



Nagorno-Karabakh Region

For Prelims: Nagorno-Karabakh Region, INSTC

For Mains: Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests

Why in News?

Recently, protests against **possible concessions by Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh** which is disputed with neighboring Azerbaijan, **have increased**.

- In September 2020, clashes broke out that rapidly escalated to become the deadliest since the 1990s.

What is Nagorno-Karabakh Region?

▪ About:

- Nagorno-Karabakh is a **mountainous and heavily forested region** that under international law is recognised as part of Azerbaijan.
 - However, **ethnic Armenians who constitute the vast majority** of the population there reject Azeri rule (the legal system of Azerbaijan).
- After **Azerbaijan's troops were pushed out of the region** following a war in the 1990s, these ethnic Armenians have been in administrative control of Nagorno-Karabakh, with support from Armenia.

▪ Strategic Significance:

- The energy-rich Azerbaijan has **built several gas and oil pipelines across the Caucasus** (the region between the [Black Sea](#) and the [Caspian Sea](#)) to Turkey and Europe.
- **Some of these pipelines pass close to the conflict zone** (within 16 km of the border).
- In an open war between the two countries, **the pipelines could be targeted**, which would impact energy supplies and may even lead to higher oil prices globally.



What is the Genesis of the Conflict?

- **Background of the Conflict:** The conflict can be traced back to the pre-Soviet era when the region was at the meeting point of Ottoman, Russian and the Persian empires.
 - Once Azerbaijan and Armenia became Soviet Republics in 1921, Russia (erstwhile Soviet Union) gave Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan but offered autonomy to the contested region.
 - In the 1980s, when the Soviet power was receding, separatist currents picked up in Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1988, the national assembly voted to dissolve the region's autonomous status and join Armenia.
 - However, Azerbaijan suppressed such calls, which led to a military conflict.
- **Flash Point of Conflict:** The self-declaration of independence by Nagorno-Karabakh in September 1991 in the backdrop of an imminent collapse of the USSR resulted in a war between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh — supported by Armenia.
- **Ceasefire:** This clash lasted till a ceasefire agreement was reached in 1994, mediated largely by Russia. Since then, the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\) Minsk Group](#) co-chaired by the USA, Russia and France have engaged Azerbaijan and Armenia extensively to resolve the conflict.
 - By that time, Armenia had taken control of Nagorno-Karabakh and handed it to Armenian rebels.

What is the Role of India?

- With Armenia, 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 the case of Azerbaijan, ONGC/OVL has made investments in an oilfield project in Azerbaijan and GAIL is exploring the possibilities of cooperation in LNG.
 - Azerbaijan also falls on the [International North South Transport Corridor \(INSTC\) route](#), connecting India with Russia through Central Asia.
 - It can also connect India with Turkey and beyond through the **Baku-Tbilisi-Kars passenger and freight rail link**.
- Armenia extends its unequivocal support to India on Kashmir issue whereas Azerbaijan not only opposes but also promotes Pakistan's narrative on this issue.
- India does not have a publicly articulated policy for the South Caucasus — **unlike** [“Neighbourhood First”](#), [“Act East”](#) or [“Central Asia Connect”](#).
 - The region has remained on the periphery of its foreign policy radar.

Way Forward

- The **conflict is essentially a conflict between two international principles viz. the principle of territorial integrity** advocated by Azerbaijan and the **principle of the right to self-determination** invoked by Nagorno-Karabakh and supported by Armenia.
- **India has every reason not to support Azerbaijan's territorial integrity** as Azerbaijan has shown scant regard for India's territorial integrity violated by Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir.
- At the same time, **it is difficult for India to publicly endorse Nagorno-Karabakh is right for self-determination** in view of the possible repercussions it can have repercussions for India as its adversaries like Pakistan may misuse it not only by making erroneous connections with Kashmir but also re-ignite secessionist movement in certain parts of India.

Source: IE

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