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Nagorno-Karabakh issue

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Why is in news? Armenian separatist forces in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region of the South Caucasus surrendered and agreed to a ceasefire. 24 hours after Azerbaijan began an offensive to restore its full control over the

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Nagorno-Karabakh is a **disputed territory** internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but mostly governed by the Republic of Artsakh, de facto independent state with an Armenian ethnic majority backed by neighbouring Armenia.

Though **Azerbaijan is predominantly Muslim** and **Armenia is a Christian majority nation**, religious tensions play only a bit role in the conflict over the territory.

Origin of the conflict: Modern-day **Armenia and Azerbaijan became part of the Soviet Union** when it formed in the 1920s.

Nagorno-Karabakh was an **ethnic-majority Armenian region**, but the Soviets gave control over the area to Azerbaijani authorities.

It was **only as the Soviet Union began to collapse** in the late 1980s that Nagorno-Karabakh's regional parliament officially voted to become part of Armenia.

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Azerbaijan sought to suppress the separatist movement, while Armenia backed it. This led to full-scale war. Armenian forces gained control of Nagorno-Karabakh and areas adjacent to it before a Russian-brokered ceasefire was declared in 1994.

After that deal, Nagorno-Karabakh remained part of Azerbaijan, but since then has mostly been governed by a separatist, self-declared republic run by ethnic Armenians and backed by the Armenian government.

For approximately four decades, **territorial disputes and ethnic conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan** have severely impacted the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The two countries **went to war over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020**, and months after the war, Russia brokered a truce.

But now, with Moscow's attention diverted by the war in Ukraine, tensions have resurfaced.

Azeri-Armenian war of 1991:

The Soviets officially placed Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous Oblast (administrative region) in Azerbaijan's territory, despite the chiefly Armenian population.

The ethnic Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh expressed a desire to be reunited with their roots and become a part of Armenia, organising a vote for the same in 1988.

This did not go down well with Azerbaijan and military clashes ensued.

With the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent countries, and this time, Armenian rebels in Nagorno-Karabakh declared it an independent territory, which was not recognised internationally.

This led to an open war between Armenia and Azerbaijan which lasted till 1994.

The **war ended in 1994** when both countries **entered into a ceasefire brokered by Russia** but the borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan were not demarcated

Minsk Group:

The Minsk Group was created by the **Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** in early 1990 to **facilitate talks** between Armenia and Azerbaijan to **find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**.

The Minsk Group was **co-chaired** by Russia, the United States, and France.

But peace treaty **could not be brokered**.

The role of the Minsk Group declined during the 2020 war between the two countries, as other negotiating groups entered the scene.

Regional Conflict:

The conflict, initially a local one between Azerbaijan and Armenia, turned into a regional one in the years following the 2016 war, with the entry of Turkey into the picture.

The **Azeris and Turks share strong cultural and historical links** as Azerbaijanis are a Turkic ethnic group of mixed heritage, speaking a language belonging to a branch of the Turkic family

Russia remained neutral in the early days of the war but later established small military outposts along the Armenian border, supposedly to prevent the conflict from extending into mainland Armenia

India's Stand:

Armenia is the only country in the region with which India has a **Friendship and Cooperation Treaty** (signed in 1995), which incidentally **would prohibit India from providing military or any other assistance to Azerbaijan** in case Azerbaijan's offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh spills over to the territory of Armenia.

Armenia extends its unequivocal support to India on Kashmir issue whereas Azerbaijan not only supports but also promotes Pakistan's narrative on this issue

Azerbaijan falls on International North-South Transport Corridor route, connecting India with Russia through central Asia; it can also connect India with Turkey and beyond through Baku-Tbilisi-Kars passenger and freight rail link.

India has **adopted a balanced and neutral stance** and made a politically correct statement in which it has expressed its concern, called for restraint and immediate cessation of hostilities and resolution of conflict peacefully through diplomatic negotiations.

Conclusion:

With Russia being in a military defence pact with Armenia and Turkey backing Azerbaijan, the escalating conflict threatens to pull in regional powers in the fighting.

With the Caucasus countries being a key region for pipelines carrying oil and gas, the conflict could further destabilise the international energy supply when the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine has already sent food and power prices skyrocketing.