

## **Karabakh's April War, One Year Later**

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Diplomatic efforts have stalled with little progress in sight.

A year after the worst clashes between Azerbaijani forces and the Armenian-backed Karabakh army since the 1994 ceasefire, regional experts warn that any future outbreak of violence is likely to be even deadlier.

More than a dozen civilians living on the frontline were killed and many more injured after fighting broke out between in the early hours of April 2, 2016.

(See also [Frontline Residents Count Cost of War](#)).

Nagorny Karabakh has been internationally referred to as a frozen conflict since war in the early 1990s left a local Armenian administration in control of the enclave of about 150,000 people inside Azerbaijan. Around 30,000 people died before a ceasefire was signed in 1994, but that agreement has frequently been violated.

Analysts told a March 29, 2017 event held by IWPR, the Public Journalism Club (PJC) and the Media Centre that the latest truce remained equally fragile.

The leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan have met twice over the last year at summits brokered by the OSCE Minsk Group, which includes Russia, France and the United States. Both presidents reiterated their commitment to ensure compliance with the April 2016 ceasefire and the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

They also agreed to broaden the mandate of the OSCE's personal representative, take steps to deploy OSCE mechanisms for the monitoring and investigation of ceasefire violations and increase the number of international observers in the conflict area.

However, not only have no steps been taken to implement this, but regular ceasefire violations have continued both on the line of contact around Karabakh and along the entire Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

Richard Giragosian, the director of the Regional Studies Centre, said that this situation was perilous and meant that any new outbreak of violence would be even more serious.

"This time, for Azerbaijan, in terms of its justified frustration, we see a temptation for a second military victory regarding the territories," he said. "But this is not a threat of war, rather this is a threat of war based on accident and miscalculations. Despite the increasing risk of renewed hostilities, this time things will be significantly different. Any renewed hostilities will not have the element of surprise from the Azerbaijani side. The Armenian side will be better prepared and therefore the clashes, the skirmishes will be more deadly."

Thomas de Waal, a senior fellow with Carnegie Europe and a Caucasus specialist, agreed, emphasising that the conflict could not be resolved by military means.

"Obviously, last year was extremely dangerous, and I would agree with our speakers that this year could

be even more hazardous and the risk of renewal of hostilities is still very high. So, there is no alternative to diplomacy and politics,” he said.

The regional framework was also important, he continued.

“Russia is the central player in this context,” de Waal said. “However, it is not trusted by either Armenia, or Azerbaijan. It is a mediator, but it also fuels war, since it sells weapons both to Yerevan and Baku. So, Russia on its own will not solve the problem anyway.”

The speakers agreed that although there was no alternative to diplomacy in terms of reaching a peaceful resolution, both sides lacked the political will to take real steps in this direction.

“During my last visits to Yerevan and Baku, I did not see much space for mutual concessions,” said Magdalena Grono, programme director for Europe and Central Asia with the International Crisis Group.

“I think we see the position entrenchment on both sides, which make any possibility for future negotiations even more difficult.

“The chances for the potential escalation are very high. And the conflict will be more deadly this time, since both sides know each other’s capabilities,” she concluded.

Ara Papyan, director of the Modus Vivendi research centre and a former Armenian ambassador to Canada, said the outbreak of violence had been a severe setback to diplomatic progress.

“We were speaking in favor of concessions, but last year’s war hardened the positions. There were no prisoners of war during the four-day war,” Papyan said. “This speaks for itself and creates distrust in Armenian society towards Azerbaijan.”

A dozen broadcast media and print publications covered the IWPR event. It was also attended by representatives of international organisations and diplomatic missions in Armenia, including German ambassador Matthias Kiesler and two representatives of the political department of the EU delegation in Armenia.

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