

Europe

Nagorno-Karabakh: UN urges ceasefire as Azerbaijan and Armenia dismiss talks

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Associated Press

Wed 30 Sep 2020 06.27 BST



▲ An apartment building in the Tartar border district of Azerbaijan allegedly damaged in recent shelling during the fighting over the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Photograph: Aziz Karimov/Getty Images

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In the latest incident, Armenia said one of its warplanes was shot down by a fighter jet from Azerbaijan's ally Turkey, killing the pilot, in what would be a major escalation of the violence. Both Turkey and Azerbaijan denied it.

The international community is calling for talks to end the decades-old conflict between the two former Soviet republics in the Caucasus Mountains region following a flare-up of violence this week. It centres on Nagorno-Karabakh, a region that lies within Azerbaijan but has been under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by the Armenian government since 1994 at the end of a separatist war.

1:58 Armenia and Azerbaijan clash over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region – video report

Azerbaijan's president, Ilham Aliyev, told Russian state TV channel Rossia 1 that Baku was committed to negotiating a resolution but accused Armenia of obstructing the process. "The Armenian prime minister publicly declares that Karabakh is [part of] Armenia, period. In this case, what kind of negotiating process can we talk about?" Aliyev said.

He added that according to principles brokered by the Minsk group, which was set up in 1992 by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to resolve the conflict, "territories around the former Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region should be transferred to Azerbaijan".

Aliyev noted that if the Armenian prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, says "that Karabakh is Armenia and that we should negotiate with the so-called puppet regime of Nagorno-Karabakh, [he is] trying to break the format of negotiations that has existed for 20 years".

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Nikol Pashinyan, Armenian prime minister

Pashinyan, in turn, told the broadcaster: "It is very hard to talk about negotiations ... when specific military operations are underway." He said there was no military solution to the conflict and called for a compromise.

But first, Azerbaijan must "immediately end aggression towards Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia", Pashinyan said. "We all perceive this as an existential threat to our nation, we basically perceive it as a war that was declared to the Armenian people, and our people are now simply forced to use the right for self-defence."

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people, and our people are now simply forced to use the right for self-defence.”

Since Sunday, the Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Ministry reported 84 servicemen had been killed. Aliyev said 11 civilians were killed on its side, although he didn't detail the country's military casualties.

Both countries accused each other of firing into their territory outside the Nagorno-Karabakh area on Tuesday.

The separatist region of about 4,400 sq km (1,700 sq miles), is 50km (30 miles) from the Armenian border. Soldiers backed by Armenia also occupy some Azerbaijani territory outside the region.

Armenia also alleged that Turkey, which supports Azerbaijan, was involved. “Turkey, according to our information, looks for an excuse for a broader involvement in this conflict,” Pashinyan said.

The Armenian military claimed an SU-25 from its air force was shot down in Armenian airspace by a Turkish F-16 fighter jet that took off from Azerbaijan, and that the pilot was killed.

The allegation was “absolutely untrue”, said Fahrettin Altun, a spokesperson for Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Azerbaijani officials called it “another fantasy of the Armenian military propaganda machine”.

Erdoğan urged Armenia to withdraw immediately from the separatist region, and Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Turkey was “by Azerbaijan's side on the field and at the [negotiating] table”.

Armenian officials said Turkey, a Nato member, was supplying Azerbaijan with fighters from Syria and weapons, including F-16 fighter jets. Both Azerbaijan and Turkey deny it.

Earlier in the day, Azerbaijan's defence ministry said Armenian forces shelled the Dashkesan region in Azerbaijan. Armenia's foreign ministry denied the reports. Armenian officials said Azerbaijani forces opened fire on a military unit in the Armenian town of Vardenis, setting a bus on fire and killing one civilian.

Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, has pushed for an immediate ceasefire and a return to the negotiating table in phone calls with the leaders of both countries, her office said.

She told them the two countries' neighbours "should contribute to the peaceful solution", said her spokesman, Steffen Seibert.

US secretary of state Mike Pompeo said "both sides must stop the violence" and work "to return to substantive negotiations as quickly as possible".

Russia, which along with France and the US co-chairs the Minsk group, urged every country to facilitate a peaceful resolution.

"We call on all countries, especially our partners such as Turkey, to do everything to convince the opposing parties to cease fire and return to peacefully resolving the conflict by politico-diplomatic means," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday.