



Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict

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Why in News

Recently, **territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan** over the **Nagorno-Karabakh region** has re-erupted with heavy clashes.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are part of **Transcaucasia or South Caucasia** (geographical region in the vicinity of the southern Caucasus Mountains on the border of Eastern Europe and Western Asia consisting of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan).



Key Points

- **Reasons for Dispute:**
 - **Territorial:** Nagorno-Karabakh region has 95% of the population as **ethnically Armenian** and is controlled by them but it is **internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan**.
 - **Religious:** Armenia is **Christian majority**, while Azerbaijan is **Muslim majority** country.
 - **Domestic Politics:** The leaders of both the nations have fueled the issue time and again for their vested political interests.
- **History of Dispute:**
 - **1920:** Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region was **established within Azerbaijan by the then Soviet Union**.
 - **1988:** Nagorno-Karabakh legislature passed a **resolution to join Armenia** despite the region's legal location within Azerbaijan's borders.
 - **1991 :** The autonomous region officially **declared that it would not join either of the countries** after a referendum which was boycotted by Azerbaijan. **War erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan** over the region, leaving roughly tens of thousands of casualties and hundreds of thousands of refugees.
 - **1994:** Russia mediated a **cease-fire** which has remained in place since.
 - **2016:** In April 2016, the region was particularly tense because of violent fighting between the two countries, which was known as the **Four Day War**.
 - Apart from this, intermittent ceasefire violations between Azerbaijani and Armenian troops have caused hundreds of deaths in the past decade.
- **Impact:**
 - **Destabilize the Region:** Renewed tensions threaten to reignite a military conflict between the countries and **destabilize the South Caucasus region**. This may cause social unrest in the region which is already suffering from the **Covid-19 pandemic**.
 - **Civilian Casualties:** In this disputed region, there are hundreds of civilian settlements, residents of which would be **directly impacted and potentially displaced** if any large-scale war were to break out between the two countries
 - **Economic Impact:** This could also disrupt oil and gas exports from the region, since Azerbaijan, is a **significant oil and gas exporter to Europe and Central Asia**. This may even lead to **higher oil prices** globally.
 - **International Involvement:** Russia has closer ties with Armenia while Turkey and USA support Azerbaijan, and Iran has a large **Azeri minority**, which could escalate a crisis and entangle actors involved. Any military escalation would draw regional powers like **Turkey and Russia** more deeply into the conflict.
 - Russia, Israel and many other countries have been supplying Arms to both the countries despite the **arms embargo by the United Nations**.

Effect on India

- **India- Armenia:** In recent years, **Indian-Armenian bilateral cooperation** has seen rapid growth.
 - The then Vice-President of India visited Yerevan (Armenia) in 2017.
 - Armenia bought the India **SWATHI military radar system** in March 2020.
 - Many Indian students study in Armenian medical Universities and in recent years Armenia has witnessed an increasing flow of Indian labour migrants.
 - For Armenia, close relations with India are vitally important as India provides a counter balance to the **rival strategic axis between Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Turkey.**
- **India-Azerbaijan:** India is part of the **International North–South Transport Corridor** (INSTC), a multimodal network of ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe.



- Azerbaijan is a dialogue partner of **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** (SCO), which India is a member of.
- In 2018, the then Indian External affairs minister had visited Baku (Azerbaijan), the first-ever bilateral visit of an Indian External Affairs Minister to Azerbaijan.
- India's ONGC-Videsh is an investor in Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (ACG) oil fields and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.
- However, Azerbaijan supports Pakistan's position on the **Kashmir issue.**
- **Pakistan Angle:**

India has supported Armenia while Azerbaijan has been supported by Pakistan. Pakistan was the second country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence after Turkey. Also, Pakistan is the only country that **does not recognize Armenia as an independent state** and fully supports Azerbaijan's position.
- **China Angle:**
 - China has grown **increasingly active in the caucasian region**, conducting a number of programs and signing economic, political and military agreements with Armenia. Armenia has also agreed to participate in the Chinese **Belt and Road project.**
 - However, **China is an ally of its rival Azerbaijan** and Armenia is also aware of **its support to Pakistan.**

Way Forward

- The conflict between the two countries has reached alarming levels and the international mediators should intervene immediately and push sides for substantive negotiations to prevent any further escalations.
- Growing Pakistan- China-Turkey's influence in the south caucasus region is a source of concern for India. It is important for it to strengthen its ties with both the countries in line continuing its **non-aligned** stance, and call for peace in the region.

Source: TH