://tinyurl.com/2s22scc8>.

⁸ Manoli, P.. "The Dynamics of Black Sea Subregionalism." Ashgate.

⁹ Ismayilova, K. "The Velvet Revolution in Armenia: Domestic vs. External Factors." *Insight Turkey*, 21(2).

¹⁰ Bournoutian, G. A. "From the Kur to the Aras: A Military History of Russia's Move into the South Caucasus and the First Russo-Iranian War, 1801–1813."

effect, the Treaty of Turkmenchay entrenched Russian dominance in the South Caucasus and curtailed Persian influence, marking the end of centuries-old Persian suzerainty over this highly contested region.¹¹ In the decades following the Treaty of Turkmenchay, Russian control over the Caucasus continued to tighten.¹² This consolidation was met with staunch resistance, particularly in the mountainous areas of the North Caucasus, leading to a series of protracted and brutal conflicts collectively known as the Caucasian War (1817-1864). The war, characterized by fierce resistance movements, particularly by the Circassian tribes, ended in Russian victory and largely completed the process of Russian unification of the Caucasus region under its Imperial banner.

World War One

However, ethnic and political divisions personified by decades of war and conquest set the stage for tumultuous changes during and after the Great War—including the rise of nationalist movements which asserted independence from Russian dominance. The Caucasus states made up a critical theater between the warring Ottoman and Russian empires. As Russia entered the war on the side of the Allies in 1914, it launched a massive offensive in the Eastern Anatolia region, intending to reach Constantinople and secure the Straits. While Russia won early victories, the harsh climate, rugged terrain, and logistical challenges severely hampered their progress.¹³ Following the Russian October Revolution in 1917, the Caucasian front saw drastic changes when the new Bolshevik government withdrew from the war, leaving the region to operate effectively on its own.

The most devastating aspect of World War I in the Caucasus region was the occurrence of the Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴ The Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire had long suffered from discrimination and marginalization. However, the situation drastically worsened during the war when the government embarked on a systematic campaign to eliminate the Armenian population, under the guise of relocations due to military necessities. Between 1915 and 1923, an estimated 1.5 million Armenians were killed through mass massacres, forced marches, and concentration camps, marking the first genocide of the 20th century.¹⁵

Postwar Developments

The impact of World War II on the Caucasus region was significant and unfolded amid the complex backdrop of the integration of Caucasus States into the Soviet Union and escalating internal ethnic conflicts that became more visible during and after the war. When World War II commenced, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia were already part of the Soviet Union. Despite the Armenian genocide and efforts by Stalin, the ruler of the Soviet Union, to suppress their national identities, the region remained a vibrant mosaic of ethnicities, languages, and religions.¹⁶

¹¹ "The Treaty of Turkmenchay between Russia and Iran signed." *Presidential Library, Russia*.
<https://www.prlib.ru/en/history/619048>.

¹² Aves, J. *Struggle for the Caucasus*. In J. Riley (Ed.), *The Road to Stalingrad*. London: Little, Brown Book Group.

¹³ McMeekin, S. "The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Modern Middle East, 1908-1923." Penguin.

¹⁴ Suny, R. G. "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide." Princeton University Press.

¹⁵ "The Armenian Genocide (1915-16): Overview." *The Holocaust Museum*.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-armenian-genocide-1915-16-overview>.

¹⁶ Jones, S. F. "The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918 - 2012: The First Georgian Republic and its Successors." Routledge.

During the war, these States gained strategic significance as Adolf Hitler sought to capture the oil-rich fields of Baku, necessary to fuel his war machine. The launch of Operation Edelweiss in 1942 marked the height of German ambition in the region. However, despite early victories, the German Wehrmacht underestimated the region's harsh weather and rugged terrain, factors that, coupled with ferocious Soviet resistance, led to their eventual failure. This marked a crucial turning point in the Eastern Front, signifying the start of Germany's strategic retreat.¹⁷ Simultaneously, this was a period of significant internal ethnic strife within the region. Suspicion of disloyalty among certain ethnic groups, predominantly Chechens, Ingush, and Karachays, led to mass deportations to Central Asia and Siberia under Stalin's policies.¹⁸ These deportations not only resulted in countless atrocities but also left long-lasting socio-political scars that dramatically influenced regional dynamics.

With the eventual Allied victory and the end of World War II, the Caucasus stayed within the boundaries of the Soviet Union. However, the social, political, and economic strains that developed during the following decades led to the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, granting Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia their independence. This independence brought new hopes, particularly for democratic governance and economic development, but also revived old conflicts, both within these nations and with Russia, some of which remain unresolved today.¹⁹

Territorial Fallout in the Post-Cold War Period

The Prigorodny region was given to North Ossetia after Stalin dissolved the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1944, displacing both the Chechen and the Ingush populations to central Asia.²⁰ When the Republic was reestablished in 1957, the Soviet Union gave the land to North Ossetia instead of returning it to the Chechen-Ingush Republic. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the Chechen-Ingush Republic was split into the two predominant ethnic groups: the Chechen and the Ingush.²¹ The Chechen population took control of the land of the fallen Chechen-Ingush Republic and decided to join the newly formed Russian Federation. The Ingush population started to reestablish the Prigorodny land as theirs and believe the land should be returned to them, but met much pushback with the Russian and Ossetian population already living in the region. Ossetians believe it was their land as this has been their home since 1944.²² This dispute created tensions throughout the region that continue to this day.

Chechnya, which is majority Muslim, has sought greater autonomy within the Russian Federation. Due to their religious and cultural differences as well as lingering resentment for the expulsion of Chechens in the 1940s, Chechnya fought both an active military conflict and engaged in

¹⁷ Bugay, N. "The Deportation of Peoples in the Soviet Union." *Nova Science Publishers*.

¹⁸ "The Massive Deportation of the Chechen People: How and why Chechens were Deported." *SciencesPo*.
<https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/fr/document/massive-deportation-chechen-people-how-and-why-chechens-were-deported.html>.

¹⁹ Asmus, R. D. "A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West." *NYU Press*.

²⁰ "Containing The Armed Conflict in Russia (East Prigorodny)." *The Better Evidence Project*.
<https://bep.carterschool.gmu.edu/containing-the-armed-conflict-in-russia-east-prigorodny/>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² "RUSSIA THE INGUSH-OSSETIAN CONFLICT IN THE PRIGORODNYI REGION." *Human Rights Watch*.
<https://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Russia.htm>.

low level guerrilla warfare, insurgency tactics. During the First Chechen War from 1994 until 1996, Russia invaded the country, but withdrew because of their unfamiliarity with the region. The First Chechen War was brutal with Grozny, Chechnya's capital city, leveled through indiscriminate bombing and between 40,000-80,000 people killed.²³ The fighting ended with a peace treaty in 1997, but the growing influence of jihadist terror groups inspired the population in the region and neighboring Dagestan to take up arms against the Russians. The Second Chechen War that started in 1999 was equally as brutal, with the Chechen rebels inflicting bombings and mass shootings against targets throughout Russia.²⁴ The Russian government won the Second Chechen War and imposed direct rule from Moscow before empowering a local warlord to rule on their behalf.²⁵ The fight against Chechen terror groups continued until 2009—at which point the Russian government



declared the fighting over.

But this was not the region's only territorial dispute, when Georgia had gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, they felt that Abkhazia—a small territory on the coast of the Black Sea—should be within their country. They thought it was their undeniable right for Abkhazia to be a part of their country as they saw them as ethnically Georgian. Abkhazia fought against this as they wanted to protect their national identity. On August 12th 1992, a 16-month war broke out between the two groups which killed up to 12,000 people and displaced about 200,000 more.²⁶ The early stages of this conflict were fueled by Russia's involvement. Although they recognized Georgia as an independent state, Russian weapons were sent to Abkhazia and used to bomb Georgian civilian targets; a handful of Russian fighters even defended Abkhazia.²⁷ Despite Russian support, Abkhazia did not gain its independence during the 1990s.

In August 2008, Russia directly intervened militarily into the dispute, fighting Georgia in order to get independence for Abkhazia as well as South Ossetia—another region in Georgia interested in independence. Russia had spent time since the 1990s strengthening its military and pulling Abkhazia and South Ossetia closer.²⁸ The battle in 2008 was quick, with Russia winning an easy victory and Georgia and Russia agreeing to a ceasefire on the conflict's fifth day.²⁹ Shortly after, Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent nations and maintains a military and government presence in both regions, violating the ceasefire with Georgia. Although this war was short, it had displaced an estimated 192,000 people, showing the impact of any small amount of conflict.³⁰

²³ "Russia's wars in Chechnya offer a grim warning of what could be in Ukraine." *NPR*. <https://rb.gy/Om4thk>; "The First Chechen War: A Blueprint for Destruction." *Bycardia*. <https://www.bycardia.org/post/the-first-chechen-war-a-blueprint-for-destruction>.

²⁴ "The War in Chechnya: A Military Analysis." *Strategic Analysis*. https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/sa/sa_aug00bag01.html.

²⁵ "Chechnya profile – Timeline." *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18190473>.

²⁶ "Georgian-Abkhaz conflict." *International Alert*. <https://www.international-alert.org/insights/georgian-abkhaz-conflict/>.

²⁷ "GEORGIA/ABKHAZIA: VIOLATIONS OF THE LAWS OF WAR AND RUSSIA'S ROLE IN THE CONFLICT." *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Georgia2.htm>.

²⁸ "Europe's forgotten war: The Georgia-Russia conflict explained a decade on." *Euronews*. <https://tinyurl.com/yknxbyha>.

²⁹ "5-day long Russo-Georgian War begins." *History.com*. <https://tinyurl.com/4hpc5asf>.

³⁰ *Ibid*.

The Current Situation

The Caucasus region remains an important locus for global politics. Beyond continued territorial challenges, the region faces environment, economic, and political challenges.

Environmental Challenges

While the region is known for its natural beauty, it also suffers from severe environmental degradation and is susceptible to climate change. Illegal logging, fishing, and the overuse of land from agriculture remain pressing threats.³¹ In Armenia, roughly 8% of the country's forests were cut down in the 1990s.³² Overall, only 10% of the region's ecosystem remains in pristine condition, with rivers, bodies of water, and ground water poisoned by untreated agricultural and industrial runoff.³³ Wild animals have not fared much better with them increasingly pushed into less healthy ecosystems and hunted to the brink of extinction by the illegal wildlife trade. For example, as of 2023 there are only 500 and 1500 red deer in Azerbaijan and Russia—despite there once being hundreds of thousands.³⁴

Climate change will only degrade the environment further as well as harm the region's economy. Climate change will increase the region's food insecurity, making agriculture more difficult; it will also take the region's precious water resources.³⁵ The strengthening of storms will lead to more intense and sudden rainfalls causing landslides and flash floods—always a concern given the region's mountainous terrain.³⁶ On the flipside, the region's droughts are expected to intensify. In Armenia, Lake Sevan is critical for hydroelectric power generation and water for irrigation and drinking, but it continues to shrink each year due to drought and overuse.³⁷ Environmental degradation and climate change must be fought and mitigated or they will exacerbate existing tensions between the region's different countries and ethnic groups.

Economic Challenges

The region also faces stark economic challenges, including high rates of poverty and inequality, that the war in Ukraine have only heightened. Positively, the region has seen its share of those in extreme poverty (defined as living on less than \$1.90 a day) decline from 33% in 2000 to 5% in 2019.³⁸ But by 2019, 40% of the region's population still lived on less than \$5.50 a day.³⁹ The war in Ukraine could see an additional 1 million people in the region fall into poverty due to a reduction in remittances from Russia and higher food costs.⁴⁰ Armenia is particularly vulnerable as it receives nearly 5% worth of its gross domestic product (GDP) from remittances from Russia.⁴¹ The region is also home to

³¹ "Caucasus – Threats." *Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund*. <https://tinyurl.com/49uj2sa7>.

³² Ibid.

³³ "CAUCASUS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT." *Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund*. <https://www.cepf.net/sites/default/files/final.caucasus.ep.pdf>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ "Climate Change and Security in the South Caucasus." *The Environment and Security Initiative*. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/9/331921.pdf>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Armenia's iconic lake on verge of destruction, environmentalists warn." *Eurasianet*. <https://tinyurl.com/2vpmft6b>.

³⁸ "War in Ukraine: Risks to Poverty and Inequality in the Caucasus and Central Asia." *The IMF*. <https://tinyurl.com/5a3yupy6>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ "Russia's War in Ukraine Could Raise Poverty in Caucasus, Central Asia." *The IMF*. <https://tinyurl.com/bddkc8fe>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

a large number of jobs in the informal economy. The informal economy is negative as governments are often not able to tax income earned from these positions and workers in the informal economy are not afforded many labor protections—subjecting them to lower wages and potentially unsafe working conditions. In Armenia around 35% of its GDP comes from the informal economy; while in Georgia and Azerbaijan it makes up around 30% of their economies.⁴² The region also faces high levels of inequality. In Azerbaijan, inequality is high. For example, less than 1% of Azerbaijanis are employed in the oil industry, despite the industry generating more than 50% of its GDP.⁴³ While the country is quite wealthy in terms of its GDP, much of this wealth does not make its way to its average citizens. Azerbaijan’s oil wealth is important, but too little of it is shared.

The greatest economic challenge the region faces is the continued lack of sustained peace and corruption. The region has too many border and territorial disputes, making it unattractive for foreign investors. Additionally, because of the ongoing disputes, countries must spend their budgets on military and national defense, leaving little left over to fund investments in education, health and the general economy. For example, Azerbaijan’s and Armenia’s military spending was valued at 5.27% and 4.44% of GDP, respectively, in 2021.⁴⁴ This dynamic is compounded by the region’s corruption. In 2022, Georgia, Armenia, Russia, and Azerbaijan ranked 41st, 63rd, 137th, and 157th, respectively, on Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index.⁴⁵ Corruption causes companies from other countries to make their investments elsewhere, not wanting to lose their money to bribes and extortion by government officials.

Political Challenges

The region also suffers from a deficit of democracy and human rights. Azerbaijan is rife with human rights abuses. Azerbaijan has few protections for speech and frequently censors and arrests critical journalists—as it did to 99 reporters in September 2022.⁴⁶ Additionally, despite laws against torture and illegal detention, the Azerbaijan government is accused of engaging in both, particularly against captured Armenian soldiers or those sympathetic to Armenians.⁴⁷ While Azerbaijan’s laws established the structures of a democracy, the country is anything but in practice. The New Azerbaijan Party wins all elections by landslides and its elections are considered neither free nor fair as the government uses its power to detain, hamper, and harass opposition party candidates.⁴⁸ The human rights situation in Chechnya is not much better with the Russian and regional Chechen government harassing critical groups.⁴⁹ The Chechen government has also engaged in persecution of the LGBTQ community with a particular focus on gay men. The Chechen authorities regularly arrest and torture

⁴² “Measuring the Informal Economy in the Caucasus and Central Asia.” *The IMF*. <https://tinyurl.com/3puykeyw>.

⁴³ “Poverty Analysis Summary.” *Asian Development Bank*. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/cps-aze-2014-2018-pa.pdf>.

⁴⁴ “Azerbaijan Military Spending/Defense Budget 1992-2023.” *Macrotrends*. <https://tinyurl.com/yrfyubrb>; “Armenia Military Spending/Defense Budget 1992-2023.” *Macrotrends*. <https://tinyurl.com/3k7u2xsn>.

⁴⁵ “Corruption Perceptions Index.” *Transparency International*. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>.

⁴⁶ “Azerbaijan.” *Amnesty International*. <https://tinyurl.com/2u4hmp2s>.

⁴⁷ “2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan.” *U.S. Department of State*. <https://tinyurl.com/39hdzsfh>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ “Chechnya.” *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/tag/chechnya>.

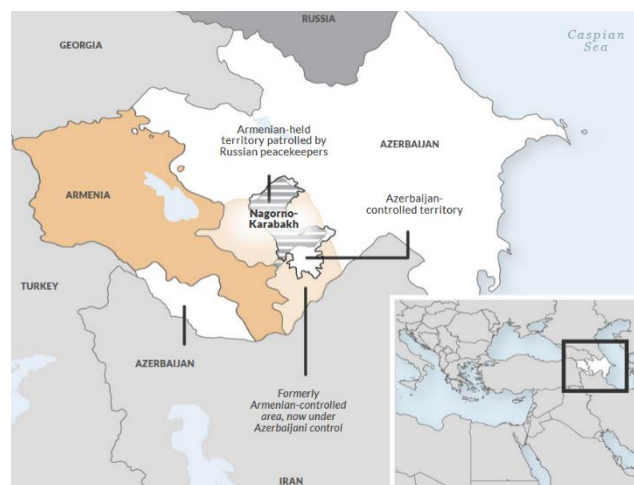
gay men—since the war in Ukraine started, they have even started forcing them to join battalions to fight there against their will.⁵⁰ The political situation in Chechnya is at a lull, but some nationalists could act should Russia be further weakened by its war in Ukraine.

Armenia and Georgia have better records, but can still make improvements. Armenia is in the middle of a political transition from a nation ruled by an authoritarian elite to one with free, fair, and competitive elections—however Armenia’s evolution towards democracy is by no-means a forgone conclusion as it could backslide towards corruption and authoritarianism at any moment.⁵¹ Georgia, meanwhile, has slid towards authoritarianism under the leadership of the Georgian Dream party. They have wrongfully imprisoned Mikheil Saakashvili, a political opponent and former president.⁵² The Georgian Dream party has also engaged in tactics to silence critical activists and media outlets.⁵³ Politically, the disputes over Abkhazia and South Ossetia continue as both areas remain frozen—enjoying the protection of Russia, but failing to win international recognition more broadly. Georgia has not joined sanctions against Russia in an effort to normalize the two nations’ relationships, but normalization will not happen until the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is resolved.

Case Study: the Nagorno-Karabakh Wars

Perhaps the most notable recent political conflict is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The conflict has its origins in the end of the Cold War when Nagorno-Karabakh region was included in Azerbaijan, dispute its ethnically Armenian population. Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a war in the early-1990s that killed roughly 30,000 people and that Armenia won.⁵⁴ A 1994 Russian-brokered ceasefire froze the conflict and granted Nagorno-Karabakh de-facto independence while leaving it dependent on Armenia economically and militarily.⁵⁵ Azerbaijan, unhappy with the conflict’s stasis, bided its time and used its oil wealth to improve its military and prepare to fight for the territory in the future. Internationally, Nagorno-Karabakh and areas around it occupied by Armenia were recognized as the territory of Azerbaijan.

The conflict remained stable until 2016 when Armenia and Azerbaijan engaged in several border shootouts, killing less than 100.⁵⁶ Russia had sold weapons to both countries and helped bring about another ceasefire—this ceasefire did not last long with conflicts and



⁵⁰ “Inside Chechnya’s gulag for gay men.” *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/inside-chechnyas-gulag-for-gay-men-russia-ramzan-kadyrov/>.

⁵¹ “Armenia.” *Freedom House*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/armenia>.

⁵² “Georgia keeps former leader Saakashvili locked up.” *Politico*. <https://tinyurl.com/3jfp9v5z>.

⁵³ “Georgia’s Slide to Authoritarianism.” *Carnegie Europe*. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/89260>.

⁵⁴ “Azerbaijan toddler killed in Nagorno-Karabakh shelling.” *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40504373>.

⁵⁵ “Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://tinyurl.com/mtp4dw4f>.

⁵⁶ “Nagorno-Karabakh violence: Worst clashes in decades kill dozens.” *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35949991>.

fights continuing to rise up. 2020 was a decisive year in the conflict as the two nations fought again over Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijan emerging victorious and taking back much of the area occupied by Armenia (see map on previous page).⁵⁷ Armenia's only remaining connection to Nagorno-Karabakh was a thin strip of land known as the Lachin Corridor where a Russian peacekeeping force was deployed in order to prevent additional fighting. This Second Nagorno-Karabakh War killed roughly 7000 people and displaced more than hundred thousand.⁵⁸

In September 2023 Azerbaijan invaded Nagorno-Karabakh and succeeded in conquering the entire area. During 2022 and 2023, Azerbaijan was accused of repeatedly encroaching on the Lachin Corridor and preventing the movement of people and goods to and from Nagorno Karabakh. Azerbaijan's victory has triggered an exodus of most of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnically-Armenian residents—around 120,000 people—to Armenia.⁵⁹ These refugees fear reprisal attacks from the Azerbaijan government and Azerbaijan paramilitary groups. In October 2023, Azerbaijan announced that Nagorno-Karabakh would no longer exist as of 1 January 2024.⁶⁰ Armenia fears that it will be overwhelmed under the title wave of refugees (Armenia only has a population of 2.8 million) and Armenia is angered by Russia's inaction in the conflict. Due to its war in Ukraine, Russian peacekeepers around Nagorno-Karabakh were spread thinly and under supported giving Azerbaijan the opportunity to invade and score an easy and decisive victory. Armenia chose not to support the breakaway government in Nagorno-Karabakh.

While the control of the Nagorno-Karabakh territory appears to have been decided, the humanitarian and political situation remains undecided. Ethnic Armenians are fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh because they fear persecution from the Azerbaijani government; much of the international community has called for their rights to be respected by the Azerbaijani government. Additionally, the resolution to this conflict will likely embolden efforts by Azerbaijan to secure a land link to its noncontiguous piece of territory on the other side of Armenia—an outcome that the Iranian and Armenian governments oppose.

Questions to Consider

- To what extent can good governance in the region be promoted?
- How should existing and recently ended territorial disputes be solved?
- To what degree can the rights of Armenians in the Nagorno Karabakh be protected?
- How can human rights be promoted across the region?
- To what degree can the impacts of climate change be mitigated and slowed?

⁵⁷ "A Renewed Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Reading Between the Front Lines." *CSIS*. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/renewed-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-reading-between-front-lines>.

⁵⁸ "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://tinyurl.com/mtp4dw4f>.

⁵⁹ "Nagorno-Karabakh will cease to exist from next year. How did this happen?" *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/28/europe/nagorno-karabakh-officially-dissolve-intl/index.html>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.