

An Analysis of the Conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis Based on Brecher's Crisis Management Model at the Regional Level

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The Introduction states that “Michael Brecher’s crisis management model provides an appropriate framework for analyzing the process of transformation in international and regional crises,” but the theoretical framework is currently introduced too briefly for a study whose principal analytical claim rests on this model. The manuscript should provide a more rigorous exposition of Brecher’s conceptualization of crisis, including the unit of analysis, the distinction between international and foreign-policy crises where relevant, and the precise conceptual status of the variables “threat to basic values,” “finite time for response,” and “heightened probability of military hostilities.” These components should not merely be mentioned later as “three perceptual conditions”; they should be defined in the theoretical section and subsequently operationalized. The authors should also explain how the four stages used in the manuscript—onset, escalation, de-escalation, and impact—are derived from or adapted to Brecher’s framework.

In the Research Method section, the sentence, “The present study is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive–analytical in terms of its nature and methodology,” is too generic to permit methodological assessment or replication. The authors should specify the research design in substantially greater detail, including the logic of case selection, the unit of analysis, the temporal segmentation of the crisis, the criteria for source inclusion and exclusion, the languages of the sources reviewed, and the procedure used to move from documentary evidence to analytical categories. Merely identifying the research as “descriptive–analytical” does not explain how evidence was systematically interpreted. A transparent analytical protocol would substantially improve methodological rigor.

The Research Method paragraph states that “Qualitative content analysis and descriptive–analytical document analysis were employed to analyze the data,” but no coding procedure is described. The authors should specify whether the categories were deductively derived from Brecher’s model, inductively generated from the documents, or developed through a hybrid approach. They should clarify how textual units were coded into the categories of onset, escalation, de-escalation, and impact, how ambiguous events were classified, and whether any secondary categories—such as threat perception, time pressure, military probability, mediation, external intervention, and post-crisis consequences—were used. If coding was conducted by more than one researcher, intercoder agreement or a comparable reliability procedure should be reported; if coding was conducted by one researcher, an audit trail, coding protocol, or peer-checking procedure should be described.

In the “Stages of Crisis Escalation” section, the manuscript describes the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, the 2016 Four-Day War, the 2020 war, and September 2023 as successive escalation points, but the relationship between these episodes and Brecher’s model remains mostly retrospective and descriptive. For example, the sentence, “From the perspective of Brecher’s model, the 2016 war may be interpreted as a warning stage and a renewed escalation of the crisis,” introduces a “warning stage” that has not been theoretically defined. The authors should specify measurable or observable indicators for acute threat, time pressure, and increased probability of war for each episode and present comparative evidence showing how these variables changed across 1991–1994, 2016, 2020, and 2023. This would transform the model from a labeling device into an actual analytical framework.

In the paragraph on the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, the statement that Azerbaijan “succeeded in regaining a substantial portion of the territories it had previously lost” should be formulated with greater territorial and legal specificity. The authors should distinguish between the seven districts surrounding the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, territories within the former autonomous oblast, and areas subsequently transferred under the November 2020 ceasefire statement. This distinction matters because the territorial changes were not homogeneous and carried different military, demographic, legal, and political implications. The paragraph would also benefit from specifying how drone warfare, intelligence, military modernization, Turkish assistance, and differences in force structure affected the operational balance rather than referring broadly to “new military capacities and warfare technologies.”

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the Research Method section, the sentence, “The documentary corpus of the study included books, peer-reviewed scientific articles, master’s theses and doctoral dissertations, official reports, documents and resolutions issued by international organizations, and credible sources,” leaves “credible sources” undefined. The authors should provide explicit source-quality criteria and indicate how conflicting narratives were handled, particularly because the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is characterized by highly politicized and mutually contradictory Armenian, Azerbaijani, Russian, Turkish, Iranian, and Western narratives. The manuscript would benefit from a source-triangulation strategy that distinguishes primary legal documents, official state statements, peer-reviewed scholarship, policy reports, and advocacy-oriented materials. This is particularly important for claims concerning displacement figures, military responsibility, territorial status, mediation failure, and the motives of external actors.

The Research Method section states that the temporal scope extends “through the developments following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the 2025 peace agreement.” This statement requires precise clarification because “the 2025 peace agreement” is analytically central to the manuscript’s future-scenario discussion. The authors should identify the exact agreement, its formal title, date, legal status, signatories, and whether it constitutes a signed and ratified peace treaty, an agreed text, an initialed document, or a political framework. The manuscript should avoid treating any incomplete or politically announced settlement process as a fully implemented peace agreement unless this is demonstrably accurate. The terminology used throughout the paper should therefore distinguish carefully among negotiation, agreement on text, signature, ratification, implementation, and normalization.

In the first Findings paragraph, the statement that “Following the Russo-Persian wars and the conclusion of the Treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay, parts of the South Caucasus were separated from Iranian territory and incorporated into the Russian sphere of influence” provides useful historical background, but the causal connection between nineteenth-century imperial territorial changes and the modern Nagorno-Karabakh crisis is insufficiently developed. The authors should avoid a purely chronological historical narrative and instead explain which institutional, demographic, administrative, or identity-related mechanisms link these events to the later conflict. Otherwise, the historical discussion risks becoming background description rather than evidence relevant to Brecher’s onset stage. A stronger analysis would show how imperial and Soviet boundary-making shaped later claims to sovereignty, identity, and territorial legitimacy.

The paragraph beginning, “Subsequently, in 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was established within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic,” needs greater historical and legal precision. The manuscript should clarify the relationship between the 1921 Caucasian Bureau decision and the formal establishment of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast in 1923, as these are related but institutionally distinct events. Furthermore, the sentence attributing later conflict partly to the Armenian demographic majority should not imply a simple deterministic relationship between ethnicity and conflict. The authors should explain how Soviet nationality policy, autonomous territorial arrangements, competing historical narratives, and center-periphery relations contributed to the politicization of identity over time.

In the subsection “Ethnic, Identity, and Territorial Factors,” the sentence, “Consequently, two competing interpretations confronted one another: on the one hand, the right to self-determination and the identity of the Armenian population, and on the other, the principle of territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan,” correctly identifies a central normative tension but oversimplifies the relevant international-law problem. The authors should distinguish political claims to self-determination from the legal threshold for external self-determination or secession and should clarify that territorial integrity, minority rights, internal self-determination, remedial-secession arguments, and non-recognition principles occupy different doctrinal positions. Because the article explicitly identifies legal challenges as a major component of the crisis, this section should engage more carefully with the legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh and avoid presenting self-determination and territorial integrity as automatically equivalent and opposing legal claims.

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2. Revised

Editor’s decision: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.