

Nagorno-Karabakh

September 2020



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At least 16 dead in Armenia-Azerbaijan clashes over disputed region

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# At least 16 dead in Armenia-Azerbaijan clashes over disputed region

## Nagorno-Karabakh provides crucial transit routes for gas and oil to international market

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Sun 27 Sep 2020 11.25 BST



▲ People attend a meeting to recruit military volunteers after Armenian authorities declared martial law following clashes with Azerbaijan in Yerevan, Armenia. Photograph: Melik Baghdasaryan/Reuters

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Military recruitment

People attend a meeting to recruit military volunteers after Armenian authorities declared martial law following clashes with Azerbaijan in Yerevan, Armenia. Photograph: Melik Baghdasaryan/Reuters

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The clashes prompted a flurry of diplomacy to prevent a flare-up of a decades-old conflict between majority Christian Armenia and mainly Muslim Azerbaijan, with Russia calling for an immediate ceasefire and another regional power, Turkey, saying it would support Azerbaijan.

Pipelines shipping Caspian oil and natural gas from Azerbaijan to the world pass close to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Human right activists in Armenia said two civilians, a woman and a child, had been killed by Azerbaijani shelling. Armenian military officials have reported at least 10 casualties on their side.

Officials in Baku, the Azerbaijani capital, said an unspecified number of their civilians had been killed and six wounded, and Nagorno-Karabakh said 16 of its military staff had been killed. The reports could not be independently confirmed.

Azerbaijan's army said it had taken control of several villages in Nagorno-Karabakh as of Sunday afternoon, a claim that Armenia rejected.

The long-running dispute in the south Caucasus attracts regional and western concern because the area is a corridor for pipelines carrying oil and gas from the Caspian Sea to global markets.

Turkey has strong cultural and economic ties with Azerbaijan and has threatened to stand with it in any conflict. Russia, another regional power, is traditionally close to Armenia, but has been forging links with Azerbaijan's elites in past years.

The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said in a statement posted on Twitter that Armenia had "once again showed that it is the biggest threat to peace and tranquility in the region" and that Turkey stood by Azerbaijan "with all its means, as always".

Armenia's defence ministry on Sunday said its troops had destroyed three tanks and shot down two helicopters and three unmanned aerial vehicles in response to an attack on civilian targets including Nagorno-Karabakh's capital, Stepanakert.

“Our response will be proportionate, and the military-political leadership of Azerbaijan bears full responsibility for the situation,” the ministry said in a statement echoed by the foreign ministry.

The Armenian prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, wrote on Twitter: “We stay strong next to our army to protect our motherland from Azeri invasion.”

Azerbaijan denied the Armenian defence ministry statement, saying it had “complete advantage over the enemy on the front”, and accused Armenian forces of launching “deliberate and targeted” attacks along the front line.

“We defend our territory, our cause is right,” Azerbaijan’s president, Ilham Aliyev, said in an address to the nation.

The two former Soviet Republics have clashed for years over the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh, a mainly ethnic Armenian territory that is officially part of Azerbaijan but which broke away from the country as the Soviet Union was dissolving.

Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a six-year war over the region until a ceasefire in 1994, and since then Nagorno-Karabakh has governed itself as the de facto independent Republic of Artsakh.