

## The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict In 2020: Causes and Consequences

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**Abstract:** The standstill conflict, Nagorno-Karabakh issue is a territorial and ethnic conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia from the last few decades. The conflict was fueled by nationalism and the geopolitics of Russia and Turkiye, which sell weapons to both countries and aim to influence the energy-rich region of the South Caucasus. The recent 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and 2022 ceasefire violations have resulted in hundreds of deaths and negatively impacted the economies of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The need for a foreign mediator in the peace process is crucial to prevent further escalation and promote growth in the region, as the two countries have no strategic or diplomatic relationship and closed borders causing trade disruptions.

### Introduction

The long-running conflict in the Karabakh region has been hanging over Azerbaijan and Armenia's heads for the past five years due to an unparalleled territorial and ethnic dispute. Both nations have fought in two wars over the region and numerous other battles. The most recent major escalation was the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, followed by a ceasefire violation in 2022. Many people are killed in conflicts, but none of the parties take responsibility and place the blame elsewhere. Two significant aspects are the root of the issue or the reason it won't be resolved. The first is that people have such a strong sense of nationalism that it compels the government to declare war, as happened in Azerbaijan when protesters stormed the parliament. This nationalism is propagated through a variety of means, including the media and the academic curricula for young children. The geopolitics of Russia and Turkey are the second factor. Both nations get weapons sales from Russia, which Armenia and Azerbaijan will deploy against one

another in 2020. (Askerov, [2020](#)). Turkiye has long-standing difficult relations with Armenia and strong cultural, economic, and military links to Azerbaijan. Russia and Turkey both want to have a say in the South Caucasus' energy-rich territory. Escalation in 2022 is the reason they need an outside mediator to assist in the peace process. The economies of Armenia and Azerbaijan are contracting as a result of the hostilities. They don't communicate strategically or diplomatically with one another, and their restricted borders prevent trade between them. To prevent future escalation and promote regional development, they must negotiate with one another through an outside mediator.

### Understanding Armenia

Armenia is a landlocked nation in Asia that borders both Turkey and Azerbaijan. It is situated in the Caucasus area. Having a population of 3 million, the majority are Christians, yet it is a secular nation. Under the umbrella of the Human Development Index, it is a democratic but impoverished state that ranks 85th. The sources claim that "its

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economy is centred mostly on industrial output and mineral extraction. Armenia is a member of many European organisations, including the Council of Europe, the Eastern Partnership, Eurocontrol, the Assembly of European Regions, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, despite being geographically located in the South Caucasus. This is because Armenia is generally regarded as having a geopolitical identity that is European. Because of the substantial number of Russian-owned and/or controlled businesses, notably in the energy sector, its economy is especially dependent on Russian commercial and governmental support. Armenia is a democratic, multiparty nation with a parliamentary system. In this case, the Prime Minister is the head of the government, while the President is considered the leader of the state (The Economist, 2023). Armenia became a parliamentary republic after transitioning from a semi-presidential system, which eliminated the president's veto authority. 3. Armenia was placed 58th out of 180 countries in the world according to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2021. Since 2012, Armenia has "much improved on the Corruption Perception Index and has taken initiatives to prevent corruption," especially in the wake of the Velvet Revolution in 2018. When it comes to democracy, Armenia performs substantially better. It is ranked 86th out of 167 nations. Current Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

## **Understanding Azerbaijan**

Due to its advantageous location, Azerbaijan is regarded as a transcontinental state that borders both Eastern Europe and Western Asia. Furthermore, it is situated in Asia's Caucasus region and has a border with the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan has a population of 10 million, the majority of whom are Muslims, although it is also a secular nation. Azerbaijan, which is ranked 88th on the Human Development Index, is a developing nation. It belongs to the group of six sovereign Turkic states. It participates actively in both the TÜRKSOY community and the Organization of Turkic States. It is a member of 38 international organisations, including the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Non-Aligned Movement, the OSCE, and the NATO PP

programme, and it has diplomatic ties with 182 nations. It is a founding member of GUAM, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) as an observer state. The economy of Azerbaijan is mostly dependent on the export of oil and natural gas, which accounts for more than 90% of all exports (Khandi, 2020)

It features a unitary system of government with a president and prime minister with semi-presidential powers. The currently in power "New Azerbaijan Party, which has been charged of authoritarian leadership," Despite being a republic, Azerbaijan is a dictatorship. From 1993 until 2003, Heyder Ali presided, followed by his son Ilham Aliyev, who is still in office. Since 2003, he has won every election with more than 80% of the vote, which is alleged to be a fraud. Due to these causes, there have been documented cases of human rights violations, serfdom, problems with freedom, equality, and the unjust incarceration of around 160 political prisoners. Because of this, this nation ranks 146 out of 167 nations in the democracy index, making it one of the lowest in the world (Abilov, 2016).

## **The Conflict and 2020 Escalation**

### **The Conflict**

Armenia and Azerbaijan have been fighting on the conflicted territory of "Nagorno-Karabakh" from the last three decades. The first Nagorno-Karabakh conflict occurred in February 1988 and resulted in a full-fledged war till May 1994. Both of them have been engaged in many armed conflicts. Post USSR fall, this region; Nagorno-Karabakh has been a flashpoint for conflict involving the two countries, which is a home to various ethnic groups. After gaining de facto independence from Azerbaijan in 1988, both started fighting over the territory which escalated and intensified until both countries declared war on each other in 1992. 30,000 people died and millions were displaced. A ceasefire was signed under the umbrella of the Russia in May 1994 which ended the conflict and led to the creation of an Armenian-backed separatist state called Artsakh or Nagorno-Karabakh (Abilov, 2016).

## **Escalation**

The 2020 escalation or second Nagorno-Karabakh war resulted after Armenia said that “Azerbaijan attacked and that 105 of its service members were killed and six civilians wounded and Azerbaijan said its military actions were measures in response to provocation from Armenia, and it reported 71 of its service members were killed.” Both countries deny that they started the fight. Armenia says Azerbaijan started it, while Azerbaijan claims the opposite. A media organization Al Jazeera, interviewed both the Azerbaijani President and Armenian Prime Minister. In the interview both sides justified their stance. President of Azerbaijan said, "On many occasions, I raised this issue and was saying that international sanctions should be imposed on Armenia to force them to comply with resolutions and to start the liberation of our territories, but my appeals were not answered properly and now what is happening is a result of the Armenian destructive policies." Also, the Armenian President said, "When there is an attack when there is aggression, the very first task is to protect from that aggression and to stop that aggression after which only, will it be possible to talk about negotiations.”\_(Khalid 2020)

Post multiple pessimistic endeavors by France, Russia and the US, Russia succeeded in signing an agreement on 09 November 2020 that culminated the second conflict of Nagorno Karabakh issue. But the tensions between the countries never finished and both of them took part in different hot conflicts and flare-ups after 2020.

## **Why this Conflict became Protracted**

There are two main causes leading to conflict:

- Nationalist Propaganda
- Geopolitics

## **Nationalist Propaganda**

In both countries, there has been massive propaganda against each other over 2-3 decades. When a new generation is born, the children learn to hate one another at a very young age. According to this survey by CCRC, 75% of Azerbaijan hates Armenia after 22% of Turkiye.

CCRC also conducted the survey for Azerbaijan in 2013, according to which 90% of

Armenia hates Azerbaijan after 7% of Russia. In both countries, the media spreads propaganda against other country. Negative stereotypes of Armenia have been formulated by the Azerbaijani media, which are shared in mass media outlets. Things are so that even in Azerbaijani textbooks, Armenians are referred to as "bandits", "aggressors", "treacherous" and "hypocritical" according to the Azerbaijani historian Arif Yunus. According to the Azerbaijani historian Yasemin Aklar, history is “distorted in the school textbooks in such a manner so as to incite hatred in the children and cause them to consider themselves ethnically and nationally superior to the Armenians.” The insidious effects of this propaganda is also visible in celebrities and national icons. In 2007, a famous Azerbaijani chess player, Teymur Rajabov, said in an interview, "The enemy is the enemy. We hate all Armenians." He also called Armenia a terrorist state in a tweet, “The terrorist state of Armenia is attacking civilians again and again, 5 dead, 35 wounded, Ganja city is outside of the conflict zone but getting attacked again and again, just shows the terroristic behavior of their leadership and military forces.”\_(Askerov, *The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict- The Beginning of the Soviet End* 2020)

If nationalism reaches this level, it only spreads hate and violence in the world and maintaining peace becomes close to becoming impossible. Azerbaijan's economy is heavily dependent on oil and is one of the only and the main source of money for the Azerbaijani economy but in 2019 oil prices crashed and fell into the negatives. Then came the COVID19 crisis. The economy of Azerbaijan was seriously affected and the people were enraged but the Azerbaijani people are so nationalistic that even if they do not have food and water, they are going to blame the Armenia for it. In July 2020, protests were staged in Azerbaijan, not to demand for democracy and not even to save the economy but to declare war against Armenia. They want to make the disputed region a part of Azerbaijan again. Protesters stormed the Parliament and pressurized their dictator to declare war against Armenia. It could be said it was a golden opportunity for the Azerbaijani dictator. The nationalist sentiment is so much in the people of Azerbaijan that if they are kept distracted against Armenia, they might never raise questions about democracy or economy and this

way seat of the dictatorship would remain safe. Many experts believe that even if a peaceful resolution is reached, it might take decades for the people to accept one another. Albert Einstein says in his quote, "Nationalism, in my opinion, is nothing more than an idealistic rationalization for militarism and aggression."

## **Geopolitics**

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The Geopolitics of Turkiye and Russia play important role in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. Following is the role of Turkiye and Russia:

### **Russia**

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According to the reports of The Economist "Russia's engagement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is part of the legacy left from Yeltsin to Putin. The Yeltsin era saw a major shift in Russian policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The change became noticeable after the definition of the foreign policy strategy in 1992 when Russia developed a strategic interest in instrumentalizing the dispute, which is to say, utilizing it as a foreign policy tool. Russia started using the dispute to control both parties involved in for the purpose to retain control over them after independence by putting pressure and imposing conditions that would favor its own policy. Nagorno-Karabakh was used as a bargaining chip to drive Azerbaijan to enter the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and to deploy military basis to the border with Turkiye and Iran and thus to ensure that Azerbaijan would be kept within its sphere of influence." (The Economist, 2023)

Russia has historically played a significant role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and its involvement continues to be important to this day. Here are some key ways in which Russia has been involved:

1. **Historical Support for Armenia:** Historically, Russia has had close ties with Armenia and has been a key supplier of military equipment and support. This has given Armenia an advantage in the conflict, as it has been able to maintain a strong military presence in Nagorno-Karabakh.
2. **Mediation Efforts:** Russia has been actively involved in mediating the conflict since the early 1990s, and is a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, which is tasked with

negotiating a settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russian officials have participated in numerous rounds of negotiations, and have helped broker several ceasefire agreements over the years.

3. **Military Intervention:** During the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, Russia played a key role in brokering a ceasefire agreement and deploying peacekeeping forces to the region. Under the agreement, Russian peacekeepers are stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh to monitor the ceasefire and ensure stability in the region.
4. **Regional Power Dynamics:** Russia's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is also influenced by broader regional power dynamics. Russia has longstanding strategic and economic interests in the Caucasus region, and sees itself as a key player in regional affairs. Its involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is seen as part of its broader efforts to maintain stability and influence in the region.

Overall, Russia's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been multifaceted, involving historical ties with Armenia, mediation efforts, military intervention, and broader regional power dynamics. Its involvement has had a significant impact on the course of the conflict, and will likely continue to be important in any future efforts to resolve it.

### **Turkiye**

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Turkiye and Azerbaijan are linked by strong ethnic, cultural and historical ties and refer to their relationship as "two states, one nation". As "Turkey was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the two have developed strong economic ties. Turkiye is the main channel for oil and gas exports from Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan is a major investor in Turkiye. Turkey and Azerbaijan are neighboring countries." (The Economist, 2023) Turkey is a big country and Azerbaijan is smaller, so why wouldn't Turkey want to exert its influence on neighboring countries? Turkey and Armenia also have a tense history. Armenia refers to the killing of up to 1.5 million Armenians in the late Ottoman period as

"genocide", which Turkey denies, with Erdogan's Turkey also seen as a key player in the conflict. Turkiye has openly stated that Azerbaijan is its long-term ally, Armenia is wrong in the conflict, and if Azerbaijan needs any support, it will provide it, even if it is military support. Turkiye stands and will stand with "friendly and brotherly Azerbaijan by all means and with all its heart," Erdogan said. In response, FM Armenia said:

"Aggression is not only planned in advance by Azerbaijan, but also by the massive support of Turkey, which has its military presence and which shows its aggressive, unilateral support for Azerbaijan and its aggressive approach to Armenia, which is worrying. It is a massive escalation." (The Economist, 2023) Turkey has been a significant player in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and its role has been shaped by a variety of factors, including historical ties with Azerbaijan, regional power dynamics, and domestic politics. Here are some key ways in which Turkey and its ruling party, the AKP, have been involved:

1. **Historical Ties with Azerbaijan:** Turkey and Azerbaijan have a close relationship, rooted in shared ethnic, linguistic, and cultural ties. Turkey has been a strong supporter of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and has provided it with political and economic support throughout the conflict. Turkish officials have also been vocal in their criticism of Armenia's actions in Nagorno-Karabakh.
2. **Diplomatic Support:** Turkey has been actively involved in diplomatic efforts to resolve this issue, and therefore, playing a crucial role in brokering the recent ceasefire agreement. Turkish officials have participated in numerous rounds of negotiations, and have worked closely with Azerbaijan to advance its interests in the conflict.
3. **Military Support:** During the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, Turkey provided military support to Azerbaijan, including weapons, ammunition, and unmanned aerial vehicles. This support is believed to have given Azerbaijan an advantage in the conflict and helped it achieve its military objectives.

4. **Domestic Politics:** The AKP, which has been in power in Turkey since 2002, has been influenced by domestic politics in its approach to this issue. The party has a nationalist agenda, but has sought to position Turkey as a regional power. Its support for Azerbaijan in the conflict is seen as part of this broader agenda, and has been popular among its nationalist base.

However, Turkey's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been shaped by a variety of factors, including historical ties with Azerbaijan, regional power dynamics, and domestic politics. Its support for Azerbaijan has had a significant impact on the course of the conflict, and has helped to shape the outcome of recent developments. (Khalid 2020)

Many party members support Azerbaijan and regard the geopolitics of the Caucasus and the Black Sea as high priorities<sup>24</sup>. Svante E Cornell, director of the US Council on Foreign Policy's Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, told Al Jazeera that "Azerbaijan and Turkey view Armenian nationalist and more pro-Western Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan as a greater threat than his predecessor. According to him, Azerbaijan may have decided that with full Turkish support, now is the right time to push for its military superiority". Istanbul think tank director Sinan Ulgen says: "Turkiye is realistic in the sense that the goal in Karabakh is not to eliminate Russian influence, but to gain influence so that Turkiye gains influence over Russia that it could potentially use in Syria or Libya." Turkiye he ends up supporting Azerbaijan not only because of brotherly love but also because of its geopolitical interests and plays a vital role in the conflict. (Askerov 2020)

### **The Economic Fall out of this Conflict**

The Washington Post, in this context, pinned down that "paying attention to the economic aspects of a

conflict is very important. It is worth to noting that to build a country, it is very important to first build an economy. The business may play a leading role in conflict resolution. At the moment, both parties of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are in a very hard position. After the destruction of the Soviet Union, the economy of post-Soviet states was

badly damaged, because according to Soviet economic plan, countries were to be dependent on each other. The ongoing conflict between the two neighbors, Azerbaijan and Armenia, also making the situation even more worse. Some Azerbaijanians were growing richer and richer by entering in oil business, the economic security of majority of the population remained extremely low. The economic situation of Armenia also remains in much harder position than in Azerbaijan. Armenians lost many economic opportunities as a result of this conflict. During the Soviet Union period, most of the goods for living and oil were entering to Armenia through Azerbaijan. After the war, the borders between two countries were closed. Armenia also did not have good relations with Turkiye. Northern neighbor Georgia had its own problems, so Iran and Russia were the only hope for Armenia. Karabakh itself suffers much from severe unemployment, and it is increasingly dependent on external support and loans from Armenia. So, as it happens in most situations, although the decision for the war was taken by the elites, it was the elites, it was the ordinary people struggled” (The Economist, 2023).

Closed borders and fault lines are also an “important factor that reduces the economic development of the region. The land borders between Armenia and Turkiye and Armenia and Azerbaijan are closed (Armenia interprets these closed borders as a blockade).” (Mortazavian, 2017) The author M Ali stated that these “factors create a specific economic dynamic in the region that is both a consequence and a source of conflict. Closed borders are actually permeable and support growing unregulated cross-border trade, while the conventional wisdom of the international community prevents international actors from conducting economic support for unrecognized entities such as Nagorno-Karabakh. Trade is the most important aspect for building community life as it provides employment and income generation. Without any kind of trade, no community has a chance to survive. During the decades preceding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, trade between Armenia and Azerbaijan was regular and dynamic. All communication and trade between the two countries was halted when the borders were officially closed.” (Mortazavian, 2017)

Despite the closed borders, “the people of both countries manage to distribute goods to each other by using neighboring Georgia and Iran as an intermediary that allows Armenian goods to find their way to Azerbaijan and vice versa. According to Arc News, unofficial trade between Armenia and Azerbaijan reached US\$40 million annually by 2002, while trade between Armenia and Turkey reached US\$60-80 million. As there is no regulation, the unofficial trade strongly affects the strained relations between the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia and their citizens. In democratic countries, governments that are elected by the people for the people should have the legitimacy to tax their citizens in order to provide the services needed to meet the needs of society. Lack of regulation of trade means that these taxes are not collected and the provision of services based on democratic principles is replaced by uneven provision. In a narrower sense, the term refers to cross-border ties between people of comparable authority and resourcefulness. These are most often local authorities and specialized law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, border guards and customs officials. Such a context certainly provides alternatives to survival for those who trade in legitimate goods, but it also creates a space in which exploitation is commonplace and criminality grows.” (Mortazavian, 2017) Criminal activities such as arms and drug trafficking overlap to some extent with corruption networks in the public sphere of South Caucasus sovereign states and unrecognized entities.

The major reason for the conflict is a combination of historical, ethnic, and territorial factors. The region has been inhabited by ethnic Armenians for centuries and was part of the Armenian Republic before it was annexed by Soviet Azerbaijan in the early 1920s. When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence, leading to a bloody war between Armenia and Azerbaijan that lasted until a ceasefire was declared in 1994. The conflict has its roots in both ethnic and territorial issues, with both sides claiming the region as their own. The conflict has been exacerbated by factors such as unresolved border disputes, economic and political competition, and historical grievances. (Ilić, 09-21)

It is clear to both sides of the conflict “that not only the region of Nagorno-Karabakh is suffering due to the unstable situation, but the entire countries of Armenia and Azerbaijan. In our globalized world, it is impossible to imagine the development of the economy without the involvement of international trade, but due to the unstable situation, many entrepreneurs avoid bringing their business to these countries. Due to poorly developed or unevenly developed economies, both countries suffer from the effects of unemployment and lack of trade.”\_(Khalid 2020)

### **What is Next in this Conflict?**

After several failed attempts by Russia, France, and the United States, on November 9, 2020, Russia successfully brokered an agreement backed by Russian peacekeepers that ended the six-week-old Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Azerbaijan has regained most of the territory it lost two decades ago, leaving Armenia with only part of Karabakh. But it is so? The 2020 ceasefire violations eventually escalated into a two-day conflict that began on 13 September 2022, the most significant provocation since 2020. Between one and three hundred were killed in cross-border attacks. Both countries blame each other for the latest outbreak of violence. Armenia claimed that several towns along the border were shelled by its neighbor and that it was responding to provocation, and Azerbaijan said its infrastructure was attacked first, with military spokesman Lt. Col. Anar Eyvazov saying that military movements over the past month "show that Armenia is preparing to a large-scale military provocation." That war ended with an agreement brokered by Russia, with Armenia withdrawing its troops from the occupied areas around Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian peacekeeping forces of nearly 2,000 men were deployed to the area as part of the negotiations, where they remain today. (Abilov, 2016)

It is reported that “without a successful mediation efforts, ceasefire violations and renewed tensions threaten to reignite a full-scale conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Such a conflict would destabilize the South Caucasus region and potentially disrupt oil and gas exports from Azerbaijan, which produces about eight hundred thousand barrels of oil a day to Central Asia and

Europe. The risk of military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is increasing due to the failure of mediation efforts, increased militarization and frequent ceasefire violations.” (Khalid 2020)

### **Recommendations**

Resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a complex and difficult process, but there are several possible solutions that have been proposed by various parties over the years. Here are a few examples:

1. **Negotiations and Diplomacy:** The most widely recognized approach to resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is through diplomatic negotiations. This would involve diplomatic negotiations, as well as international mediators such as the OSCE Minsk Group. Negotiations could address issues such as the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the demarcation of borders, and the return of internally displaced persons.
2. **Mutual Recognition:** Another possible solution would be for Armenia and Azerbaijan to mutually recognize each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, including over Nagorno-Karabakh. This would require both sides to accept the reality of the other's claims and work towards peaceful coexistence.
3. **Autonomy or Confederation:** Some experts have suggested that Nagorno-Karabakh could be granted a high degree of autonomy within Azerbaijan, or that it could become a separate confederation with a shared government and joint military. This could allow for greater self-rule for the region's Armenian population, while preserving Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.\_(Askerov, [The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict- The Beginning of the Soviet End 2020](#))
4. **International Peacekeeping:** Another possible solution would be for the deployment of international peacekeeping forces to monitor the ceasefire and prevent future conflict. This could involve a United Nations or other multinational force, tasked with maintaining security in the region and helping to build trust between the two sides. (Ilić, 09-21)

Ultimately, any lasting solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will require compromise and dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as the support of the international community. (Khalid 2020)

## **Conclusion**

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The ongoing conflict of the Nagorno Karabakh region is important part of international politics. The instability in the region is due to two important factors, which are, nationalism spread by propaganda which is forcing the governments to stay in conflict and geopolitical interest of

countries like Russia and Turkiye which look for their interests and are trying to increase their influence in the region. This is causing complexities in the region regarding economy. If both the countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, settle for peace and decrease their money spent on military, there will be economic progress in the region. If not, statistics have shown significant decrease in the economies of both after 2020. They must come to an agreement and open borders for each other for trade. International mediation is required to overlook them so there won't be any escalation again.



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