

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The management of territorial and ethnic conflicts have long been a complex issue in international relations. This study focuses on two significant disputes: the Nagorno-Karabakh Region conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon. Both conflicts, though geographically distant, have a number of features in common such as their underlying geopolitical tensions, even ethnic dimensions. This study aims to provide a comparative analysis of these conflicts, exploring how foreign policy tools are employed to deal with or manage them differently. The relationship between geopolitical interests, ethnic identities, and territorial disputes is crucial in understanding complex conflicts such as those in the Nagorno-Karabakh Region and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula¹. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, situated in the South Caucasus, involves deep-rooted ethnic tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the status of this ethnically Armenian-majority region². This conflict has been marked by intermittent violence, protracted negotiations, and significant international involvement. The struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh is not merely a territorial dispute but a manifestation of broader ethnic and historical grievances.

Similarly, the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon centres on the control of a resource-rich territory, in which both parties have common and conflicting interests. The origins of the disputes are tied to colonial-era boundaries and competing claims over maritime resources. This conflict has led to regional instability and has involved international arbitration efforts, with varying degrees of success. The

Bakassi Peninsula dispute illustrates how colonial legacies and resource competition can fuel prolonged territorial disputes³.

The significance of this study lies in its comparative approach to analysing these conflicts. By examining the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute together, this study aims to uncover patterns and differences in how geopolitical and ethnic factors influence conflict management. Understanding these factors provides insights into the broader dynamics of international conflict resolution and the effectiveness of various foreign policy tools.

Moreover, the comparative analysis highlights the role of international actors and foreign policy tools in managing these crises. The involvement of international organizations, peacekeeping forces, and diplomatic initiatives plays a crucial role in shaping the conflict resolution process⁴. By evaluating the strategies and tools used in both contexts, this study seeks to identify best practices and lessons learned that can inform future conflict management efforts.

So, Nigeria's experience in managing the Bakassi Peninsula dispute, with its unique geopolitical and ethnic dimensions, offers valuable insights into the broader implications for conflict resolution. Similarly, the strategies employed in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict provide a framework for understanding how ethnic conflicts can be addressed through diplomacy and international engagement⁵. This study aims to draw comparisons between these cases to enhance the understanding of conflict management in diverse geopolitical and ethnic contexts.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Precisely, the gap this work fills, is the evaluation of the nature of the two conflicts and comparative explanation of the applied interventions using foreign policy tools and strategies aimed at managing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula conflicts. Despite extensive research on each conflict individually, there is a lack of comprehensive comparative analysis that examines how geopolitical interests, even ethnic identities, and foreign policy mechanisms interplay in these distinct yet comparable disputes.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute both involve complex territorial claims influenced by historical grievances, ethnic identities, and resource competition. However, the specific foreign policy tools and strategies employed to manage these conflicts, and their effectiveness, have not been systematically compared. Understanding how different foreign policy tools such as diplomacy, mediation, economic sanctions, and military interventions have been applied in each context is crucial for identifying successful practices and areas needing improvement.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of these conflicts can reveal insights into how international actors and organizations address similar challenges in different geopolitical settings. This study aims to fill the gap by providing a detailed assessment of the foreign policy approaches and their impact on the resolution or management of these territorial disputes.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aims at providing an appraisal of handling styles of two inter-state crises, and specific assessment of the foreign policy tools and strategies utilised in managing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula conflicts. The objectives of the study are to:

1. conduct a thorough examination of the geopolitical factors influencing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute.
2. evaluate the foreign policy tools or strategies employed by the involved states in managing these conflicts.
3. examine the effectiveness of conflict management strategies in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute.
4. assess the involvement of international actors or organizations in managing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the geopolitical factors influencing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute?
2. How have the involved states utilized foreign policy tools or strategies to manage these conflicts?
3. How do the effectiveness of conflict management strategies compare between the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute?
4. What role have international actors or organizations played in managing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several ways, especially in the evolving field of international conflict analysis and management. Firstly, the study fills an academic gap by comparatively analysing two high-stakes geopolitical conflicts that have not been widely examined side-by-side. While both cases have received individual scholarly attention, little to none works have evaluated them in tandem to uncover common patterns, divergences, and lessons in conflict management. So, this shows how different geopolitical environments, colonial legacies, and ethnic compositions interact with state and international interventions to either escalate or de-escalate conflict.

Secondly, the research contributes to the theoretical understanding of international relations and conflict studies. It engages with concepts such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, identity politics, and regional stability while exploring how ethnic grievances and geopolitical ambitions influence the success or failure of conflict management efforts. The analysis of international actors including the United Nations, regional blocs, and non-governmental organizations further illustrates the complexities of third-party involvement in localized conflicts.

Moreover, the study has regional significance for both Africa and the Caucasus. In the African context, the peaceful (albeit contested) resolution of the Bakassi dispute through legal and diplomatic mechanisms offers a model of how African states can utilize international legal frameworks for territorial resolution. In contrast, the recurrence of hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region presents a contrasting model of frozen conflict and protracted warfare, showing how unresolved ethnic nationalism can undermine peace processes despite external intervention.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study is limited to a broad appraisal of the political economy, geopolitical and ethnic nature, as well as management capabilities, working with foreign policy tools to examine these diverse dimensions of the Nagorno-Karabakh and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula conflicts. The study will cover the historical origins of the conflicts, their development over time, and the current status of the disputes. The justification for this is that both crises are inter-state, have geopolitical nature, involve third parties to resolve or not, are resource-based.

The temporal scope of the study includes the period from the onset of the conflicts to the present day, providing a comprehensive view of their evolution and the strategies employed to address them. It specifically focuses on first, geopolitical contexts examining the geographical and political factors that shape the conflicts, including historical claims, territorial boundaries, and strategic interests of the involved states.

Secondly, it examines conflict management or the foreign policy tools and strategies, such as diplomacy, mediation, sanctions, and military interventions employed by the states involved and international actors.

Further, it focuses on the covert roles and interests of shadow parties, on the one hand, and then, on the other hand, international non-state actors and organizations, also focused with a view to assessing the involvement and outcomes of third parties, including the United Nations, regional organizations, and non-governmental organizations, NGOs, in managing and resolving the conflicts.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

Every research endeavour has inherent limitations that may affect the scope and outcomes of the study. Acknowledging these limitations is essential for providing a balanced understanding of the research findings and their implications. This section outlines the primary limitations of this study on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute. Identified limitations include the following:

1. Dependence on Secondary Data

One of the primary limitations of this study is its reliance on secondary data sources. While secondary data provides valuable insights, it is limited by the scope, quality, and perspective of the available sources. The study depends on existing literature, official documents, and media reports, which may have inherent biases or gaps. Consequently, the analysis might be constrained by the availability and completeness of the secondary data, potentially affecting the depth of the study's findings. For instance, media reports and official documents might reflect partial views or be influenced by political agendas. This variability in data quality can impact the overall reliability of the research findings.

2. Inhibitions from state bureaucracy

Primary actors in these crises are largely state actors, who are restricted from giving classified information, even if primary sources were a preference. For instance, observers and participants such as the belligerents take or give information based on unity of command to which the researcher do not belong, and so likely infringing on accuracy.

3.Contextual Limitations

The study's findings are influenced by the historical, political, and cultural contexts of the conflicts. The complex and evolving nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the

Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute means that the data might not fully capture recent developments or emerging trends. As such, the analysis may not reflect the most current state of the conflicts or the latest strategies employed by the involved parties.

4. Scope of Analysis

The comparative analysis between the two conflicts is limited by the study's focus on specific aspects of conflict management and foreign policy tools. While the study aims to provide a detailed comparison, it may not encompass all relevant factors or strategies. This focus might result in an incomplete picture of the conflicts and their management, potentially overlooking other important dimensions or approaches.

1.8. Operational Definition of Terms

1. Comparative Appraisal: This refers to a broad and cursory overview of both crises being studied.

2. Conflict Management: The methods and approaches used to address and mitigate conflicts, aiming to reduce tensions and promote stability. This includes efforts to resolve disputes, manage ongoing conflicts, and prevent escalation.

3. Foreign Policy Tools: The strategies and instruments employed by states and international actors to manage and resolve conflicts. These tools include diplomacy (negotiations and dialogue), mediation (third-party facilitation of negotiations), economic sanctions (financial restrictions imposed to influence behaviour), and military interventions (use of force to achieve objectives).

4. Geopolitical Context: Refers to the geographical and political factors that influence the relationships and strategies of states in a conflict. This includes historical claims, strategic interests, territorial boundaries, and international alignments.

5. International Actors: Entities that influence or participate in conflict management and resolution, including states, international organizations (such as the United Nations and regional bodies), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These actors can provide mediation, support peacekeeping missions, or facilitate negotiations.

6. Nature and Management: These words mean the distinguishing factors and means or styles of handling the crises.

7. Nagorno-Karabakh: A region disputed by Armenia and Azerbaijan.

8. Nigeria-Bakassi: A disputed region by Nigeria and Cameroon, later awarded to Cameroon by International Court of Justice.

Endnotes

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Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

The conceptual review provides an overview of key ideas and frameworks relevant to the geopolitical and conflict management aspects of the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula crises. It explores the definition and significance of geopolitics, the characteristics that shape geopolitical conflicts, and the concept of conflict, conflict management strategies, and the role of third-party interventions in resolving geopolitical tensions.

2.1.1 Geopolitics

Geopolitics is a multidisciplinary field that examines the influence of geography on political power, international relations, and global affairs. It considers how factors such as territorial location, natural resources, demographics, and strategic positioning shape the interactions between states and other political entities. The term “geopolitics” was first coined by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén in the early 20th century, and since then, it has evolved to encompass various schools of thought, including classical geopolitics, critical geopolitics, and modern geopolitical analysis¹.

At its core, geopolitics is concerned with the struggle for power and influence over geographical spaces. States engage in geopolitical strategies to secure economic interests, military advantages, and political dominance. For instance, classical geopolitical theorists

like Halford Mackinder proposed the “Heartland Theory,” which suggested that controlling Central Eurasia (the “Heartland”) would grant dominance over global affairs. Similarly, Nicholas Spykman’s “Rimland Theory” emphasized the importance of coastal regions in global power struggles. These theories highlight how geography directly impacts the decision-making of nations and shapes conflicts worldwide.

In contemporary discussions, geopolitics is no longer limited to state-centric interactions. Non-state actors such as multinational corporations, international organizations, and insurgent groups also play crucial roles in geopolitical dynamics¹. Additionally, modern geopolitical analysis integrates economic, environmental, and technological considerations, recognizing that power struggles are not solely determined by military strength but also by economic leverage, energy resources, and digital influence.

2.1.2 Notable Characteristics of Geopolitics

Geopolitics is shaped by several key characteristics that influence how states and other actors interact on the global stage. One of the primary features of geopolitics is territoriality, which refers to the control and competition over geographical spaces. Nations seek to secure and expand their territorial influence due to strategic, economic, or cultural reasons². This is evident in regions like Nagorno-Karabakh and the Bakassi Peninsula, where territorial disputes have led to prolonged conflicts.

Another characteristic of geopolitics is power dynamics, which involve the struggle for dominance among states. Superpowers and regional powers often engage in geopolitical maneuvering to strengthen their influence. For example, Russia, Turkey, and Western countries have played roles in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict due to their strategic interests in the South Caucasus³. Similarly, in the Bakassi Peninsula crisis, Nigeria and

Cameroon's geopolitical positioning influenced the involvement of international bodies like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the United Nations³.

Resource control is also a defining factor in geopolitics. Many geopolitical conflicts arise due to competition over natural resources such as oil, gas, and minerals. The Bakassi Peninsula, for instance, is rich in oil reserves, making it a critical area of economic interest⁴. Likewise, geopolitical disputes often involve ethnic and cultural identities, as seen in Nagorno-Karabakh, where ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis have historical claims to the region, fueling nationalist sentiments and territorial tensions².

Lastly, geopolitical alliances and rivalries play a crucial role in shaping international relations. Countries form alliances based on mutual interests, security concerns, or ideological alignments. The involvement of military alliances like NATO, CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), and regional organizations in various conflicts reflects how geopolitical strategies extend beyond national borders⁵.

2.1.3 Importance of Geopolitics

Geopolitics plays a crucial role in shaping global political and economic systems, influencing national security, international diplomacy, and economic policies. Understanding its significance helps in analyzing conflicts, power struggles, and international relations. One of the primary benefits of geopolitics is that it helps in understanding the power relations between states and other political entities. Geopolitical analysis allows policymakers, scholars, and international organizations to assess how nations compete for resources, influence, and strategic positioning². For example, the geopolitical rivalry between the United States, Russia, and China affects global trade policies, military alliances, and regional stability. Similarly, in the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict, geopolitical interests of major powers like Russia and Turkey influence peace efforts and military engagements².

Geopolitics is essential in national security planning, as countries must evaluate threats, alliances, and military strategies based on their geographical and political realities. Nations develop military bases, border security policies, and foreign strategies considering their geopolitical environment. For instance, Nigeria's military policies in the Bakassi Peninsula were largely shaped by its geopolitical concerns regarding Cameroon's claims and the role of international courts in settling disputes. Similarly, Azerbaijan's military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh were influenced by its geopolitical positioning and alliances, particularly with Turkey⁶.

Economic power is another major aspect of geopolitics. Countries leverage their geographical position and natural resources to gain economic advantages. Nations with access to vital waterways, trade routes, and resource-rich areas often wield significant economic influence. The Bakassi Peninsula, for example, is rich in oil and gas, making it a contested area between Nigeria and Cameroon⁴. Likewise, geopolitical positioning plays a role in pipeline routes and energy distribution, as seen in the competition between Russia and Europe over energy supplies⁷.

Geopolitical knowledge is essential for conflict resolution and diplomacy. By understanding geopolitical factors, international organizations and governments can negotiate peace treaties, mediate conflicts, and establish diplomatic solutions. The International Court of Justice's (ICJ) ruling on the Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon was an example of how geopolitical factors shape legal decisions and international diplomacy⁷. In Nagorno-Karabakh, ceasefires and peace negotiations have been influenced by regional and global geopolitical pressures³.

Geopolitical considerations also affect the functioning of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU). These organizations play key roles in global governance by addressing geopolitical challenges, promoting peace, and facilitating economic cooperation. For instance, the UN's role in managing territorial disputes in Africa, including the Bakassi Peninsula, highlights how international bodies shape geopolitical outcomes. Similarly, organizations like the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) have been involved in attempts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict⁷.

Beyond politics and economics, geopolitics also influences cultural and ideological trends. Regions with historical geopolitical significance often experience cultural exchanges, ideological shifts, and political realignments. For example, in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Armenian and Azerbaijani national identities have been shaped by historical geopolitical struggles, impacting their political narratives and foreign relations⁸. Likewise, colonial histories and geopolitical rivalries have shaped Nigeria's and Cameroon's national identities, influencing how they approached the Bakassi dispute⁵.

2.1.4 Geopolitical Components

Geopolitical conflicts, such as those in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Bakassi Peninsula, are influenced by various interconnected components that shape international relations and territorial disputes. These components help explain the causes, dynamics, and implications of geopolitical struggles. The major components of geopolitics include territoriality, natural resources, political power, military strategy, economic interests, and international diplomacy¹².

One of the most fundamental aspects of geopolitics is territoriality; the claim, control, and defense of geographic space by political entities. Territorial disputes often arise when two or more states claim the same land, as seen in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon. Sovereignty, or the authority to govern a specific territory, is central to geopolitical tensions. States seek to assert their sovereignty over contested regions due to strategic, historical, or cultural reasons ¹³.

Natural resources play a significant role in geopolitical conflicts. Many territorial disputes are driven by the presence of valuable resources such as oil, gas, minerals, and fertile land. The Bakassi Peninsula, for instance, is rich in oil and fishing resources, making it an economically valuable region for both Nigeria and Cameroon⁸. Similarly, while Nagorno-Karabakh itself lacks significant natural resources, the wider South Caucasus region is strategically important for energy transit routes, which Azerbaijan controls and seeks to protect. The competition for resource control often intensifies conflicts and influences the involvement of external actors.

Geopolitical struggles are often fueled by nationalism and the pursuit of political power. States and ethnic groups use historical narratives and cultural identities to justify territorial claims. In Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian nationalism has driven efforts for self-determination, while Azerbaijan's national identity is strongly tied to reclaiming its internationally recognized territory¹³. Similarly, in the Bakassi Peninsula, Nigerian and Cameroonian national interests shaped the legal and diplomatic battles over the region. Political leaders often exploit nationalist sentiments to rally domestic support for territorial claim.

Military strength and strategic positioning are critical components of geopolitics. Nations engage in military buildup, alliances, and interventions to secure their geopolitical interests. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia relied on Russian military support, while Azerbaijan strengthened its military capabilities with the help of Turkey and Israeli drone technology¹⁴. Similarly, Nigeria initially deployed military forces in the Bakassi Peninsula before ultimately accepting the ICJ ruling and withdrawing its troops. Military strategies often dictate the outcomes of geopolitical conflicts and influence diplomatic negotiations.

Global and regional powers frequently intervene in geopolitical disputes, either as mediators or as actors with vested interests. International organizations like the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the OSCE play roles in conflict resolution, but their effectiveness is often limited by geopolitical rivalries. In Nagorno-Karabakh, the OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by Russia, the US, and France, attempted to mediate peace, but the 2020 war showed the limitations of diplomatic interventions¹⁵. In the Bakassi Peninsula case, the ICJ ruling and UN mediation led to a peaceful resolution, though tensions still exist⁸.

Geopolitical conflicts are rarely isolated; they often reflect broader regional and global power struggles. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, for example, is influenced by Russian, Turkish, and Western interests in the South Caucasus⁴. The Bakassi Peninsula dispute was tied to Nigeria's regional influence in West Africa and the role of former colonial powers in African territorial boundaries¹¹. Global superpowers often engage in proxy conflicts or strategic alliances to maintain their influence in contested regions.

The geographical position of a region affects its geopolitical significance. Territories located along key trade routes, near important waterways, or in resource-rich areas

become major geopolitical hotspots. The South Caucasus, where Nagorno-Karabakh is located, serves as a transit corridor for energy pipelines between Europe and Central Asia, increasing its strategic importance¹⁵. Similarly, the Bakassi Peninsula's location along the Gulf of Guinea makes it a critical region for maritime security and economic activities in West Africa⁸.

2.1.5 The Concept of Conflict

Conflict is a fundamental aspect of human society and international relations, occurring when individuals, groups, or states perceive incompatible goals, interests, or values. It can manifest in various forms, ranging from interpersonal disputes to large-scale geopolitical struggles. In the context of geopolitics, conflicts often emerge from territorial disputes, resource competition, historical grievances, and power struggles¹⁶. Understanding conflict requires analyzing its definitions, causes, and theoretical perspectives.

Scholars have defined conflict in different ways, depending on the field of study. Coser opines that conflict is “a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals.” In the geopolitical sense, conflict refers to the political, economic, or military struggles between nations or groups over territorial control, sovereignty, or strategic interests¹⁶.

Conflict is not inherently negative; in some cases, it can lead to social change, innovation, and the redefinition of political boundaries. However, when conflicts escalate without resolution mechanisms, they can lead to prolonged violence, instability, and humanitarian crises.

Conflicts arise from multiple interconnected factors. Some of the major causes include:

Territorial Disputes – Competing claims over land and natural resources often lead to conflicts, as seen in the cases of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Bakassi Peninsula. Nations and ethnic groups assert historical, cultural, or legal justifications for territorial claims, leading to prolonged disputes ¹⁷.

Ethnic and Religious Divisions – Identity-based conflicts occur when groups perceive discrimination or exclusion based on ethnic or religious lines. In Nagorno-Karabakh, ethnic Armenians sought independence due to fears of Azerbaijani domination, fueling violent confrontations¹⁴.

Resource Competition – Access to valuable resources such as oil, gas, water, and minerals can trigger geopolitical rivalries. The Bakassi Peninsula crisis was partly driven by Nigeria and Cameroon's interest in controlling offshore oil reserves⁹

Historical Grievances and Colonial Legacies – Many conflicts have roots in colonial-era decisions that arbitrarily divided territories and ethnic groups. The Bakassi dispute was influenced by colonial treaties, while Nagorno-Karabakh's status was shaped by Soviet-era policies.

Political Power Struggles – Political elites may manipulate conflicts to consolidate power, rally nationalist sentiment, or suppress opposition groups. This is evident in authoritarian regimes that use territorial disputes to justify military actions¹⁰

Conflicts can be categorized based on their scope and nature:

Intra-state Conflicts – Occur within a single country, often between the government and rebel groups (e.g., the Syrian Civil War).

Inter-state Conflicts – Involve disputes between sovereign nations, such as the Nigeria-Cameroon conflict over Bakassi.

Ethnic and Religious Conflicts – Arise from identity-based divisions, as seen in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Resource Conflicts – Occur over valuable natural resources, influencing geopolitical rivalries.

Proxy Wars – Conflicts where external powers support opposing factions, as seen in the South Caucasus with Russia and Turkey backing different sides.

2.1.6 Features of Conflict

Conflict, particularly in geopolitical contexts, follows identifiable patterns and stages. It is characterized by specific features, shaped by the identities of the involved parties, and progresses through different phases. Understanding these aspects helps explain the complexities of conflicts like those in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Bakassi Peninsula.

Conflicts, especially geopolitical ones, share several key characteristics:

Incompatibility of Interests – Conflicting parties have opposing goals, such as sovereignty claims over Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia vs. Azerbaijan) or the Bakassi Peninsula (Nigeria vs. Cameroon).

Historical and Cultural Ties – Many conflicts involve deep-seated historical grievances and cultural identities. Nagorno-Karabakh is tied to Armenian and Azerbaijani national identities, while Bakassi's dispute is linked to colonial agreements⁸.

Power Struggles – Geopolitical conflicts often involve struggles for military, political, or economic dominance, as seen in Azerbaijan's military build-up before the 2020 war¹⁶.

Resource Competition – Conflicts are frequently driven by control over natural resources. The Bakassi Peninsula's oil and gas reserves heightened Nigeria and Cameroon's interests in the region

External Influence – Many conflicts involve international actors. Russia, Turkey, and the OSCE played roles in Nagorno-Karabakh, while the ICJ and the UN mediated the Bakassi dispute.

2.1.7 Stages of Conflict

Conflicts typically progress through a series of stages, from initial tensions to possible resolution:

Stage 1: Latent Conflict – Tensions exist, but open confrontation has not yet occurred. The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute began as an administrative issue during the Soviet era before escalating

Stage 2: Escalation – Open hostilities emerge, often due to political decisions or military actions. Both Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi saw military confrontations before diplomatic efforts intervened

Stage 3: Stalemate – Neither side gains a decisive victory, leading to prolonged tensions. Nagorno-Karabakh was in a frozen conflict state for decades before Azerbaijan's 2020 offensive

Stage 4: De-escalation/Negotiation – Diplomatic efforts begin, often with third-party mediation. The Bakassi dispute was settled through the ICJ ruling and the Green Tree Agreement.

Stage 5: Resolution – A formal agreement or settlement is reached, though tensions may persist. Bakassi was officially handed to Cameroon, but some Nigerian groups still oppose the decision.

Stage 6: Post-Conflict Adjustments – Long-term peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts occur, often with economic and social reintegration policies¹⁶

2.1.8 Core Concepts in Conflict

Territorial Conflict

Territorial conflict has long held a significant place in the study of international relations, as disputes over land continue to dominate the causes of inter-state wars, regional instability, and the broader dynamics of global peace and security. Scholars such as Paul Diehl and Monica Toft argue that territorial issues are not merely about physical geography, but rather about a mixture of symbolic, strategic, historical, and identity-laden factors that often make such disputes uniquely intense and persistent.¹⁸ The continued relevance of territorial disputes, even in the post-Cold War international system, highlights the complex nature of territoriality as both a geopolitical and psychological phenomenon.

The roots of territorial conflict stretch far beyond the state system and into evolutionary behavior. For Johnson and Toft, territoriality is an ingrained behavior observable across numerous species, including humans.¹⁸ The logic underlying such behavior is evolutionary: ancestral communities, like modern states, engaged in cost-benefit calculations when competing for access to space, resources, or strategic positioning. This behavioral inclination, when applied to contemporary international relations, explains why territorial issues often provoke strong emotional responses, why they are rarely negotiated away easily, and why they serve as flashpoints for recurrent warfare. These dynamics help explain why modern territorial disputes are more likely than other types of conflicts to escalate, resist resolution, and result in protracted violence.¹⁹

Empirical evidence further reinforces the notion that territorial disputes are more escalatory and harder to manage than other kinds of conflicts. As Hensel's quantitative studies on issue salience demonstrate, disputes that involve territory are far more likely to lead to war than disputes over policies or ideologies.²⁰ This is partly because territory often carries multi-dimensional significance combining material interests, such as access

to natural resources or strategic trade routes, with intangible concerns, such as identity, nationalism, or historical grievances. Consequently, territorial conflicts often become deeply entrenched and resistant to compromise, especially when claims are tied to nationalist narratives or ethnic group survival, as seen in the conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh and the Bakassi Peninsula.

Moreover, the significance of territorial conflict has not diminished with the end of formal colonialism. Contrary to expectations that globalization and liberal institutionalism would dampen territorial rivalries, scholars argue that the salience of territory has, in some regions, become more pronounced in the post-Cold War order. Forsberg notes that territorial disputes are increasingly wrapped in the language of ethnic autonomy, postcolonial self-determination, and resource entitlement.²¹ The disintegration of empires and the redrawing of borders have left behind unresolved claims and ambiguous demarcations, which continue to spark disputes in Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus.

Territory thus serves as a symbolic extension of national sovereignty and state identity. When the integrity of a state's borders is challenged either externally, through invasion or occupation, or internally, through secessionist movements, the resulting crisis often touches on questions of legitimacy, identity, and power. This explains the longevity and intensity of conflicts such as that between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula. In both cases, the contested territory holds not just strategic or economic value, but is also deeply tied to national identity narratives, which makes diplomatic compromise all the more difficult.

Understanding the dynamics of territorial conflict is, therefore, essential not only for the development of robust international relations theory, but also for designing effective conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. Contemporary peacebuilding efforts must

grapple with the layered meanings that territory holds for states and ethnic groups. The international community, including institutions like the United Nations and regional blocs like the African Union, must navigate a fine line between upholding state sovereignty and addressing legitimate historical grievances tied to land and identity. As long as the symbolic, strategic, and emotional weight of territory remains central to how political communities conceive of themselves, territorial conflicts are likely to persist as one of the most intractable challenges in international affairs.²⁰

2.1.9 State Sovereignty and Nationhood

The concepts of state sovereignty and nationhood have long served as foundational pillars of the international system. Rooted in the Westphalian tradition, sovereignty has traditionally been conceived as the absolute authority of a state over its territory and population, free from external interference.²² This classical notion presumes a defined geographic boundary, a homogeneous population, and a centralized authority capable of exercising supreme power within its domain. However, both historical developments and evolving theoretical perspectives have challenged the rigidity of this framework, revealing the fluidity and contested nature of sovereignty and national identity in contemporary international relations.

State sovereignty, in its classical form, assumes that the state is the ultimate decision-maker, with full control over internal matters and the exclusive right to engage with other states on behalf of its population.²² Keating argues that this conventional view, while central to the modern international order, fails to accommodate the increasing complexity of global interactions, identity shifts, and transnational loyalties that complicate the notion of singular authority.²³ Similarly, the idea of the nation-state, a political unit in which cultural, ethnic, or linguistic identity overlaps with territorial sovereignty has

proven problematic in a world marked by migration, colonial legacies, and contested histories.

The model of the nation-state emerged relatively recently in the arc of history, gaining prominence particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries.²³ It represents a significant concentration of power, whereby centralized governments promote common national identities through education, media, language policy, and institutional symbols. Keating notes that this model often masks the diversity within many states, which contain multiple national groups, ethnic minorities, or indigenous populations with distinct political aspirations.²² In such contexts, sovereignty becomes a site of negotiation rather than a settled reality.

Constructivist scholars have taken a more dynamic view of sovereignty and nationhood, emphasizing their socially constructed nature. Doty critiques the realist assumption in international relations that states are unitary actors with fixed interests, arguing instead that sovereignty and national identity are continuously shaped by discourse, practices, and power relations.²⁴ From this perspective, sovereignty is not merely a legal status, but a product of historical contingencies, colonial legacies, and shifting global norms. It can be fragmented, shared, or contested depending on political circumstances.

Barkin and Cronin similarly contend that sovereignty is not a static principle, but one that evolves alongside changes in international norms, regional integration, and domestic pressures.²⁵ They argue that the definition of legitimate authority shifts as understandings of population and territory change. For instance, the rise of supranational organizations like the European Union has redefined aspects of sovereignty, while secessionist movements and autonomous regions challenge the coherence of the nation-state from within. This is evident in many postcolonial states, where imposed borders and artificially

constructed national identities continue to provoke instability and demands for self-determination.

The crises in regions such as Nagorno-Karabakh and the Bakassi Peninsula reflect these tensions between formal sovereignty and lived nationhood. In both cases, internationally recognized borders coexist with contested allegiances, ethnic affiliations, and historical claims that challenge the authority of the state. These conflicts illuminate the limitations of rigid sovereignty and expose the need for more flexible, negotiated, and inclusive forms of governance. Sovereignty in these contexts cannot be understood purely in legal terms; it must also grapple with the legitimacy bestowed or withheld by the governed populations.

In sum, the evolving nature of state sovereignty and nationhood demands a reassessment of how authority is conceived and exercised in the international system. As global interconnectedness deepens and subnational identities assert themselves, the state is no longer the sole or always the most relevant actor in matters of governance. Rather than viewing sovereignty as a fixed and indivisible attribute, scholars and policymakers must begin to treat it as a relational and dynamic process shaped by historical, political, and cultural factors.²⁵ This shift in perspective is essential for understanding not only contemporary territorial disputes but also broader trends in global conflict, diplomacy, and state legitimacy.

2.1.10 Crisis and Conflict Management

In the intricate landscape of both organizational and geopolitical dynamics, crisis and conflict management have emerged as critical areas of scholarly inquiry and practical application. Though often discussed within corporate or administrative contexts, the principles underlying effective management of crises and conflicts have significant

relevance to inter-state relations and territorial disputes such as those witnessed in the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula regions. Both concepts, though distinct interact in complex ways, often overlapping in periods of heightened tension or instability, and require strategic, timely, and context-sensitive interventions.

Conflict, broadly defined as a struggle between opposing forces, interests, or values, is an inherent part of human interaction.²⁶ Thakore emphasizes that conflict should not be viewed solely as destructive; rather, it can serve as a catalyst for innovation, transformation, and progress when properly managed.²⁶ In team or organizational settings, conflict may arise due to differences in personality, power struggles, communication breakdowns, or resource competition. Similarly, in international contexts, conflicts may be driven by territorial disputes, ethnic divisions, colonial legacies, or geopolitical rivalries. The key variable determining whether conflict yields constructive or destructive outcomes lies in the method of management.

Crisis, by contrast, is often marked by sudden disruptions or emergencies that threaten the stability and functionality of a system.²⁷ It typically demands urgent responses to prevent severe consequences or irreversible damage. In political or international contexts, crises can take the form of military escalation, failed peace talks, or abrupt policy reversals. Wobodo et al. highlight the high-stakes nature of crises, noting that they can paralyze institutions or destabilize regions if not addressed with efficiency and strategic foresight.²⁶ While conflict may simmer over time, crisis accelerates the pace of deterioration, often serving as a flashpoint within longer-standing conflicts.

Despite their differences, both conflict and crisis require robust management strategies to prevent escalation and to support long-term stability. Conflict management emphasizes early identification, structured resolution, and the transformation of disputes through

dialogue and negotiation. Thakore underscores the importance of developing individual competencies such as emotional intelligence, empathy, and communication skills as well as institutional frameworks that facilitate conflict resolution.²⁸ In both public and private institutions, self-awareness among leaders and clear procedural structures contribute to reducing the intensity and duration of conflict episodes.

Crisis management, meanwhile, focuses more heavily on preparedness, rapid decision-making, and damage control. Touitou stresses that consistent and effective communication lies at the heart of crisis response.²⁷ In volatile situations whether a natural disaster, terrorist attack, or territorial standoff, stakeholders rely on accurate, timely, and trustworthy communication from leadership. Misinformation, delayed responses, or opaque strategies can exacerbate public fear, diplomatic tensions, or institutional breakdowns. For this reason, a well-articulated crisis communication plan is indispensable for organizations and governments alike.

Moreover, both conflict and crisis management benefit from diagnostic and evaluative processes. Wobodo et al. advocate for regular internal and external assessments to identify early warning signs and vulnerabilities.²⁷ In international relations, this approach may take the form of diplomatic intelligence, track-two diplomacy, or regional monitoring mechanisms. Recognizing the signs of potential flashpoints, such as troop movements, inflammatory rhetoric, or economic sanctions, enables the formulation of preemptive strategies, thereby reducing the probability of escalation into full-blown conflict or crisis.

The relevance of these concepts to territorial disputes becomes apparent when examining real-world examples. In both the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula cases, mismanaged communication, delayed international intervention, and rigid political

postures have, at times, transformed manageable conflicts into intractable crises. In contrast, when structured negotiation platforms and third-party mediation were employed, such as in the ICJ's role in the Bakassi Peninsula resolution, stakeholders were able to contain tensions and progress toward settlement.

In summary, crisis and conflict management are indispensable to both domestic governance and international peacebuilding. While conflict offers the potential for constructive change, crisis often demands immediate containment. Both, however, necessitate intentional strategies rooted in communication, structural preparedness, and a nuanced understanding of human behavior. Whether in boardrooms or battlefields, the ability to manage conflict and crisis remains a decisive factor in the resilience and effectiveness of institutions and states alike.²⁷

2.1.11 Themes and Patterns in Crisis Management

The International Court of Justice and Legal Resolution: The International Court of Justice (ICJ), as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, continues to play an essential role in the peaceful resolution of international disputes. Its function goes beyond merely adjudicating legal disagreements between states; it also contributes to broader conflict management frameworks and the preservation of international peace and security. Through its binding judgments and advisory opinions, the ICJ provides a structured legal process that often serves as an alternative to violent or prolonged conflict. In many modern crises, including those involving armed conflict or contested sovereignty, the ICJ has emerged as a stabilizing force. The ICJ is instrumental in crisis management, reinforcing legal principles and international norms in highly contentious situations where diplomacy alone has proven insufficient.²⁹

One of the clearest illustrations of the ICJ's active role in contemporary conflict management is its intervention in the Ukraine crisis. According to S. Hill, the ICJ demonstrated an uncharacteristic swiftness in response to the conflict, underlining the urgency of legal protection for populations caught in war zones.³⁰ This responsiveness showcased the evolving expectations placed on international courts, not merely as retrospective arbiters of state conduct but as timely contributors to global efforts to minimize human suffering and maintain order. Hill further notes that the ICJ's decision to act early in the Ukraine crisis represented a shift from passive adjudication to a more dynamic presence in international affairs, setting a precedent for future crises.² In doing so, the ICJ reinforced the broader international community's commitment to supporting affected populations, and to upholding legal accountability even during ongoing armed confrontations.

However, the ICJ's position within the broader UN framework continues to attract scholarly debate, particularly concerning its relationship with the Security Council. The current system does not clearly define the boundaries of influence between the ICJ and the Security Council, leading some experts to advocate for the ICJ to play a more proactive supervisory or preventive role. In a scholarly view, one possible reform would be for the ICJ to offer more advisory opinions that could serve as legal checks or pre-emptive clarifications before the Security Council adopts coercive measures.³¹ This preventive function could reduce legal ambiguity and provide clearer guidance to both states and multilateral bodies during crisis escalation. Currently, the ICJ issues advisory opinions only upon request, and while these are not binding, they carry significant normative weight. Institutionalizing such opinions during emerging crises could strengthen the rule of law at the international level and prevent misinterpretations of legal mandates or jurisdictional overreach.

The Darfur crisis offers another instructive case in the relationship between international legal institutions and crisis management mechanisms. In 2005, the United Nations Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC), leading to the issuance of an arrest warrant for Sudan's then-President Omar al-Bashir in 2009.³² This was a landmark moment, it marked the first time the ICC acted on a case referred by the Security Council involving a sitting head of state. However, as pointed out by the scholar, this unprecedented move stirred significant controversy.³² While some praised the referral as a bold step toward international justice and accountability, others criticized it for encroaching upon state sovereignty and potentially exacerbating the conflict.³²

The Darfur case raises fundamental questions about the legitimacy and scope of international legal interventions in politically sensitive contexts. When the Security Council refers a case to the ICC, it draws from its Chapter VII authority under the UN Charter, which is primarily political rather than judicial in nature. This blending of legal and political functions often leads to questions about impartiality, selectivity, and enforcement.³¹ In such cases, there is growing support for involving the ICJ, not only as an adjudicator after the fact but also as a provider of advisory opinions that could help define the legal contours of such referrals beforehand.³¹ These advisory opinions could offer guidance on jurisdictional issues, the interpretation of international humanitarian law, and the obligations of states under various treaties. By clarifying these matters in advance, the ICJ could reduce the risk of legal and diplomatic backlash that may follow highly politicized legal actions.

Moreover, the Darfur experience exemplifies the limitations of legal mechanisms when they are not backed by coherent enforcement strategies. While the ICC issued an arrest warrant for al-Bashir, his movements across multiple African states over the years without arrest revealed the gap between legal decisions and political will.³² This points to a broader issue in international crisis management: legal judgments, however well-argued, often rely on state cooperation for implementation. The ICJ's potential role in bridging this gap through early legal interpretation, coordination with political organs, and the setting of normative expectations could make legal resolution a more central and effective part of global crisis management.

In both the Ukraine and Darfur cases, a common theme emerges: the need for stronger institutional synergy between international legal bodies and political decision-makers. The ICJ, as the guardian of international law, has the legitimacy and expertise to shape how international actors approach crises -- before, during, and after they escalate. Its judgments and advisory opinions can frame the boundaries of lawful action, establish state accountability, and provide legal clarity in moments of uncertainty. Yet, as these examples also demonstrate, the ICJ must walk a fine line between judicial independence and political relevance. Calls for expanding its advisory capacity suggest a future where the ICJ plays not only a reactive but a preventive and directive role in global crisis management.³¹

Ultimately, the patterns emerging from these cases underscore the ICJ's evolving role in the international system. Whether through binding rulings, as in contentious cases between states, or through advisory opinions on complex legal questions, the ICJ has the potential to enhance both the legality and legitimacy of international crisis responses. Its involvement can signal the international community's commitment to the rule of law, and

when effectively utilized, can help manage and resolve disputes in ways that promote peace and reduce the risk of further violence. However, its effectiveness will continue to depend on the political will of states, the support of international organizations, and the court's ability to maintain its authority in the face of geopolitical pressures.

The ICJ played a central role in resolving the Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon. After Cameroon filed a case in 1994, the ICJ delivered a judgment in 2002 in favor of Cameroon, and the decision was later formalized through the 2006 Greentree Agreement, under UN auspices. Nigeria's eventual compliance with the ruling reflected the power of legal institutions to settle contentious issues without bloodshed. This process also aligned with scholarly arguments supporting the ICJ's preventive and stabilizing functions.²⁹ The Bakassi case underscores how international courts can provide legitimacy, finality, and structure in complex disputes, especially when legal judgments are supported by strong diplomatic mechanisms and regional cooperation.

In contrast, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has been marked by decades of unresolved tension, ethnic violence, and military confrontation, most recently reignited during the 2020 war and subsequent operations in 2023. Despite multiple ceasefires and international mediation efforts, the conflict has lacked a decisive legal pathway such as adjudication by the ICJ. Unlike in the Bakassi case, neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan has sought formal legal arbitration at the ICJ to settle territorial claims. Instead, resolution efforts have primarily been political, mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group and influenced heavily by Russian, Turkish, and Western involvement. This has led to fragile arrangements that often unravel, fueling cycles of mistrust and renewed hostilities.

The contrast highlights a recurring theme in international crisis management: the absence of legal resolution mechanisms can prolong disputes and contribute to instability. The ICJ's non-involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh may be attributed to multiple factors, chief among them being the reluctance of either party to internationalize the dispute legally, the fear of an unfavorable ruling, or a belief in the primacy of force and diplomacy over legal arbitration. Whatever the reason, the consequence has been a conflict where power dynamics, rather than legal principles, determine territorial control.

Furthermore, the ICJ's potential role as a preventive or advisory institution, as advocated by some scholars could have been particularly relevant in Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁰ Through advisory opinions, the ICJ might have provided legal clarity on the status of the region, the applicability of self-determination principles, or the obligations of parties under international humanitarian law. This legal guidance could have served as a foundation for negotiations and as a normative check on excessive use of force. Unfortunately, such legal intervention was neither requested nor pursued, leaving the conflict vulnerable to escalation.

Meanwhile, in the Bakassi dispute, even though the ICJ's judgment did not resolve all tensions, especially among local populations, it created a durable framework for peaceful transition and post-conflict governance. The ruling's legitimacy rested not only on legal precedent but also on international support and the parties' willingness to accept legal outcomes. This shows how legal institutions can function effectively when embedded in a broader system of diplomacy, enforcement, and normative consensus.

In sum, the divergent experiences of Bakassi and Nagorno-Karabakh affirm the broader themes found in ICJ-related crisis management literature. The presence of a legal pathway, when used, can channel disputes into manageable and peaceful processes,

offering finality grounded in international norms. Conversely, in conflicts where legal adjudication is absent, political and military solutions often dominate, risking protracted violence and fragile ceasefires. These patterns suggest that while legal tools alone may not solve all crises, their availability and proper utilization can make the difference between enduring peace and unresolved conflict.

Humanitarian Impact (Displacement, Refugees, and Rights Violations) The humanitarian impact of international conflicts has remained a persistent and devastating feature of modern global relations, shaping the lives of millions and exposing systemic weaknesses in the international order. Conflicts invariably produce human suffering, but their most visible consequences are often mass displacement, refugee crises, and widespread violations of basic human rights. Across continents, from the Middle East to Eastern Europe and Africa, the plight of displaced persons has become a symbol of the failures of both national governments and international organizations to safeguard vulnerable populations. In particular, the crises emerging from the conflicts in Syria, Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Bakassi Peninsula reflect broader patterns of systemic breakdown in humanitarian protections, requiring closer scholarly and policy attention.³³ The complex interplay of political, ethnic, and territorial disputes often exacerbates civilian suffering, leading to the uprooting of entire communities, the breakdown of social structures, and long-term consequences for regional stability.

Armed conflict often leads to forced displacement on a massive scale, stripping individuals not only of their homes but also their social networks, livelihoods, and identities. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, decades of hostility between Armenia and Azerbaijan culminated in multiple waves of displacement, most notably during the 2020 conflict, where thousands of ethnic Armenians were forced to flee their ancestral lands.³⁴

Similarly, in the Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon, the handover of the territory following the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in 2002 led to the displacement of Nigerian citizens who found themselves stateless or inadequately integrated into Cameroonian society.³⁵ In both instances, displaced populations experienced violations of their rights to property, security, and cultural identity, highlighting the broader humanitarian costs of unresolved territorial disputes. These crises are not merely the byproducts of warfare but are often the result of deliberate political decisions that prioritize territorial control over human dignity and safety.

International legal instruments such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the broader framework of international humanitarian law were designed to address the needs of displaced populations; however, in practice, these frameworks frequently prove inadequate. For instance, while the Convention articulates the rights of refugees to seek asylum and access basic services, enforcement mechanisms are weak, and many host countries impose severe restrictions or fail to provide adequate protections. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, political tensions between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and neighboring powers have often hindered the provision of humanitarian assistance, while in the Bakassi Peninsula, displaced Nigerians faced legal limbo without effective mechanisms for restitution or integration.³³ The limitations of international law in addressing these humanitarian crises reflect deeper structural issues within the global system, including the unequal distribution of responsibility among states and the politicization of refugee status.

Humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) strive to alleviate suffering, yet they too face severe obstacles. Resource constraints, political interference, and security risks often limit their

ability to operate effectively in conflict zones.³² In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, access to displaced populations has been restricted at various times due to political disputes and security concerns, impeding the delivery of vital aid.³⁵ Likewise, in the Bakassi Peninsula, humanitarian access has been complicated by tensions between Nigerian and Cameroonian authorities, as well as by the complex legal status of displaced individuals. These challenges reveal a critical gap between humanitarian principles and operational realities, with vulnerable populations frequently caught in the crossfire of geopolitical maneuvering.

To improve the humanitarian response to displacement crises, there must be a concerted effort to strengthen international cooperation, reform legal frameworks, and ensure more equitable burden-sharing among states. Stronger enforcement mechanisms within the international legal system are necessary to hold states accountable for rights violations against displaced populations.³³ Furthermore, greater political will is needed to prioritize human rights over territorial ambitions, recognizing that sustainable peace and stability cannot be achieved without addressing the humanitarian dimensions of conflict. In the specific cases of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Bakassi Peninsula, long-term solutions must involve not only political negotiations but also comprehensive strategies for restitution, reintegration, and the protection of cultural and social identities. As these cases demonstrate, the humanitarian impact of conflict extends far beyond the battlefield, leaving enduring scars on individuals, communities, and entire regions.

Post-Conflict Rehabilitation and Governance: Post-conflict rehabilitation and governance represent some of the most formidable challenges facing societies emerging from prolonged periods of violence and instability. Rebuilding a nation or community after conflict involves far more than reconstructing destroyed infrastructure; it necessitates a comprehensive process that addresses the deeper wounds inflicted on

political, social, and economic systems. Effective post-conflict rehabilitation must tackle issues such as governance reform, justice and reconciliation, security stabilization, and the restoration of essential services.³⁷ Experiences from various conflict-affected regions , including Nagorno-Karabakh and Nigeria's Bakassi Peninsula , demonstrate that sustainable peace depends not only on ending active hostilities but also on building robust, inclusive institutions that can foster trust, equity, and long-term development. Without deliberate and well-coordinated strategies for post-conflict governance, societies risk falling back into cycles of violence, instability, and humanitarian suffering.

One crucial aspect of post-conflict governance is the establishment or restoration of legitimate political institutions capable of providing security, enforcing the rule of law, and delivering public goods effectively. Following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the region faced significant governance challenges, with displaced populations needing resettlement and devastated communities requiring urgent reconstruction.³³ Similarly, after the handover of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon, issues of political representation, citizenship rights, and security enforcement emerged among the Nigerian-origin populations who remained or relocated.³⁵ In both cases, the lack of effective governance structures initially hindered efforts to restore normalcy, underscoring the necessity of quickly building or rebuilding governmental frameworks that are inclusive, responsive, and capable of gaining public trust. Importantly, constitutional governance , characterized by checks and balances, human rights protections, and the equitable distribution of power , must be prioritized to prevent the resurgence of conflict.

Beyond political institutions, successful post-conflict rehabilitation must also address the social fractures caused by war and displacement. Societies torn apart by conflict often experience deep mistrust, ethnic or sectarian divides, and grievances that can linger for

generations. Healing these societal wounds requires deliberate efforts toward justice and reconciliation, including truth-telling processes, reparations for victims, and the promotion of inclusive national identities.³⁸ In Nagorno-Karabakh, mutual animosities between Armenians and Azerbaijanis continue to impede reconciliation efforts, while in the Bakassi Peninsula, displaced Nigerians often faced cultural alienation and discrimination in their new environments.³⁴ Post-conflict societies must foster mechanisms for dialogue, forgiveness, and social cohesion, recognizing that rebuilding physical infrastructure without addressing emotional and psychological trauma is insufficient for achieving lasting peace.

Community-based governance models offer promising pathways for rebuilding trust and enhancing resilience in post-conflict societies. According to recent research, empowering local communities to participate actively in governance processes, particularly in sectors like law enforcement, education, and environmental management, can promote more sustainable and equitable outcomes.³⁹ In regions like Nagorno-Karabakh, localized approaches to governance have helped communities manage scarce resources more effectively and rebuild social bonds at the grassroots level. Similarly, in areas affected by the Bakassi Peninsula dispute, community engagement has been critical in managing land use conflicts and promoting local development initiatives. Water governance, in particular, has emerged as a vital sector requiring resilient and adaptive institutions, given its importance for human survival, economic recovery, and conflict prevention.⁴⁰ Building inclusive and flexible governance frameworks that prioritize environmental sustainability and community participation is, therefore, essential for holistic post-conflict recovery.

Ultimately, post-conflict rehabilitation and governance demand multifaceted strategies that integrate physical reconstruction with societal healing and sustainable development.

Economic stabilization, the restoration of essential services, infrastructure rebuilding, justice and reconciliation processes, and inclusive political reforms must be pursued simultaneously to prevent the re-emergence of conflict and to lay the foundation for durable peace.⁴¹ For the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula cases, this means addressing both the territorial and human dimensions of the crises: securing fair treatment for displaced populations, ensuring that governance structures reflect the diversity of affected communities, and promoting development policies that foster inclusion and equity. As global experiences demonstrate, post-conflict periods present both risks and opportunities , and the choices made during these critical moments will determine whether societies fall back into violence or move forward toward peace and prosperity.

Boundary Demarcation and Disputes: Boundary demarcation is not merely a technical or cartographic exercise; it is deeply embedded in the political, historical, and emotional landscapes of states. As a core component of sovereignty and statehood, the process of defining, marking, and maintaining territorial boundaries plays a central role in the stability or volatility of international relations. Indeed, boundary demarcation stands at the intersection of law, diplomacy, and power, and its failure or delay often fuels conflicts that transcend generations.

The criticality of boundary demarcation in global politics is underscored by its historical entanglement with state formation and interstate conflict. Kokha observes that disputes over boundaries frequently arise during or shortly after the birth of a new state, when the delineation of borders is either contested or left ambiguous.⁴² In many post-colonial regions, particularly in Africa and parts of Asia, colonial powers left behind arbitrary boundaries that ignored ethnic, cultural, or geographic realities. The absence of clear

demarcation has resulted in enduring tensions, as neighboring states contest areas based on historical claims, access to resources, or the presence of ethnic kin across borders.

Statistical analyses have confirmed a strong correlation between territorial disputes and militarized interstate conflicts.⁴³ According to Blanchard, such disputes are more likely to escalate into high-intensity warfare compared to conflicts centered on ideology, trade, or diplomacy.⁴³ The mere presence of an official, unresolved border dispute is a strong predictor of future hostilities, particularly when the contested territory is contiguous, physically touching both parties involved.⁴³ This proximity often creates frequent points of friction, as local populations, military patrols, and political actors interact directly with contested land.

Kocs further emphasizes that the risk of war is heightened when borders remain undefined or when demarcation is resisted by either side due to perceived losses or symbolic importance.⁴⁴ The case of Nagorno-Karabakh, a disputed territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan, highlights how ethnic identity, nationalism, and historical grievances can intersect with boundary demarcation to create a long-term frozen conflict. Despite multiple ceasefires and international mediation attempts, the lack of a mutually recognized border and the symbolic weight of the land have kept the conflict alive, with recurrent outbreaks of violence, including the 2020 war and subsequent tensions in 2023. This conflict underscores the danger of leaving boundaries unresolved, particularly when the territory is seen as existentially tied to national identity.

Similarly, in West Africa, the Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon illustrates how colonial-era boundaries can become flashpoints for conflict. Though the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in favor of Cameroon in 2002, Nigeria initially resisted the judgment due to political pressure, national pride, and the strategic economic

value of the region. The eventual peaceful handover of Bakassi in 2008 stands as a rare example of successful international arbitration and demarcation. However, the transition was far from smooth, and it exposed how contested sovereignty, identity, and local resistance can complicate even legally resolved boundary disputes.⁴⁵

The South American experience serves as another compelling case study in the persistent volatility of boundary disputes. Parodi documents numerous historical conflicts where border disagreements led to wars, military standoffs, or long-term diplomatic freeze.⁴⁶ In some instances, such as the wars between Ecuador and Peru, or between Chile and Bolivia, even peace treaties did not fully erase the grievances tied to perceived territorial injustice. These examples reflect a broader truth: unless boundaries are both clearly demarcated and socially legitimized, they remain vulnerable to challenge and disruption. To address this volatility, a particular study recommends that newly independent states prioritize the demarcation process immediately after gaining sovereignty.⁴² Early and proactive boundary definition helps to pre-empt disputes before they take root in national consciousness or become militarized. Furthermore, the establishment of Joint Demarcation Commissions bilateral or multilateral bodies tasked with overseeing and finalizing border agreements has proven effective in several global contexts. However, for such bodies to function optimally, they must be granted sufficient discretionary power to resolve disagreements, navigate technical difficulties, and adapt to shifting realities on the ground.

Importantly, the concept of a border is not purely geographical; it is socially constructed and politically negotiated.⁴³ As Blanchard explains, domestic political actors often play a significant role in framing border disputes to suit nationalistic agendas or to rally public support.⁴³ Leaders may use contested borders as a means of political consolidation,

portraying compromise as betrayal and territorial claims as non-negotiable matters of national pride. This dynamic complicates international mediation efforts, as external actors must not only broker legal settlements but also navigate the internal narratives that sustain conflict.

In sum, boundary demarcation is far more than line-drawing, it is a foundational pillar of peace, identity, and power in international relations. Its mishandling can destabilize entire regions, while its careful execution, paired with institutional legitimacy and local buy-in, can transform contested territories into zones of cooperation. For enduring peace, particularly in historically volatile regions, boundary clarity must be matched with political will, cultural sensitivity, and the strategic engagement of both domestic and international stakeholders.

International Law and Conflict Arbitration: International law, particularly as it pertains to conflict arbitration, serves as a cornerstone for managing and resolving disputes between and within states. In modern international relations, especially in the post-Cold War and post-colonial world order, arbitration has increasingly gained traction as an essential mechanism for managing not only commercial disputes but also territorial and political conflicts. Its value lies in its flexibility, neutrality, and perceived fairness, which have made it an indispensable instrument for both state and non-state actors engaged in complex geopolitical disagreements.

The evolution of international arbitration is grounded in the broader field of private international law, which governs the resolution of cross-border legal conflicts. Arbitration relies heavily on these laws, which determine which state's legal standards should apply in transnational disputes.⁴⁷ Traditionally, arbitration has been situated at the intersection of domestic laws, conflict-of-law principles, and a growing body of transnational legal

norms.⁴⁸ While domestic legal systems play a crucial role, especially regarding the recognition and enforcement of arbitration awards, there is now a significant shift toward harmonization through international conventions, such as the 1958 New York Convention, which standardizes the recognition and enforcement of foreign arbitral awards in over 170 countries.⁴⁹

This transformation has been most apparent in conflicts that straddle legal, political, and territorial domains. For instance, the Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon was ultimately resolved not through war but through the arbitration-like processes embedded within the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ, although not a traditional arbitral body, applied principles consistent with international arbitration, including equity, *uti possidetis juris*, and customary international law.⁵⁰ The resolution of the Bakassi dispute in 2002 set a precedent for peaceful conflict management by applying international legal norms and frameworks to a highly sensitive post-colonial boundary dispute. Despite initial resistance and domestic dissatisfaction in Nigeria, the legal ruling was eventually implemented, largely due to the legitimacy conferred by international law and the involvement of regional bodies such as the African Union and the United Nations.⁵¹

In contrast, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan highlights the limitations of international arbitration and legal mechanisms when international recognition, ethnic self-determination, and sovereignty claims collide without the mutual consent of parties to enter into binding adjudication. Despite several negotiation attempts mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group, both parties have resisted formal arbitration or adjudication, preferring political negotiations backed by military pressure and diplomatic maneuvering.⁵² This divergence from legal arbitration underscores a critical limitation:

arbitration cannot succeed without the willingness of parties to submit themselves to its processes and outcomes. Where mutual recognition is absent, as in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh (an unrecognized republic), international legal norms alone have proven insufficient to de-escalate tensions or enforce a lasting peace.⁵³

Furthermore, international arbitration increasingly incorporates non-state legal norms, including the *lex mercatoria*, and emerging technologies such as smart contracts and blockchain-based arbitration platforms.⁵⁴ While these are more common in commercial spheres, their underlying logic, emphasizing neutrality, decentralization, and party autonomy, may influence future political or territorial arbitration mechanisms. In particular, they demonstrate how the concept of law itself is evolving, moving beyond the strict confines of state sovereignty to encompass more fluid, adaptable norms that might one day find application in territorial and ethnic disputes.

What is crucial, however, is that international law in conflict arbitration remains a tool whose power is deeply influenced by geopolitical realities. The efficacy of arbitration is highly contingent on international support, enforcement mechanisms, and the legitimacy of the legal institution overseeing the process. In Bakassi, legal arbitration succeeded due to the strong backing of international organizations and the willingness of both Nigeria and Cameroon to uphold international norms. In Nagorno-Karabakh, the absence of these enabling conditions has led to periodic violence and a breakdown of negotiated efforts, suggesting that legal tools alone cannot override entrenched historical grievances and power asymmetries.

In sum, international law's role in conflict arbitration lies at the intersection of legal theory and political will. It offers powerful frameworks for dispute resolution but must be coupled with regional cooperation, international enforcement, and internal political

legitimacy. While the Bakassi Peninsula dispute illustrates a relatively successful application of these principles, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demonstrates the limitations of legalism in the absence of broader diplomatic and geopolitical alignment.

Resource Politics and Territorial Value: Resource politics extends beyond mere competition for resources, shaping broader conceptions of politics, state territoriality, and national identity.⁵⁵ Contrary to conventional wisdom, the presence of capital-intensive resources like oil or minerals can actually decrease a state's willingness to claim territory due to domestic distributional concerns.⁵⁶ This challenges the assumption that resource-rich territories are inherently more desirable. Instead, state preferences for territory are deeply shaped by internal political and economic structures, and by the nature of domestic institutions.⁵⁷ In some cases, the presence of resources may even serve to deter claims if leaders anticipate that control over those resources will exacerbate internal divisions or prompt redistributive conflicts.⁵⁶

These insights are particularly relevant when examining territorial disputes like those over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and the Bakassi Peninsula. Both regions are characterized not just by strategic or historical significance, but by varying degrees of resource endowment and symbolic value. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, while not known for abundant extractive wealth, the region holds significant value for both Armenia and Azerbaijan in terms of national identity, cultural heritage, and political legitimacy. Resource politics in this context intersects with identity politics, where control over land is not just a material concern but a question of sovereignty and self-determination.⁵⁸

Conversely, the Bakassi Peninsula, which lies between Nigeria and Cameroon, is notable for its offshore oil reserves and rich fishing grounds. However, rather than automatically

intensifying Nigeria's territorial ambitions, the presence of these resources complicated the state's approach to the region. The eventual decision by Nigeria to comply with the International Court of Justice ruling and cede the territory to Cameroon in 2008 illustrates the importance of broader political calculations.⁵⁹ Nigeria's acquiescence may reflect a preference for domestic stability and international legitimacy over the uncertain benefits of resource extraction.⁶⁰ In this light, resource endowments can act as double-edged swords: while potentially valuable, they also raise the stakes of internal political contestation, making states more cautious about aggressive territorial claims.

Capital-intensive resource wealth is often accompanied by concerns over how the benefits will be distributed across political and regional constituencies.⁵⁵ In states with high levels of internal fragmentation or weak institutions, the potential for resource wealth to fuel corruption or conflict may disincentivize assertive territorial claims.⁵⁵ These domestic constraints are particularly salient in multi-ethnic or federated systems, where leaders must carefully navigate competing demands. Nigeria's federal structure, for example, makes questions of resource allocation highly sensitive, especially given the legacy of conflict in the Niger Delta.⁶¹

Autocratic regimes, in contrast, may find it easier to pursue territorial expansion over resource-rich areas, particularly if such claims can be justified as restoring historical rights or national prestige.⁵⁷ This is more evident in the South Caucasus, where authoritarian tendencies and strong executive control in Azerbaijan have enabled a consistent and forceful position on Nagorno-Karabakh. The use of military power in the 2020 conflict also points to how resource politics, while not solely determinative, can be subsumed within broader strategic calculations aimed at territorial consolidation and regional hegemony.⁶²

What these cases illustrate is that resource politics operates not in isolation but through interaction with state capacity, regime type, and institutional dynamics. Markowitz suggests that land-oriented and autocratic states are more inclined to value resource-rich territories, but this valuation must be tempered by the ability to govern and extract effectively.⁵⁷ A state's decision to pursue or forgo territorial claims, even in the face of material wealth, thus reflects a strategic calculus that includes domestic risks, international costs, and normative commitments to international law. In both the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi cases, the outcomes demonstrate that the presence of resources is not a sufficient condition for sustained territorial claims.

Finally, resource politics shapes not only state behavior but also public opinion and national narratives. In post-colonial contexts especially, control over territory is often imbued with meanings that go beyond economic value. The invocation of historical grievances, cultural rights, and indigenous entitlements can serve to galvanize support for or against territorial concessions.⁶³ In such contexts, resource wealth may be less salient than symbolic capital in shaping the contours of territorial politics. This underscores the importance of a multi-dimensional approach to resource politics, one that integrates material, institutional, and ideational factors. In doing so, scholars and policymakers alike can better understand the strategic behavior of states and the enduring complexity of territorial disputes.

Conflict Resolution and Frozen Conflicts: Frozen conflicts represent one of the most persistent and destabilizing phenomena in contemporary international relations, particularly within the post-Soviet sphere. Defined as unresolved disputes characterized by the absence of active armed conflict or a formal peace treaty, these conflicts maintain a state of political limbo that resists conventional resolution efforts.⁶⁴ Rather than

concluding with negotiated settlements, frozen conflicts often remain suspended after initial ceasefires, leaving underlying grievances unaddressed.⁶⁵ This pattern of stalemate, though seemingly stable, is inherently volatile and subject to sudden shifts, as demonstrated by the resurgence of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020.⁶⁶

What distinguishes frozen conflicts from other forms of protracted conflict is their complex layering of ethnic identity, territorial contestation, and international involvement. In many cases, minority rights and demands for ethnic autonomy form the core of the dispute, but broader geopolitical rivalries sustain the impasse.⁶⁵ Russia frequently plays a dual role in these contexts, positioning itself as both mediator and participant.⁶⁵ Its presence in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, and Nagorno-Karabakh serves not only to manage local disputes but also to project influence and inhibit Western integration efforts by neighboring states.⁶⁷ This ambiguity in Russia's role complicates the prospects for durable conflict resolution, as it often acts to preserve the status quo that frozen conflicts create.

The term "frozen" has itself been subject to academic critique. While it captures the absence of large-scale military operations, it arguably misrepresents the ongoing political evolution of these disputes.⁶⁷ Local authorities in regions like Transnistria or Abkhazia may establish quasi-state institutions, engage in informal diplomacy, and integrate economically with patron states, creating *de facto* polities that function outside the recognized international system.⁶⁷ These developments challenge traditional models of sovereignty and call into question the efficacy of formal recognition as the primary criterion of statehood. In Nagorno-Karabakh, for example, the self-declared Republic of Artsakh operated with substantial autonomy prior to the 2020 war, despite lacking international recognition.⁶⁶

The events of 2020 in Nagorno-Karabakh starkly exposed the fragility of frozen conflicts. The sudden escalation into full-scale warfare between Armenia and Azerbaijan disrupted assumptions about the enduring stability of ceasefire lines and highlighted the limitations of existing conflict management mechanisms.⁶⁴ The renewed hostilities resulted in significant territorial changes and a Russian-brokered ceasefire, but the agreement did not address the core issues of status, return of displaced persons, or the long-term governance of contested areas.⁶⁶ As such, while the ceasefire ended the fighting, it did not constitute a comprehensive resolution. Instead, the region reverted to a new, unstable equilibrium, arguably a re-frozen conflict under altered conditions.⁶⁶

From a conceptual standpoint, frozen conflicts problematize traditional approaches to conflict resolution, which often rely on identifiable parties, clear demands, and finite end goals. In frozen conflicts, however, the multiplicity of actors, ranging from local authorities and external patrons to diaspora communities and multilateral institutions, makes consensus difficult to achieve. Furthermore, the ambiguity surrounding sovereignty and self-determination blurs the lines between secession, occupation, and legitimate governance.⁶⁵ In this way, frozen conflicts expose the limits of the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, which assumes that negotiated settlements, democratic institution-building, and economic integration can resolve deeply embedded disputes.

The study of frozen conflicts is particularly relevant for understanding regional security dynamics in the post-Soviet space. These disputes not only shape bilateral relations between states but also influence broader alignments within international politics.⁶⁷ Russia's support for separatist entities acts as a strategic buffer against NATO and EU expansion, effectively anchoring contested territories in its sphere of influence.⁶⁵ As such,

frozen conflicts serve a dual function: they are both the residue of historical grievances and instruments of contemporary power projection.

Although the Bakassi Peninsula is not typically categorized as a frozen conflict in the post-Soviet sense, it offers a revealing contrast. The Nigeria-Cameroon dispute was resolved through legal adjudication by the International Court of Justice and a subsequent peaceful handover. The absence of external patronage, ethno-nationalist militias, or competing systems of governance enabled a negotiated outcome and reduced the potential for the conflict to become "frozen." This highlights how certain institutional and geopolitical conditions, such as international legal legitimacy, relatively balanced state capacities, and low levels of external interference, can facilitate resolution. In contrast, frozen conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh persist precisely because they lack these enabling conditions.

Ultimately, frozen conflicts represent a category of international disputes that defy easy classification. Their apparent stasis masks deeper political shifts, and their sudden reactivation, as seen in Nagorno-Karabakh, reveals the inherent instability of unresolved sovereignty claims.⁶⁴ Any attempt to understand the long-term trajectories of such conflicts must grapple with their embeddedness in local identities, geopolitical rivalries, and institutional ambiguity. As such, they are not simply the absence of peace or war, but a distinct mode of conflict shaped by the contradictions of the post-Cold War order.

2.1.12 Role of Ethnicity, Identity, and Nationalism

Ethnicity and nationalism are not merely background elements in territorial disputes; they are often central to both the origins and persistence of conflict. In regions like Nagorno-Karabakh and the Bakassi Peninsula, identity politics shape not only how territory is claimed, but also how peace is conceptualized and pursued.⁶⁸ These conflicts reveal that

territorial claims are often about more than strategic or economic interest, they are also symbolic of group belonging, historical grievance, and political legitimacy.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is a paradigmatic case of ethno-territorial struggle. Rooted in the late 19th-century emergence of Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalism, the dispute reflects the deep entanglement of identity with territorial control.⁶⁹ Nagorno-Karabakh became a symbolic space for both groups, a site through which competing national narratives were built and maintained.⁶⁹ The use of nationalist rhetoric by elites and the mobilization of historical narratives have hardened public opinion on both sides, making compromise politically risky and ideologically charged.⁶⁸ This emotional investment, grounded in cultural memory and perceived historical injustice, obstructs diplomatic efforts and increases the likelihood of renewed hostilities.⁶⁸

Russia's involvement in the South Caucasus, particularly in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, adds further complexity. As both a mediator and a regional power with vested interests, Russia has shaped the geopolitics of the region in ways that often prioritize strategic leverage over genuine resolution.⁷⁰ Rather than resolving the conflict, Russia's actions have largely served to freeze it in place, delaying confrontation while preserving the underlying identity tensions.⁷⁰ Razmadze argues that this management strategy sustains instability, allowing Russia to exert influence over both Armenia and Azerbaijan while appearing as a peace-broker.⁷⁰

Understanding the persistence of such ethnic conflicts requires engaging with both structural and ideational factors. Abushov contends that identity plays a central role in the onset and intractability of civil wars like Nagorno-Karabakh.⁷¹ While structural elements, such as state capacity or institutional arrangements, are significant, they cannot explain

why certain territorial disputes become deeply personal and emotional. Instead, it is the ideational construction of territory as sacred or central to group identity that fuels long-term resistance to compromise.⁷¹ Peacebuilding in such cases, therefore, cannot be limited to political agreements alone but must also target identity narratives at the societal level.

Efforts to resolve identity-based disputes must acknowledge the ideological and emotional salience of territory. As an argument has it, resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict requires rethinking the priorities of political elites and gradually transforming public consciousness through civil society engagement and cross-community initiatives.⁶⁸ This long-term transformation is crucial for dismantling zero-sum narratives and building a political culture in which peaceful coexistence is possible.

The Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon offers a contrasting, though related, case where ethnic identity and nationalism shaped both the conflict and its aftermath. While the initial dispute was primarily framed around resource control, especially access to oil-rich waters and fishing rights, it also involved deeper questions of ethnic affiliation and belonging.⁷² Many Bakassi inhabitants identify culturally and linguistically with Nigeria, even after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in 2002 that the territory belonged to Cameroon.⁷³ Despite the 2006 Green Tree Agreement formalizing the handover, issues of identity and citizenship remained unresolved, leaving the affected populations in a liminal legal and political state.⁷⁴

Bakassi residents faced with identity crisis, who found themselves effectively stateless or marginalized due to inadequate citizenship provisions following the territorial transfer.⁷⁴ For these communities, the dispute was not simply about sovereignty but about the right to maintain their way of life, cultural affiliation, and legal recognition. The situation underscores that even when territorial disputes are resolved through international

mechanisms, failure to address identity-based concerns can perpetuate insecurity and social fragmentation.

Additionally, the post-conflict role of the military has evolved. Kpwa notes that both Nigeria and Cameroon have shifted their armed forces' activities from purely security-focused operations to include humanitarian and developmental efforts in the Bakassi region.⁷³ This evolution signals a broader understanding of security that incorporates human needs and societal rebuilding. However, such efforts must also contend with local resistance to colonial-era borders, as many Bakassi indigenes continue to reject externally imposed boundaries.⁷⁴ Sama and Johnson-Ross observe that despite extensive cross-border movement and economic interdependence, identity remains a powerful force shaping local perceptions of legitimacy and belonging.⁷⁵

Both the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula cases illustrate how nationalism and identity can transform otherwise solvable disputes into deeply entrenched conflicts. The former shows how symbolic narratives can entrench positions and obstruct compromise, while the latter reveals how even legally resolved disputes can remain volatile when cultural and legal belonging are left unaddressed. These cases suggest that lasting resolution requires more than political or legal frameworks, it necessitates a holistic approach that centers on identity, inclusion, and the reshaping of nationalist discourse.

In conclusion, the role of ethnicity, identity, and nationalism in territorial conflicts cannot be overstated. These factors shape how populations relate to territory, how states articulate sovereignty, and how peace is either pursued or avoided. For both the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula disputes, recognizing the ideational foundations of conflict is essential not only for understanding past events but also for imagining more effective, inclusive, and durable pathways to peace.

2.1.13 Historical Overview of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict traces its origins to the complex historical entanglements of ethnic identity, imperial politics, and national mobilization in the South Caucasus. Prior to the Soviet era, the region was marked by alternating waves of control between Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires. As the Russian Empire expanded into the Caucasus during the 19th century, its annexation of territories such as Karabakh introduced new layers of administrative authority and ethnic resettlement. These demographic and political changes intensified latent divisions between the predominantly Armenian Christian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and Turkic Muslim Azerbaijanis. Ethnic violence erupted in the early 20th century during the chaos of the Russian Revolution, most notably between 1917 and 1920, when mutual pogroms and paramilitary clashes occurred across the region, including in Karabakh itself.⁷⁶

The drawing of new administrative boundaries in the early Soviet years further embedded structural tensions in the region. Despite Armenian demands, the Soviet leadership assigned Nagorno-Karabakh to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in 1921 and formally established the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) within Azerbaijan in 1923. This decision was heavily influenced by broader geopolitical strategies, particularly Moscow's intent to maintain favorable relations with Turkey, a regional ally in the early Bolshevik years.⁷⁷ However, this decision contradicted the ethnic composition of the area, which was overwhelmingly Armenian, and generated long-term grievances. Soviet administrators often prioritized political control over ethnic or cultural alignment, and this logic guided their approach to the internal borders of the Caucasus.

The impact of Stalinist policies further exacerbated local tensions. In particular, the forced resettlement of populations during the late Stalinist period created disruptions in both the demographic balance and social fabric of the region.⁷⁸ These population shifts often benefited Azerbaijani communities while marginalizing Armenian ones, feeding narratives of historical injustice. Although overt expressions of nationalism were suppressed under Soviet rule, national identity was not eradicated, it was merely redirected. The decades of official Soviet multiculturalism could not eliminate the deeper communal aspirations on either side, and beneath the surface, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis cultivated memories of injustice and entitlement to the region.

With the onset of perestroika and glasnost in the 1980s, these buried tensions re-emerged. The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, emboldened by the liberalization of public discourse, initiated formal petitions to transfer the region from Azerbaijani to Armenian jurisdiction. This effort met fierce resistance from Azerbaijani authorities and citizens, leading to rapid political polarization and ethnic violence. The Sumgait pogrom of 1988, in which Armenians were attacked in Azerbaijan, became a symbol of the breakdown of coexistence and further catalyzed Armenian mobilization.⁷⁹ The demand for reunification with Armenia was no longer a distant aspiration but a political project infused with urgency and backed by mass demonstrations, parliamentary action, and eventually armed conflict.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the dispute evolved into a full-scale war between the newly independent states of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1991–1994) resulted in a decisive military advantage for the Armenian side, which gained control not only of Nagorno-Karabakh but also of surrounding Azerbaijani territories. This outcome triggered the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis and entrenched the perception of national trauma within

Azerbaijan.⁷⁹ At the same time, the victory strengthened Armenian national identity, framing the war as a liberation struggle against historical oppression. The trauma of the First Karabakh War, on both sides, became central to nationalist narratives, impeding meaningful dialogue and reconciliation in the decades that followed.

In the post-war period, the unresolved status of Nagorno-Karabakh remained a central issue in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Despite the 1994 ceasefire, brokered primarily through Russian mediation, the region remained in a state of "frozen conflict." Armenian-backed authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence, forming the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh, though no country, including Armenia, formally recognized its statehood. International mediators, particularly the OSCE Minsk Group, sought to facilitate negotiations, but progress was minimal, hampered by mutual distrust and zero-sum perceptions of sovereignty.⁷⁷ Over time, the conflict gained regional and international dimensions, with powers such as Turkey, Russia, and Iran taking an interest in its outcome. Historical narratives played a crucial role in these broader engagements, as both Armenian and Azerbaijani historians produced competing versions of the past to legitimize territorial claims.⁷⁶

The long shadow of history continues to shape the politics of Nagorno-Karabakh. The renewed war in 2020 demonstrated that the legacies of imperial border-making, Soviet administrative decisions, and ethnonational trauma have not faded. Instead, they persist, layered and unresolved, fueling new cycles of violence. A comprehensive historical understanding of these origins is not merely academic; it is a precondition for any viable peace process. Without acknowledging how deeply the past permeates the present, attempts at resolution are unlikely to succeed.

Timeline from 2000–2024

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has remained one of the most intractable post-Soviet territorial disputes. Between 2000 and 2024, the conflict evolved through intermittent negotiations, military escalations, and shifting geopolitical dynamics.

Early 2000s: Frozen Conflict, Diplomatic Impasse

From 2000 to 2007, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remained largely static. The region operated as a de facto independent entity supported by Armenia but unrecognized internationally. Meanwhile, negotiations under the OSCE Minsk Group continued, albeit without meaningful progress. Azerbaijan, emboldened by rising oil revenues, began modernizing its military, while Armenia remained economically constrained and diplomatically isolated.⁸⁰

In 2006, the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities conducted a constitutional referendum that reaffirmed their claim to independence, further straining relations with Baku.⁸¹ The international community, including the European Union and OSCE, reiterated support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, but the lack of enforcement mechanisms rendered such pronouncements largely symbolic.

2008–2015: Rising Tensions and Military Posturing

The post-2008 period saw increasing skirmishes along the Line of Contact, exacerbated by both states' arms buildups and belligerent rhetoric. The 2010s marked a transition from a "frozen" to a "simmering" conflict. In 2010 alone, over 20 soldiers from both sides were killed in cross-border incidents.⁸²

Notably, in 2014 and 2015, clashes intensified, and Azerbaijan demonstrated a more assertive posture. These events foreshadowed a broader strategic shift, as Baku increasingly signaled its readiness to resolve the conflict through military means.

Azerbaijan's acquisition of advanced weaponry from Israel and Russia played a critical role in tilting the military balance.⁸³

April 2016: The Four-Day War

Azerbaijan launched a surprise offensive in April 2016, capturing strategic positions in Talish and Lele Tepe. The brief conflict, which lasted from April 2 to 5, resulted in several hundred military casualties on both sides and was the most significant escalation since the 1994 ceasefire.⁸⁴

Though Azerbaijan gained only modest territorial advantages, the conflict demonstrated its improved military capabilities and underscored Armenia's vulnerabilities. The international community, including Russia and the OSCE Minsk Group, brokered a return to the ceasefire, but the episode marked a turning point: it revealed the fragility of the status quo and the limitations of diplomacy alone.⁸⁵

2017–2019: Entrenched Stalemate and Political Change

In 2018, Armenia underwent a peaceful revolution that brought Nikol Pashinyan to power. His reformist agenda raised hopes for renewed diplomacy, but relations with Azerbaijan remained strained. Pashinyan's mixed messages, simultaneously expressing willingness to negotiate while affirming Nagorno-Karabakh's right to self-determination, were viewed in Baku as provocative.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan intensified its military exercises and rhetoric. The diplomatic space continued to narrow, and the Minsk Group was increasingly sidelined by unilateral initiatives from Russia and Turkey.

2020: The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

On September 27, 2020, full-scale war erupted after Azerbaijani forces launched a coordinated offensive. Over six weeks of intense combat, Azerbaijan regained significant

territories, including the cities of Shusha and Hadrut. The war featured the unprecedented use of drone warfare, precision strikes, and Turkish military support to Azerbaijan.⁸⁷

By November 9, 2020, a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement ended hostilities. Armenia ceded control of several districts surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, and Russian peacekeepers were deployed to enforce the ceasefire.⁸⁸ The agreement effectively reversed decades of Armenian strategic gains and altered the balance of power in the region.

2021–2022: Post-War Reconfiguration

The post-war period saw ongoing tensions and a fragile peace. Azerbaijan began extensive reconstruction in the reclaimed areas and proposed a “Zangezur corridor” linking it to its Nakhchivan exclave through Armenia, a proposal viewed by Yerevan as a threat to sovereignty.⁸⁹

In parallel, Armenia experienced political upheaval, with Pashinyan facing mass protests but ultimately winning re-election in 2021. Russia maintained a peacekeeping force, but its effectiveness was increasingly questioned, particularly as Azerbaijan conducted further incursions along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in 2022.⁹⁰

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further diminished Moscow’s capacity to manage the Caucasus, and the OSCE Minsk Group became largely inactive. Turkey emerged as a more assertive regional actor, deepening ties with Azerbaijan.

2023–2024: Final Offensive and Evacuation

In September 2023, Azerbaijan launched a final military operation, rapidly defeating remaining Armenian defense forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. The de facto authorities

capitulated within 24 hours, and over 100,000 ethnic Armenians fled to Armenia in what was widely viewed as an ethnic cleansing.⁹¹

International condemnation followed, but no major power intervened. The self-declared Republic of Artsakh announced its dissolution by January 1, 2024.⁹² This marked the end of the Armenian presence in Nagorno-Karabakh after three decades of de facto independence.

By early 2024, Azerbaijan had reasserted full sovereignty over the region. The conflict, while no longer “frozen,” remains unresolved in terms of justice, human rights, and the future of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations.

2.1.14 Historical Overview of the Bakassi Peninsula Dispute

The roots of the dispute trace back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the era of European imperialism, when the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 gave colonial powers the authority to draw artificial boundaries in Africa with little or no regard for indigenous communities and ethnic configurations. The initial phase of the conflict is deeply rooted in the diplomatic agreements between Britain and Germany, who held colonial control over Nigeria and Cameroon respectively. Between 1884 and 1913, several treaties and negotiations sought to demarcate the spheres of influence of these powers in West Africa. The 1913 Anglo-German Treaty, which attempted to define the boundary between British-controlled Nigeria and German Kamerun, eventually became the central legal document referenced in the dispute.⁹³ However, this treaty was fraught with ambiguities, including vague geographical markers and inconsistent maps, setting the stage for future discord. The colonial delineation failed to take into account the traditional land use and political affiliations of the people inhabiting the Bakassi Peninsula.

Following World War I and the defeat of Germany, Cameroon became a League of Nations Mandate Territory, and later a United Nations Trust Territory under French and British administration. This further complicated the territorial arrangements. The peninsula, originally part of German Kamerun, was administered by Britain as part of its Eastern Region of Nigeria. When both Nigeria and Cameroon gained independence in 1960, the ambiguous status of Bakassi resurfaced. Although the region continued to be administered by Nigeria, Cameroon persistently claimed sovereignty over it, referencing the 1913 Anglo-German Treaty and various post-independence diplomatic exchanges.

The dispute escalated in the 1980s and 1990s, with both countries accusing each other of military incursions and violations of territorial sovereignty. Several skirmishes occurred during this period, leading to loss of lives and further souring diplomatic relations. Unable to reach a bilateral resolution, Cameroon submitted the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1994. Nigeria initially objected to the ICJ's jurisdiction but eventually participated in the proceedings. After nearly a decade of legal arguments and the submission of extensive archival evidence, the ICJ delivered its verdict in October 2002, awarding the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon based on the 1913 Anglo-German Treaty and other supporting documentation.⁹⁴ The ICJ ruling, while legally binding and aimed at ensuring peace, generated significant controversy within Nigeria. The Nigerian government, led by President Olusegun Obasanjo, accepted the ruling and initiated the process of handing over the territory. This decision was met with considerable opposition from the Nigerian National Assembly, traditional rulers, civil society groups, and most importantly, the Bakassi inhabitants who identified as Nigerians. Critics argued that the government had failed to protect its citizens and that the executive arm of government had acted unilaterally without legislative approval, thereby undermining democratic

processes.⁹⁵ The ruling exposed underlying tensions between Nigeria's executive and legislative branches, raising questions about sovereignty, citizenship, and national interest.

In an effort to manage the transition and mitigate its humanitarian impact, the Green Tree Agreement was signed in June 2006 in New York under the auspices of the United Nations. The agreement provided a framework for the peaceful withdrawal of Nigerian military forces, the deployment of Cameroonian administration, and the protection of the rights of Bakassi residents for a transitional period of five years. While the Green Tree Agreement represented a diplomatic milestone, it failed to adequately address critical issues such as the political and legal status of the peninsula's inhabitants. Many residents were left in a state of limbo, facing uncertainty over citizenship rights, access to public services, and socio-economic opportunities. The lack of clear provisions for their integration into Cameroon or resettlement within Nigeria created an enduring identity crisis.⁹⁶

Furthermore, the implementation of the boundary demarcation mandated by the ICJ ruling has been fraught with technical and logistical difficulties. Despite the formation of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, tasked with supervising the demarcation, the process has been slow and controversial. The continued demarcation activities, often conducted without adequate consultation with local populations, have generated confusion and anxiety. Communities have reported being uncertain about which country's laws apply to them, while incidents of displacement and land disputes have persisted.⁹⁷ These unresolved issues risk triggering new conflicts and exacerbating grievances in an already vulnerable region.

The Bakassi Peninsula dispute therefore exemplifies the enduring legacy of colonial boundary-making in Africa. It illustrates how treaties drafted without local involvement

can have long-lasting consequences, particularly when the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of affected populations are ignored. The case also highlights the limitations of international legal mechanisms in addressing human realities on the ground. While the ICJ ruling may have provided a legal resolution, it did not fully account for the complex human, political, and developmental issues that define territorial disputes in post-colonial contexts.

Moreover, the handling of the dispute underscores broader challenges in the governance of African states, particularly in the interface between law, diplomacy, and the lived experiences of citizens. The executive decision to hand over Bakassi without legislative ratification points to institutional weaknesses in democratic accountability and the marginalization of citizen voices in critical national matters. The absence of a comprehensive resettlement or compensation plan for displaced Bakassi residents has further compounded their plight, creating a humanitarian situation that remains inadequately addressed.

In conclusion, the Bakassi Peninsula dispute is not merely a conflict over territorial control but an issue encompassing historical injustice, post-colonial governance dilemmas, international legal processes, and human security. It calls for renewed efforts by African governments, regional bodies like the African Union, and the international community to develop more inclusive and context-sensitive approaches to boundary resolution. Only through such efforts can the promise of peace and justice truly reach the people most affected by these legacies of colonial rule.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This section discusses key geopolitical theories that provide frameworks for understanding territorial conflicts and strategic dynamics in international relations. The

Heartland Theory, introduced by British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder in 1904, and the Rimland Theory, formulated by Nicholas Spykman in the 1940s, offer contrasting perspectives on global power dynamics. Additionally, Sea Power Theories, as articulated by Alfred Thayer Mahan, emphasize the significance of naval dominance in shaping geopolitical strategies and economic strength on a global scale.

2.3.1 Heartland Theory

The Heartland Theory, introduced by British geographer Sir Halford Mackinder in 1904, remains one of the foundational concepts in geopolitical theory. Mackinder's central argument was that control over a central area of Eurasia, termed the "Heartland," was key to dominating the world⁹⁸. He famously asserted that "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island controls the world." While Mackinder's original focus was on Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the principles of the Heartland Theory can be extended to broader territorial conflicts, as seen in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute⁹⁹. Both of these conflicts, while geographically distant from Mackinder's Heartland, embody core elements of his theory, including the pursuit of territorial control, the strategic value of geography, and the role of resources in shaping national and regional power dynamics¹⁰⁰.

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the region's geopolitical significance can be understood through the lens of the Heartland Theory. Although not part of Mackinder's defined Heartland, the South Caucasus region, where Nagorno-Karabakh is located, has historically been a contested area between larger powers like Russia, Turkey, and Iran¹⁰¹. It serves as a vital corridor for energy resources, such as oil and gas, from the Caspian Sea to Europe. The importance of land-based control and strategic positioning is evident

in the struggle between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh¹⁰². For both nations, control of this territory represents more than just a historical or ethnic claim -- it is about establishing a foothold in a region that holds geopolitical weight due to its proximity to larger Eurasian powers.

For Azerbaijan, regaining control of Nagorno-Karabakh reinforces its territorial sovereignty and strengthens its regional standing. Azerbaijan's ambitions in the conflict are aligned with Mackinder's notion of land control as a determinant of power. Armenia, on the other hand, views the region as crucial to its national identity and security, further emphasizing the Heartland Theory's focus on the centrality of land power in shaping state actions. External actors, particularly Russia and Turkey, have also played key roles in the conflict, reflecting Mackinder's argument that powers outside the Heartland have an interest in influencing the balance of control within it. Russia's support for Armenia ensures its continued influence in the South Caucasus, while Turkey's backing of Azerbaijan serves as a counterbalance to Russian power in the region.

In parallel, the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute, though situated far from the Eurasian Heartland, can also be analyzed using Mackinder's framework. The Bakassi Peninsula is located along the Gulf of Guinea, a region rich in oil and other natural resources, making it a valuable asset for both Nigeria and Cameroon¹⁰³. In this case, the Heartland Theory's emphasis on the importance of controlling strategic territories for resource acquisition and security plays a significant role. Although Mackinder's original theory focused on landlocked regions, the principles of land-based power and resource control apply to coastal areas like Bakassi, where the contest for territorial dominance is driven by access to vital economic resources.

For Nigeria, control over the Bakassi Peninsula meant maintaining access to valuable offshore oil reserves and fishing grounds, which directly contribute to its economic and regional power. Losing the Peninsula to Cameroon following the 2002 ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) threatened Nigeria's aspirations to maintain its dominance in West Africa. On the other hand, Cameroon's successful claim to Bakassi through international legal mechanisms allowed it to enhance its regional standing and secure control over economically important resources, echoing Mackinder's idea that territorial control is crucial for national strength and geopolitical leverage.

Moreover, the security implications of controlling Bakassi resonate with the Heartland Theory's broader concept of geopolitical stability. The Gulf of Guinea is a known hotspot for piracy and illegal activities, making territorial control over the Bakassi Peninsula essential for ensuring security in the region. Both Nigeria and Cameroon have sought to assert military and naval power in the area, highlighting the importance of maintaining security over strategically important regions, a core component of Mackinder's theory. The peaceful resolution of the dispute, facilitated by the 2006 Green Tree Agreement, also underscores the international community's interest in preventing regional instability, aligning with Mackinder's broader argument that external powers will intervene to maintain the balance of control in contested regions.

In both disputes, the Heartland Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the significance of territorial control in shaping state behaviour. Control over strategically important regions, whether landlocked or coastal, offers states economic resources, security, and regional influence. The geopolitical significance of both conflicts extends beyond the immediate region, drawing in external powers and influencing broader international power dynamics. Through the application of Mackinder's Heartland Theory,

these territorial disputes can be viewed as part of a larger pattern of geopolitical competition where control of land and resources determines the balance of power within a region. This theory does not cover coastal issues, hence adoption of the next theory.

2.3.2 Rimland Theory

The Rimland Theory, formulated by Nicholas Spykman in the 1940s, offers a contrasting perspective to Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory. While Mackinder emphasized the centrality of Eurasia's interior to global dominance, Spykman argued that the coastal fringes of Eurasia -- what he termed the "Rimland"-- are the most crucial zones in the global power structure. He contended that whoever controls the Rimland controls Eurasia, and whoever controls Eurasia determines the fate of the world. The Rimland includes regions stretching from Western Europe through the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia, encompassing critical maritime and coastal territories that influence global trade, security, and political stability¹⁰⁴.

In examining the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute, the Rimland Theory provides an insightful framework for understanding the significance of these regions, particularly in how their geographic positioning along the peripheries of major powers impacts both local and international geopolitics. Both conflicts, though situated in different parts of the world, involve coastal and strategic border zones where control of territory translates into broader geopolitical leverage.

When applying the Rimland Theory to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the region's broader geopolitical context becomes apparent¹⁰⁵. Though Nagorno-Karabakh itself is landlocked, it lies within the South Caucasus, a region that serves as a critical land bridge between Europe and Asia¹⁰⁶. This area is geopolitically important because it borders the Black Sea to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east, making it part of the larger Rimland that Spykman described. Control over this region allows influence over

significant land and energy corridors. For instance, pipelines transporting oil and gas from the Caspian Sea through Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia to Europe are of immense geopolitical importance¹⁰⁷. Azerbaijan, in particular, views the control of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of its broader strategy to secure its territorial integrity and economic resources.

The role of external actors such as Russia and Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict further underscores the Rimland's significance¹⁰⁸. For Russia, maintaining influence in the South Caucasus is key to its strategy of controlling the region as a buffer zone to prevent NATO expansion into its southern borders¹⁰⁹. Turkey, on the other hand, sees its support for Azerbaijan as a way to expand its influence into the Caucasus and Central Asia. In both cases, the involvement of these external powers aligns with Spykman's argument that the Rimland is the most contested zone in global geopolitics, where control is essential for maintaining influence over the surrounding regions.

The Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute fits even more directly into the Rimland framework, as it involves a coastal region with significant maritime importance. The Bakassi Peninsula, situated along the Gulf of Guinea, is not just a land dispute but a contest over a strategic coastal zone rich in resources. The Gulf of Guinea is known for its vast offshore oil reserves and critical sea routes, making the control of Bakassi crucial for both Nigeria and Cameroon. Nigeria, as the dominant regional power, viewed the Bakassi Peninsula as an essential component of its economic and geopolitical strategy, given its access to offshore oilfields and its proximity to key shipping lanes.

Cameroon's claim to Bakassi, which was upheld by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2002, allowed it to gain control over these valuable resources, thereby strengthening its regional position¹⁰³. In this context, Spykman's Rimland Theory emphasizes the

importance of coastal and maritime territories in determining the power dynamics of a region. The Gulf of Guinea, much like the coastal zones of Eurasia, is a hotbed of geopolitical competition, where control over maritime routes and resources shapes regional and international relations. For both Nigeria and Cameroon, control over the Bakassi Peninsula had direct implications for their economic growth, security, and ability to project power within West Africa.

Moreover, the international dimension of the Bakassi dispute reflects Spykman's idea that external powers have a vested interest in maintaining stability within the Rimland. The peaceful resolution of the dispute, mediated by the United Nations and culminating in the 2006 Green Tree Agreement, highlights the global importance of the Gulf of Guinea as a critical maritime region¹¹⁰. The involvement of international actors in managing this dispute underscores the global stakes in maintaining control over strategic coastal regions, where resources and security interests intersect.

In both conflicts, the Rimland Theory helps to explain why these seemingly localized disputes have broader geopolitical implications. Control over coastal and border regions in the Rimland is not just about local sovereignty, but securing strategic resources, maintaining access to global trade routes, and ensuring regional stability. As Spykman argues, the Rimland is the most contested and crucial zone in global geopolitics. This theory is weak at capturing role of naval dominance, hence the choice of Sea Power theory

2.3.3 Sea Power Theory

Sea Power Theory, most notably developed by Alfred Thayer Mahan in his influential work *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, emphasises the critical role of naval

dominance in determining the geopolitical and economic strength of nations. Mahan argued that control over the seas, including trade routes, naval bases, and coastal territories, directly translates into global power. Nations that dominate the seas can control the flow of commerce, project military power across vast distances, and maintain superior strategic positions, underscoring the idea that maritime dominance is essential for achieving and maintaining international supremacy. Applying Sea Power Theory to the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula helps in understanding the role of maritime resources, access to waterways, and naval strategies in shaping the outcomes of these disputes¹¹¹.

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and Sea Power: While the Nagorno-Karabakh region is entirely landlocked and far removed from any significant bodies of water, the broader geopolitical environment surrounding the conflict has important maritime dimensions. The South Caucasus, where Nagorno-Karabakh is situated, is bordered by the Black Sea to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east. These two bodies of water are critical maritime zones that connect Europe to Asia and play key roles in global energy transport and trade.

The Caspian Sea, in particular, is highly relevant to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict because it contains some of the world's largest oil and natural gas reserves¹¹². Azerbaijan, one of the main parties to the conflict, has significant offshore energy assets in the Caspian Sea, which are central to its economic and geopolitical strategies. Access to the Caspian Sea allows Azerbaijan to export oil and gas to Europe and other markets via pipelines, bypassing Russian and Iranian control over energy flows. In this sense, Azerbaijan's economic power is intimately linked to its control over maritime energy

resources, aligning with Mahan's emphasis on the importance of sea power in shaping national strength.

From a strategic perspective, Azerbaijan's military operations during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were also influenced by the broader need to secure its maritime and energy interests. Control over territories such as Nagorno-Karabakh ensures that Azerbaijan maintains a buffer against regional rivals, while protecting its vital energy corridors that stretch from the Caspian Sea across the South Caucasus to international markets. Though not directly a maritime conflict, the broader geopolitical stakes in the Nagorno-Karabakh war are deeply connected to Azerbaijan's access to and control over maritime resources and trade routes, highlighting the relevance of Sea Power Theories in understanding the conflict.

Bakassi Peninsula Conflict and Sea Power: In contrast, the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute is a prime example of a conflict that fits directly within the framework of Sea Power Theories. The Bakassi Peninsula is located in the Gulf of Guinea, one of the most strategically important maritime regions in the world due to its rich offshore oil deposits and critical sea routes¹⁰³. The Gulf of Guinea is often referred to as the "oil-rich sea," and the region is home to some of the largest reserves of crude oil in Africa, making it a focal point for global energy markets.

For Nigeria, control over the Bakassi Peninsula meant not only the ability to assert sovereignty over a resource-rich territory but also to maintain strategic dominance in the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria, as the largest economy in Africa, relies heavily on its oil and gas exports, much of which are sourced from offshore reserves in the Gulf of Guinea. Mahan's theory suggests that control over maritime resources, particularly oil, translates into economic power and international influence. The Bakassi Peninsula, with its

proximity to Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta, represents a critical asset for maintaining Nigeria's economic stability and geopolitical leverage.

Cameroon's claim to the Bakassi Peninsula, which was eventually recognized by the International Court of Justice in 2002, similarly demonstrates the application of Sea Power Theories in shaping the dynamics of the conflict¹⁰³. By gaining control over Bakassi, Cameroon was able to assert its own influence over offshore oil fields and secure its maritime borders in the Gulf of Guinea. For Cameroon, acquiring the Bakassi Peninsula was a significant geopolitical victory, as it provided access to valuable maritime resources that could boost its economy and regional standing.

Moreover, the international significance of the Gulf of Guinea extends beyond Nigeria and Cameroon, as the region is a key transit point for global maritime trade. Control over this area allows for the protection of vital shipping lanes that connect West Africa to global markets. The Gulf of Guinea is also a hotspot for piracy and maritime insecurity, further emphasizing the strategic importance of sea power in maintaining control over this region. Both Nigeria and Cameroon, by asserting claims over the Bakassi Peninsula, sought to secure their ability to control these critical maritime zones, in line with Mahan's theory that sea power is essential for national security and prosperity.

International Implications of Sea Power: Beyond the local dimensions of these conflicts, the role of external powers and international actors also reflects the broader implications of Sea Power Theories. In both the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula disputes, external actors such as Russia, Turkey, and Western powers have a vested interest in the outcomes, largely due to the strategic maritime and energy resources at stake.

In the Bakassi dispute, international mediation efforts, including the 2006 Green Tree Agreement, underscore the global stakes involved in securing stability in the Gulf of Guinea. For global powers reliant on oil from West Africa, maintaining peace and control over maritime routes in the region was crucial for ensuring uninterrupted access to energy resources. The involvement of international actors in mediating the dispute further highlights the strategic importance of sea power in shaping global geopolitics.

Similarly, in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Russia's role as a key player in the South Caucasus is partially motivated by its interest in maintaining control over vital energy routes and access to the Caspian Sea¹¹³. For Turkey, its involvement in the conflict is linked to its broader ambitions of projecting power into the Caucasus and Central Asia, regions that are strategically positioned along key maritime and land-based trade routes.

2.3 Empirical Framework

Drawing on existing research, this section explores how natural resources, ethnic identities, and strategic interests have shaped the course of these disputes, along with the foreign policy choices made by the states involved and the efforts taken to manage or resolve the conflicts. While theoretical frameworks show ways to think about territorial disputes, this section grounds the discussion in what past empirical studies have shown, providing a clearer picture of how they have played out in practice. It highlights both common themes and key differences that help explain state behavior, regional tensions, and the varying chances for peace.

2.3.1 Role of Natural Resources, Ethnic Groups, and Strategic Interests in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

While territorial claims and ethnic divisions lie at the core of the conflict, past studies suggest that natural resource dynamics and regional geopolitical rivalries have also

played roles in shaping it. This section analyzes past recent scholarly discourse on how resource wealth, ethnic narratives, and strategic interests have each contributed to the escalation and durability of conflict.

Although Nagorno-Karabakh itself is not richly endowed with extractive resources, the wider South Caucasus region, especially Azerbaijan, possesses extensive oil and gas reserves. These reserves have affected the military, political, and economic strategies of both state and non-state actors. Wegenast and Basedau believe that the presence of lucrative oil resources in Azerbaijan has indirectly contributed to conflict escalation.¹¹⁴ Oil rents have allowed Azerbaijan to significantly increase its defense spending over the past two decades, with military expenditures rising from \$135 million in 2003 to over \$2 billion by 2014. This military buildup culminated in Azerbaijan's assertive strategy during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, when it reclaimed territories using advanced drone warfare and a technologically superior arsenal funded largely through petroleum revenues.

The strategic geography of the South Caucasus has transformed Azerbaijan into a central player in regional energy politics, especially through its control over the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. Control over energy transit routes has increased Azerbaijan's geopolitical leverage and created incentives for Western powers, including the United States and European Union, to align more closely with Baku. This external support has arguably emboldened Azerbaijan's approach to conflict resolution through force rather than negotiation. The strategic importance of hydrocarbon exports has, therefore, created a political economy of conflict, whereby the pursuit and protection of energy interests intersect with nationalistic and territorial ambitions.

The destabilizing potential of natural resources when coupled with ethnic heterogeneity is a keynote in empirical studies. Drawing on cross-national data, Wegenast and Basedau

argue that in multiethnic contexts, resource wealth increases the likelihood of both the onset and intensity of conflict¹¹⁴. In Nagorno-Karabakh, where ethnic identities and territorial control are deeply intertwined, the benefits of oil wealth have reinforced Azerbaijan's capacity and willingness to pursue territorial objectives through force, thus amplifying the conflict's militarized character.

Ethnic identity lies at the heart of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The region has long been inhabited by a predominantly ethnic Armenian population, though it lies within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan. Competing historical narratives, cultural attachments to the land, and experiences of victimization have sustained deeply entrenched inter-group hostilities.

The ethnopolitical dimension of the conflict has been analyzed extensively in empirical literature, especially concerning forced displacement, ethnic cleansing, and population engineering. Tatikyan provides a detailed account of Azerbaijan's tactics during the 2020 war, characterizing them as part of a broader "de-Armenization" campaign.¹¹⁵ According to this interpretation, the strategic targeting of civilian areas, cultural monuments, and local infrastructure formed part of a systematic effort to eliminate the Armenian presence from contested territories. This phenomenon is empirically comparable to other cases of ethnic cleansing in the post-Soviet space, such as Kosovo, where demographic transformation was pursued as a means of securing ethnic homogeneity.

Gzoyan et al. corroborate this perspective with demographic data and field reports documenting large-scale displacement of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in the aftermath of military operations.¹¹⁶ Empirical studies also show that ethnic narratives have served not only to justify territorial claims but also to mobilize public support for military engagement. These discursive strategies have been empirically linked to the

radicalization of political attitudes and the delegitimization of compromise-based solutions.

Furthermore, the presence of ethnic fractionalization, defined as the degree of ethnic heterogeneity within a state, has been associated with an increased risk of conflict, especially when paired with resource competition or external interventions.¹¹⁴ In the Nagorno-Karabakh case, the ethnic composition of adjacent districts and the interspersed location of minority populations have complicated both conflict dynamics and post-war reintegration efforts.

Empirical patterns from post-war reintegration efforts indicate that the deep-seated ethnic cleavages continue to pose significant barriers to peacebuilding. Surveys and interviews conducted by regional think tanks reveal that mutual distrust and the absence of transitional justice mechanisms hinder the return of displaced populations and the rebuilding of inter-ethnic trust. This suggests that ethnic identity, while foundational to the conflict, also constitutes one of its most intractable dimensions.

2.3.2 Role of Natural Resources, Ethnic Groups, and Strategic Interests in the The Bakassi Peninsula conflict

The Bakassi Peninsula conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon reflects the dynamics of natural resource control, ethnic identity, and strategic interest. Located in the Gulf of Guinea, the region gained renewed attention following the discovery of oil and gas reserves, exacerbating territorial claims over an area already burdened by colonial-era ambiguities. This empirical analysis examines how natural wealth, ethnic composition, and geopolitical interests have driven conflict escalation, framed diplomatic engagements, and affected civilian populations in the Bakassi region.

At the heart of the Bakassi conflict lies the presence of hydrocarbons and maritime resources, making the peninsula not only a territorial claim but an economic imperative. Although the region's potential was not fully realized during the colonial period, technological advancements in offshore drilling and increasing global energy demand have transformed Bakassi into a strategic prize. Literature indicate that resource-rich borderlands are disproportionately prone to conflict, especially in developing states where governance structures are weak and political elites view natural resources as a source of rent-seeking.¹¹⁷ In Bakassi's case, hydrocarbon deposits and abundant fisheries have incentivized both Nigeria and Cameroon to entrench their claims. Opuene demonstrates how the economic value of these resources played a decisive role in Nigeria's reluctance to immediately comply with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in favor of Cameroon in 2002.¹¹⁸

Further, resource nationalism intensified during the oil boom of the 1990s, as Nigeria increased its offshore drilling activities near Bakassi. Cameroon, seeing these developments as encroachment, filed its case with the ICJ in 1994, asserting both colonial-era treaties and contemporary economic losses. Research by Onyebukwa and Kinge underscores the role of resource competition in fueling not just the state-level dispute, but also in deepening mistrust among local communities, many of whom relied on fishing and informal oil bunkering for livelihoods.¹¹⁹

Moreover, the conflict reveals a broader pattern where natural resource endowments, when coupled with unclear territorial demarcation, function as both a trigger and a sustainer of conflict. As seen in the Niger Delta and now in Bakassi, natural wealth becomes a double-edged sword, fostering elite competition, fuelling secessionist or irredentist movements, and complicating peace enforcement mechanisms.¹²⁰

Beyond economics, the ethnic and cultural makeup of the Bakassi population adds significant depth to the conflict. The peninsula is inhabited predominantly by Efik, Ibibio, and other Cross River ethnic groups who share historical and cultural ties with Nigeria's southeastern communities. These populations speak Nigerian languages, practice local Nigerian traditions, and have historically aligned politically with Nigerian governance structures.¹²¹

The 2002 ICJ ruling and subsequent 2006 Green Tree Agreement, which facilitated Nigeria's withdrawal from Bakassi, failed to account for the self-determination rights of the local inhabitants, leading to what some scholars term legal displacement. Opuene notes that residents perceived the ruling as a betrayal, resulting in localized resistance and non-compliance with Cameroonian administrative integration.¹¹⁸

Ethnic affiliations have thus acted as a form of territorial legitimacy, complicating Cameroon's post-handover governance efforts. Okoi highlights how Cameroon's attempts to enforce new governance protocols faced resistance not merely on legal grounds but through ethnic loyalty and identity-based refusal.¹²¹ This aspect has broader implications for international conflict resolution frameworks that prioritize state sovereignty over local agency.

Research in ethnically divided regions consistently shows that ethnic homogeneity within contested areas increases the likelihood of territorial conflict, particularly when those ethnic groups are aligned with the challenger state.¹²² In the Bakassi case, Nigeria's historical and cultural integration of Bakassi's residents provided an ethno-political foundation for rejecting Cameroonian sovereignty, thereby prolonging administrative and military tensions even after formal demarcation was completed.

Additionally, the role of ethnic narratives in framing the conflict cannot be underestimated. Political elites in both nations have used ethnic solidarity discourse to justify territorial claims and mobilize public support. Nigeria often framed the withdrawal as a necessary but painful concession, while Cameroonian narratives emphasized colonial treaty obligations and legal victories. These divergent narratives have deepened the identity divide, entrenching local resistance in Bakassi and complicating reconciliation efforts.

The Bakassi Peninsula's location near key Gulf of Guinea shipping lanes adds a vital strategic dimension to the conflict. Control over this region ensures not only access to offshore oil exploration zones, but also enhanced maritime security, both of which are crucial for national defense and economic projection in West Africa.

From a realist international relations perspective, both Nigeria and Cameroon perceived Bakassi as a strategic asset that could extend maritime influence. Nigeria's naval deployments during the height of the dispute reflect this strategic calculus. Okoi points out that Nigerian political leaders, especially under military regimes in the 1990s, were unwilling to cede Bakassi due to concerns over national prestige, regional hegemony, and control of strategic oil lanes.¹²¹

Moreover, strategic interests were not confined to the direct stakeholders. The United States, France, and multinational oil corporations closely monitored the region, given its increasing relevance in the global oil market post-9/11, as Western countries sought to diversify their energy sources away from the Middle East.¹²³ These interests shaped diplomatic interventions, influencing how both Nigeria and Cameroon negotiated post-ICJ arrangements.

Internally, the Bakassi conflict also served domestic political objectives. Nigerian elites have historically used the conflict to divert attention from internal crises, including Niger Delta militancy and growing discontent with federal governance structures. Similarly, the Cameroonian government leveraged the conflict to consolidate national unity amid internal dissent in its Anglophone regions. The resolution of the Bakassi dispute bolstered President Paul Biya's image as a statesman, enhancing his domestic legitimacy.¹²¹

Empirical studies on territorial conflict management in Africa suggest that strategic calculations, particularly those involving military deterrence, regional leadership, and global diplomatic alignment, often override legal rulings or humanitarian considerations. The Bakassi case confirms this trend, illustrating how strategic interests often delay compliance, even in the face of clear international adjudications.

While natural resources, ethnicity, and strategy are central, it is essential to situate the Bakassi conflict within the broader colonial cartographic legacy. The initial treaties governing the peninsula were signed between Germany and Britain in the early 20th century. These treaties, often ambiguous and lacking indigenous consultation, form the backbone of Cameroon's legal claim, as recognized by the ICJ.

Yet, these colonial-era agreements have been criticized by scholars for ignoring local identities and socio-economic realities. As Onyebukwa and Kinge argue, the application of colonial treaties to resolve contemporary conflicts often results in 'legal injustices', particularly when they fail to engage the aspirations of the people inhabiting the contested territory.¹²⁴

Moreover, the ICJ's emphasis on legal positivism, prioritizing treaty documentation over self-determination claims, highlighted the limitations of international law in contexts where human geography clashes with historical documentation. This echoes broader

critiques within post-colonial legal scholarship, which argue that Western legal frameworks often reinforce state-centric solutions, marginalizing subnational identities and perpetuating historical injustices.¹²⁵

The Green Tree Agreement of 2006, brokered by the United Nations with support from the United States, Germany, and the UK, was designed to facilitate peaceful handover. It included provisions for the protection of Bakassi residents, though implementation has been partial at best. Reports of abuse, marginalization, and statelessness among the Bakassi population continue to surface, raising questions about the efficacy and ethics of international conflict resolution mechanisms.

The Bakassi Peninsula conflict represents a paradigmatic case of post-colonial territorial disputes driven by resource competition, ethno-political dynamics, and strategic imperatives. The presence of hydrocarbons and maritime resources heightened the economic stakes for both Nigeria and Cameroon, while deep-rooted ethnic affiliations rendered top-down legal solutions insufficient and controversial. Strategic interests, shaped by both regional and global geopolitics, added further complexity, revealing how domestic and international agendas often hinder conflict resolution.

Empirical studies on Bakassi reveal a multifaceted reality: while legal adjudication and diplomacy have succeeded in averting large-scale war, they have not resolved the underlying drivers of discontent, especially among local populations. The Bakassi conflict thus underscores the need for inclusive, context-sensitive conflict resolution approaches, ones that go beyond legalistic frameworks to incorporate local identities, economic needs, and geopolitical realities.

2.3.3 Foreign Policy Approaches by States Involved in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh represents one of the most intractable and enduring territorial disputes in the post-Soviet space. Rooted in historical grievances, ethnic divisions, and shifting power dynamics, the conflict has evolved through phases of intensive warfare, fragile ceasefires, legal contestation, and diplomatic deadlock. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have leveraged a mix of strategies , diplomatic, military, legal, and geopolitical , to assert sovereignty and shape narratives around Nagorno-Karabakh. This section empirically explores these strategic dimensions and evaluates their implications for peace, regional stability, and international law.

From the early 1990s, diplomacy has played a central role in managing, though not resolving, the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. Chief among the mediators has been the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States. However, despite decades of involvement, the Minsk Group has made limited progress in advancing a durable solution. Analysts argue that the group's failure stems from both structural deficiencies, including lack of enforcement mechanisms , and the mistrust between the conflicting parties.¹²⁶

Armenia's diplomatic approach has focused heavily on achieving international recognition for the self-declared Republic of Artsakh, though no UN member state, including Armenia itself, has formally recognized it. This strategy reflects a desire to frame the conflict as one of self-determination, positioning Armenia as a protector of an ethnic Armenian enclave rather than an aggressor. Conversely, Azerbaijan has consistently emphasised territorial integrity, a principle widely supported under international law, thereby gaining diplomatic legitimacy in multilateral forums.

Azerbaijan's diplomatic success has also been bolstered by its alignment with Turkey, a key NATO member that has openly supported Azerbaijan's stance. Chhabra notes that

Turkey's backing has provided Baku with not only political cover but also leverage in international negotiations, enabling Azerbaijan to assert itself more confidently on the global stage.¹²⁷ Meanwhile, Armenia's reliance on Russia has proved increasingly tenuous, especially in light of Moscow's ambivalence following Armenia's democratic transition in 2018 and its preoccupation with the Ukraine war since 2022.

While diplomatic efforts have faltered, military actions have dramatically reshaped the conflict, particularly following the 44-day war in 2020. In that offensive, Azerbaijan launched a large-scale military campaign, deploying Turkish drones, Israeli weaponry, and advanced artillery systems, resulting in the reclamation of large portions of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding districts.¹²⁸ This marked a decisive shift from a frozen conflict to a military-dominated status quo, in which Azerbaijan not only gained ground but reasserted control over internationally recognized territories.

Empirical accounts reveal that the 2020 war caused the displacement of over 90,000 ethnic Armenians, and destroyed critical infrastructure, raising concerns over potential war crimes and ethnic cleansing.¹²⁹ Human rights organizations and independent monitors documented targeted attacks on civilian areas, use of cluster munitions, and desecration of cultural sites, suggesting that military gains were accompanied by widespread humanitarian violations.

One of the most contentious military strategies post-2020 has been the blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only land route connecting Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh. Starting in late 2022, Azerbaijan implemented restrictions on food, medicine, and fuel, effectively isolating the Armenian population in the enclave.¹³⁰ This action has not only exacerbated humanitarian conditions but also triggered legal proceedings at the International Court of

Justice (ICJ), where Armenia accused Azerbaijan of violating the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

Legal tools have emerged as an increasingly important front in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Armenia has turned to international legal institutions, particularly the ICJ, to challenge Azerbaijan's actions on the grounds of human rights violations and blockade-induced suffering. In 2021 and 2023, Armenia filed urgent applications accusing Azerbaijan of state-sponsored ethnic discrimination, based on the impacts of the blockade, cultural destruction, and forced displacement.¹³⁰

While these cases are ongoing, they reflect a broader strategy, that, Armenia seeks to shift international opinion through legal narratives, framing Azerbaijan's actions as violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Azerbaijan, for its part, has filed counter-claims, alleging Armenia's decades-long occupation of its sovereign territories and abuses during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in the 1990s. One contentious area of legal debate is the terminology used to describe Azerbaijani actions. Armenian scholars and politicians have argued that the blockade and military offensives amount to ethnic cleansing or even genocide.¹²⁸ However, legal experts note that proving intent and scale for such designations is complex, and international actors have been cautious in their assessments, often to avoid alienating either side.

In this legal tug-of-war, international bodies such as the United Nations and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) have remained relatively muted. Analysts attribute this to the geopolitical sensitivities involved, particularly given the interests of powerful actors such as Russia, Turkey, and the EU in maintaining regional stability and energy corridors.

Geopolitical alliances have proven pivotal in shaping the trajectory of the conflict. Azerbaijan has significantly benefited from military, economic, and intelligence cooperation with Turkey, which has not only supplied advanced weaponry but also deployed military advisors and supported Azerbaijan in international forums. This strategic partnership has allowed Baku to alter the military balance and project power with greater confidence.¹²⁷

Armenia, on the other hand, has historically relied on Russia for military support and diplomatic backing. Russia maintains a military base in Armenia and was instrumental in brokering the 2020 ceasefire, which included the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Yerevan has grown increasingly disillusioned with Moscow's neutrality, especially as Russia failed to intervene during Azerbaijan's advances in 2023. Ahmed argues that Armenia's pivot toward the West, reflected in stronger ties with the EU and the U.S., has created geopolitical recalibration, though it remains unclear whether Western powers are willing to offer tangible military or diplomatic guarantees.¹²⁶

These competing alliances reflect a regionalization of the conflict, in which major powers use the Armenia–Azerbaijan rivalry to advance broader strategic goals, from energy security and arms sales to influence over the Caucasus. This external involvement has often exacerbated the conflict by emboldening either side rather than facilitating impartial mediation.

In conclusion, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh exemplifies how asymmetric power, external backing, and legal-diplomatic frameworks interact in shaping contemporary ethno-territorial conflicts. Azerbaijan's combination of military force, strategic diplomacy,

and legal defensiveness has yielded tangible territorial and political gains, effectively reversing the post-1994 status quo. Armenia's strategy, reliant on legal norms and appeals to human rights, has been less successful in altering the power dynamics on the ground, although it has garnered some international sympathy. Yet, neither side has achieved comprehensive legitimacy.

Azerbaijan's victories have come at considerable humanitarian and reputational costs, while Armenia's losses have sparked domestic political upheaval and questions about the effectiveness of its strategic choices. The international community's inconsistent response, driven more by geopolitical calculus than normative concerns, has further entrenched the conflict. Ultimately, the empirical evidence suggests that while legal and diplomatic tools remain crucial, in high-stakes ethno-political disputes like Nagorno-Karabakh, military force and strategic alliances often prove more decisive, raising difficult questions about the future of peaceful conflict resolution in volatile regions.

2.3.4 Foreign Policy Approaches by States Involved in Bakassi Peninsula Conflict

The territorial conflict over the Bakassi Peninsula between Nigeria and Cameroon is one of Africa's most diplomatically complex post-colonial disputes. Situated in the Gulf of Guinea and rich in oil and gas reserves, Bakassi became a point of contention due to colonial legacies, competing resource interests, and geopolitical calculations. While the conflict culminated in a peaceful resolution through the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Greentree Agreement, the process was fraught with military tension, legal ambiguity, and humanitarian consequences. This section empirically examines how diplomacy, military strategies, legal mechanisms, and international alliances contributed to shaping the conflict and its resolution.

From the early 1990s, Cameroon demonstrated a preference for diplomatic over military confrontation, a strategy shaped by its historical relations with Nigeria and the recognition of Nigeria's demographic and economic superiority. Cameroon adopted a "lawfare" strategy, utilizing legal diplomacy to internationalize the dispute and seek adjudication from the ICJ. The diplomatic route allowed Cameroon to elevate the conflict beyond bilateral engagements and frame it within the jurisdiction of international law.¹³¹

One of the most significant outcomes of these efforts was the Greentree Agreement signed in 2006. Brokered by the United Nations, the agreement formalized the implementation of the ICJ's 2002 decision, which awarded sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon. The agreement stipulated a phased withdrawal of Nigerian administrative and military presence, and the protection of the rights of Nigerian nationals residing in the region.¹²⁶ This agreement is widely regarded as a diplomatic milestone and exemplifies how third-party mediation and international oversight can facilitate compliance with international rulings.

However, diplomatic efforts were not without challenges. Within Nigeria, the ruling and subsequent agreement were met with strong opposition, particularly from residents of the Bakassi region and political elites in Cross River State. The lack of public consultation and inadequate resettlement plans for displaced Nigerians exposed limitations in Nigeria's domestic diplomatic management, even as the country adhered to its international obligations.

Talking about Military Actions -escalation and de-escalation, before the ICJ ruling, the Bakassi conflict was marked by intermittent military confrontations, especially in the mid-1990s. Skirmishes between Nigerian and Cameroonian forces resulted in casualties and heightened regional tension, with both sides deploying naval and land forces to assert

control over the peninsula.¹³² These clashes were driven largely by the strategic and economic value of Bakassi's hydrocarbon reserves, as both nations sought to establish physical control over oil-rich waters.

Nigeria maintained a strong military presence in the region until after the ICJ ruling, which served as both a deterrent and a bargaining chip in the ongoing negotiations. The final withdrawal of Nigerian troops, beginning in 2006 and completed by 2008, was a key moment in conflict de-escalation and compliance with the Greentree Agreement.¹²¹ This transition was facilitated by UN observer missions, which helped monitor troop movements and reassured both parties of each other's adherence to agreed terms.

However, the de-escalation did not entirely prevent violence and insecurity. Following the handover, reports emerged of harassment of Nigerian settlers by Cameroonian authorities, as well as armed resistance by local militias who rejected the territorial transfer. These incidents underline that while inter-state military tensions subsided, micro-level violence and insecurity persisted, often fueled by perceptions of abandonment and injustice among local populations.

Also, on the role of the International Court of Justice, her 2002 ruling was pivotal in transforming the conflict from a potential war into a case study of legal conflict resolution. The Court's decision, based on the interpretation of colonial-era treaties between Germany and Britain, awarded the peninsula to Cameroon. This ruling was not merely legalistic but carried significant geopolitical and socio-economic implications.¹³³ Initially, Nigeria contested the ruling, citing the lack of local consultation and the potential disenfranchisement of Bakassi residents. However, under international pressure and guided by diplomatic pragmatism, Nigeria accepted the judgment. The subsequent legal agreements, including the Greentree Agreement, established a compliance framework,

with timelines and monitoring mechanisms that proved essential in enforcing the ICJ's decision.

Nevertheless, compliance was slow and uneven. Nigeria delayed withdrawal due to political resistance and concerns about local backlash. According to Abdulyakeen, the legal framework lacked provisions for robust enforcement, necessitating supplementary diplomatic negotiation and international oversight. Moreover, there was ambiguity surrounding the rights of Nigerian settlers, leading to disputes over nationality, land ownership, and political representation under Cameroonian administration.

The Bakassi case reveals both the strengths and limitations of legal resolution mechanisms. On the one hand, it demonstrates that territorial disputes can be resolved peacefully through legal arbitration; on the other, it underscores that legal outcomes must be coupled with political will and humanitarian planning to ensure sustainability.

The involvement of international institutions such as the United Nations, the European Union, and regional actors significantly contributed to conflict management and eventual resolution. The UN's role in brokering and supervising the Greentree Agreement was instrumental in ensuring that both Nigeria and Cameroon adhered to their commitments.¹³⁴ The presence of neutral third parties reduced suspicion and increased transparency in implementation processes. Cameroon's alliance with France and its alignment with Western legal and diplomatic norms provided it with leverage and legitimacy in international forums. Conversely, Nigeria's role as a regional hegemon in West Africa made its eventual acceptance of the ruling a crucial precedent for international law in Africa. Analysts suggest that Nigeria's compliance helped to reinforce the norm of peaceful dispute resolution in the continent and strengthened its image as a responsible actor in global governance.¹³⁴

However, international involvement did not translate into adequate support for local populations. The displacement of thousands of Nigerians, who faced statelessness and loss of livelihoods, received insufficient international humanitarian assistance. This failure points to a critical gap between macro-level conflict resolution and micro-level justice for affected communities.

In conclusion, the resolution of the Bakassi Peninsula dispute offers several strategic and empirical insights into territorial conflict management. Cameroon's reliance on legal diplomacy and international alliances proved effective in achieving sovereignty over Bakassi, while Nigeria's eventual compliance reflected a pragmatic shift from militarized assertiveness to legal responsibility. The ICJ ruling and the Greentree Agreement remain significant milestones in international adjudication of border disputes. However, the process also reveals the limits of state-centric conflict resolution. Military de-escalation and legal compliance did not translate into sustainable peace for local communities. The displacement of Nigerian settlers, erosion of local identities, and unresolved citizenship issues continue to haunt the post-conflict environment. As such, while the Bakassi case is often held as a model of peaceful resolution, it simultaneously serves as a reminder of the complex interplay between international law, diplomacy, military strategy, and human security.

2.3.5 Conflict Management Strategies and Their Effectiveness

Both conflicts centered on disputed territories but unfolded in different geopolitical contexts, Nagorno-Karabakh amid the post-Soviet collapse and overlapping regional interests, and Bakassi in post-colonial West Africa with colonial-era treaties at play. While both involved legal adjudication, military engagement, and bilateral or multilateral

agreements, the outcomes diverged. One culminated in a broadly respected international judgment and a peaceful transfer of authority (Bakassi), while the other (Nagorno-Karabakh) remains a volatile "frozen" conflict. This section evaluates the effectiveness of these strategies in sustaining peace.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict pits two foundational principles of international law against each other: territorial integrity and self-determination. Azerbaijan invokes Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which affirm the inviolability of borders. Armenia, on the other hand, emphasizes the principle of self-determination found in Article 1(2) of the UN Charter and UNGA Resolution 1514, asserting that the ethnic Armenian majority in Nagorno-Karabakh has the right to determine its political status.

International legal bodies have largely upheld Azerbaijan's territorial claims, refusing to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent entity¹³⁵. However, there has been no binding international court ruling, unlike the Bakassi case. This legal vacuum, coupled with the OSCE Minsk Group's failure to broker a political resolution, left room for military force to redefine the status quo, which occurred decisively in 2020.

The 2020 ceasefire reflects a de facto shift in legal interpretations, as Azerbaijan justified its military campaign under the right to self-defense against occupation. This maneuver, while not adjudicated by a legal body, was tacitly accepted by international actors, suggesting a normative erosion of non-use-of-force principles in situations involving prolonged occupation.¹³⁵

As for Bakassi conflict, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered a definitive legal ruling in 2002, awarding sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon. The judgment relied on colonial-era treaties, notably the 1913 Anglo-German Treaty, and emphasised effectivités, or effective administration, which Cameroon could demonstrate.

The ICJ decision was instrumental in shifting the conflict from military confrontation to legal compliance.^{136,137} While Nigeria initially resisted the ruling, diplomatic pressure , especially from the United Nations and the African Union , led to the Green Tree Agreement (GTA) in 2006. This agreement established a timeline and procedures for Nigeria's peaceful withdrawal.

The empirical significance lies in the ruling's binding nature and enforcement mechanisms. As Nwoko observes, the ICJ-GTA tandem created a rules-based environment for compliance, aided by the Mixed Commission, which monitored implementation.¹³⁸ Although imperfect, the legal ruling was the turning point that transformed a territorial dispute into a legal-administrative process, significantly reducing violence.

The use of legal adjudication, military force, and signed agreements in territorial conflicts has been the subject of extensive academic and institutional analysis as well, in the Bakassi Peninsula dispute, the ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in *Cameroon v. Nigeria* (2002) is frequently cited as a benchmark for peaceful dispute settlement. Ariye conducted a post-ruling field analysis and found that while elite political actors in Nigeria initially resisted the ruling, diplomatic engagement, especially via the Green Tree Agreement (GTA), facilitated eventual compliance.¹³⁶ Nwoko builds on this by empirically analyzing media reports and elite interviews, concluding that ICJ rulings are effective only when accompanied by third-party monitoring and bilateral incentives, such as those provided by the UN-led Mixed Commission.¹³⁸

By contrast, in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, no binding international legal ruling has clarified sovereignty beyond UN affirmations of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Studies show that the lack of adjudication has created a space for parallel normative claims,

territorial integrity for Azerbaijan and self-determination for Armenians.^{139, 140} Makili-Aliyev's doctrinal and field-based research identifies the failure of legal institutions (including the OSCE Minsk Group) to produce a consensus framework as a driver of escalation. Without a judicial anchor like the ICJ, diplomatic stasis and geopolitical interests filled the void.¹³⁹

Empirically, the presence or absence of legal finality appears to condition state behavior. While Nwoko and Baye argue that legal clarity promotes compliance in the presence of pressure and rewards, Mirzayev shows that ambiguity, especially when protracted, may normalize the use of military force to alter facts on the ground.^{138,137,135}

A consistent theme in conflict resolution literature is the ambiguous role of military intervention. It may serve either as a mechanism to alter diplomatic deadlock or as a spoiler of peace processes. In Nagorno-Karabakh, Sargsyan et al. conducted a military-geopolitical analysis of the 2020 war, showing how Azerbaijan's use of drones and Turkish military support reshaped territorial control within weeks.¹⁴¹ Their empirical study, drawing from conflict zone mapping and casualty data, confirms that military asymmetry, not legal or diplomatic momentum, was the decisive factor. Ciobanu further argues that military success reconfigured the terms of negotiation, with Armenia losing leverage and the OSCE Minsk Group losing relevance.¹⁴²

On the other hand, in Bakassi, while Kpwa acknowledges that Nigeria and Cameroon engaged in military skirmishes during the 1990s, the ICJ ruling created a new incentive structure for disengagement.¹⁴³ His empirical fieldwork among Bakassi residents, military officials, and local NGOs shows a reduction in cross-border incursions post-GTA, though he cautions that non-state armed groups (NSAGs) exploited the resulting security vacuum.

Baye corroborates this with survey evidence that reveals declining public confidence in post-withdrawal security, even as interstate military confrontations ceased.¹³⁷

What emerges is a dual pattern: in Nagorno-Karabakh, the failure of law and diplomacy enabled war to substitute for negotiation, while in Bakassi, a legalistic pathway reduced military escalation, but not necessarily local insecurity. As Ruys and Silvestre conclude, military force is most disruptive when not bounded by adjudicative or negotiated limits, a point illustrated in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war.¹⁴⁰

The presence of structured, monitored peace agreements is another recurring explanatory factor in the literature on durable conflict resolution. In the Bakassi conflict, the Green Tree Agreement (2006) has been analyzed extensively. Ariye and Nwoko offer detailed content and process analyses of the GTA, focusing on how it provided not only a timeline for withdrawal but also mechanisms for local administration, citizenship options, and population monitoring.^{136,138} These provisions were implemented with the backing of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and an international observer mission. Empirically, Baye finds that while implementation was imperfect, interstate compliance was high, with Nigeria completing its withdrawal by 2008.¹³⁷ The presence of third-party enforcement and diplomatic visibility are considered critical to this outcome.

In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the 2020 ceasefire agreement is widely seen as a ceasefire without peace. Libaridian critiques the agreement's vagueness on the region's final status, minority protections, and displaced persons.¹⁴⁴ He draws from post-war ethnographic research in Stepanakert and Shusha to argue that the ceasefire institutionalized a Russian-mediated stalemate rather than a peace framework. Makili-Aliyev adds that the lack of international oversight, compared to the Green Tree Agreement in Bakassi, has enabled both sides to selectively interpret the ceasefire

terms.¹³⁹ This is supported by a study which used Russian-language diplomatic cables and policy documents to show that Russia's role as a unilateral mediator has concentrated power but not legitimacy, undermining long-term peacebuilding efforts.¹⁴⁵ Unlike the Green Tree Agreement, the Nagorno-Karabakh agreement lacks an institutional mechanism for conflict resolution, and does not include multilateral commitments, a key predictor of compliance in conflict resolution studies

2.3.6 Role of International and Regional Organizations

This review juxtaposes empirical findings from various studies to critically assess the roles of the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in both conflicts, with attention to mediation efficacy, legal authority, and impact on local populations.

2.3.6.1 United Nations (UN) Mediation and Enforcement

Empirical studies widely acknowledge the limitations of the United Nations in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Askerov and Matyók argue that despite the adoption of four UN Security Council Resolutions (822, 853, 874, and 884) in 1993, the absence of enforcement mechanisms rendered these resolutions symbolically rather than operationally effective.¹⁴⁶ Sargsyan et al. similarly conclude that these resolutions failed to alter the status quo, citing the lack of political will among permanent Security Council members to enforce compliance.¹⁴¹

By contrast, the UN's role in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict is comparatively more effective. Empirical analyses credit the UN with facilitating structured dialogue between Nigeria and Cameroon following the ICJ ruling.¹⁴⁷ This aligns with observations by Ibeanu (2008), who contends that the UN's active logistical and political support during

the Greentree Agreement implementation was pivotal in averting military escalation. The contrast here underlines what Boban and Blažević describe as the “instrumental utility of UN involvement only when backed by consensual enforcement and regional compliance.”¹⁴⁸

2.3.6.2 OSCE in Nagorno-Karabakh

Scholarly evaluations of the OSCE’s Minsk Group are largely critical. Hopmann (2015) attributes the Group’s ineffectiveness to its consensus-based structure, which allows co-chair states, France, Russia, and the United States, to neutralize each other’s diplomatic leverage due to competing geopolitical interests. Empirical studies reinforce this view, noting that the Minsk Group has failed to secure even a temporary roadmap for conflict resolution, despite its near-exclusive mandate since 1992.¹⁴⁸

Sargsyan et al. offer a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that while the Minsk Group provided a necessary platform for dialogue, its incapacity to impose deadlines, propose binding solutions, or engage local populations eroded its legitimacy over time.¹⁴¹ No equivalent OSCE role is observed in the Bakassi conflict, reinforcing the conclusion that the OSCE’s effectiveness is geographically and politically constrained.

2.3.6.3 The African Union’s Role

In empirical terms, the African Union (AU) is conspicuously absent in both conflict zones in terms of direct mediation. Hackett emphasizes that while the AU’s normative framework, particularly its principle of “African solutions to African problems”, encouraged regional cooperation, it was not materially involved in the Bakassi Peninsula’s resolution process.¹⁴⁷ In the Nagorno-Karabakh context, the AU is largely irrelevant due to its geographical mandate. However, Uzoigwe argues that the AU’s evolving role in African conflict mediation may offer strategic lessons for other regions,

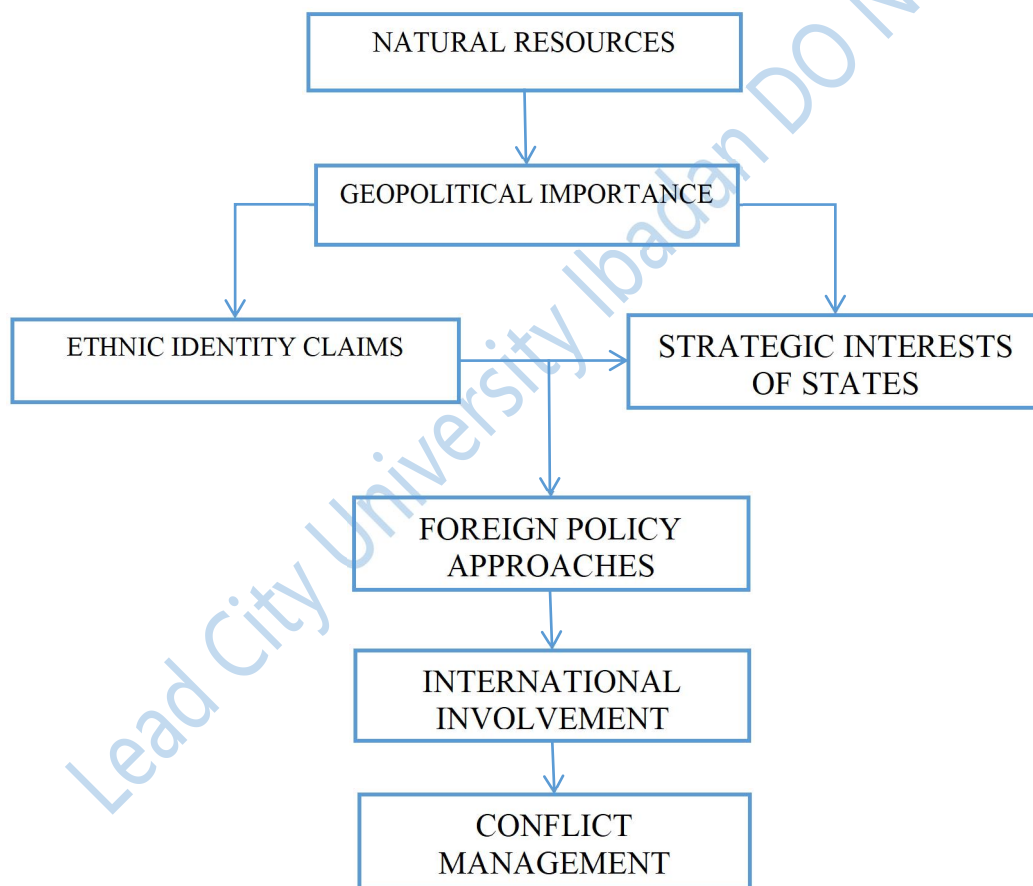
especially in multilateral engagement and community-level inclusion.¹⁴⁹ This contrast reveals an empirical gap in literature on cross-regional application of institutional mediation frameworks.

2.3.6.4 The ICJ's Role

There is broad empirical consensus on the pivotal role of the ICJ in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. Ajibola argue that the 2002 ruling and its subsequent interpretation in the Greentree Agreement of 2006 provided a definitive legal resolution, which facilitated compliance by both parties.¹⁵⁰ By contrast, the ICJ's role in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute has been more fragmented. Srivastava notes that Armenia and Azerbaijan have taken legal recourse under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, allowing the ICJ to hear aspects of the conflict, but only under limited jurisdiction.¹⁵¹ Uraz points out that such litigation focuses on human rights violations rather than territorial claims, and thus does not provide a basis for comprehensive resolution.¹⁵²

Hence, while the ICJ has operated effectively as a dispute-resolution mechanism in the Bakassi case, its function in Nagorno-Karabakh is constrained by the lack of an overarching legal agreement between the parties. This disparity illustrates the dependence of international legal efficacy on political consent.

2.4 Conceptual Model



The conceptual framework for this study integrates geopolitical, ethnic, strategic, and diplomatic dimensions to explore the underlying causes and management of territorial

conflicts. The diagram represents how various elements interrelate in shaping the nature and progression of the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula disputes.

At the foundation are Natural Resources, which serve as a catalyst for geopolitical interest. Both regions possess resources, whether oil-rich waters or agriculturally valuable lands, that heighten their strategic value. These resources elevate the Geopolitical Importance of the territories in question, prompting stronger state claims and more aggressive political behavior.

This geopolitical value then influences Ethnic Identity Claims, as ethnic groups often anchor their political legitimacy in historical ties to resource-rich or symbolically significant territories. These identity-driven assertions of sovereignty frequently escalate tensions, particularly in multi-ethnic regions where national borders were arbitrarily drawn or contested over time.

Simultaneously, Strategic Interests of States, both regional and global, intervene as powerful actors assess the value of these conflicts in relation to their economic, military, or ideological goals. For example, Russia, Turkey, and Armenia each view Nagorno-Karabakh through different strategic lenses, just as Nigeria and Cameroon weigh their interests in Bakassi.

These interests and claims heavily inform Foreign Policy Approaches, where states may choose diplomacy, military engagement, bilateral treaties, or regional cooperation mechanisms to pursue their objectives. The approach selected often reflects not only domestic pressures but also alignment with global powers or international norms.

As foreign policy is formulated, International Involvement becomes inevitable. This includes mediation efforts, peacekeeping missions, and legal arbitration by bodies such as

the United Nations or International Court of Justice. Their roles shape, and are shaped by, the existing strategic interests and policy choices of involved states.

Lastly, these dynamics culminate in Conflict Management Strategies, such as ceasefires, resource-sharing agreements, peace accords, or prolonged negotiations. The effectiveness of these strategies is largely contingent on how well they reconcile resource control, ethnic identities, and geopolitical interests, as well as the willingness of external actors to enforce or support outcomes.

2.5 Gap in Literature

Despite the breadth of existing literature on the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula conflicts, several important gaps remain unaddressed, especially in relation to their comparative geopolitical dimensions and conflict management outcomes. Much of the scholarly work has approached these crises individually, analyzing them either from a legal, historical, or ethnopolitical lens. However, comparative studies that systematically explore both cases using shared analytical frameworks remain scarce. This limits a broader understanding of how similar territorial disputes unfold across different regions and under varying geopolitical contexts.

Furthermore, while significant attention has been paid to the role of international law particularly the International Court of Justice in the Bakassi dispute, there is a relative lack of research examining the absence of formal legal mechanisms in the resolution process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Few studies critically interrogate how this disparity affects the longevity, recurrence, or transformation of conflict in each case. Another underexplored area is the intersection of resource politics and national identity. Although there is acknowledgment of the role of natural resources in intensifying

territorial claims, limited literature explores how resource control interacts with identity politics, particularly in post-colonial and post-Soviet contexts.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by adopting a comparative geopolitical approach, examining both the nature and management of the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula conflicts. By analyzing them side by side, it offers fresh insights into how geography, identity, legal mechanisms, and international involvement converge differently across regions , contributing to the broader field of conflict and peace studies.

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Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this study is structured around a comparative and qualitative approach to analyze the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute. This design is chosen to offer a detailed examination of the conflicts, focusing on their management and resolution strategies.

The study employs a comparative research design to systematically evaluate and contrast the foreign policy tools and conflict management strategies utilized in the two case studies. By comparing these distinct conflicts, the research aims to uncover similarities and differences in how various strategies and tools have been applied. This comparative analysis will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of different approaches, allowing for a broader understanding of conflict management practices.

A qualitative approach underpins this research, given the complex and multi-faceted nature of the conflicts. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for exploring the intricate interplay of geopolitical, ethnic, and historical factors that influence each conflict.

Through in-depth interviews, thematic analysis, and a comprehensive review of relevant literature, the study seeks to capture the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders involved in the conflicts. This approach will enable a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics and contextual factors that shape conflict management and resolution efforts.

The rationale for adopting a comparative and qualitative approach lies in the need for a holistic understanding of the conflicts. Comparative analysis allows for the identification of best practices and potential areas for improvement in conflict resolution. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach facilitates a rich and detailed exploration of the conflicts' contexts, providing insights that quantitative methods might not fully capture. Together, these methods will contribute to a thorough and nuanced analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute, addressing the study's research questions and objectives.

3.2 Population of the Study

Since the study adopts a qualitative and comparative design relying on secondary data, the population includes documents and sources that provide detailed information about the political, geopolitical, ethnic, and diplomatic dimensions of both conflicts.

This population includes:

- Scholarly publications such as academic journal articles, theses, and research papers on both conflicts.
- Official records and archival materials from relevant national governments (e.g., Nigeria, Cameroon, Armenia, and Azerbaijan).

- Reports and resolutions from international bodies like the United Nations, African Union, International Court of Justice (ICJ), and other regional or intergovernmental organizations involved in mediation or arbitration.
- Historical accounts, media reports, and think tank analyses that chronicle the development, management, and outcomes of the two conflicts.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

The study adopts a purposive sampling technique, to select secondary data sources, such as texts, in soft and hard copies containing useful and relevant information published before, during and after the crises broke out. Sample of works adopted includes government documents and all known interviews previously conducted on the subject-matter. The objective is to extract in-depth insights from information-rich sources. The sample includes documents, reports, and literature that meet the following selection criteria:

Relevance to the conflicts: Materials must directly address either the Nagorno-Karabakh or Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula conflict, or offer comparative geopolitical or conflict management frameworks applicable to these cases.

Credibility and Authority: Sources must originate from reputable academic, governmental, or international organizations.

Temporal relevance: Documents covering the historical background, periods of active conflict, post-conflict negotiations, and present-day developments are included to offer a holistic view.

3.4 Description of the Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study is a document review matrix, designed to systematically collect, organize, and evaluate relevant secondary sources that address the research questions of the study. This instrument facilitated a structured analysis of academic literature, official documents, international court rulings and reports by international organizations that pertain to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute.

The matrix was constructed with columns identifying the document title, author or issuing body, year of publication, geographical focus, research question addressed, nature of the data (legal, historical, diplomatic, media, etc.), and a summary of findings relevant to the study. Each entry in the matrix was carefully selected based on its credibility, relevance, and analytical value to the thematic and comparative framework employed in this research.

This instrument enabled the researcher to match each data source with each research questions and to extract key information aligned with the analytical categories such as geopolitical factors, ethnic dimensions, conflict management strategies, foreign policy tools, and the role of international actors.

3.5 Method of Data Collection

For this study, the data collection process relies entirely on secondary sources to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute. This approach involves a meticulous review of existing literature and documents to gather relevant information and insights.

The primary method of data collection will be a thorough literature review. This includes examining academic articles, books, research papers, and scholarly journals that focus on the historical, geopolitical, and ethnic dimensions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute. This extensive review will help establish a solid foundation for understanding the background and evolution of the conflicts, as well as the various strategies and tools employed in their management.

In addition to academic literature, official documents and reports will be analyzed. These sources include international treaties, resolutions from organizations such as the United Nations, and official reports from peacekeeping missions and conflict resolution initiatives. By scrutinizing these documents, the study aims to understand the formal mechanisms and strategies used in managing and resolving the conflicts.

Media reports and news articles will also be included in the data collection process. These sources provide current and diverse perspectives on the conflicts, reflecting recent developments, public opinion, and the broader discourse surrounding the issues. Media analysis will offer additional context and insights into how the conflicts are portrayed and discussed in the public sphere.

To complement these sources, relevant policy papers, white papers, and analytical reports from think tanks and research organizations will be reviewed. These documents often

provide in-depth analysis and evaluations of conflict management strategies and foreign policy tools, offering valuable perspectives on the effectiveness of various approaches.

By relying on secondary data, this study will ensure a comprehensive examination of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute. The analysis will integrate diverse sources of information to provide a well-rounded understanding of the conflicts and the strategies employed in their management.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study is designed to extract meaningful insights from the secondary data collected on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute. This section outlines the analytical framework and methods for interpreting the data to address the research questions and objectives.

3.6.1 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for this study involves a combination of thematic and comparative analysis. Thematic analysis is employed to identify and interpret key themes and patterns within the secondary data. This approach allows for a detailed examination of the recurring issues, strategies, and outcomes related to the conflicts.

Thematic analysis begins with coding the data into various categories based on recurring themes and topics. This process involves organizing the data into themes such as geopolitical factors, ethnic dimensions, foreign policy tools, and conflict management

strategies. By analyzing these themes, the study aims to uncover underlying patterns and trends that influence the conflicts and their resolution.

In addition to thematic analysis, comparative analysis is used to juxtapose the findings from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with those from the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute. This comparative approach highlights similarities and differences in the conflict management strategies and foreign policy tools employed in each case. The goal is to evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches and identify best practices or areas for improvement.

3.6.2 Data Interpretation

Data interpretation involves contextualizing the findings within geopolitical and historical contexts of the conflicts. This step ensures that the analysis is grounded in an understanding of the complex factors influencing each conflict. The interpretation process begins with a contextual analysis of the themes identified through thematic analysis. This involves examining how the themes relate to the geopolitical, ethnic, and historical aspects of the conflicts. For example, the study will explore how ethnic tensions and geopolitical interests shape the management strategies and foreign policy tools used in each conflict.

Comparative data interpretation focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of conflict management strategies by comparing the outcomes and impacts observed in the two case studies. This involves assessing how different strategies have addressed the conflicts' root causes, managed tensions, and contributed to resolution efforts. The analysis will also

consider the role of international actors and organizations in influencing the conflicts and their management.

The data interpretation aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conflicts' dynamics and the effectiveness of various management approaches. By integrating thematic and comparative analysis, the study will offer valuable insights into the conflicts and contribute to a deeper understanding of conflict resolution strategies and foreign policy tools.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are a crucial aspect of conducting research, ensuring that the study adheres to principles of integrity and respect. This section outlines the ethical guidelines and practices observed in the data collection and analysis processes for this study.

1. Confidentiality

Although this study relies exclusively on secondary data, maintaining confidentiality and respecting the privacy of the sources is paramount. For sources that involve sensitive information, such as unpublished reports or internal documents, the study will ensure that all data is handled with care and that any identifying details are omitted or anonymized. This approach safeguards the privacy of individuals and organizations involved and adheres to ethical standards in research.

2. Bias and Objectivity

Addressing potential biases is a fundamental aspect of ensuring the objectivity of the research findings. The study acknowledges that secondary sources may present varying perspectives and biases depending on their origins. To mitigate these biases, the research will involve a thorough and critical review of diverse sources, including academic literature, official documents, and media reports. By considering multiple viewpoints and cross-referencing information, the study aims to present a balanced and objective analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute.

3. Integrity of Sources

Ensuring the accuracy and reliability of secondary data is critical to maintaining the study's credibility. The research will focus on reputable and authoritative sources, including peer-reviewed academic articles, official reports from recognized organizations, and well-regarded media outlets. By relying on high-quality sources, the study aims to uphold the integrity of its findings and contribute valuable insights to the field.

4. Ethical Review

While secondary data collection typically involves fewer ethical concerns compared to primary research, it is still essential to review the ethical implications of using specific sources. The study will adhere to ethical guidelines established by academic institutions and research organizations, ensuring that the data used is obtained and presented in an ethically sound manner.

The ethical considerations for this study are designed to uphold principles of confidentiality, objectivity, accuracy, and integrity. By adhering to these guidelines, the research aims to provide a responsible and credible analysis of the conflicts and their management strategies.

Chapter Four

Results and Discussion of Findings

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon are both characterized by interplays of geopolitical and ethnic factors. These disputes have shaped the regions' political landscapes and influenced foreign policy strategies in significant ways. This chapter aims to explore the geopolitical and ethnic dimensions that have driven these crises, the foreign policy tools utilized by the involved states and international actors, Also, by addressing the effectiveness of these conflict management strategies, this chapter will provide a detailed comparative analysis of the roles played by both regional and global actors in managing these protracted disputes.

4.1 Research Question 1: What are the geopolitical and ethnic factors influencing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute?

The geopolitical and ethnic underpinnings of both the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute have played roles in shaping the trajectory of these crises. In both regions, territorial disputes are intertwined with the identities, aspirations, and historical grievances of the local populations, making the conflicts not just political, but deeply rooted in the ethnic and cultural fabric of the affected areas. Below is a table comparing these factors in the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula conflicts.

Table 4.1: Comparative Geopolitical and Ethnic Factors in the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula Conflicts

Factor	Nagorno-Karabakh	Bakassi Peninsula
Historical Legacy	Soviet-era administrative decision	Colonial-era boundary errors
Ethnic Dynamics	Ethnic Armenians vs. Azerbaijanis	Indigenous ethnic groups vs. colonial boundaries
Territorial Basis	Autonomous oblast within Azerbaijan	Treaty-defined boundary contested post-independence
Post-Conflict Fragility	Ongoing military skirmishes, unresolved status	Relatively stabilized through international legal mechanisms
Economic Interests	Strategic location, minerals, agriculture	Oil, gas reserves, rich fisheries

Source: Researcher’s Compilation, 2025

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh as established, has its roots in the collapse of the Soviet Union, when ethnic Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast

sought unification with Armenia¹. Ethnic Armenians have historically made up over 90% of the population in the region, despite its official designation within Azerbaijani territory by Soviet authorities in the 1920s.² Armenians view Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of their historical homeland, with strong religious and cultural ties that date back centuries. This connection has been a rallying point for Armenian nationalism, with ethnic identity serving as a powerful tool for mobilizing domestic and diaspora support. For Azerbaijan, however, regards the territory as part of its sovereign state, drawing on international legal principles of territorial integrity. According to estimates, Azerbaijan lost 20% of its internationally recognized territory during the first phase of the conflict in the early 1990s, which displaced over 600,000 ethnic Azerbaijanis.³

The dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula is not driven primarily by ethnic divisions but rather by geopolitical and economic factors. The peninsula is located in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea, a strategic area for both nations due to its vast oil reserves and fishing resources. The peninsula is home to the Efik people, an ethnic group with historical ties to Nigeria, further complicating the territorial dispute. The population of Bakassi, predominantly Nigerian, opposed the transfer of sovereignty to Cameroon, seeing themselves as ethnically and culturally aligned with Nigeria. While the ethnic factor is less prominent than in Nagorno-Karabakh, it plays a role in the post-conflict period, as many Bakassi residents have resisted Cameroonian control. Many were displaced, and over 100,000 Bakassi inhabitants fled to Nigeria following the International Court of Justice ruling, creating humanitarian issues.⁴

Nigeria, until the ICJ ruling in 2002, claimed Bakassi based on historical treaties, notably the Anglo-German Agreement of 1913, which placed Bakassi under Nigerian sovereignty. Cameroon's claim, however, rested on later colonial treaties, and the ICJ's ruling was

based on colonial boundaries, awarding the peninsula to Cameroon. Despite Nigeria's initial resistance, the territory was formally handed over in 2006 following diplomatic negotiations. Economically, the Gulf of Guinea is a geopolitical flashpoint due to its oil reserves. Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer, sought to retain control of Bakassi for strategic reasons, while Cameroon's claim was driven by the prospect of accessing its own oil reserves in the region. The involvement of multinational oil companies and external actors just shows the geopolitical significance of the Bakassi Peninsula.

Therefore, while both conflicts involve territorial disputes, the role of ethnic divisions is more pronounced in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is a classic example of ethnic self-determination clashing with territorial integrity, with external powers like Russia and Turkey exacerbating the dispute⁵. In contrast, the Bakassi Peninsula dispute is primarily geopolitical, focused on control over resources and strategic territory, with ethnicity playing a more secondary role in the post-conflict phase.

4.2 Research Question 2: How have the involved states and international actors utilized foreign policy tools and strategies to manage these conflicts?

Both the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute have witnessed the deployment of various foreign policy tools by the involved states, aimed at securing territorial claims and managing the crises. The use of diplomacy, military force, and legal avenues has been pivotal in the strategies employed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, and Cameroon. These tools have been shaped by the unique geopolitical contexts of each conflict, as well as the foreign policy objectives of the states involved.

Table 4.2: Comparative Foreign Policy Strategies in the Management of the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula Conflicts

Foreign Policy Tool	Nagorno-Karabakh		Bakassi Peninsula	
	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Nigeria	Cameroon
Diplomatic Engagements	1. Participated in OSCE Minsk Group negotiations since 1992. 2. Engaged in trilateral talks with Russia and Azerbaijan, leading to the 2020 ceasefire agreement. 3. Recent shift towards EU and US mediation efforts.	1. Engaged in OSCE Minsk Group negotiations. 2. Participated in trilateral talks with Russia and Armenia. 3. Strengthened diplomatic ties with Turkey and other regional players.	1. Engaged in UN-mediated negotiations post-ICJ ruling. 2. Signed the Greentree Agreement in 2006 to facilitate peaceful transfer of Bakassi.	1. Initiated legal proceedings at the ICJ in 1994. 2. Participated in UN-mediated negotiations leading to the Greentree Agreement.
Military Actions	1. Maintained control over Nagorno-Karabakh until 2020. 2. Faced military setbacks during the 2020 conflict.	1. Launched military offensives in 2020 and 2023 to regain control over Nagorno-Karabakh. 2. Achieved significant territorial gains.	1. Maintained military presence in Bakassi until the ICJ ruling. 2. Withdrew forces following the Greentree Agreement.	1. Limited military involvement; relied on legal and diplomatic channels.
Bilateral Talks	1. Engaged in direct negotiations with Azerbaijan, including recent discussions on border demarcation and peace agreements.	1. Participated in bilateral talks with Armenia, focusing on reintegration of Nagorno-Karabakh and regional cooperation.	1. Collaborated with Cameroon through the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission to implement the ICJ ruling.	1. Worked with Nigeria via the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission to ensure peaceful resolution and boundary demarcation.
Court Appeals	1. No significant international legal actions noted.	- No significant international legal actions noted.	1. Accepted the ICJ ruling in 2002, which awarded Bakassi to Cameroon.	1. Filed a case with the ICJ in 1994, resulting in a favorable ruling in 2002.
Alliances	1. Historically aligned with Russia; member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). 2. Recent efforts to diversify alliances, engaging more with EU and US.	1. Strong alliance with Turkey, receiving military and political support. 2. Maintains strategic partnerships with Russia and other regional powers.	1. Cooperated with the UN and international community to implement the ICJ decision.	1. Engaged with the UN and international partners to ensure enforcement of the ICJ ruling and peaceful transition.

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2025

In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan have relied heavily on military force as a key foreign policy tool to assert their respective territorial claims. Military escalation has been a recurrent strategy for both sides, particularly Azerbaijan, which utilized military intervention in 2020 to shift the balance of power in its favor. Azerbaijan's reliance on military intervention has been central to its foreign policy. The most notable example is the 2020 war, during which Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey, launched a full-scale offensive to reclaim territories in and around Nagorno-Karabakh that had been under Armenian control since the 1990s. Azerbaijan's military strategy was bolstered by its use of advanced military technology such as drones supplied by Turkey and Israel, which significantly contributed to its battlefield successes. This military victory altered the geopolitical landscape and forced Armenia to agree to a ceasefire that ceded much of the disputed territory back to Azerbaijan. By integrating military force with regional alliances, Azerbaijan has demonstrated the importance of military strength in pursuing foreign policy objectives.

In contrast, Armenia has largely pursued a strategy of diplomatic engagement and international mediation. Armenia has relied on its historical alliance with Russia, a key regional actor, to balance Azerbaijan's military advantages. Russia's role in mediating ceasefires and deploying peacekeeping forces has been crucial in preventing a total Azerbaijani victory, though Armenia's dependency on Russia has highlighted its limitations in securing long-term control over Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia has also engaged with international organizations like the OSCE Minsk Group, a mediating body tasked with facilitating peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, these diplomatic efforts have often failed to produce lasting solutions, as military realities on the ground have frequently overshadowed negotiations.

Unlike the militarized Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon has been managed primarily through legal mechanisms and diplomatic negotiations, which have led to a relatively peaceful resolution of the territorial conflict. After decades of tension and minor skirmishes between Nigerian and Cameroonian forces, the dispute was taken to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which issued its ruling in 2002, awarding sovereignty over the peninsula to Cameroon. The decision was based on colonial-era treaties, particularly the Anglo-German Agreement of 1913, which placed the peninsula within Cameroon's boundaries. Although Nigeria initially rejected the ruling, domestic and international pressure, combined with the fear of a full-scale conflict, led to Nigeria's eventual compliance in 2006, when it formally withdrew its military forces and handed over the territory to Cameroon. Nigeria's decision to comply with the ICJ ruling and avoid further military escalation was framed as a demonstration of its commitment to international law and the peaceful settlement of dispute.⁶

For Cameroon, the successful legal outcome was a major diplomatic victory. Cameroon's reliance on international institutions like the ICJ and the UN helped to secure its territorial claims without resorting to military force. In the aftermath of the ICJ ruling, Cameroon sought to consolidate its control over Bakassi by integrating the local population and securing the region economically. However, Cameroon faced ongoing challenges related to the integration of the Bakassi population, many of whom have resisted Cameroonian governance, preferring to maintain their historical and ethnic ties to Nigeria.⁷

4.3 Research Question 3: How do the approaches and effectiveness of conflict management strategies compare between the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute?

Table 4.3: Comparative Effectiveness of Conflict Management Strategies in the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula Disputes

Criteria	Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia & Azerbaijan)	Bakassi Peninsula (Nigeria & Cameroon)
Duration of Peace	Intermittent ceasefires since 1994; major conflicts in 2020 and 2023. A tentative peace agreement was reached in 2025, but full implementation remains pending.	ICJ ruling in 2002 led to the Greentree Agreement in 2006. Nigeria completed the transfer of Bakassi to Cameroon by 2008, resulting in sustained peace since then.
Satisfaction of Parties	Azerbaijan regained significant territories, aligning with its objectives. Armenia faces internal dissent over concessions, including the transfer of villages.	Cameroon achieved its goal of sovereignty over Bakassi. Nigeria complied with the ICJ ruling, though some domestic dissatisfaction persists.

Displacement & Humanitarian Impact	Approximately 100,000 ethnic Armenians fled Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 due to Azerbaijani military operations. Humanitarian concerns remain significant.	Displacement occurred during the handover, with some Nigerian residents relocating. Resettlement challenges have been reported, but large-scale humanitarian crises were avoided.
Return of Territories	Azerbaijan regained control over Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas. Armenia ceded additional villages as part of ongoing negotiations.	Nigeria transferred Bakassi to Cameroon as per the ICJ ruling and Greentree Agreement, completing the process by 2008.
Long-Term Stability	The region remains volatile, with unresolved issues and potential for renewed conflict. Russian peacekeepers are present, but their long-term role is uncertain.	The dispute has been resolved peacefully, with ongoing cooperation between Nigeria and Cameroon. Some local grievances persist but have not escalated into conflict.

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2025

The Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula conflicts, while rooted in territorial and ethnic tensions, showcase starkly different approaches to conflict management. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been primarily militarized, with a heavy emphasis on armed confrontation, ethnic mobilization, and geopolitical competition. In contrast, the Bakassi Peninsula dispute was resolved largely through diplomatic and legal means, demonstrating the potential for peaceful conflict resolution when international law and multilateral institutions are prioritized. This section analyzes and compares the key strategies used in each conflict and evaluates their effectiveness. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been dominated by the use of military force, while the Bakassi Peninsula dispute was settled through international legal arbitration and diplomacy.

When assessing the effectiveness of these strategies, the stark contrast between Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi becomes evident. In Nagorno-Karabakh, military strategies have led to high human costs, protracted instability, and ethnic cleansing, with little hope for a

permanent resolution in the near future.⁸ Conversely, the Bakassi dispute, managed through legal diplomacy, resulted in a relatively peaceful outcome.⁹

Despite Azerbaijan's military victory in 2020, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains unresolved. The military-centric approach has led to recurring cycles of violence, with ceasefires providing only temporary relief. The human toll of the conflict has been immense, with thousands of soldiers and civilians killed, hundreds of thousands displaced, and deep ethnic divisions entrenched. Moreover, the involvement of regional powers like Turkey and Russia complicates the prospects for lasting peace, as both countries have their own strategic interests in the region. The use of military force in Nagorno-Karabakh has proven effective in achieving short-term gains, particularly for Azerbaijan, but it has failed to address the underlying ethnic and territorial grievances that fuel the conflict. Without a comprehensive peace settlement, the risk of renewed violence remains high. Furthermore, the ethnic dimension of the conflict, rooted in the historical enmity between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, continues to drive irredentist claims and identity-based mobilization, preventing meaningful dialogue and reconciliation.

The Bakassi Peninsula dispute, by contrast, has demonstrated the potential for peaceful conflict resolution through legal mechanisms. The ICJ ruling provided a clear and internationally recognized solution to the territorial dispute, and Nigeria's eventual compliance with the ruling helped to avert military confrontation. The peaceful handover of Bakassi to Cameroon in 2006, overseen by the UN, was a significant diplomatic achievement, and it remains one of the few examples of successful legal diplomacy in Africa.⁷ However, the long-term stability of the Bakassi region remains fragile. The displacement of tens of thousands of Nigerians following the handover created humanitarian challenges, while local resistance to Cameroonian rule has occasionally

flared up. Despite these challenges, the conflict management strategy employed in Bakassi has been far more effective in preventing violence and ensuring a degree of stability than the militarized approach seen in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The comparative analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula conflicts reveals key lessons about the effectiveness of conflict management strategies. One is that Militarization can yield short-term gains but at a high human and political cost. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demonstrates how military victories, such as Azerbaijan’s in 2020, can shift the balance of power but fail to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict. Ethnic tensions, territorial claims, and external interference continue to fuel instability in the region. Second, legal and diplomatic approaches provide a viable pathway to peaceful conflict resolution. By turning to the ICJ and complying with its ruling, Nigeria and Cameroon avoided a protracted and bloody conflict, though challenges related to displacement and integration remain.

4.4 Research Question 4: What role have international actors and organizations played in managing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute, and what has been their impact?

Table 4.4: Roles and Impacts of International Actors in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Actor	Role & Impact
Russia	Brokered the 2020 ceasefire and deployed approximately 1,960 peacekeepers to monitor compliance. However, Russia's peacekeeping efforts have faced criticism for ineffectiveness, particularly during the 2023 Azerbaijani offensive, which led to the displacement of ethnic Armenians.
OSCE Minsk Group (US, France, Russia)	Established in 1992 to mediate the conflict. Despite early efforts, the group has been largely ineffective, with its activities diminishing post-2020 due to geopolitical shifts and internal disagreements.

United Nations	Limited direct involvement. While the UN has called for peaceful resolutions and respect for international law, it has not played a central role in mediation or peacekeeping in this conflict.
Turkey	Provided significant military and political support to Azerbaijan, influencing the balance of power in the region.
European Union & United States	Post-2020, both have attempted to mediate and provide humanitarian assistance. However, their influence has been limited compared to regional actors.

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2025

The involvement of international actors and organizations helps in understanding the dynamics of conflict management in both the Nagorno-Karabakh and Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula disputes. International organizations, particularly the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), have played significant roles in both conflicts, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the OSCE established the Minsk Group in 1992 to facilitate negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The group, co-chaired by Russia, the United States, and France, aimed to promote a peaceful settlement through diplomatic dialogue. Despite multiple rounds of negotiations and proposals for conflict resolution, the Minsk Group has been criticized for its lack of tangible results and effectiveness in achieving a lasting peace.¹⁰

One of the key challenges faced by the Minsk Group has been the influence of external actors like Turkey and Russia, which have their own strategic interests in the region. Turkey's strong support for Azerbaijan, especially during the 2020 war, complicated the mediation efforts, as did Russia's dual role as both a mediator and an ally of Armenia.¹⁰ As a result, the OSCE's influence has been undermined, and its capacity to facilitate a comprehensive peace settlement has been questioned.

Russia

Russia has positioned itself as a key player in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, historically acting as a mediator while also maintaining close ties with Armenia. The 2020 ceasefire agreement, brokered by Russia, resulted in the deployment of Russian peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh, solidifying Russia's role as a security guarantor. However, Russia's dual role has been criticized, as it simultaneously supports Armenia while allowing Azerbaijan to regain territory, reflecting a balancing act driven by its geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus.

The Russian involvement has led to accusations of biased mediation, as Armenia views Russia's actions as undermining its security. This complex relationship complicates the peace process and highlights the challenges posed by regional power dynamics in conflict management.

Turkey

Turkey's support for Azerbaijan, particularly during the 2020 war, has significantly altered the conflict dynamics. Ankara's provision of military assistance and strategic partnership with Baku has strengthened Azerbaijan's position, enabling it to reclaim territory. Turkey's involvement exemplifies how regional powers can shape conflict outcomes and influence the course of negotiations.

In the context of the Bakassi Peninsula dispute, regional powers had a more limited role. While both Nigeria and Cameroon are members of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), their conflict resolution efforts primarily relied on international legal mechanisms rather than regional diplomacy. The relative stability in West Africa

and the absence of competing regional interests facilitated a more straightforward resolution through the ICJ and UN.

Table 4.5: Roles and Impacts of International Actors in the Bakassi Peninsula Conflict

Actor	Role & Impact
International Court of Justice (ICJ)	Delivered a binding judgment in 2002, awarding sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon. Both nations accepted the ruling, setting a precedent for peaceful resolution of territorial disputes.
United Nations	Played a pivotal role in mediating the dispute post-ICJ ruling. Facilitated the Greentree Agreement in 2006, ensuring a peaceful transfer of authority and establishing the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission to oversee implementation.
African Union (AU)	Supported the peaceful resolution process, reinforcing the importance of respecting international legal decisions within the continent.
ECOWAS	While not directly involved in mediation, ECOWAS supported the peaceful resolution and emphasized regional stability.(UN News, UN News)

Source: Researcher’s Compilation,2025

The resolution of the Bakassi Peninsula dispute involved the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the United Nations more directly. The ICJ’s ruling in 2002 provided a clear legal framework for resolving the territorial dispute based on historical treaties. The

court's decision was significant in legitimizing Cameroon's claims to the peninsula and setting a precedent for peaceful conflict resolution in Africa.

The UN played a supportive role in facilitating the implementation of the ICJ ruling. The establishment of the UN Peacekeeping Force in West Africa helped monitor the situation in Bakassi during the transition period, ensuring that the handover to Cameroon was conducted peacefully. The involvement of these international organizations underscores the potential for legal frameworks and diplomatic interventions to manage conflicts and achieve peaceful resolutions.

In the Bakassi dispute, the role of non-state actors has been more subdued. Civil society organizations and local communities have been involved in advocacy and dialogue, but their influence on the conflict resolution process has been limited. The legal and diplomatic focus of the resolution has overshadowed grassroots engagement, although local stakeholders are critical in implementing peace initiatives and fostering community relations post-conflict.

Table 4.6: Comparative Impact of International Interventions in the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula Conflicts

Criteria	Nagorno-Karabakh	Bakassi Peninsula
Mediation Outcomes	Multiple ceasefires brokered, but long-term resolution remains elusive.	Successful mediation leading to a binding ICJ judgment and peaceful implementation.
Peacekeeping Deployment	Russian peacekeepers deployed; effectiveness questioned due to subsequent conflicts and displacement.	No peacekeeping forces deployed; peaceful transfer achieved through diplomatic means.
Enforceability of Decisions	Ceasefire agreements have been fragile, with violations leading to renewed hostilities.	ICJ ruling effectively enforced with UN support, leading to lasting peace.

Funding for Reconstruction	Limited international funding; reconstruction efforts hampered by ongoing tensions.	UN and international community provided support for resettlement and development projects.(Middle East Institute)
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Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2025

In terms of mediation outcomes, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has witnessed several brokered ceasefires facilitated by international actors, most notably through the OSCE Minsk Group. However, these efforts have not produced a lasting resolution. Ceasefires have often been temporary, with frequent violations and recurring hostilities, indicating a limited impact of international mediation. In contrast, the Bakassi Peninsula dispute was resolved through legal diplomacy under the auspices of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The resulting judgment was binding and led to a peaceful and coordinated transfer of territory from Nigeria to Cameroon, demonstrating a more definitive and successful mediation process.

Regarding peacekeeping deployment, the post-ceasefire phase in Nagorno-Karabakh involved the deployment of Russian peacekeepers intended to stabilize the region. However, the effectiveness of this deployment has been widely questioned, particularly due to subsequent flare-ups and displacement of civilians. Conversely, the Bakassi dispute required no deployment of peacekeeping troops. Instead, the peaceful resolution was achieved solely through diplomatic engagement and international legal mechanisms, underscoring the efficacy of non-military intervention in certain contexts.

On the enforceability of decisions, the Nagorno-Karabakh region has experienced considerable difficulties in implementing and maintaining ceasefire agreements. Violations and renewed aggression have undermined the legitimacy and durability of these agreements. On the other hand, the enforcement of the ICJ ruling in the Bakassi

case was markedly more effective. Supported by the United Nations and key international stakeholders, the decision was implemented smoothly, leading to a relatively stable and lasting peace between Nigeria and Cameroon.

Also, with respect to funding for reconstruction, Nagorno-Karabakh has seen limited international investment, and ongoing political tensions continue to hinder development and resettlement efforts. By contrast, the Bakassi Peninsula benefited from international support, including resettlement initiatives and development projects backed by the United Nations and various international partners, as noted by the Middle East Institute. This external support played a crucial role in mitigating the humanitarian impact of the transition and fostering post-conflict recovery.

In summary, the comparison underscores the varying degrees of success in international interventions. The Bakassi Peninsula serves as a model of effective legal and diplomatic conflict resolution, while the Nagorno-Karabakh case illustrates the limitations of ceasefire diplomacy and peacekeeping in the absence of enforceable agreements and consistent international pressure.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that both conflicts are rooted in territorial disputes, but the forces driving them differ fundamentally. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is shaped primarily by ethnic nationalism and competing historical narratives, whereas the Bakassi Peninsula dispute is anchored more firmly in geopolitical interests and colonial treaty legacies. As supported by a study, the ethnic dimension of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, centered on Armenian self-determination, has intensified irredentist tendencies, consistent with the

logic of Mackinder's Heartland Theory.¹¹ The region, viewed as a strategic "pivot area," became an arena for identity-driven geopolitical competition.

In contrast, the Bakassi dispute reflects the principles of Mahan's Sea Power Theory. Control over maritime space, rich in oil and fishing resources, was a principal driver. Nigeria's desire to retain Bakassi stemmed from its resource value and strategic positioning in the Gulf of Guinea. Here, sea-based geopolitical logic, rather than land-based ethnic self-rule, dominated state interests. While ethnicity played a supporting role, especially in the post-handover humanitarian crisis, the overriding motivation was resource-based state security, echoing maritime strategic imperatives.

Also, the comparison of state responses as regards to research question two, shows a clear divergence in foreign policy strategy. Azerbaijan's aggressive military diplomacy, including its strategic alliance with Turkey and deployment of drone warfare, was contrasted with Armenia's reliance on Russia and multilateral diplomacy.¹² This divergence illustrates the Rimland Theory in action, where control over the borderlands and alliances along Eurasia's coastal periphery defines influence. Azerbaijan leveraged its rimland position to access modern warfare tools and strategic partnerships.

In the Bakassi case, the Nigerian government's acceptance of the ICJ judgment, despite public dissent, highlights a turn towards legal diplomacy. The Greentree Agreement's peaceful enforcement exemplifies effective use of soft power, contrasting sharply with the hard power employed in Nagorno-Karabakh. Nigeria's strategy demonstrated legal restraint for the sake of international reputation and long-term economic partnerships, especially given the regional implications for oil exploration and maritime security.¹³

Moreover, while both conflicts saw the deployment of conflict resolution mechanisms, their effectiveness varied widely. The Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreements, though numerous, failed to produce sustainable peace. Russian peacekeepers were unable to prevent renewed hostilities in 2023, and the continued displacement of ethnic Armenians underscores the fragility of the region. This validates critiques of the Minsk Group's ineffectiveness and reinforces the idea that without enforceable structures, ceasefires remain tactical pauses.¹⁴

The Bakassi Peninsula resolution, however, emerged as a model for peaceful conflict management. Through the enforceable ICJ ruling, facilitated by the UN and African Union, both Nigeria and Cameroon engaged in an internationally supervised transition. The presence of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission and adherence to the Greentree Agreement ensured a structured implementation process, demonstrating the potential of legal diplomacy in complex disputes. Still, challenges related to displacement and local dissent persist, reminding us that institutional compliance doesn't always secure grassroots harmony.¹⁵

Lastly, the findings also reveal stark contrasts in international engagement. In Nagorno-Karabakh, external actors like Russia and Turkey played self-interested, sometimes contradictory roles. Russia mediated ceasefires while simultaneously enabling Armenian dependence, and Turkey openly backed Azerbaijan militarily. These dualities reflect the power rivalries inherent in Heartland and Rimland frameworks, where control over buffer zones and alliances dictate regional hegemony.

Conversely, the Bakassi Peninsula benefited from coherent international legal intervention. The ICJ ruling served as a decisive turning point, and the UN's diplomatic efforts lent legitimacy and enforceability to the process. The African Union and

ECOWAS supported the peaceful transition, highlighting the importance of coordinated multilateralism in dispute resolution.

Revisiting the Heartland, Rimland, and Sea Power theories reveals how geographical constructs still shape modern conflict. Nagorno-Karabakh fits the Heartland model: a strategic inland zone where ethnic identity, historical grievance, and regional rivalry converge. Azerbaijan's military strategy mirrors Spykman's Rimland vision, leveraging access to maritime allies like Turkey to influence continental outcomes. Meanwhile, Bakassi embodies Sea Power logic, where maritime control, international trade routes, and resource extraction take precedence over ethnic considerations.

The comparison affirms that legal and diplomatic strategies, when backed by enforceable mechanisms and international legitimacy, can yield lasting peace, as demonstrated in Bakassi. In contrast, militarized solutions may offer short-term victories but rarely secure enduring resolution, as seen in Nagorno-Karabakh. The strategic choices made by state actors, shaped by geography, alliances, and legal obligations, determine the conflict trajectory more than the conflict's origin.

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Chapter Five

Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Research Findings

This research has provided an in-depth comparative analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon. Both conflicts, though geographically distant and involving different ethnic groups, share common threads that highlight the intricate relationship between geopolitics, ethnicity, and foreign policy.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is deeply rooted in ethnic tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The historical claims to the region are intertwined with national

identities, each side viewing the land as an integral part of their cultural and historical heritage. The dissolution of the Soviet Union exacerbated these tensions, resulting in violent conflict over the control of the region. The geopolitical significance of Nagorno-Karabakh, positioned at a strategic intersection between regional powers such as Russia, Turkey, and Iran, has further complicated efforts toward resolution. Both regional and global powers have found themselves involved in the conflict, not only out of historical or ethnic affiliations but also because of the strategic importance of the South Caucasus as a bridge between Europe and Asia.

On the other hand, the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute, though less about ethnic identity, revolves around issues of colonial legacy and economic resources. The conflict arose from ambiguous colonial-era boundaries between Nigeria and Cameroon, with both countries laying claim to the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula. Unlike Nagorno-Karabakh, the core of the Bakassi dispute is less about ethnic affiliations and more about the control of strategic resources such as oil and fisheries, which are vital to both Nigeria's and Cameroon's economies. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in favor of Cameroon and the subsequent Green Tree Agreement, facilitated by international actors, helped to ease the immediate tensions, but local resistance and dissatisfaction have persisted among the Bakassi people, many of whom identify more closely with Nigeria.

In both cases, the research has highlighted the significant role played by international actors in conflict management. For Nagorno-Karabakh, the involvement of Russia, Turkey, and the OSCE Minsk Group has shaped much of the diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict, though with mixed success. The Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute, meanwhile, saw the ICJ and the United Nations playing key roles in mediating a peaceful

resolution, with the Green Tree Agreement serving as a framework for cooperation between Nigeria and Cameroon.

Ultimately, this comparative study underscores the complexity of territorial disputes, particularly when compounded by ethnic identities, historical claims, and geopolitical interests. Both cases illustrate the challenges of implementing foreign policy tools in contexts where local grievances, economic interests, and international dynamics are deeply intertwined.

5.2 Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute has provided critical insights into how geopolitical, ethnic, and foreign policy dynamics shape the management and outcomes of territorial conflicts. Both cases, while unique in their regional contexts, reveal common challenges that underline the complexity of resolving disputes over land and sovereignty.

In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, it is clear that ethnic tensions and historical claims play a central role in prolonging the conflict. The region, claimed by both Armenia and Azerbaijan, symbolizes more than just territorial control, it represents deep-seated national identities and aspirations. The persistent nature of the conflict, even after multiple ceasefires and diplomatic negotiations, underscores the difficulties of achieving lasting peace when ethnic divisions and national pride are at the forefront of the dispute. The involvement of external actors like Russia and Turkey has further complicated the situation, as their geopolitical interests often drive them to support conflicting sides, thus perpetuating the instability in the South Caucasus.

The Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute, while also involving territorial claims, stands apart due to its focus on economic and strategic resources. The conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon primarily revolved around control of the Peninsula's rich oil reserves and maritime resources, making it a conflict deeply intertwined with the economic interests of both nations. The resolution of this conflict through the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Green Tree Agreement highlights the potential for international legal mechanisms to play a constructive role in territorial disputes. However, the continuing dissatisfaction of the Bakassi people, who feel culturally and historically connected to Nigeria despite the Peninsula's transfer to Cameroon, demonstrates that legal resolutions do not always resolve underlying social and identity-based tensions.

This study highlights the importance of recognizing both geopolitical and local dynamics in conflict management. While international actors and legal frameworks can offer mechanisms for dispute resolution, their success is often limited when local grievances and ethnic identities are not adequately addressed. The Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi Peninsula conflicts exemplify how the convergence of local, national, and international factors complicates the search for sustainable peace. It is evident that long-term stability in such conflicts requires more than just political or legal agreements, it demands a comprehensive approach that acknowledges and integrates the concerns of local populations and respects their historical and cultural identities.

5.3 Recommendations

Drawing from the insights and conclusions of this study, several recommendations emerge for effectively managing territorial conflicts such as those seen in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula. These recommendations aim to address

both the immediate issues at stake and the underlying factors that contribute to the persistence of such disputes.

1. First and foremost, it is essential to prioritize inclusive dialogue and negotiation processes that involve all stakeholders, particularly local populations. In both the Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi conflicts, the voices of the people directly affected by the disputes have often been marginalized. Establishing platforms for community engagement can facilitate a better understanding of local grievances and aspirations, ultimately leading to more acceptable and sustainable solutions. For instance, initiatives that promote inter-community dialogue between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, as well as between the Bakassi people and both the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments, could help bridge divides and foster a sense of ownership in the peace process.

2. Furthermore, it is vital for international actors to adopt a more balanced approach in their mediation efforts. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the involvement of regional powers like Russia and Turkey has sometimes escalated tensions rather than alleviating them. A neutral stance from international mediators, such as the OSCE Minsk Group, may foster an environment conducive to compromise and cooperation. In the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula case, continued engagement by the United Nations and other international organizations can help ensure that the rights and needs of the Bakassi people are respected in governance structures post-resolution.

3. Another critical recommendation is the integration of economic development strategies into conflict resolution frameworks. In both conflicts, control over valuable resources has been a driving factor. Therefore, creating economic incentives that promote cooperation rather than competition is essential. For example, joint resource management agreements in the Gulf of Guinea could benefit both Nigeria and

Cameroon, fostering interdependence that reduces the likelihood of future conflicts. Similarly, investment in infrastructure and economic projects that benefit both Armenia and Azerbaijan could lay the groundwork for lasting peace in the South Caucasus.

4. Moreover, addressing historical narratives and national identities is crucial for long-term reconciliation. Educational initiatives that promote mutual understanding and respect for different cultural identities can help mitigate the deep-seated animosities that fuel these conflicts. In the context of Nagorno-Karabakh, teaching balanced histories that acknowledge the perspectives of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis can foster a culture of peace among future generations. For the Nigeria-Bakassi dispute, promoting awareness of the cultural ties of the Bakassi people to Nigeria while encouraging respect for Cameroonian sovereignty can help facilitate coexistence.

5. Lastly, it is important to build strong local governance structures that empower communities to participate in decision-making processes. This can be particularly effective in ensuring that the needs and rights of marginalized groups are addressed in post-conflict governance. For example, establishing local councils that include representatives from Bakassi, Nigeria, and Cameroon can provide a platform for addressing ongoing grievances and ensuring that the interests of all parties are considered in future policy-making.

By adopting these recommendations, stakeholders can work toward sustainable solutions that not only resolve immediate disputes but also lay the groundwork for lasting peace and stability in regions affected by similar conflicts.

5.4 Suggestion for Future Studies

The examination of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute opens avenues for further research that can contribute to a deeper understanding of territorial conflicts in a global context. Future studies can explore various dimensions of these conflicts and related themes that extend beyond the immediate cases.

One area for further research could focus on the role of regional organizations in conflict resolution. Analyzing the effectiveness of organizations such as the African Union (AU) in the Nigeria-Bakassi Peninsula dispute and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of regional diplomatic efforts. This would also highlight how regional dynamics influence international mediation and the overall success of peace initiatives.

Another promising avenue for future research is the impact of economic interdependence on conflict resolution. Investigating how shared economic interests, such as trade agreements and joint resource management, can facilitate peace-building efforts would offer valuable insights into sustainable conflict management. Case studies that analyze existing partnerships in resource-rich regions might reveal effective strategies for mitigating tensions and fostering cooperation.

Additionally, future studies could delve into the role of civil society organizations and grassroots movements in peace-building processes. Exploring how local communities, advocacy groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engage in dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict prevention would shed light on the importance of bottom-up approaches in addressing territorial disputes. Research in this area could assess the effectiveness of local initiatives and their potential to influence policy at national and international levels.

Moreover, the intersection of climate change and territorial disputes presents another critical area for exploration. As environmental challenges increasingly affect resource availability and population displacement, understanding how climate change impacts conflicts like those in Nagorno-Karabakh and Bakassi could yield important insights into emerging security threats. Investigating the ways in which climate-induced factors exacerbate existing grievances or create new conflicts would contribute to the growing field of environmental security studies.

Lastly, comparative studies that extend beyond these two cases to include other territorial disputes globally could enhance the understanding of common patterns, dynamics, and conflict resolution strategies. By drawing parallels between different contexts, researchers can identify best practices and lessons learned that may apply to a broader range of territorial conflicts.

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Role of Regional cum International Organisations and Shadow Party Involvements in the Nagorno-Karabakh Geopolitical Conflict.

Adekunle Abdulkabir Akinlade & EmmaJimo EmmaJimo,

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This is to certify that this thesis by Adekunle Abdulkabir AKINLADE with Matriculation No. LCU/PG/005581 in the Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Lead City University, Ibadan is in full compliance with the university approved style.

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