



Fact Sheet

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The United States and the Conflict Over Nagorno-Karabakh

The U.S. as Mediator

The U.S. remains actively engaged in advancing a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Cooperation among the U.S., Russian, and French mediators is excellent. The United States does not recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent country, and its leadership is not recognized internationally or by the United States. The United States supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and holds that the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh is a matter of negotiation between the parties with the aim of achieving a lasting and comprehensive political resolution of the conflict. The United States remains committed to finding a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the Minsk Group process.

Background

The armed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) lasted from 1990 to 1994. By the time a cease-fire went into effect in 1994, Armenian forces controlled most of the N-K region of Azerbaijan, as well as a considerable amount of adjacent Azerbaijani territory. The fighting, plus the expulsion of Armenians from Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis from Armenia, produced more than a million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Approximately 100,000 Azerbaijanis remain in refugee camps today, where they face desperate living conditions. Turkey closed its land border with Armenia during the conflict to show solidarity with Azerbaijan and has not reopened it. The United States provides humanitarian assistance to the victims of the conflict, which includes support for housing and school repairs, primary health care, irrigation, potable water and sanitation, subsistence agriculture, micro-finance, and demining.

The parties have observed a cease-fire agreement since 1994. Although cease-fire violations and cross-border sniping occur, all sides insist on their continued commitment to a peaceful settlement reached through negotiation.

Peace Process

In 1992, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)--now the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)--created the Minsk Group, a coalition of member states dedicated to facilitating a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group (Russia, France, and the U.S.) serve as mediators, working in close and effective cooperation with the parties. In 1997-98, Co-Chair shuttle diplomacy generated three separate peace proposals. Each of these proposals was rejected by one or another of the parties.

Beginning in 1999, Presidents Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Robert Kocharian of Armenia began a direct dialogue through a series of bilateral meetings. Positive developments during a March 2001 Paris meeting among Presidents Aliyev, Kocharian, and Chirac inspired then Secretary of State Colin L. Powell to invite both Presidents to continue their dialogue in the United States. Aliyev and Kocharian met with the Co-Chairs in Key West in April 2001. The sides made significant progress but failed to reach a comprehensive settlement. Presidents Aliyev and Kocharian met on the margins of multilateral meetings in late 2001 and on the border between the two countries in August 2002 but failed to narrow their differences. President Heydar Aliyev died in 2003, and negotiations slowed as both countries held presidential elections that year.

In 2004, the Co-Chairs initiated a series of meetings in Prague between the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The "Prague Process" was designed to reinvigorate dialogue between the sides. Following an initial series of meetings between the Foreign Ministers, Presidents Ilham Aliyev and Robert Kocharian began meeting more regularly, with a focus on advancing negotiations towards a settlement. During this period, the Co-Chairs introduced a proposed set of Basic Principles for the Peaceful Settlement of the N-K Conflict to serve as the basis for the conclusion of an eventual peace agreement. Negotiations over the Basic Principles continued throughout 2005 and 2006. On the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid in November 2007, the ministerial representatives of the three Co-Chair countries -- Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov -- formally presented a refined set of Basic Principles to the Azerbaijani and Armenian Foreign Ministers, for direct transmission to their presidents, and urged them to endorse the proposal and proceed on this basis with drafting a peace agreement. The Madrid document was archived on a confidential basis with the Secretary General of the OSCE.

The Co-Chairs have stated their intention to continue the negotiations on the Basic Principles in 2008 and to secure an endorsement from both Presidents as soon as possible.

