

= Nagorno @-@ Karabakh War =

The Nagorno @-@ Karabakh War ( Azerbaijani : Qarabağ Müharibəsi ), referred to as the Artsakh Liberation War ( Armenian : Հայաստանի Երասխայի ազատամարտ ) by Armenians , was an ethnic conflict that took place in the late 1980s to May 1994 , in the enclave of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh in southwestern Azerbaijan , between the majority ethnic Armenians of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh backed by the Republic of Armenia , and the Republic of Azerbaijan . As the war progressed , Armenia and Azerbaijan , both former Soviet Republics , entangled themselves in a protracted , undeclared war in the mountainous heights of Karabakh as Azerbaijan attempted to curb the secessionist movement in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . The enclave 's parliament had voted in favor of uniting itself with Armenia and a referendum , boycotted by the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , was held , whereby most of the voters voted in favor of independence . The demand to unify with Armenia , which began anew in 1988 , began in a relatively peaceful manner ; however , in the following months , as the Soviet Union 's disintegration neared , it gradually grew into an increasingly violent conflict between ethnic Armenians and ethnic Azerbaijanis , resulting in claims of ethnic cleansing by both sides .

Inter @-@ ethnic clashes between the two broke out shortly after the parliament of the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Autonomous Oblast ( NKAO ) in Azerbaijan voted to unify the region with Armenia on 20 February 1988 . The declaration of secession from Azerbaijan was the final result of a territorial conflict regarding the land . As Azerbaijan declared its independence from the Soviet Union and removed the powers held by the enclave 's government , the Armenian majority voted to secede from Azerbaijan and in the process proclaimed the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh .

Full @-@ scale fighting erupted in the late winter of 1992 . International mediation by several groups including the Organization for Security and Co @-@ operation in Europe ( OSCE ) failed to bring an end resolution that both sides could work with . In the spring of 1993 , Armenian forces captured regions outside the enclave itself , threatening the involvement of other countries in the region . By the end of the war in 1994 , the Armenians were in full control of most of the enclave and also held and currently control approximately 9 % of Azerbaijan 's territory outside the enclave . As many as 230 @, @ 000 Armenians from Azerbaijan and 800 @, @ 000 Azeris from Armenia and Karabakh have been displaced as a result of the conflict . A Russian @-@ brokered ceasefire was signed in May 1994 and peace talks , mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group , have been held ever since by Armenia and Azerbaijan .

= = Background = =

The territorial ownership of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh today is still heavily contested between Armenians and Azerbaijanis . The current conflict has its roots in events following World War I. Shortly before the Ottoman Empire 's capitulation in the war , the Russian Empire collapsed in November 1917 and fell under the control of the Bolsheviks . The three nations of the Caucasus , Armenians , Azerbaijanis and Georgians , previously under the rule of the Russians , declared the formation of the Transcaucasian Federation which dissolved after only three months of existence .

= = = Armenian ? Azerbaijani war = = =

Fighting soon broke out between the First Republic of Armenia and the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in three specific regions : Nakhchevan , Zangezur ( today the Armenian province of Syunik ) and Karabakh itself , in Azerbaijan .

Armenia and Azerbaijan quarreled about the putative boundaries of the three provinces . The Karabakh Armenians attempted to declare their independence but failed to make contact with the Republic of Armenia . Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I , Armenian General Andranik Ozanian entered Karabakh with military success and was headed towards the region capital of Shusha in December 1918 . British troops occupied the South Caucasus in 1919 ,

and the British command suggested Andranik cease his offense and allow the conflict to be solved at the Paris Peace Conference . Afterward , the British provisionally affirmed Azerbaijani statesman Khosrov bey Sultanov as the governor @-@ general of Karabakh and ordered him to " squash any unrest in the region " . Afterward followed the Shusha massacre of an estimated 20 @,@ 000 Armenians .

= = = Soviet division = = =

Two months later however , the Soviet 11th Army invaded the Caucasus and within three years , the Caucasian republics were formed into the Transcaucasian SFSR of the Soviet Union . The Bolsheviks thereafter created a seven @-@ member committee , the Caucasus Bureau ( typically referred to as the Kavburo ) . Under the supervision of the People 's Commissar for Nationalities , the future Soviet ruler Joseph Stalin , the Kavburo was tasked to head up matters in the Caucasus . On 4 July 1921 the committee voted 4 ? 3 in favor of allocating Karabakh to the newly created Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia but a day later the Kavburo reversed its decision and voted to leave the region within Azerbaijan SSR . The Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Autonomous Oblast ( NKAO ) was created in 1923 , leaving it with a population that was 94 % Armenian . The reversal was substantiated with the economic connections the region had with Azerbaijan . The capital was moved from Shusha to Khankendi , which was later renamed as Stepanakert .

Armenian and Azeri scholars have speculated that the decision was an application of the principle of " divide and rule " by Soviet Union . This can be seen , for example , by the odd placement of the Nakhichevan exclave , which is separated by Armenia but is a part of Azerbaijan . Others have also postulated that the decision was a goodwill gesture by the Soviet government to help maintain " good relations with Atatürk 's Turkey . " Over the following decades of Soviet rule the Armenians retained a strong desire for unification of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh with Armenia , an aim that some members of the Armenian Communist Party attempted to accomplish . First Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia Aghasi Khanjian was murdered by Deputy Head ( and soon Head ) of the NKVD Lavrentiy Beria after submitting Armenian grievances to Stalin , which included requests to return Nagorno @-@ Karabakh and Nakhichevan to Armenia . The Armenians insisted that their national rights had been suppressed and their cultural and economic freedoms were being curtailed .

= = Revival of the Karabakh issue = =

After Stalin 's death , Armenian discontent began to be voiced . In 1963 , around 2 @,@ 500 Karabakh Armenians signed a petition calling for Karabakh to be put under Armenian control or to be transferred to Russia . Also in 1963 , there were violent clashes in Stepanakert , leading to the death of 18 Armenians . In 1965 and 1977 , there were large demonstrations in Yerevan , which also called for unifying Karabakh with Armenia . As the new general secretary of the Soviet Union , Mikhail Gorbachev , came to power in 1985 , he began implementing his plans to reform the Soviet Union . These were encapsulated in two policies : perestroika and glasnost . While perestroika had more to do with economic reform , glasnost or " openness " granted limited freedom to Soviet citizens to express grievances about the Soviet system itself and its leaders . Capitalizing on this new policy of Moscow , the leaders of the Regional Soviet of Karabakh decided to vote in favor of unifying the autonomous region with Armenia on 20 February 1988 . The resolution read :

Welcoming the wishes of the workers of the Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Region to request the Supreme Soviets of the Azerbaijani SSR and the Armenian SSR to display a feeling of deep understanding of the aspirations of the Armenian population of Nagorny Karabakh and to resolve the question of transferring the Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR , at the same time to intercede with the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to reach a positive resolution on the issue of transferring the region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR .

On 24 February , Boris Kevorkov , the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh autonomous region party secretary

and an Azerbaijan loyalist , was dismissed .

Karabakh Armenian leaders complained that the region had neither Armenian language textbooks in schools nor in television broadcasting , and that Azerbaijan 's Communist Party General Secretary Heydar Aliyev had extensively attempted to " Azerify " the region and increase the influence and the number of Azeris living in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , while at the same time reducing its Armenian population ( in 1987 , Aliyev would step down as General Secretary of Azerbaijan 's Politburo ) . By 1988 , the Armenian population of Karabakh had dwindled to nearly three @-@ quarters of the total population .

The movement was spearheaded by popular Armenian figures and found support among intellectuals in Russia as well . According to journalist Thomas De Waal some members of the Russian intelligentsia , such as the dissident Andrei Sakharov expressed support for Armenians . More prominent support for the movement among the Moscow elite was interpreted by some in the public : in November 1987 L 'Humanité published the personal comments made by Abel Aganbegyan , an economic adviser to Gorbachev , to Armenians living in France , in which he suggested that Nagorno @-@ Karabakh could be ceded to Armenia . Prior to the declaration , Armenians had begun to protest and stage workers ' strikes in Yerevan , demanding a unification with the enclave . This prompted Azeri counter @-@ protests in Baku . After the demonstrations in Yerevan to demand unification of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh with Armenia began , Gorbachev met with two leaders of the Karabakh movement , Zori Balayan and Silva Kaputikyan on 26 February 1988 . Gorbachev asked them for a one @-@ month moratorium on demonstrations . When Kaputikyan returned to Armenia the same evening , she told the crowds the " Armenians [ had ] triumphed " although Gorbachev hadn 't made any concrete promises . According to Svante Cornell , this was an attempt to pressure Moscow . On March 10 , Gorbachev stated that the borders between the republics would not change , in accordance with Article 78 of the Soviet constitution . Gorbachev also stated that several other regions in the Soviet Union were yearning for territorial changes and redrawing the boundaries in Karabakh would thus set a dangerous precedent . But the Armenians viewed the 1921 Kavburo decision with disdain and felt that in their efforts they were correcting a historical error through the principle of self @-@ determination , a right also granted in the constitution . Azeris , on the other hand , found such calls for relinquishing their territory by the Armenians unfathomable and aligned themselves with Gorbachev 's position .

On 19 February 1988 , during the seventh day of the Armenian rallies , the first counterprotest was held in Baku . The poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh and the historian Suleyman Aliyarov published an open letter in the newspaper Azerbaijan , declaring that Karabakh was historically Azerbaijani territory .

= = = Askeran and Sumgait = = =

Ethnic infighting soon broke out between Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Karabakh . It is claimed as early as the end of 1987 Azerbaijanis from the villages of Ghapan and Meghri in Armenia were forced to leave their homes as a result of tensions between them and their Armenian neighbors and in November 1987 two freight cars full of Azerbaijanis are alleged to have arrived at the train station in Baku . In later interviews , the mayors of the two villages denied that any such tension existed at the time and no such documentation has been adduced to support the notion of forced expulsions .

On 20 February 1988 two Azerbaijani trainee female students in Stepanakert hospital were allegedly raped by Armenians . On 22 February 1988 a direct confrontation between Azerbaijanis and Armenians , near the town of Askeran ( located on the road between Stepanakert and Agdam ) in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , degenerated into a skirmish . During the clashes two Azerbaijani youths were killed . One of them was probably shot by a local policeman , possibly an Azerbaijani , either by accident or as a result of a quarrel . On 27 February 1988 , while speaking on Baku 's central television , the Soviet Deputy Procurator Alexander Katusev reported that " two inhabitants of the Agdam district fell victim to murder " and gave their Muslim names .

The clash in Askeran was the prelude to the pogroms in Sumgait , where emotions , already

heightened by news about the Karabakh crisis , turned even uglier in a series of protests starting on 27 February . Speaking at the rallies , Azerbaijani refugees from the Armenian town of Ghapan accused Armenians of " murder and atrocities " . According to the Soviet media , these allegations were disproved and many of the speakers were reportedly agents provocateurs . Within hours , a pogrom against Armenian residents began in Sumgait , a city some 25 kilometers north of Baku . The pogroms resulted in the deaths of 32 people ( 26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis ) , according to official Soviet statistics , although many Armenians felt that the true figure was not reported . Nearly all of Sumgait 's Armenian population left the city after the pogrom . Armenians were beaten , raped , mutilated and killed both on the streets of Sumgait and inside their apartments during three days of violence ( with no intervention from the police or the local bodies ) that only subsided when Soviet armed forces entered the city and quelled much of the rioting on 1 March . The manner in which they were killed reverberated among Armenians , recalling memories of the Armenian Genocide .

On 23 March 1988 the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union rejected the demands of Armenians to cede Nagorno @-@ Karabakh to Armenia . Troops were sent to Yerevan to prevent protests against the decision . Gorbachev 's attempts to stabilize the region were to no avail , as both sides remained equally intransigent . In Armenia , there was a firm belief that what had taken place in the region of Nakhichevan would be repeated in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh : prior to its absorption by Soviet Russia , it had a population which was 40 % Armenian ; by the late 1980s , its Armenian population was virtually non @-@ existent .

= = Interethnic violence = =

Armenians refused to allow the issue to subside despite a compromise made by Gorbachev , which included a promise of a 400 million @-@ ruble package to introduce Armenian language textbooks and television programming in Karabakh . At the same time , Azerbaijan was unwilling to cede any territory to Armenia . Calls to transfer Karabakh to Armenia briefly subsided when a devastating earthquake hit Armenia on 7 December 1988 , which leveled the towns of Leninakan ( now Gyumri ) and Spitak , killing an estimated 25 @,@ 000 people . But conflict brewed up once more when the eleven members of the newly formed Karabakh Committee , including the future president of Armenia Levon Ter @-@ Petrosyan , were jailed by Moscow officials in the ensuing chaos of the earthquake . Such actions polarized relations between Armenia and the Kremlin ; Armenians lost faith in Gorbachev , despising him even more because of his handling of the earthquake relief effort and his uncompromising stance on Nagorno @-@ Karabakh .

In the months following the Sumgait pogroms , a forced population exchange took place as Armenians living in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis living in Armenia were compelled to abandon their homes . According to the Azerbaijani government , between 27 and 29 November 1988 33 Azerbaijanis were killed in Spitak , Gugark , and Stepanavan and 216 in the 1987 ? 1989 period . According to Azerbaijani MP Arif Yunusov in November of the same year twenty Azerbaijanis from the Armenian village of Vartan were reportedly burned to death . However , according to Armenian sources , the number of Azerbaijanis killed in the 1988 ? 1989 period was 25 .

Interethnic fighting also spread throughout cities in Azerbaijan , including , in December 1988 , in Kirovabad and Nakhichevan , where seven people ( among them four soldiers ) were killed and hundreds injured when Soviet army units attempted once more to stop attacks directed at Armenians . Estimates differ on how many people were killed during the first two years of the conflict . The Azerbaijani government alleges that 216 Azerbaijanis were killed in Armenia , while the researcher Arif Yunusov gives 127 to those killed in 1988 alone . An October 1989 piece by Time , however , stated that over 100 people were estimated to have been killed since February 1988 , in both Armenia and Azerbaijan .

By the end of 1988 , dozens of villages in Armenia had become deserted , as most of Armenia 's more than 200 @,@ 000 Azerbaijanis and Muslim Kurds left . While Muslim Kurds did not take up arms against Armenians , almost all of them fled their homes from the Armenian controlled areas ( at most , 1 @,@ 000 Muslim Kurds are estimated to remain in Armenia today ) .

== Black January ==

Inter-ethnic strife began to take a toll on both countries' populations, forcing most of the Armenians in Azerbaijan to flee to Armenia and most of the Azeris in Armenia to Azerbaijan. The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh had grown so out of hand that in January 1989 the central government in Moscow temporarily took control of the region, a move welcomed by many Armenians. In September 1989, Popular Front (APF) leaders and their ever-increasing supporters managed to institute a railway blockade against Armenia and the NKAO, effectively crippling Armenia's economy, as 85% of the cargo and goods arrived through rail traffic, although some claim this was a response to Armenia's embargo against Nakhichevan ASSR that had started earlier that summer. The disruption of rail service to Armenia was, accordingly, in part due to the attacks of Armenian militants on Azerbaijani train crews entering Armenia.

In January 1990, another pogrom directed at Armenians in Baku forced Gorbachev to declare a state of emergency and send troops from the MVD to restore order. Amid the rising independence movement in Azerbaijan, Gorbachev dispatched the military to dragoon the events, as the Soviet regime inched closer to collapse. Soviet troops received orders to occupy Baku at midnight on January 20, 1990. City residents, who saw tanks coming at about 5 AM, said the troops were the first to open fire. The Shield Report, an independent commission from the USSR military procurator's office, rejected the military claims of returning fire, finding no evidence that those manning the barricades on the roads to Baku were armed. A curfew was established and violent clashes between the soldiers and the surging Azerbaijan Popular Front were common, in the end leading to the deaths of 120 Azerbaijanis and eight MVD soldiers in Baku. During this time, however, Azerbaijan's Communist Party had fallen and the belated order to send the MVD forces had more to do with keeping the Party in power than with protecting the city's Armenian population. The events, referred to as "Black January", also strained the relations between Azerbaijan and the central government.

== Fighting in Qazakh ==

Azerbaijan has several exclaves within the territory of Armenia: Yukhari Askipara, Barkhudarli and Sofulu in the northwest and an exclave of Karki in the Nakhchivan exclave of Azerbaijan Republic. In early 1990, the road alongside the border village of Baganis came under routine attack by militia members from Azerbaijan. At the same time, Armenian forces attacked both these Azerbaijani enclaves within the Armenian territory and the border villages of Qazakh and Sadarak rayon in Azerbaijan proper. On 26 March 1990 several cars with Armenian paramilitaries arrived in the Armenian border village of Baganis. At dusk, they crossed the border storming the Azerbaijani village Ba?anis Ayrum. About 20 houses were burned and 8 to 11 Azerbaijani villagers killed. The bodies of members of one family, including infants, were found in the charred ruins of their burned homes. By the time the Soviet Interior Ministry troops arrived in Ba?anis Ayrum, the attackers had already fled.

On 18 August a significant accumulation of Armenian militants near the border was observed. The following day, units of the Armenian national army bombarded Azeri villages Yuxar? skipara, Ba?anis Ayrum, A?a? skipara and Qu?çu Ayr?m, and according to eyewitnesses used rocket- propelled grenades and mortars. The first attack was repulsed with additional reinforcements arriving from Yerevan, Armenian forces were able to seize Yuxar? skipara and Ba?anis Ayrum. On 20 August tanks, anti-aircraft guns and helicopter gunships of the Soviet army under the command of Major General Yuri Shatalin were brought in and by the end of the day the Armenians were driven off. According to the Soviet Ministry of Interior, one internal ministry officer and two police officers were killed, nine soldiers and thirteen residents were injured. According to Armenian media reports, five militants were killed and 25 were wounded; according to Azerbaijani media, about 30 were killed and 100 wounded.

== Operation Ring ==

In the spring of 1991 , President Gorbachev held a special countrywide referendum called the Union Treaty which would decide if the Soviet republics would remain together . Newly elected , non @-@ communist leaders had come to power in the Soviet republics , including Boris Yeltsin in Russia ( Gorbachev remained the President of the Soviet Union ) , Levon Ter @-@ Petrosyan in Armenia , and Ayaz Mutalibov in Azerbaijan . Armenia and five other republics boycotted the referendum ( Armenia would hold its own referendum and declared its independence from the Soviet Union on 21 September 1991 ) , whereas Azerbaijan voted in compliance to the Treaty .

As many Armenians and Azeris in Karabakh began an arms build up ( by acquiring weaponry located in caches throughout Karabakh ) in order to defend themselves , Mutalibov turned to Gorbachev for support in launching a joint military operation in order to disarm Armenian militants in the region . Termed Operation Ring , Soviet forces acting in conjunction with the local Azerbaijani OMON forcibly deported Armenians living in the villages of the region of Shahumyan . The operation involved the use of ground troops , military , armored vehicles and artillery . The deportations of the Armenian civilians were carried out with gross human rights violations documented by international human rights organizations .

Ring was perceived by both Soviet and Armenian government officials as a method of intimidating the Armenian populace to giving up their demands for unification . Operation Ring proved counter @-@ productive to what it had originally sought to accomplish . The violence that took place during the operation only reinforced the belief among Armenians that the only solution to the Karabakh conflict was through armed resistance . The initial Armenian resistance inspired volunteers to start forming irregular volunteer detachments .

= = = First attempt to mediate peace = = =

First peace mediation efforts were started by the Russian President , Boris Yeltsin and Kazakhstan President , Nursultan Nazarbayev in September 1991 . After peace talks in Baku , Ganja , Stepanakert ( Khankendi ) and Yerevan on 20 ? 23 September , the sides agreed to sign the Zheleznovodsk Communiqué in the Russian city of Zheleznovodsk taking the principles of territorial integrity , non @-@ interference in internal affairs of sovereign states , observance of civil rights as a base of the agreement . The agreement was signed by Yeltsin , Nazarbayev , Mutalibov , and Ter @-@ Petrosian . The peace efforts came to a halt due to continuing bombardment and atrocities by Azerbaijani OMON in Stepanakert and Chapar in late September . With the final blow being the Azerbaijani MI @-@ 8 helicopter shoot down near the village of Karakend in the Martuni District with peace mediating team consisting of Russian , Kazakh observers and Azerbaijani high @-@ ranking officials on board .

= = = Conflict in the last days of the USSR = = =

In late 1991 , Armenian militias launched offensives to capture Armenian @-@ populated villages seized by Azerbaijani OMON in May ? July 1991 . Leaving these villages , the Azerbaijani units in some cases burned them . According to the Moscow @-@ based Human Rights organization Memorial , at the same time , as a result of attacks by Armenian armed forces , several thousand residents of Azerbaijani villages in the former Shahumian , Hadrut , Martakert , Askeran , Martuni rayons of Azerbaijan had to leave their homes , too . Some villages ( e.g. , Imereti and Gerevent ) were burned by the militants . There were instances of serious violence against the civilian population ( in particular , in the village Meshali ) .

Starting in late autumn of 1991 , when the Azerbaijani side started its counter @-@ offensive , the Armenian side began targeting Azerbaijani villages . According to Memorial , the villages Malibeyli and Gushchular , from which Azeri forces regularly bombarded Stepanakert , were attacked by Armenians where the houses were burned and dozens of civilians were killed . Each side accused the other of using the villages as strategic gathering points , covering the artillery positions . On 19 December , Internal Ministry troops began to withdraw from Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , which was

completed by 27 December . With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of internal troops from Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , the situation in the conflict zone became uncontrollable .

= = Weapons vacuum = =

As the disintegration of the Soviet Union became a reality for Soviet citizens in the autumn of 1991 , both sides sought to acquire weaponry from military caches located throughout Karabakh . The initial advantage tilted in Azerbaijan 's favor . During the Cold War , the Soviet military doctrine for defending the Caucasus had outlined a strategy where Armenia would be a combat zone in the event that NATO member Turkey were to have invaded from the west . Thus , there were only three divisions stationed in the Armenian SSR and no airfields , while Azerbaijan had a total of five divisions and five military airfields . Furthermore , Armenia had approximately 500 railroad cars of ammunition in comparison to Azerbaijan 's 10 @,@ 000 .

As MVD forces began pulling out , they bequeathed the Armenians and Azerbaijanis a vast arsenal of ammunition and stored armored vehicles . The government forces initially sent by Gorbachev three years earlier were from other republics of the Soviet Union and many had no wish to remain any longer . Most were poor , young conscripts and many simply sold their weapons for cash or even vodka to either side , some even trying to sell tanks and armored personnel carriers ( APCs ) . The unsecured weapons caches led both sides to blame Gorbachev 's policies as the ultimate cause of the conflict . The Azerbaijanis purchased a large quantity of these vehicles , as reported by the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan in November 1993 , which reported it had acquired 286 tanks , 842 armored vehicles , and 386 artillery pieces during the power vacuum . The emergence of black markets helped facilitate the import of Western weaponry .

Most weaponry was Russian @-@ made or came from the former Eastern bloc countries ; however , some improvisation was made by both sides . Azerbaijan received substantial military aid and provisions from Turkey , Israel and numerous Arab countries . The Armenian Diaspora donated a significant amount of aid to Armenia through the course of the war and even managed to push for legislation in the United States Congress to pass a bill entitled Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act in response to Azerbaijan 's blockade against Armenia , placing a complete ban on military aid from the United States to Azerbaijan in 1992 . While Azerbaijan charged that the Russians were initially helping the Armenians , it was said that " the Azeri fighters in the region [ were ] far better equipped with Soviet military weaponry than their opponents . "

With Gorbachev resigning as Soviet General @-@ Secretary on 26 December 1991 , the remaining republics including Ukraine , Belarus , and Russia , declared their independence and the Soviet Union ceased to exist on 31 December 1991 . This dissolution gave way to any barriers that were keeping Armenia and Azerbaijan from waging a full @-@ scale war . One month prior , on 21 November , the Azerbaijani Parliament had rescinded Karabakh 's status as an autonomous region and renamed its capital " Xankandi . " In response , on 10 December , a referendum was held in Karabakh by parliamentary leaders ( with the local Azerbaijani community boycotting it ) , whereby the Armenians voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence . On 6 January 1992 , the region declared its independence from Azerbaijan .

The withdrawal of the Soviet interior forces from Nagorno @-@ Karabakh in the Caucasus region was only temporary . By February 1992 , the former Soviet states were consolidated as the Commonwealth of Independent States ( CIS ) . While Azerbaijan abstained from joining , Armenia , fearing a possible invasion by Turkey in the escalating conflict , entered the CIS , which brought it under the organization 's " collective security umbrella . " In January 1992 , CIS forces established their new headquarters at Stepanakert and took up a slightly more active role in peacekeeping , incorporating old units , including the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment and elements of the Soviet 4th Army .

= = Building armies = =

The sporadic battles between Armenians and Azeris had intensified after Operation Ring recruited

thousands of volunteers into improvised armies from both Armenia and Azerbaijan . In Armenia , a recurrent and popular theme at the time compared and idolized the separatist fighters to historical Armenian guerrilla groups and revered individuals such as Andranik Ozanian and Garegin Nzhdeh , who fought against the Ottoman Empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries . In addition to the government 's conscription of males aged 18 ? 45 , many Armenians volunteered to fight and formed *jokats* , or detachments of about forty men , which , combined with several others , came under the command of a Lieutenant Colonel . Initially , many of these men chose when and where to serve and acted on their own behalf , rarely with any oversight , when attacking or defending areas . Direct insubordination was common as many of the men simply did not show up , looted the bodies of dead soldiers and commodities such as diesel oil for armored vehicles disappeared only to be sold in black markets .

Many women enlisted in the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh military , taking part in the fighting as well as serving in auxiliary roles such as providing first @-@ aid and evacuating wounded men from the battlefield .

Azerbaijan 's military functioned in much the same manner ; however , it was better organized during the first years of the war . The Azeri government also carried out conscription and many Azeris enthusiastically enlisted for combat in the first months after the Soviet Union collapsed . Azerbaijan 's National Army consisted of roughly 30 @,@ 000 men , in addition to nearly 10 @,@ 000 in its OMON paramilitary force and several thousand volunteers from the Popular Front . Suret Huseynov , a wealthy Azeri , also improvised by creating his own military brigade , the 709th of the Azerbaijani Army and purchasing many weapons and vehicles from the 23rd Motor Rifle Division 's arsenal . ?sgandar Hamidov 's *bozqurt* or Grey Wolves brigade also mobilized for action . The government of Azerbaijan also poured a great deal of money into hiring mercenaries from other countries through the revenue it was making from its oil field assets on and near the Caspian Sea .

Former troops of the Soviet Union also offered their services to either side . For example , one of the most prominent officers to serve on the Armenian side was former Soviet General Anatoly Zinevich , who remained in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh for five years ( 1992 ? 1997 ) and was involved in planning and implementation of many operations of the Armenian forces . By the end of war he held the position of Chief of Staff of the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Republic ( NKR ) armed forces . The estimated amount of manpower and military vehicles each entity involved in the conflict had in the 1993 ? 1994 time period was :

Because at the time Armenia did not have the kind of far reaching treaties with Russia ( signed later in 1997 and 2010 ) , and because CSTO did not exist then , Armenia had to protect its border with Turkey by itself . For the duration of the war most of the military personnel and equipment of the Republic of Armenia stayed in Armenia proper guarding the Armenian @-@ Turkish border against possible aggression .

In an overall military comparison , the number of men eligible for military service in Armenia , in the age group of 17 ? 32 , totalled 550 @,@ 000 , while in Azerbaijan it was 1 @.@ 3 million . Most men from both sides had served in the Soviet Army and so had some form of military experience prior to the conflict , including tours of duty in Afghanistan . Among Karabakh Armenians , about 60 % had served in the Soviet Army . Most Azeris , however , were often subject to discrimination during their service in the Soviet military and relegated to work in construction battalions rather than fighting corps . Despite the establishment of two officer academies including a naval school in Azerbaijan , the lack of such military experience was one factor that rendered Azerbaijan unprepared for the war . The Azerbaijani military was assisted by Afghan commander Gulbuddin Hekmatyar . The recruitment for the purpose was mostly made in Peshawar by commander Fazle Haq Mujahid and several groups were dispatched to Azerbaijan for different duties .

= = Early Armenian offensives = =

= = = Khojaly = = =



On 2 January 1992 Ayaz Mutalibov assumed the office of the presidency of Azerbaijan . Officially , the newly created Republic of Armenia publicly denied any involvement in providing any weapons , fuel , food , or other logistics to the secessionists in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . However , Ter @-@ Petrosyan later did admit to supplying them with logistical supplies and paying the salaries of the separatists , but denied sending any of its own men to combat . Armenia faced a debilitating blockade by the now Republic of Azerbaijan , as well as pressure from neighboring Turkey , which decided to side with Azerbaijan and build a closer relationship with it . In early February , the Azeri villages of Mal'b'yli , Karadagly and Agdaban were conquered and their population evicted , leading to at least 99 civilian deaths and 140 wounded .

The only land connection Armenia had with Karabakh was through the narrow mountainous Lachin corridor which could only be reached by helicopters . The region 's only airport was in the small town of Khojaly , which was seven km ( 4 @. @ 3 miles ) north of capital Stepanakert with an estimated population of 6 @, @ 000 ? 10 @, @ 000 people . Additionally , Khojaly had been serving as an artillery base from which GRAD missiles were launched upon the civilian population of capital Stepanakert : On some days as many as 400 GRAD missiles rained down on Armenian multi- storey apartments . By late February , the Armenian forces reportedly warned about the upcoming attack and issued an ultimatum that unless the Azerbaijanis stopped the shelling from Khojaly they would seize the town .

By late February , Khojaly had largely been cut off . On 26 February , Armenian forces , with the aid of some armored vehicles from the 366th , mounted an offensive to capture Khojaly . According to the Azerbaijani side and the affirmation of other sources including Human Rights Watch , the Moscow @-@ based human rights organization Memorial and the biography of a leading Armenian commander , Monte Melkonian , documented and published by his brother , after Armenian forces captured Khojaly , they proceeded to kill several hundred civilians evacuating from the town . Armenian forces had previously stated they would attack the city and leave a land corridor for them to escape through . However , when the attack began , the attacking Armenian force easily outnumbered and overwhelmed the defenders who along with the civilians attempted to retreat north to the Azeri held city of Agdam . The airport 's runway was found to have been intentionally destroyed , rendering it temporarily useless . The attacking forces then went on to pursue those fleeing through the corridor and opened fire upon them , killing scores of civilians . Facing charges of an intentional massacre of civilians by international groups , Armenian government officials denied the occurrence of a massacre and asserted an objective of silencing the artillery coming from Khojaly .

An exact body count was never ascertained but conservative estimates have placed the number to 485 . The official death toll according to Azerbaijani authorities for casualties suffered during the events of 25 ? 26 February is 613 civilians , of them 106 women and 83 children . On 3 March 1992 , the Boston Globe reported over 1 @, @ 000 people had been slain over four years of conflict . It quoted the mayor of Khojaly , Elmar Mamedov , as also saying 200 more were missing , 300 were held hostage and 200 injured in the fighting . A report published in 1992 by the human rights organization Helsinki Watch however stated that their inquiry found that the Azerbaijani OMON and " the militia , still in uniform and some still carrying their guns , were interspersed with the masses of civilians " which may have been the reason why Armenian troops fired upon them .

Under pressure from the APF due to the mismanagement of the defense of Khojaly and the safety of its inhabitants , Mutallibov was forced to submit his resignation to the National Assembly of Azerbaijan .

= = = Capture of Shusha = = =

When Armenians launched one of the first offensives , at Stepanakert on 13 February 1988 , many Azerbaijanis fled to the stronghold of Shusha . On 28 March , Azerbaijani troops deployed to attack Stepanakert , attacked enemy positions above the village Kirkidzhan from the village of Dzhangasan . During the afternoon of the next day , Azerbaijani units took up positions in close proximity to the city , but were quickly repulsed by the Armenians .

In the ensuing months after the capture of Khojaly , Azeri commanders holding out in the region 's last bastion of Shusha began a large @-@ scale artillery bombardment with GRAD rocket launchers against Stepanakert . By April , the shelling had forced many of the 50 @,@ 000 people living in Stepanakert to seek refuge in underground bunkers and basements . Facing ground incursions near the city 's outlying areas , military leaders in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh organized an offensive to take the town .

On 8 May a force of several hundred Armenian troops accompanied by tanks and helicopters attacked the Azeri citadel of Shusha . Fierce fighting took place in the town 's streets and several hundred men were killed on both sides . Although the Armenians were outnumbered and outgunned by the Azeri army , they managed to capture the town and force the Azeris to retreat on 9 May .

The capture of Shusha resonated loudly in neighboring Turkey . Its relations with Armenia had grown better after it had declared its independence from the Soviet Union ; however , they gradually worsened as a result of Armenia 's gains in the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh region . Turkey 's prime minister Suleyman Demirel said that he was under intense pressure by his people to have his country intervene and aid Azerbaijan . Demirel , however , was opposed to such an intervention , saying that Turkey 's entrance into the war would trigger an even greater Muslim @-@ Christian conflict ( Turks are overwhelmingly Muslims ) .

Turkey never did send troops to Azerbaijan but did contribute substantial military aid and advisers . In May 1992 , the military commander of the CIS forces , Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov , issued a warning to Western nations , especially the United States , to not interfere with the conflict in the Caucasus , stating it would " place us [ the Commonwealth ] on the verge of a third world war and that cannot be allowed . "

A Chechen contingent , led by Shamil Basayev , was one of the units to participate in the conflict . According to Azeri Colonel Azer Rustamov , in 1992 , " hundreds of Chechen volunteers rendered us invaluable help in these battles led by Shamil Basayev and Salman Raduev . " Basayev was said to be one of the last fighters to leave Shusha . According to Russian news reports Basayev later said during his career , he and his battalion had only lost once and that defeat came in Karabakh in fighting against the " Dashnak battalion . " He later said he pulled his forces out of the conflict because the war seemed to be more for nationalism than for religion . Basayev received direct military training from the Russian GRU during the War in Abkhazia ( 1992 ? 1993 ) since the Abkhaz were backed by Russia . Other Chechens also were trained by the GRU in warfare . Many of these Chechens who fought for the Russians in Abkhazia against Georgia had fought for Azerbaijan against Armenia in the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh war .

= = = Sealing Lachin = = =

The loss of Shusha led the Azeri parliament to lay the blame on Yaqub Mammadov , then acting President of Azerbaijan , which removed him from power and cleared Mutalibov of any responsibility after the loss of Khojaly , reinstating him as President on 15 May 1992 . Many Azeris saw this act as a coup in addition to the cancellation of the parliamentary elections slated in June of that year . The Azeri parliament at that time was made up of former leaders from the country 's communist regime and the losses of Khojaly and Shusha only aggrandized their desires for free elections .

To contribute to the turmoil , an offensive was launched by Armenian forces on 18 May to take the city of Lachin in the narrow corridor separating Armenia and Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . The city itself was poorly guarded and , within the next day , Armenian forces took control of the town and cleared any remaining Azeris to open the road that linked the region to Armenia . The taking of the city then allowed an overland route to be connected with Armenia itself with supply convoys beginning to trek up the mountainous region of Lachin to Karabakh .

The loss of Lachin was the final blow to Mutalibov 's regime . Demonstrations were held despite Mutalibov 's ban and an armed coup was staged by Popular Front activists . Fighting between government forces and Popular Front supporters escalated as the political opposition seized the parliament building in Baku as well as the airport and presidential office . On 16 June 1992 Abulfaz Elchibey was elected leader of Azerbaijan with many political leaders from the Azerbaijan Popular

Front Party were elected into the parliament . The instigators characterized Mutalibov as an undedicated and weak leader in the war in Karabakh . Elchibey was staunchly against receiving any help from the Russians , instead favoring closer ties to Turkey .

The fighting also spilled into nearby Nakhchivan , which was shelled by Armenian troops in May 1992 .

= = Escalation = =

= = = Operation Goranboy = = =

Operation Goranboy was a large @-@ scale Azerbaijani offensive in the summer of 1992 aimed at taking control over the entire Nagorno @-@ Karabakh and putting a decisive end to the resistance . This offensive is regarded as the only successful breakthrough by the Azeri Army and marks the peak of Azerbarajani success in the entirety of the six @-@ year @-@ long conflict . It also marks the beginning of a new , more intense , phase of the war . Over 8 @,@ 000 Azeri troops and four additional battalions , at least 90 tanks and 70 Infantry fighting vehicles , as well as Mi @-@ 24 attack @-@ helicopters were used in this operation .

On 12 June 1992 , the Azerbaijani military launched a large @-@ scale diversionary attack in the direction of the Askeran region at the center of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . Two groups , numbering 4 @,@ 000 men , attacked the positions to the north and south of Askeran . As a result of fierce fighting the Azeris managed to establish control over some settlements in the Askeran region : Nakhichevanik , Arachadzor , Pirdzhamal , Dahraz and Agbulak .

On 13 June 1992 , Azerbaijan launched its main offensive against the region of Goranboy , located north of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , which was defended by just two small and poorly @-@ equipped Armenian voluntary detachments . This three @-@ day offensive was code @-@ named Operation Goranboy and commanded by Suret Huseynov . After fifteen hours of fierce fighting against Azerbaijani forces , the two Armenian detachments were forced to retreat . Azerbaijan managed to capture several dozen villages in the Goranboy region originally held by the Armenian forces , and the entire Armenian civilian population of this region fled . On 4 July 1992 , the Azeris captured the largest town in the region , Mardakert .

The scale of the Azeri offensive prompted the Armenian government to threaten Azerbaijan that it would directly intervene and assist the separatists fighting in Karabakh . The assault forced Armenian forces to retreat south toward Stepanakert where Karabakh commanders contemplated destroying a vital hydroelectric dam in the Martakert region if the offensive was not halted . An estimated 30 @,@ 000 Armenian refugees were also forced to flee to the capital as the assaulting forces had taken nearly half of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh .

On 18 June 1992 , a state of Emergency was announced throughout the NKR . On 15 August , the Committee for State Defense of the NKR was created , headed by Robert Kocharyan and later by Serzh Sargsyan . Partial mobilization was called for , which covered sergeants and privates in the NKR , NKR men available for military service aged 18 ? 40 , officers up to the age of 50 and women with previous military training . The newly conscripted now numbered 15 @,@ 000 men . Military reforms swiftly took place consolidating many of the separate fighting Armenian volunteer detachments into a single NKR Defense Army .

The Azeri thrust ground to a halt when the armor was driven off by helicopter gunships . It was claimed that many of the crew members of the armored units in the Azeri launched assault were Russians from the 104th Guards Airborne Division , based out of Ganja and , ironically enough , so were the units that eventually stopped them . According to an Armenian government official , they were able to persuade Russian military units to bombard and effectively halt the advance within a few days . Russia also supplied arms to the Armenians . This allowed the Armenian government to make up its losses and reorganize a counteroffensive to restore the original lines of the front . Given the reorganization of the NKR Defense Army , the tide of Azeri advances was finally stemmed . By the autumn of 1992 , the Azerbaijani army was exhausted and had suffered heavy losses . Faced

with imminent defeat , Suret Huseynov moved what was left of his army out of Aghdara and back to Ganja , where it could recuperate and restock on ammunition and armaments found at the 104th Guards Airborne Division 's base . In February ? March of the following year , the NKR Defense Army helped turn the tide into an unprecedented wave of advances .

= = = Subsequent attempts to mediate peace = = =

New efforts at peace talks were initiated by Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the first half of 1992 , after the events in Khojaly and the resignation of Azeri President Ayaz Mutallibov . Iranian diplomats conducted shuttle diplomacy and were able to bring the new president of Azerbaijan Yaqub Mammadov and President of Armenia Levon Ter @-@ Petrosian to Tehran for bilateral talks on 7 May 1992 . The Tehran Communiqué was signed by Mammadov , Ter @-@ Petrosian , and Rafsanjani following the agreement of the parties to international legal norms , stability of borders and to deal with the refugee crisis . However , the peace efforts were disrupted on the next day when Armenian troops captured the town of Shusha and completely failed following the capture of the town Lachin on 18 May .

In the summer of 1992 , the CSCE ( later to become the Organization for Security and Co @-@ operation in Europe ) , created the Minsk Group in Helsinki which comprised eleven nations and was co @-@ chaired by France , Russia , and the United States with the purpose of mediating a peace deal with Armenia and Azerbaijan . However , in their annual summit in 1992 , the organization failed to address and solve the many new problems that had arisen since the Soviet Union collapsed , much less the Karabakh conflict . The war in Yugoslavia , Moldova 's war with the breakaway republic of Transnistria , the secessionist movement in Chechnya , and Georgia 's renewed disputes with Russia , Abkhazia , and Ossetia were all top agenda issues that involved various ethnic groups fighting each other .

The CSCE proposed the use of NATO and CIS peacekeepers to monitor ceasefires and protect shipments of humanitarian aid being sent to displaced refugees . Several ceasefires were put into effect after the June offensive but the implementation of a European peacekeeping force , endorsed by Armenia , never came to fruition . The idea of sending 100 international observers to Karabakh was once raised but talks broke down completely between Armenian and Azeri leaders in July . Russia was especially opposed to allowing a multinational peacekeeping force from NATO to entering the Caucasus , seeing it as a move that encroached on its " backyard " .

= = = Mardakert and Martuni Offensives = = =

In late June , a new , smaller Azeri offensive was planned , this time against the town of Martuni in the southeastern half of Karabakh . The attack force consisted of several dozen tanks and armored fighting vehicles along with a complement of several infantry companies massing along the Machkalashen and Jardar fronts near Martuni and Krasnyy Bazar . Martuni 's regimental commander , Monte Melkonian , referred now by his men as " Avo " , although lacking heavy armor , managed to stave off repeated attempts by the Azeri forces .

In late August 1992 , Nagorno @-@ Karabakh 's government found itself in a disorderly state and its members resigned on 17 August . Power was subsequently assumed by a council called the State Defense Committee and chaired by Robert Kocharyan , which stated it would temporarily govern the enclave until the conflict ended . At the same time , Azerbaijan also launched attacks by fixed @-@ wing aircraft , often bombing civilian targets . Kocharyan condemned what he believed were intentional attempts to kill civilians by the Azeris and also Russia 's alleged passive and unconcerned attitude toward allowing its army 's weapons stockpiles to be sold or transferred to Azerbaijan .

= = = Winter thaw = = =

As winter approached , both sides largely abstained from launching full @-@ scale offensives so as

to preserve resources , such as gas and electricity , for domestic use . Despite the opening of an economic highway to the residents living in Karabakh , both Armenia and the enclave suffered a great deal due to the economic blockades imposed by Azerbaijan . While not completely shut off , material aid sent through Turkey arrived sporadically .

Experiencing both food shortages and power shortages , after the shutting down of the Metsamor nuclear power plant , Armenia 's economic outlook appeared bleak : in Georgia , a new bout of civil wars against separatists in Abkhazia and Ossetia began , and supply convoys were raided and the only oil pipeline leading from Russia to Armenia repeatedly destroyed . Similar to the winter of 1991 ? 1992 , the 1992 ? 1993 winter was especially cold , as many families throughout Armenia and Karabakh were left without heating and hot water .

Grain had become difficult to procure . The Armenian Diaspora raised money and donated supplies to Armenia . In December , two shipments of 33 @, @ 000 tons of grain and 150 tons of infant formula arrived from the United States via the Black Sea port of Batumi , Georgia . In February 1993 , the European Community sent 4 @. @ 5 million ECUs to Armenia . Armenia 's southern neighbor Iran also helped Armenia economically by providing power and electricity . Elchibey 's acrimonious stance toward Iran and his remarks to unify with Iran 's Azeri minority alienated relations between the two countries .

Azeris displaced as internal and international refugees were forced to live in makeshift camps provided by both the Azerbaijan government and Iran . The International Red Cross also distributed blankets to the Azeris and noted that by December , enough food was being allocated for the refugees . Azerbaijan also struggled to rehabilitate its petroleum industry , the country 's chief export . Its oil refineries were not generating at full capacity and production quotas fell well short of estimates . In 1965 , the oil fields in Baku were producing 21 @. @ 5 million tons of oil annually ; by 1988 , that number had dropped down to almost 3 @. @ 3 million . Outdated Soviet refinery equipment and a reluctance by Western oil companies to invest in a war region where pipelines would routinely be destroyed prevented Azerbaijan from fully exploiting its oil wealth .

= = Summer 1993 = =

= = = Conflicts = = =

Despite the grueling winter , the new year was viewed enthusiastically by both sides . Azerbaijan 's President Elchibey expressed optimism toward bringing an agreeable solution to the conflict with Armenia 's Ter @-@ Petrosyan . Glimmers of such hope , however , quickly began to fade in January 1993 , despite the calls for a new ceasefire by Boris Yeltsin and George H. W. Bush , as hostilities in the region brewed up once more . Armenian forces began a new bout of offensives that overran villages in northern Karabakh that had been held by the Azeris since the previous autumn .

Frustration over these military defeats took a toll on the domestic front in Azerbaijan . Azerbaijan 's military had grown more desperate and defense minister Gaziev and Huseynov 's brigade turned to Russian help , a move which ran against Elchibey 's policies and were construed as insubordination . Political infighting and arguments on where to shift military units between the country 's ministry of the interior ?sgandar Hamidov and Gaziev led to the latter 's resignation on 20 February . Armenia was similarly wracked by political turmoil and growing Armenian dissension against President Ter @-@ Petrosyan .

= = = Kelbajar = = =

Situated west of northern Karabakh , outside the official boundaries of the region , was the rayon of Kelbajar , which bordered Armenia . With a population of about 60 @, @ 000 , the several dozen villages were made up of Azeris and Kurds . In March 1993 , the Armenian @-@ held areas near the Sarsang reservoir in Mardakert were reported to have been coming under attack by the Azeris . After successfully defending the Martuni region , Melkonian 's fighters were tasked to move to

capture the region of Kelbajar , where the incursions and artillery shelling were said to have been coming from .

Scant military opposition by the Azeris allowed Melkonian 's fighters to gain a foothold in the region and along the way capture several abandoned armored vehicles and tanks . At 2 : 45 pm , on 2 April , Armenian forces from two directions advanced toward Kelbajar in an attack that struck Azerbaijani armor and troops entrenched near the Ganje @-@ Kelbjar intersection . Azerbaijani forces were unable to halt the advances made by Armenian armor and were wiped out completely . The second attack toward Kelbajar also quickly overran the defenders . By 3 April , Armenian forces were in possession of Kelbajar . President Elchibey imposed a state of emergency for a period of two months and introduced universal conscription .

On 30 April , the United Nations Security Council ( UNSC ) passed Resolution 822 , co @-@ sponsored by Turkey and Pakistan , demanding the immediate cessation of all hostilities and the withdrawal of all occupying forces from Kelbajar . Human Rights Watch concluded that during the Kelbajar offensive Armenian forces committed numerous violations of the rules of war , including the forcible exodus of a civilian population , indiscriminate fire , and taking of hostages .

The political repercussions were also felt in Azerbaijan when Huseynov embarked on his " march to Baku . " Frustrated with what he felt was Elchibey 's incompetence and demoted from his rank of colonel , his brigade advanced in early June from its base in Ganje toward Baku with the explicit aim of unseating the president . Elchibey stepped down from office on 18 June and power was assumed by then parliamentary member Heydar Aliyev . On 1 July , Huseynov was appointed prime minister of Azerbaijan . As acting president , Aliyev disbanded 33 voluntary battalions of the Popular Front , which he deemed politically unreliable . Aliyev became the President of Azerbaijan on 10 October 1993 .

= = = Agdam , Fizuli , Jabrail and Zangilan = = =

While the people of Azerbaijan were adjusting to the new political landscape , many Armenians were mourning Melkonian , who was killed earlier on 12 June in a skirmish with Azerbaijani light armor and infantry near the town of Merzuli and given a state funeral in Yerevan . The Armenian side made use of the political crisis in Baku , which had left the Karabakh front almost undefended by the Azerbaijani forces . The following four months of political instability in Azerbaijan led to the loss of control over five districts , as well as the north of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh . Azerbaijani military forces were unable to put up much resistance in the face of Armenian advances and abandoned most of their positions without so much as putting up a fight . In late June , they were driven out from Martakert , losing their final foothold of the enclave . By July , Armenian forces were preparing to attack and capture the region of Agdam , another rayon that fell outside of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , claiming that they were attempting to widen a barrier that would keep towns and villages and their positions out of the range of Azerbaijani artillery .

On 4 July artillery bombardment commenced against Agdam by Armenian forces , destroying many parts of the town . Soldiers , along with civilians , began to evacuate Agdam . Facing military collapse , Aliev attempted to mediate with the de facto Karabakh government and Minsk Group officials . In mid @-@ August , Armenians massed a force to take the Azerbaijani @-@ held regions of Fizuli and Jebrail , south of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh proper .

In light of the Armenians ' advance into Azerbaijan , Turkey 's prime minister Tansu Çiller , warned the Armenian government not to attack Nakhichevan and demanded that Armenians pull out of Azerbaijan 's territories . Thousands of Turkish troops were sent to the border between Turkey and Armenia in early September . Russian Federation forces in Armenia in turn countered their movements and thus warded off the possible Turkish participation in the conflict .

By early September , Azerbaijani forces were nearly in complete disarray . Many of the heavy weapons they had received and bought from the Russians had been taken out of action or abandoned during the battles . Since the June 1992 offensive , Armenian forces had captured dozens of tanks , light armor , and artillery from Azerbaijan . For example , according to Monte Melkonian in a television interview in March 1993 , his forces in Martuni alone had captured or

destroyed a total of 55 T @-@ 72s , 24 BMP @-@ 2s , 15 APCs and 25 pieces of heavy artillery since the June 1992 Goranboy offensive . " Most of our arms , " he stated , " [ were ] captured from Azerbaijan . " Serzh Sargsyan , the then military leader of the Karabakh armed forces , tallied a total of 156 tanks captured through the course of the war . By the summer of 1993 , Armenian forces had captured so much equipment that many of them were praising Elchibey , since he was , in effect , arming both sides .

Further signs of Azerbaijan 's desperation included the recruitment by Aliyev of 1 @,@ 000 ? 1 @,@ 500 Afghan and Arab mujahadeen fighters from Afghanistan . Although the Azerbaijani government denied this claim , correspondence and photographs captured by Armenian forces indicated otherwise . A United States @-@ based petroleum company , MEGA OIL , also hired several American military trainers as a prerequisite for Azerbaijan to grant it drilling rights at its oil fields .

= = Aerial warfare = =

The aerial warfare in Karabakh involved primarily fighter jets and attack helicopters . The primary transport helicopters of the war were the Mi @-@ 8 and its cousin , the Mi @-@ 17 and were used extensively by both sides . Armenia 's active air force consisted of only two Su @-@ 25 ground support bombers , one of which was lost due to friendly fire . There were also several Su @-@ 22s and Su @-@ 17s ; however , these aging craft took a backseat for the duration of the war . In total , throughout the war Armenians brought down 28 Azerbaijani warplanes and 19 military helicopters .

Azerbaijan 's air force was composed of forty @-@ five combat aircraft which were often piloted by experienced Russian and Ukrainian mercenaries from the former Soviet military . They flew mission sorties over Karabakh with such sophisticated jets as the MiG @-@ 25 and Sukhoi Su @-@ 24 and with older @-@ generation Soviet fighter bombers , such as the MiG @-@ 21 . They were reported to have been paid a monthly salary of over 5 @,@ 000 rubles and flew bombing campaigns from air force bases in Azerbaijan often targeting Stepanakert .

These pilots , like the men from the Soviet interior forces in the onset of the conflict , were also poor and took the jobs as a means of supporting their families . Several were shot down over the city by Armenian forces and according to one of the pilots ' commanders , with assistance provided by the Russians . Many of these pilots faced the threat of execution by Armenian forces if they were shot down . The setup of the defense system severely hampered Azerbaijan 's ability to carry out and launch more air strikes . The most widely used helicopter gunship by both the Armenians and Azeris was the Soviet @-@ made Mil Mi @-@ 24 Krokodil .

= = Armenian and Azerbaijani aircraft equipment = = =

Below is a table listing the number of aircraft that were used by Armenia and Azerbaijan during the war .

= = 1993 ? 1994 attack waves = =

In October 1993 , Aliyev was formally elected president and promised to bring social order to the country in addition to recapturing the lost regions . In October , Azerbaijan joined the CIS . The winter season was marked with similar conditions as in the previous year , both sides scavenging for wood and harvesting foodstuffs months in advance . Two subsequent UNSC resolutions on the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh conflict were passed , ( 874 and 884 ) , in October and November and , although reemphasizing the same points as the previous two , they acknowledged Nagorno @-@ Karabakh as a party to the conflict .

In early January , Azerbaijani forces and Afghan guerrillas recaptured part of the Fizuli district , including the railway junction of Horadiz on the Iranian border , but failed to recapture the town of Fizuli itself . On 10 January 1994 an offensive was launched by Azerbaijan toward the region of Martakert in an attempt to recapture the northern section of the enclave . The offensive managed to

advance and take back several parts of Karabakh in the north and to the south but soon petered out . In response , the Republic of Armenia began sending conscripts and regular Army and Interior Ministry troops to stop the Azerbaijani advance in Karabakh . To bolster the ranks of its army , the Armenian government issued a decree that instituted a three @-@ month call @-@ up for men up to age forty @-@ five and resorted to press @-@ gang raids to enlist recruits . Several active @-@ duty Armenian Army soldiers were captured by the Azerbaijani forces .

Azerbaijan 's offensives grew more desperate as boys as young as 16 , with little to no training , were recruited and sent to take part in ineffective human wave attacks ( a tactic often compared to the one employed by Iran during the Iran ? Iraq War ) . The two offensives that took place in the winter cost Azerbaijan as many as 5 @,@ 000 lives ( at the loss of several hundred Armenians ) . The main Azeri offensive was aimed at recapturing the Kelbajar district , which would thus threaten the Lachin corridor . The attack initially met little resistance and was successful in capturing the vital Omar Pass . However , as the Armenian forces reacted , the bloodiest clashes of the war ensued and the Azeri forces were soundly defeated . In a single episode of that time 's clashes , Azerbaijan lost about fifteen hundred of its soldiers after the failed offensive in Kelbajar . Several Azeri brigades were isolated when the Armenians recaptured the Omar Pass , surrounded , then destroyed .

While the political leadership changed hands several times in Azerbaijan , most Armenian soldiers in Karabakh claimed that the Azeri youth , and Azeris themselves , were demoralized and lacked a sense of purpose and commitment to fighting the war . Russian professor Georgiy I. Mirsky lent credence to this view in his 1997 book , On Ruins of Empire , stating that " Karabakh does not matter to Azerbaijanis as much as it does to Armenians . Probably , this is why young volunteers from Armenia proper have been much more eager to fight and die for Karabakh than the Azerbaijanis have . " This view received further validation in a report filed by a journalist from the New York Times visiting the region , who noted that " In Stepanakert , it is impossible to find an able @-@ bodied man ? whether volunteer from Armenia or local resident ? out of uniform . [ Whereas in ] Azerbaijan , draft @-@ age men hang out in cafes . " Andrei Sakharov famously remarked on this at the outset of the conflict : " For Azerbaijan the issue of Karabakh is a matter of ambition , for the Armenians of Karabakh , it is a matter of life or death . "

= = = 1994 ceasefire = = =

After six years of intense fighting , both sides were ready for a ceasefire . Azerbaijan , with its manpower exhausted and aware that Armenian forces had an unimpeded path to march on to Baku , counted on a new ceasefire proposal from either the CSCE or Russia . As the final battles of the conflict took place near Shahumyan , in a series of brief engagements in Gulustan , Armenian and Azerbaijani diplomats met in the early part of 1994 to hammer out the details of the ceasefire . On May 5 , with Russia acting as a mediator , all parties agreed to cease hostilities and vowed to observe a ceasefire that would go into effect at 12 : 01 AM on May 12 . The agreement was signed by the respective defense ministers of the three principle warring parties ( Armenia , Azerbaijan , and the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Republic ) . In Azerbaijan , many welcomed the end of hostilities . Sporadic fighting continued in some parts of the region but all sides vowed to abide by the terms of the ceasefire .

= = Media coverage = =

Valuable footage of the conflict was provided by a number of journalists from both sides , including Vardan Hovhannisyan , who won the 2007 Tribeca Film Festival 's prize for best new documentary filmmaker for his A Story of People in War and Peace , and Chingiz Mustafayev , who was posthumously awarded the title of National Hero of Azerbaijan . Armenian @-@ Russian journalist Dmitri Pisarenko who spent a year at the front line and filmed many of the battles later wrote that both Armenian and Azerbaijani journalists were preoccupied with echoing the official stands of their respective governments and that " objectiveness was being sacrificed for ideology . " Armenian military commanders were eager to give interviews following Azerbaijani offensives when they were



able to criticise the other side for launching heavy artillery attacks that the " small @-@ numbered but proud Armenians " had to fight off . Yet they were reluctant to speak out when Armenian troops seized a village outside Nagorno @-@ Karabakh in order to avoid justifying such acts . Therefore , Armenian journalists felt the need to be creative enough to portray the event as " an Armenian counter @-@ offensive " or as " a necessary military operation . "

Bulgarian journalist Tsvetana Paskaleva is noted for her coverage of Operation Ring . Some foreign journalists previously concerned with emphasizing the Soviet conceding in the Cold War , gradually shifted towards presenting the USSR as a country swamped by a wave of ethnic conflicts , the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh conflict being one of them .

Foreign reporters often referenced religious factors in the conflict , i.e. the fact that Armenians were predominantly Christian , and outside coverage of the conflict is often skewed by allegiances .

= = Post @-@ ceasefire violence and mediation = =

Today , the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh conflict remains one of several frozen conflicts in the former Soviet Union , alongside Georgia 's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Moldova 's troubles with Transnistria . Karabakh remains under the jurisdiction of the government of the unrecognized but de facto independent Republic of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , which maintains its own uniformed military , the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Defense Army .

Contrary to media reports that nearly always mentioned the religions of the Armenians and Azeris religious aspects never gained significance as an additional casus belli , and the Karabakh conflict has remained primarily an issue of territory and the human rights of Armenians in Karabakh . Since 1995 , the co @-@ chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group has been mediating with the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan to settle for a new solution . Numerous proposals have been made which have primarily been based on both sides making several concessions . One such proposal stipulated that as Armenian forces withdrew from the seven regions surrounding Karabakh , Azerbaijan would share some of its economic assets including profits from an oil pipeline that would go from Baku through Armenia to Turkey . Other proposals also included that Azerbaijan would provide the broadest form of autonomy to Karabakh next to granting it full independence . Armenia has also been pressured by being excluded from major economic projects throughout the region , including the Baku @-@ Tbilisi @-@ Ceyhan pipeline and Kars @-@ Tbilisi @-@ Baku railway .

According to Armenia 's former president , Levon Ter @-@ Petrosyan , by giving certain Karabakh territories to Azerbaijan , the Karabakh conflict would have been resolved in 1997 . A peace agreement could have been concluded and a status for Nagorno @-@ Karabakh would have been determined . Ter @-@ Petrosyan noted years later that the Karabakh leadership approach was maximalist and " they thought they could get more . " Most autonomy proposals have been rejected , however , by the Armenians , who consider it as a matter that is not negotiable . Likewise , Azerbaijan has also refused to let the matter subside and regularly threatens to resume hostilities . On 30 March 1998 , Robert Kocharyan was elected president and continued to reject calls for making a deal to resolve the conflict . In 2001 , Kocharyan and Aliyev met in Key West , Florida for peace talks sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe . While several Western diplomats expressed optimism , failure to prepare the populations of either country for compromise reportedly thwarted hopes for a peaceful resolution .

Refugees displaced from the fighting amount to nearly one million people . An estimated 400 @,@ 000 Armenians living in Azerbaijan fled to Armenia or Russia and a further 30 @,@ 000 came from Karabakh . Many of those who left Karabakh returned after the war ended . An estimated 800 @,@ 000 Azeris were displaced from the fighting including those from both Armenia and Karabakh . Various other ethnic groups living in Karabakh were also forced to live in refugee camps built by both the Azeri and Iranian governments . Although Azerbaijan has repeatedly claimed that 20 % of its territory has fallen under Armenian control and other sources have given figures as high 40 % , the actual percentage , taking into account the exclave of Nakhichevan , is estimated to be closer to 13 @.@ 62 % or 14 % ( the number comes down to 9 % if Nagorno @-@ Karabakh itself is excluded ) .

The Nagorno @-@ Karabakh war has given rise to strong anti @-@ Armenianism in Azerbaijan and anti @-@ Azerbaijani sentiment in Armenia . The ramifications of the war were said to have played a part in the February 2004 murder of Armenian Lieutenant Gurgen Markaryan who was hacked to death with an axe by his Azerbaijani counterpart , Ramil Safarov at a NATO training seminar in Budapest , Hungary . Upon his extradition in 2012 Safarov was pardoned by president Aliyev and greeted as a hero in Azerbaijan .

Azerbaijani enmity against anything Armenian led to the destruction of thousands of medieval Armenian gravestones , known as khachkars , at a massive cemetery in Julfa , Nakhichevan . This destruction was temporarily halted when first revealed in 1998 , but then continued on to completion in 2005 . Azerbaijan has likened Armenia 's control of the region to the Nazi occupation of the Soviet Union during World War II .

= = Current situation = =

In the years since the end of the war , a number of organizations have passed resolutions regarding the conflict . On 25 January 2005 , for example , PACE adopted a controversial non @-@ binding resolution , Resolution 1416 , which criticized the " large @-@ scale ethnic expulsion and the creation of mono @-@ ethnic areas " and declared that Armenian forces were occupying Azerbaijan lands . On 14 May 2008 thirty @-@ nine countries from the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 62 / 243 which called for " the immediate , complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan . " Almost one hundred countries , however , abstained from voting while seven countries , including the three co @-@ chairs of the Minsk Group , Russia , the United States , and France , voted against it .

During the summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference ( OIC ) and the session of its Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs , member states adopted OIC Resolution ? 10 / 11 and OIC Council of Foreign Ministers Resolution ? 10 / 37 , on 14 March 2008 and 18 ? 20 May 2010 , respectively . Both resolutions condemned alleged aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan and called for immediate implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 822 , 853 , 874 and 884 . As a response , Armenian leaders have stated Azerbaijan was " exploiting Islam to muster greater international support . "

In 2008 , the Moscow Defense Brief opined that because of the rapid growth of Azeri defense expenditures ? which is driving the strong rearmament of the Azeri armed forces ? the military balance appeared to be now shifting in Azerbaijan 's favor : " ... The overall trend is clearly in Azerbaijan 's favor , and it seems that Armenia will not be able to sustain an arms race with Azerbaijan 's oil @-@ fueled economy . And this could lead to the destabilization of the frozen conflict between these two states , " the journal wrote . Other analysts have made more cautious observations , noting that administrative and military deficiencies are obviously found in the Azerbaijani military and that the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Defense Army maintains a " constant state of readiness ... "

= = = Clashes = = =

In early 2008 , tensions between Armenia , the NKR Karabakh and Azerbaijan grew . On the diplomatic front , President Ilham Aliyev repeated statements that Azerbaijan would resort to force , if necessary , to take the territories back ; concurrently , shooting incidents along the line of contact increased . On 5 March 2008 a significant breach of the ceasefire occurred in Mardakert , when up to sixteen soldiers were killed . Both sides accused the other of starting the battle . Moreover , the use of artillery in the skirmishes marked a significant departure from previous clashes , which usually involved only sniper or machine gun fire . Deadly skirmishes took place during the summer of 2010 as well .

Tensions escalated again in July ? August 2014 with ceasefire breaches by Azerbaijan taking place and the President of Azerbaijan , Aliyev , threatening Armenia with war .

Rather than receding , the tension in the area increased in April 2016 with the 2016 Armenian @-@ Azerbaijani clashes when the worst clashes since the 1994 ceasefire erupted . The Armenian Defense Ministry alleged that Azerbaijan launched an offensive to seize territory in the region . Azerbaijan reported that 12 of its soldiers were killed in action and that a Mil Mi @-@ 24 helicopter and tank were also destroyed . Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan stated that 18 Armenian soldiers were killed and 35 were wounded .

= = Misconduct = =

Emerging from the collapse of the Soviet Union as nascent states and due to the near @-@ immediate fighting , it was not until mid @-@ 1993 that Armenia and Azerbaijan became signatories of international law agreements , including the Geneva Conventions . Allegations from all three governments ( including Nagorno @-@ Karabakh 's ) regularly accused the other side of committing atrocities which were at times confirmed by third party media sources or human rights organizations . Khojaly Massacre , for example , was confirmed by both Human Rights Watch and Memorial . Maraghar Massacre was testified by British @-@ based organization Christian Solidarity International and by the Vice @-@ Speaker of the British Parliament 's House of Lords Caroline Cox in 1992 . Azerbaijan was condemned by HRW for its use of aerial bombing in densely populated civilian areas and both sides were criticized for indiscriminate fire , hostage @-@ taking and the forcible displacement of civilians .

The lack of international laws for either side to abide by virtually sanctioned activity in the war to what would be considered war crimes . Looting and mutilation ( body parts such as ears , brought back from the front as treasured war souvenirs ) of dead soldiers were commonly reported and even boasted about among soldiers . Another practice that took form , not by soldiers but by regular civilians during the war , was the bartering of prisoners between Armenians and Azerbaijanis . Often , when contact was lost between family members and a soldier or a militiaman serving at the front , they took it upon themselves to organize an exchange by personally capturing a soldier from the battle lines and holding them in the confines of their own homes . New York Times journalist Yo 'av Karyn noted this practice was as " old as the people occupying [ the ] land . "

After the war ended , both sides accused their opponents of continuing to hold captives ; Azerbaijan claimed Armenia was continuing to hold nearly 5 @,@ 000 Azerbaijani prisoners while Armenians claimed Azerbaijan was holding 600 prisoners . The non @-@ profit group , Helsinki Initiative 92 , investigated two prisons in Shusha and Stepanakert after the war ended , but concluded there were no prisoners @-@ of @-@ war there . A similar investigation arrived at the same conclusion while searching for Armenians allegedly laboring in Azerbaijan 's quarries .

= = Cultural legacy = =

The conflict has come to be represented in different forms of media in Armenia and Azerbaijan . In June 2006 , the film Chakatagir ( Destiny ) premiered in Yerevan and Stepanakert . The film stars and is written by Gor Vardanyan and is a fictionalized account of the events revolving around Operation Ring . It cost \$ 3 @.@ 8 million to make , the most expensive film ever made in the country , and was the first film made about the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh War . In the summer of 2012 , Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan released a video game entitled ???al Alt?nda : ?u?a ( Under Occupation : Shusha ) , a free first person shooter that allows the player to assume the role of an Azerbaijani soldier who takes part in the 1992 battle of Shusha . Commentators have noted that the game " is not for the faint of heart : there 's lots of killing and computer @-@ generated gore . To a great extent , it 's a celebration of violence : to advance , players must handle a variety of tasks , including shooting lots of Armenian enemies , rescuing a wounded Azerbaijani soldier , retrieving a document and blowing up a building in the town of Shusha . " Another opus followed , ???al Alt?nda : A?dam , which was released in 2013 . This episode is very similar to the previous one , but this time it takes place in Agdam .

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