

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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The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is one of the most complex and protracted regional crises to have emerged following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Its consequences have extended beyond relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, affecting the security environment and geopolitical structure of the South Caucasus. The present study aims to explain the conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis on the basis of Michael Brecher's crisis management model and to examine its consequences at the regional level, with particular emphasis on the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In terms of purpose, the study is applied research, and methodologically, it employs a descriptive-analytical approach. The required data were collected through library and documentary research and examined using qualitative content analysis and descriptive-analytical document analysis. The findings indicate that the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis can be analyzed through the four stages of Brecher's model: onset, escalation, de-escalation, and impact. At the onset stage, historical, ethnic, identity-related, political, and territorial factors created the conditions for the emergence of the crisis. During the escalation stage, perceptions of acute threat, time pressure, and the increasing probability of war reached their highest levels during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, the 2016 clashes, and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, while the role of regional and extra-regional actors in intensifying the crisis became increasingly prominent. At the de-escalation stage, mediation efforts and ceasefires failed to produce a sustainable settlement of the conflict, and the crisis entered a new phase in September 2023 following the military operation conducted by the Republic of Azerbaijan. At the impact stage, the consequences of the crisis became evident at both bilateral and regional levels. The findings further demonstrate that the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis has affected the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran through changes in the regional balance of power, the increased presence of extra-regional actors, threats arising from potential changes to transportation and transit corridors, and the consequences of population displacement and refugee movements. Accordingly, Brecher's model provides an appropriate analytical framework for explaining the dynamics and complexity of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, while strengthening active diplomacy, maintaining balanced relations with both parties, promoting regional cooperation, and enhancing public diplomacy may contribute to managing the consequences of the crisis and safeguarding the national interests and national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, Brecher's crisis management model, Republic of Azerbaijan, Armenia, South Caucasus

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1. Introduction

The South Caucasus, due to its geopolitical position, location along energy and transit routes, and proximity to regional and extra-regional powers, is regarded as one of the most crisis-prone peripheral regions surrounding the Islamic Republic of Iran (Ashrafi, 2020; Khalili et al., 2013). Within this context, the conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh constitutes one of the most protracted regional crises to have emerged following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with roots extending to ethnic, historical, and territorial disputes. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, existing disputes over Nagorno-Karabakh evolved into armed conflict, and the wars of the 1990s transformed the crisis into one of the principal security challenges of the South Caucasus (Khodabandelou, 2017). The significance of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis is not confined to the dispute between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia; rather, the involvement and rivalry of actors such as Russia, Turkey, Iran, and extra-regional powers have transformed it into a regional crisis. For the Islamic Republic of Iran, the crisis is of particular significance because Iran shares borders with both countries, and regional developments may affect the security of its northern borders, economic and commercial relations, transit routes, and geopolitical position (Tousirkani, 2011). In particular, developments concerning transportation corridors, Nakhchivan, and Armenia's Syunik region have increased the importance of this issue for Iran (Akhbari, 2020). The primary objective of this study is to explain the conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and its effects on the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran based on Michael Brecher's crisis management model. Accordingly, four subsidiary questions are posed: (1) What are the roots, factors, and dimensions affecting the emergence and persistence of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? (2) How can the roles and positions of regional and extra-regional actors and international organizations in this conflict be explained? (3) How can the trajectory of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, settlement scenarios, and its legal, political, and security challenges be analyzed based on Brecher's model? and (4) What consequences has the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict had for the national security of the

Islamic Republic of Iran, and what capacities does Iranian public diplomacy possess for managing the consequences of this crisis? Michael Brecher's crisis management model provides an appropriate framework for analyzing the process of transformation in international and regional crises. This model does not conceptualize crisis as a static phenomenon; rather, it regards crisis as a dynamic process that emerges, escalates, declines, and produces effects on its surrounding environment through successive stages (Brecher, 2003). Accordingly, the four stages of onset, escalation, de-escalation, and impact constitute the principal analytical basis of the present study. The significance of applying Brecher's model to the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis lies in its capacity to facilitate a continuous and stage-based examination of the conflict and, rather than concentrating exclusively on military events, to address the relationship among the conditions underlying crisis formation, escalation factors, crisis-management and de-escalation mechanisms, and post-crisis consequences (Moradi & Salehi Yeganeh, 2023). Furthermore, the model provides an appropriate framework for examining the roles of different actors and crisis-induced changes at the regional level (Brecher, 2003; Khalili et al., 2013).

2. Research Method

The present study is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-analytical in terms of its nature and methodology, and it was conducted using documentary and library-based research. The objective of the study is to explain the conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and to examine its consequences for the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the basis of Michael Brecher's crisis management model. Accordingly, the required information and data were collected through the examination of written sources and credible documents and subsequently evaluated using an analytical approach. 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 concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the role of regional and extra-regional actors, and the

consequences of the crisis for the Islamic Republic of Iran. In addition, to examine the legal and international dimensions of the crisis, United Nations Security Council documents and resolutions and the activities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, particularly the Minsk Group, were considered. Data were collected through documentary and library research. To this end, sources concerning the historical and political background of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were first reviewed; subsequently, data relating to the different stages of the crisis, including the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, the 2016 clashes, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, and the developments of September 2023, were collected and classified. The roles and positions of the principal actors, including Russia, Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States, the European Union, and Israel, as well as international organizations, were then examined. Qualitative content analysis and descriptive-analytical document analysis were employed to analyze the data. Following examination and extraction of the relevant material, the collected data were classified and analyzed according to the principal components of Michael Brecher's crisis management model. Accordingly, the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis was examined through four principal stages: onset, escalation, de-escalation, and impact. At the onset stage, the historical, ethnic, identity-related, political, and territorial roots of the crisis were analyzed; at the escalation stage, escalation factors, threat perception, time pressure, the probability of war, and the role of actors were assessed; at the de-escalation stage, mediation initiatives, ceasefires, and settlement efforts were examined; and at the impact stage, the consequences of the crisis at bilateral and regional levels, particularly its effects on the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran, were analyzed. These four stages constitute the principal analytical framework of the study. In the analytical process, major events and developments in the crisis were first reconstructed chronologically, after which each development was interpreted according to the components of Brecher's model. In addition, to enhance the comprehensiveness of the analysis, attention was paid to the interaction between the conflict's internal factors and regional and extra-regional variables. Finally, the consequences of the crisis for the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran were examined in security, political, geopolitical,

economic, and transit dimensions, and the capacities of Iranian public diplomacy for managing the crisis consequences were analyzed. In terms of temporal scope, the study examines developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the emergence of its historical and political foundations through the developments following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the 2025 peace agreement. The spatial scope encompasses the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and the geopolitical environment of the South Caucasus, with particular emphasis on the consequences of these developments for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The findings derived from the examination of documents and sources were compared and interpreted within Brecher's framework in order to explain the process of crisis onset, escalation, de-escalation, and impact and to identify the effects of shifts in the balance of power and the presence of regional and extra-regional actors on the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Accordingly, the research method enabled a stage-based and dynamic analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and an examination of the relationship between developments in the crisis and the security environment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

3. Findings

The findings indicate that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is rooted in a series of historical, political, and administrative developments. In previous centuries, the South Caucasus was an arena of competition among regional powers, particularly Iran and Russia and, during certain periods, the Ottoman Empire. Developments during the nineteenth century and the expansion of the Russian Empire's influence in the Caucasus constituted a major turning point in the political history of the region. 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 ([Karabakh Liberation, 2014](#); [Soltan, 2005](#)). Following the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet system, the status of Nagorno-Karabakh was considered within the framework of Soviet political decision-making in 1921, and ultimately Nagorno-Karabakh was placed within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

Subsequently, in 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was established within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. This administrative arrangement was created despite the fact that Armenians constituted the majority of the region's population, an issue that became one of the principal sources of dispute in subsequent decades (Elahinia, 2022; Mooradian & Druckman, 1999).

With the initiation of Mikhail Gorbachev's reform policies in the second half of the 1980s, the political environment within the Soviet republics became more open, and political demands among the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh for a change in the region's status intensified. In 1988, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast Council requested the incorporation of the region into Armenia, a demand opposed by the Republic of Azerbaijan. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 constituted the most significant turning point in transforming this dispute into an interstate conflict (Broers, 2019; Javaheri, 2022).

4. Ethnic, Identity, and Territorial Factors

One of the most significant dimensions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is its ethnic and identity-based character. The Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh emphasized its ethnic, linguistic, religious, and historical characteristics, whereas the Republic of Azerbaijan emphasized its territorial integrity and sovereignty over the region. 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 (Valigholizadeh, 2012; Valizada, 2026).

The territorial dimension also constitutes one of the most fundamental components of the conflict. The geopolitical importance of Nagorno-Karabakh extends beyond its size and immediate location. Its position in the South Caucasus and its proximity to transportation routes connecting the Caspian Sea, Russia, Iran, and Turkey enhance its strategic value (Sultanov, 2018; Vits & Götz, 2026). This situation has prompted various actors to follow developments in Nagorno-Karabakh through the prism of their own security and geopolitical interests.

5. Stages of Crisis Escalation

The findings demonstrate that the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis reached its peak during three major periods:

The First Nagorno-Karabakh War, 1991–1994: Following the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the conflict entered a military phase and developed into the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. During the war, Armenian forces gained control over Nagorno-Karabakh and parts of the surrounding territories, while large numbers of people on both sides were displaced. In 1994, a ceasefire was established through the Bishkek Protocol, but the political and legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh remained unresolved (Mooradian & Druckman, 1999; Yadollahi, 2022).

The Four-Day War of 2016: In April 2016, intense clashes occurred between the two sides, demonstrating the fragility of the 1994 ceasefire and confirming that the conflict retained the potential to escalate into a large-scale war. From the perspective of Brecher's model, the 2016 war may be interpreted as a warning stage and a renewed escalation of the crisis (Cavanaugh, 2022; Moradi, 2022).

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020: The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War lasted from September 27 to November 10, 2020, and constituted a turning point in the regional balance of power. Benefiting from enhanced military capabilities and the use of new military capacities and warfare technologies, the Republic of Azerbaijan succeeded in regaining a substantial portion of the territories it had previously lost (Beyouk, 2023; Miarka, 2021). The November 2020 ceasefire agreement, mediated by Russia, marked the end of the principal phase of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (Kalwar et al., 2022).

Developments of September 2023: In September 2023, the Republic of Azerbaijan launched a large-scale military operation and established full control over Nagorno-Karabakh. Subsequently, the political structure of the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh collapsed, and more than 100,000 Armenians left the region (Feyzollahi, 2025; Gale et al., 2023).

6. Role of Regional and Extra-Regional Actors

The findings indicate that, because of its geopolitical location, the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis has had a multi-actor character from its inception:

Russia: Russia is the most important historical, security, and geopolitical actor in the South Caucasus. During different phases of the crisis, it played a significant role ranging from mediation and the establishment of ceasefire arrangements to a direct security presence (Ebrahimi & Kheiri, 2018; Бижан, 2021). The deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces in parts of the region following the 2020 war maintained Moscow's military presence in the area (Souleimanov, 2024).

Turkey: Owing to its close political, economic, historical, and cultural ties with the Republic of Azerbaijan, Turkey is one of the most important regional actors. Military and defense cooperation between the two countries, particularly during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, played an important role in altering the balance of power (Akif, 2013; Isachenko, 2020). Close relations between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, particularly during the Nagorno-Karabakh War, affected the regional balance of power (Tousirkani, 2011).

The Islamic Republic of Iran: Because it directly borders both the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Iran is regarded as a key regional actor. Iran has emphasized the preservation of internationally recognized borders, the territorial integrity of states, and the peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue (Akhbari, 2020; Osuli Odlu et al., 2026). The security of Iran's northern borders, prevention of geopolitical changes along its borders, and preservation of Iran's communication route with Armenia are among Tehran's most important considerations regarding the South Caucasus (Kouzehgar Kaleji, 2017).

The United States and the European Union: These actors have primarily participated in the crisis through diplomatic, political, economic, and mediation instruments. Following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, the European Union assumed a more prominent role in dialogue between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia (Kafi, 2021; Rácz, 2020). Energy security, transit routes, and limiting Russian influence are among the principal motivations underlying U.S. engagement in the region (Taghinejad Fashtakeh, 2024).

Israel: Through military and arms cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan, Israel has contributed to changes in the balance of power. Intelligence and security cooperation between Tel Aviv and Baku has acquired broader security dimensions (Akbari, 2020; Seifi & Hasanvand, 2023). Israel has also been one of the major

suppliers of military equipment to the Republic of Azerbaijan (Hosseini Atiq, 2020).

7. International Organizations

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE): Through the establishment of the Minsk Group in 1992, the OSCE created the principal mediation mechanism intended to facilitate an agreement between the parties. Nevertheless, disagreements concerning the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the right to self-determination of the region's Armenian population prevented the achievement of a comprehensive settlement (Lesani & Movahedi Saveji, 2023; Moeinabadi Bidgoli & Sayyad Sadri Ali, 2015). The primary objective of the Minsk Group was to create the necessary conditions for direct and indirect negotiations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia (Souleimanov, 2024).

The United Nations: Through the adoption of Security Council Resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884, the United Nations emphasized the need to halt hostilities, establish a ceasefire, and withdraw military forces from the disputed territories. Nevertheless, the absence of an effective enforcement mechanism impeded the full implementation of these resolutions (Jafari, 2022; Nasri, 2007). A considerable gap persisted between the formal decisions of the international community and developments on the ground (Mianabadi et al., 2013).

8. Crisis De-escalation and Management

Numerous efforts were undertaken to reduce tensions and achieve a political settlement. The Islamic Republic of Iran played a mediating role through two Tehran meetings held in 1992 and 1993 (Zaki & Pashalou, 2017). Russia contributed to the establishment of a ceasefire through the Bishkek peace initiative in 1994 (Beyouk, 2021). Despite these efforts, fundamental disagreements between the parties, the absence of agreement on territorial and security issues, mutual distrust, and competing interests among regional and extra-regional actors prevented the achievement of a sustainable settlement (Asadi et al., 2023; Moradi & Salehi Yeganeh, 2023). The crisis ultimately ended through the use of force and the unilateral military action of the Republic of Azerbaijan in September 2023, an outcome that,

consistent with the expectations of Brecher's model, is associated with a lower degree of stability (Hynek & Ter-Ghazaryan, 2026).

9. Impact Stage and Consequences of the Crisis

At the bilateral level: The principal consequences included a shift in the balance of power in favor of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the influx of more than 120,000 Armenian refugees into Armenia, widespread dissatisfaction with the Pashinyan government and the weakening of its legitimacy on the one hand, and the consolidation of Azerbaijani sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh and the strengthening of Baku's regional position on the other (Avedissian, 2023; Najafi Sayar, 2021).

At the regional level: The crisis resulted in an expanded role for Turkey and Israel in the South Caucasus, a decline in Russia's traditional influence, intensified geopolitical competition, and serious threats to the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran arising from its proximity to Azerbaijan and Israel's presence near Iran's northwestern borders (Osuli Odlu et al., 2026; Seifi & Hasanvand, 2023). The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War contributed to the end of the previous security order and the emergence of new arrangements in the South Caucasus (Rasouli, 2025). The shift in the balance of power, the increasing roles of Turkey and Israel, and the erosion of Russia's traditional monopoly transformed the regional security structure (Norouzani, 2025).

Impact on Iran's national security: According to the findings, the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis has affected Iran's national security in four principal respects: (1) the shift in the balance of power in favor of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which may encourage greater regional adventurism by that country; (2) the presence and influence of extra-regional actors, particularly Israel, in Iran's immediate neighborhood, which constitutes a serious national security threat; (3) the potential alteration of transportation routes and corridors, including the proposed Zangezur Corridor, which could weaken Iran's transit and geopolitical role; and (4) the refugee and displacement crisis, which may generate security and social consequences for Iran's border regions (Akhbari, 2020; Najafi Sayar, 2021; Rasolzadeh, 2019).

10. Discussion and Analysis of the Findings Based on Brecher's Model

The findings demonstrate that Michael Brecher's crisis management model possesses substantial explanatory capacity for complex regional crises and can serve as an effective analytical framework for studying similar conflicts in the Eurasian region. The Nagorno-Karabakh crisis can be analyzed through the four stages of Brecher's model as follows:

Onset stage: The historical roots of the conflict extend to the political and administrative developments of the Caucasus from the nineteenth century onward, while the administrative structures established during the Soviet period created the initial foundations of the dispute. Ethnic and identity-related factors, together with both parties' perception of Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral component of their national identity, transformed a territorial dispute into an issue of national prestige and security. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 transformed an intra-systemic dispute into an interstate conflict (Brecher, 2003; Khalili et al., 2013; Vits & Götz, 2026). This finding is fully consistent with Brecher's emphasis on the role of threat perception and increasing psychological pressure during the onset stage of a crisis and demonstrates how ethnic-territorial disagreements, combined with the parties' perceptions of threats to their vital interests, escalated to the level of a crisis (Balian, 2026).

Escalation stage: Brecher's three perceptual conditions—acute threat, time pressure, and an increased probability of war—reached their highest levels during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1991–1994), the Four-Day War of 2016, and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020. The developments of September 2023 constituted the final peak of the crisis. During this stage, the asymmetry of power between the two countries in terms of population, gross domestic product, military expenditure, and external support became clearly visible, while regional and extra-regional actors, including Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel, the United States, and the European Union, exerted a decisive influence on the trajectory of the crisis (Beyouk, 2023; Miarka, 2021; Moradi & Salehi Yeganeh, 2023). These findings demonstrate that the multiplicity of actors and conflicts among their interests substantially complicated crisis management, a dynamic clearly observable during

the escalation and de-escalation stages of Brecher's model (Sahakyan, 2024).

De-escalation stage: Despite extensive mediation efforts by the Islamic Republic of Iran through the two Tehran meetings of 1992 and 1993, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe through the establishment of the Minsk Group in 1992, the United Nations through Security Council Resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884, and Russia through the 1994 Bishkek peace initiative, these measures failed to generate a comprehensive and sustainable resolution of the conflict (Asadi et al., 2023; Lesani & Movahedi Saveji, 2023; Mooradian & Druckman, 1999). The principal obstacles included the persistence of fundamental disagreements between the parties, mutual distrust, competing interests among the actors, particularly within the Minsk Group, and divergent understandings of the normative foundations for resolving the conflict, namely the tension between the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the right to self-determination of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh (Davtyan, 2024). The Nagorno-Karabakh crisis ultimately ended through the use of force and unilateral action by the Republic of Azerbaijan in September 2023. According to Brecher's model, such an outcome is likely to be associated with lower levels of satisfaction and stability and a greater probability of crisis recurrence (Hynek & Ter-Ghazaryan, 2026; Moradi & Salehi Yeganeh, 2023).

Impact stage: The consequences of the conflict were not confined to relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia but also affected the security and geopolitical structure of the South Caucasus. At the bilateral level, major consequences included the influx of more than 120,000 Armenian refugees into Armenia, widespread dissatisfaction with the Pashinyan government and the weakening of its legitimacy on the one hand, and the consolidation of Azerbaijani sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh, reconstruction of the territories, and strengthening of Baku's regional position on the other (Avedissian, 2023; Najafi Sayar, 2021). At the regional level, the shift in the balance of power in favor of Baku, the increasing roles of Turkey and Israel in the South Caucasus, the decline of Russia's traditional influence, and serious threats to the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran constitute some of the most important consequences of the crisis (Akhbari, 2020; Rasulzadeh, 2019; Seifi & Hasanvand,

2023). According to Brecher's model, because the crisis ended through unilateral action and the use of force, it is likely to produce lower levels of satisfaction and stability, while the possibility of renewed conflict may increase if the balance of power shifts in Armenia's favor (Balian, 2026).

11. Responses to the Research Questions

Response to the main research question: The conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis can be explained within Brecher's crisis management model as a four-stage process. At the onset stage, historical, ethnic, political, and territorial factors, together with the emergence of threat perceptions among the parties, created the foundations of the crisis. At the escalation stage, intensified threat perceptions, time pressure, shifts in the balance of power, and the involvement of regional and extra-regional actors aggravated the crisis. At the de-escalation stage, although mediation efforts produced ceasefires, persistent fundamental disagreements and competing interests among the actors prevented a comprehensive and sustainable settlement, and the crisis ultimately ended through the use of force. At the impact stage, bilateral and regional consequences can be identified, including a shift in the balance of power, the increased roles of Turkey and Israel, a decline in Russia's traditional influence, and threats to the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. According to Brecher's model, the termination of the crisis through force and unilateral action has generated a lower level of regional stability and increased the possibility of renewed conflict (Souleimanov, 2024).

Response to the first subsidiary question: The roots, factors, and dimensions affecting the emergence and persistence of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict include the following: historical factors, including the Treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay, the Soviet administrative structure, and the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast in 1923; ethnic and identity-related factors, including the incompatibility between the Armenian identity of the region and the political sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the perception by both parties of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of their national identity; political factors, including the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the transformation of intra-systemic disputes into an

interstate conflict; territorial factors, including the tension between the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the right to self-determination of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh; and geopolitical factors, including Nagorno-Karabakh's strategic location along transportation routes in the South Caucasus and competition among regional and extra-regional powers. These factors, acting simultaneously and interactively, created the conditions for the emergence and continuation of the crisis (Elahinia, 2022; Karabakh Liberation, 2014; Valigholizadeh, 2012; Yemelianova, 2023).

Response to the second subsidiary question: The roles and positions of regional and extra-regional actors and international organizations in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be explained as follows: Russia, as the traditional regional power and mediator, participated in all stages of the crisis and, despite the relative weakening of its position in the post-war period, remains one of the principal actors (Ebrahimi & Kheiri, 2018; Бижан, 2021). Turkey, through its strategic support for the Republic of Azerbaijan, particularly during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, succeeded in consolidating its position as a key regional actor (Akif, 2013; Isachenko, 2020). The Islamic Republic of Iran, adopting an approach centered on the preservation of borders, national security, and the prevention of geopolitical changes, constitutes another important regional actor (Akhbari, 2020; Osuli Odlu et al., 2026). The United States, through diplomacy, competition with Russia, and its focus on energy security; the European Union, through diplomatic mediation and support for dialogue; and Israel, through military and security cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan, have each influenced the trajectory of the crisis (Akbari, 2020; Kafi, 2021; Taghinejad Fashtakeh, 2024). At the level of international organizations, the OSCE, through the establishment of the Minsk Group, and the United Nations, through the adoption of Security Council resolutions, attempted to provide the necessary legal and political framework for crisis management; however, the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms and conflicts of interest among the members prevented the achievement of a comprehensive and sustainable settlement (Lesani & Movahedi Saveji, 2023; Nasri, 2007; Souleimanov, 2024).

Response to the third subsidiary question: The trajectory of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis can be analyzed through the four stages of Brecher's model. At the onset stage, threat perception and growing psychological pressure came to dominate relations between the two states. At the escalation stage, Brecher's three perceptual conditions—acute threat, time pressure, and the increased probability of war—reached their maximum intensity. At the de-escalation stage, mediation efforts, despite producing ceasefires, failed to generate a comprehensive and sustainable solution because of persistent fundamental disagreements and competing interests among the actors, and the crisis ultimately ended through the use of force. At the impact stage, the consequences of the crisis can be identified at multiple levels. Future scenarios include three possibilities: relative stabilization, contingent upon full implementation of the 2025 peace agreement; a new frozen conflict, resulting from continued border and corridor disputes; and renewed crisis, should the balance of power shift in Armenia's favor (Davtyan, 2024; Javaheri, 2022). The principal legal challenges include final border delimitation, the legal status of displaced persons, and legal guarantees for minorities; political challenges include normalization of relations, development of mutual trust, and resolution of corridor-related disputes; and security challenges include the presence of foreign forces, border insecurity, and landmines remaining from previous wars (Dadparvar & Parto, 2026; Feyzollahi, 2025).

Response to the fourth subsidiary question: The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has affected the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran in four principal respects: first, the regional balance of power has shifted in favor of the Republic of Azerbaijan, potentially encouraging greater regional adventurism by that country; second, the presence and influence of extra-regional actors, particularly Israel, in Iran's immediate neighborhood constitute a serious threat to national security; third, potential changes in transportation routes and corridors, including the proposed Zangezur Corridor, may weaken Iran's transit and geopolitical role; and fourth, the refugee and displacement crisis may generate security and social consequences for Iran's border regions (Akhbari, 2020; Rasulzadeh, 2019; Seifi & Hasanvand, 2023). By contrast, Iranian public diplomacy can contribute to managing the consequences of the

crisis by strengthening a discourse of regional peace and stability, utilizing shared cultural and civilizational capacities, activating economic and transit diplomacy, participating in regional and international mechanisms, and strengthening bilateral relations with both countries through a balanced approach (Cingöz & Erendor, 2026; Mahboubi, 2021).

12. Conclusion

The present study was conducted to explain the conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis and its effects on the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the basis of Michael Brecher's crisis management model. The findings demonstrated that the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis is a multilayered regional crisis with historical, ethnic, political, and geopolitical roots that can be analyzed through the four stages of onset, escalation, de-escalation, and impact. Brecher's model has substantial explanatory capacity for complex regional crises and can serve as an effective analytical framework for examining comparable conflicts in the Eurasian region.

The results demonstrated that historical, ethnic, political, and territorial factors jointly contributed to the formation and persistence of the crisis, while competition and the positions of regional and extra-regional actors and the performance of international organizations influenced its trajectory. Moreover, the processes of crisis onset, expansion, and de-escalation were explicable through the components of Brecher's model, while legal, political, and security challenges affected the prospects for settlement. The Nagorno-Karabakh crisis has affected the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and strengthening public diplomacy may contribute to managing its consequences. The termination of the crisis through force and unilateral action by the Republic of Azerbaijan in September 2023, consistent with the expectations of Brecher's model, has produced a lower degree of regional stability and increased the possibility of renewed conflict. Although the 2025 peace agreement constitutes a positive step toward reducing tensions, its full implementation and the achievement of sustainable stability require political will on both sides, resolution of the remaining legal and border issues, and constructive cooperation among regional actors.

The future of the region depends on how remaining issues, including border delimitation, normalization of relations, the status of displaced persons, transportation corridors, and the roles of regional and extra-regional actors, are managed.

From the perspective of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis has affected national security across multiple dimensions. Through active diplomacy, maintenance of balanced relations with both parties to the conflict, enhancement of regional cooperation, and utilization of public diplomacy capacities, Iran can play an effective role in managing the consequences of the crisis and safeguarding its national security. Strengthening a discourse of regional peace and stability, employing shared cultural and civilizational capacities, activating economic and transit diplomacy, participating in regional and international mechanisms, and strengthening bilateral relations with both countries through a balanced approach are among the strategies that can contribute to managing the consequences of the crisis and transforming threats into opportunities for regional cooperation.

With all research hypotheses confirmed, it can be concluded that the conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, when analyzed according to the components of Brecher's model, has affected the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and these effects can be identified and analyzed across security, political, economic, and geopolitical dimensions.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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