

Foreign Perspective on the Russian Role in the Conflict Between Armenia and Azerbaijan

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Moscow will likely continue using the struggle over Karabakh to pursue its own interests.

Following the Russo-Persian War of 1804-1813, Iran ceded a number of territories in the South Caucasus to the Russian Empire. Among them was an enclave that under the Kremlin rule came to be known as Nagorno Karabakh. Christian Armenians and Turkic Azeris historically lived in this area—generally speaking, in peace. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviet government, not unlike its tsarist predecessor, controlled the people in the region as it did with all minorities within its borders—by keeping them divided. Thus, in July 1923, the Kremlin established the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast made up of an ethnic Armenian majority, but located within the Soviet Azerbaijan. As the Soviet Union was coming to collapse in the late 1980s, ethnic Armenians began to talk of Karabakh joining Armenia. In February 1988 Karabakh's parliament voted to join Armenia, and violent clashes ensued, though they remained small and localized. In 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan gained independence, and soon afterwards, the conflict grew into full-blown regional war...

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