

Republic of Artsakh

(formerly known as the Nagorno Karabakh Republic)



Profile and Geographic Location

Territory: 4,457 sq. miles (11,500 sq. km.)

Population: 146,600 (2012 est.)

Religion: Armenian Apostolic Christian

Language: Armenian

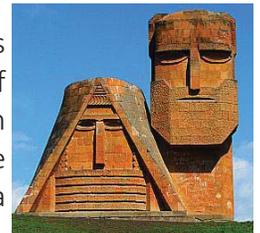
Capital: Stepanakert

Largest Cities: Shushi, Martuni, Martakert, Hadrut, Askeran



Artsakh, also known as Nagorno Karabakh, one of the 15 provinces of historic Armenia, is located in the eastern Armenian Plateau. Geographically, the Artsakh Republic defines itself within administrative borders of the former Soviet Union's Region of Mountainous Karabakh, and the adjacent Shahumyan district.

Confronted by the genocidal forces of the Ottoman Empire, Armenia was fighting in 1918 for its very existence. Artsakh was mostly left to defend itself against Azerbaijani forces allied with the Ottoman Turks. When the Russian Communists took over the South Caucasus in 1920, instead of resolving the ethnic tensions that had inflamed the region, they perpetuated the divisions as a method of controlling the nominal republics of the Soviet Union.



Recognizing that 95 percent of the population was Armenian, the Soviet regime granted Nagorno Karabakh autonomy, but within Soviet Azerbaijan. During the last liberalizing phase of the Soviet era, per existing law, the population of Nagorno Karabakh declared its own self-governing republic in 1991. Azerbaijan, with its Muslim majority population, responded by declaring war against the Christian Armenians. After a bloody and destructive conflict resulting in 30,000 deaths, a cease-fire agreement was signed in 1994. Year after year, however, serious and deadly violations by Azerbaijan increased in frequency until the April 2016 escalation into a major confrontation involving large-scale attacks by Azeri forces along the entire border of Azerbaijan with Artsakh and Armenia.

April War 2016 - On April 2, 2016 Azerbaijan, with the support of Turkish military personnel and equipment,



initiated a military offensive against Armenia and Artsakh. The offensive started with the killing of a 12-year-old boy on his way to school and continued with the gruesome mutilation of an elderly Armenian couple. Increasingly and without international condemnation, Azerbaijan has flaunted the signed 1994 cease-fire agreement, targeting civilians in violation of international law. Azerbaijan admitted to launching the offensive – which came hours after President Ilham Aliyev's meeting with Secretary of State John Kerry in Washington, D.C. The large-scale incursions along the Line of Contact resulted in the death of over 100 members of the Artsakh defense forces.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1920s - In 1921, Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, to consolidate his power, forcibly placed Artsakh under Soviet Azerbaijani rule. An arbitrary decision without precedent placed a millennia-old autonomous Christian territory into a largely hostile Muslim regional government entity. During the Soviet regime, Artsakh repeatedly appealed to the Central Government in Moscow to restore justice and reunite the region with Armenia. After years of tireless struggle, Moscow granted autonomous status to the region. The Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast

(Region) was created on a part of historical Artsakh. However, this new formation was deliberately separated from Armenia by a slim corridor.

Since its creation in 1918, Azerbaijan has been implementing an open campaign of national, ethnic, religious, cultural, and economic discrimination, aiming to eliminate the region’s Armenian heritage. Just as it succeeded in eliminating the Armenian population of Nakhichevan, which was 50 percent Armenian in 1920 down to zero by 1991, Azerbaijan aimed to achieve ethnic cleansing in Artsakh. Its policies had already shaved down the Armenian population from 95 percent to 75 percent when it resorted to



more violent methods of eliminating the Armenians.

1990s - With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Artsakh rejected Azerbaijan’s repressive rule, and established itself as a free and sovereign nation through a legal national referendum. Establishment of the Artsakh Republic (September 2, 1991) and its Declaration of Independence (January 6, 1992) was realized in full compliance with existing legislation and international norms.

In response, Azerbaijan launched an aggressive and destructive war that lasted from 1991 until May, 1994, when a cease-fire agreement was signed by Artsakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan. It remains in force to this day.



Since 1992, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group has sponsored peace talks aimed at reaching a negotiated resolution. Since 1997, Azerbaijan has rejected Artsakh as a negotiating partner in the conflict, opting instead to distort this conflict over independence as a conflict with Armenia over territorial claims.



Artsakh continues to express its readiness to take steps to renew the peace talks. However, Azerbaijan continues to refuse to sign any agreement or allow additional peacekeeping forces and directional fire-monitoring equipment to be deployed along the Line of Contact.

1994-2016 - The people of Artsakh focused on rebuilding their country and their economy. They forged a constitution, created a working government, improved health care services and educational opportunities, and sought to join the community of nations. At the same time, the government in Azerbaijan came under the control of a corrupt hereditary dynasty that used its growing oil revenues to purchase billions of dollars worth of offensive military equipment in preparation of conducting large-scale military operations against Artsakh. The regime abandoned all democratic principles, repressed all independent media, suppressed political opposition, and kept its population in poverty as oil wealth was concentrated in the hands of the Aliyev dynasty and those connected to it.





CONCERNS AND SOLUTIONS

Cease-fire Violations - The Armenian Assembly is deeply concerned about the authoritarian regime in Azerbaijan, its jailing of journalists, abandonment of democratic values, as well as the impact it has on the region, particularly for America’s longtime ally Armenia. Unfortunately, these authoritarian trends have spilled over into the OSCE-mediated Artsakh peace process.

According to reports filed with the United Nations (UN) and the OSCE, there were over 54,000 cease-fire violations committed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh between 2014 and 2015 alone.

Additionally, there were over 11,500 cross-border violations committed by Azerbaijan against Armenia during the same period, constituting an estimate of more than 200,000 shots fired. In April 2016, Azerbaijan ignited a four-day war resulting in extensive death and

These violations constitute an estimated total of nearly 1 million shots fired by Azerbaijan.

destruction. The Azerbaijani government continues to violate daily the 1994 cease-fire agreement with powerful deadly weaponry. In Armenia’s Tavush region, a kindergarten has been the repeated target of sniper fire. This is an outrageous violation. The targeting of innocent civilians and children must end.

Some of the weapons used by Azerbaijan in its attacks against Armenia and Artsakh in 2014-2015 include: grenade launchers, large caliber machine guns, large caliber sniper weapons, mortars, and howitzers. Not surprisingly 2014 and 2015 have been marked by increased civilian deaths and casualties. The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs in a Joint Statement in December 2015 said “there is no justification for the death and injury of innocent civilians.” “We especially condemn the use of mortars and other heavy weaponry,” the joint statement highlighted “and regret deeply the civilian casualties these weapons have caused.”



U.S. Representatives Royce-Engel Initiative - These violations constitute a clear disregard for the rule of law and pose a direct threat to fundamental freedoms. Given these egregious violations, the Assembly welcomed the 2015 initiative by House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce (R-CA) and Ranking Member Eliot Engel (D-NY) to address the dramatic increase of deadly cease-fire violations. In their letter to the U.S. Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, they called for three concrete steps to be taken. These include: (1) an agreement from all sides not to deploy snipers along the Line of Contact; (2) the placement of OSCE-monitored, advanced gunfire-locator systems and sound-ranging equipment to determine the source of attacks along the Line of Contact; and (3) the deployment of additional OSCE observers along the Line of Contact to better monitor cease-fire violations.



Armenia and Artsakh have joined the call for international monitors along the Line of Contact and for the cease-fire framework to be respected. However, Azerbaijan has not. Instead, it continues to escalate its war rhetoric and match it with aggressive frontline fighting and shelling. In a February 10, 2016 *Wall Street Journal* article, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry stated that it had given “the order to all troops, including rocket-artillery troops to be prepared to deliver crushing blows” to Stepanakert, the capital of Artsakh. *The Washington Post* also reported that the Azeri Defense Ministry stated that its soldiers “became shahids” – Muslim martyrs. The Armenian Assembly is deeply troubled by Azerbaijan’s attempts to make this a religious conflict as well as reports of Azerbaijan’s ties to ISIS.

Freedom Support Act - On October 24, 1992, in response to Azerbaijan’s war of aggression in Artsakh and Azerbaijan’s blockade of Armenia, the United States Congress passed Section 907 of the U.S. Freedom Support Act which bans any kind of direct United States aid to the Azerbaijani government. This ban made Azerbaijan the only post-Soviet state not to receive direct aid from the United States government for the purpose of economic and political development.



On October 24, 2001, in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. Senate adopted an amendment to the Freedom Support Act that provides the President with the ability to waive Section 907, a waiver that has been granted continuously since that time.

Given Azerbaijan’s blatant violations, the Armenian Assembly continues to press for full enforcement of Section 907. There should be no U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan unless and until it ceases all military hostilities against Armenia and Artsakh and agrees to a path for a peaceful and just resolution of the conflict. Anything less risks further escalation of hostilities and full-scale war.



U.S. Assistance to Artsakh - Direct U.S. aid to Artsakh has, for almost two decades, represented a powerful investment in peace and an expression of America’s leadership in support of a negotiated and democratic resolution of security and status issues related to Artsakh. This direct aid has met pressing humanitarian needs such as the clearing of land mines and unexploded ordnance from villages and farmlands. The Artsakh region has the highest per capita rate of land mine accidents in the world, with a reported third of the victims being children.

The Armenian Assembly continues to press the Department of State and USAID to support expansion of humanitarian assistance in Artsakh to include support for rehabilitation centers and regional clinics, which serve over 1,000 children and adults with physical and cognitive disabilities every year.



Inclusion of Artsakh in the Peace Talks - Artsakh is one of the three parties to the 1994 cease-fire agreement, which ended military hostilities between Artsakh and Azerbaijan. Artsakh participated in the OSCE Minsk Group peace process



as a partner, together with Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, since 1997, Azerbaijan has rejected Artsakh as a negotiating partner in the conflict, opting instead to distort this conflict over self-determination as a conflict with Armenia over territorial claims. Artsakh must, in the interests of peace and justice, be included in all talks regarding its future. The best and most sustainable path to peace requires direct engagement with the people and government of Artsakh, whose fate and future are the subject of ongoing talks and whose security will rest on the outcome of those negotiations.