



## [Crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh](#)

By Colin Bailey

In just a week, nearly the entire ethnic Armenian population has fled from their homeland of Nagorno-Karabakh over fears of ethnic cleansing by the Azerbaijanian government. A land once home to over 140,000 inhabitants just a week ago now is home to less than 40,000, with several utterly deserted towns.

Over the weekend, the United Nations arrived in the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert, but many decried that they were too late. Aren Harutyunyan, one of the refugees who fled to the Armenian capital, said, “Where is there left for the UN to monitor? No one is there anymore, everyone is gone, it’s a ghost town.” Photos captured by Al Jazeera depict the capital devoid of human life in what should have been a bustling metropolitan area.

As Azerbaijan forces took control of Nagorno-Karabakh, the entire population was forced to squeeze together through the Lachin Corridor, the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. The roads were crowded, with families left waiting in their cars for over a day, fearing for their lives and whether they would be able to complete the journey to Armenia at all.

The Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, has promised that they will be able to provide shelter for over ‘40,000 families,’ but where these refugees will be able to stay remains unclear. Pashinyan has decried this forced exodus as a “direct act of ethnic cleansing.” Pashinyan plans to attend an EU-sponsored talk in Spain to over assistance in managing refugees, as no country has yet to offer asylum.

Nagorno-Karabakh has been the subject of turmoil for several decades. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) has been internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan despite being home to an ethnical Armenian population for centuries. In the late 1980s, the people of NK tried to break away from Azerbaijan and join Armenia. Between 1992, NK, backed by Armenian forces, clashed with Azerbaijan over control. The bloody conflict came to an end in 1994 with a Russian ceasefire.

A result of the war left NK acting as its own de facto government, the Republic of Artsakh, which was not recognized as an official country. Unsurprisingly, this has left the region in a state of limbo as Artsakh operated as its own nation-state while under the control of Azerbaijan.

Hostilities escalated in 2020 with the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, which sought Azerbaijan to establish complete control over the region. The conflict concluded after 44 days with a ceasefire that installed over 2000 Russian peacekeepers in the area.

Since the onset of the Ukrainian war, Azerbaijan has again been emboldened in threatening NK. In December 2022, Azerbaijan established a blockade of the Lachin Corridor, which was met with no resistance by the Russian peacekeepers. Said blockades remained in place up until the large-scale military operation that took place September 19th, where the peacekeepers were brushed aside. Speculation has arisen on whether the Russian government permitted Azerbaijan to take control.

Displaced refugees took shelter in Russian military bases, leaving them fearful and confused. “We were happy living there, even during the nine months of blockade when there was no light, gas supply, internet, no flour to bake bread because we were in our homeland,” explains Anoush, whose entire family was forced to evacuate. “It’s 13 of us here, sleeping on the floor. Six more will come soon.” Hundreds of families filled their cars with little they could fit as they left their homes, unsure if they would ever return. Hospitals in Armenia are becoming overwhelmed with the large influx of elderly patients who often arrive in critical condition due to the restricted food access from the blockade.

With very few natives left in Nagorno-Karabakh, it seems Azerbaijan will maintain complete control over the region for the foreseeable future, and the prospect of the refugees returning home is equally unrealistic. With nobody left, the Armenian government must prioritize providing homes to the refugees and expanding infrastructure. Housing prices have already gone up across the country and will likely continue to do so. Most damning, Russia, historically Armenia’s most valued ally, has taken little interest in assisting Armenia in its time of need. Instead, Russia continues to focus its resources on the ongoing war in Ukraine. With all of these factors at play, both the Nagorno-Karabakh natives and all of Armenia are left more isolated than ever before.