

As divisions erupt within NATO

## Armenia, Azerbaijan bomb each other's cities

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A week after fighting erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan, bloodshed escalated this weekend as both sides bombarded each other's cities. A new eruption of the 1988-1994 war between the two former Soviet republics over control of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, which initially broke out in the run-up to the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, threatens to escalate into an all-out regional war.

The war threatens to drag in not only the two countries' main regional backers—Russia, which supports Armenia, and Turkey, which backs Azerbaijan—but also to intensify divisions within NATO. Calls are growing in France, which is already fighting a proxy war against Turkish-backed forces in Libya and backing Greek maritime claims in the Mediterranean against Turkey, to intervene more aggressively in support of Armenia.

Azeri barrages targeted several towns in Nagorno-Karabakh, which Armenian forces have held since 1994 and Azeri forces are trying to retake. Azeri forces also reported that they captured several villages there.

Azeri President Ilham Aliyev tweeted: “Today the Azeri army liberated the village of Talish in the Terter region; the villages of Mehdili, Chakhyrly, Ashagi Maralyan, Shaibey and Guidzhag in the Jibrail region; and the village of Ashagi Abdurrahmanli in the Fizuli region. Karabakh is Azerbaijan.”

On October 2, Armenian authorities reported that Azeri forces hit the road linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh with an Israeli-made LORA missile.

Yesterday, Armenian forces bombed Ganja, Azerbaijan's second-largest city after Baku, saying the risk of civilian casualties would not deter them. The Azeri Defense Ministry reported that in Ganja, “As a result of enemy fire, civilians, civilian infrastructure, and ancient historical buildings were harmed.”

Arayik Harutyunyan, the leader of Artsakh, the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh, said he would respond to strikes on his capital, Stepanakert, by bombing

Azeri cities. He declared: “The Azeri terrorist army is targeting civilians in Stepanakert, using Polonez and Smerch weapons systems. From now on, military targets in large Azeri cities are the target of the Defense Army of Artsakh. We are calling on the Azeri population to leave these cities to avoid inevitable losses.”

The toll in civilian and military losses is rising rapidly. Officials reported 21 civilian deaths in Azerbaijan and 13 in Armenia this weekend, with the military situation on the ground remaining unclear. Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh reported that 51 servicemen were killed on Saturday, while Azeri forces have declined to state their military losses.

In a TV address Saturday, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said: “As of now, we already have significant human losses, both military and civilian, large quantities of military equipment are no longer usable, but the adversary still has not been able to solve any of its strategic issues.”

Mortar fire from the Armenian-Azeri fighting also landed in neighboring Iran's East Azerbaijan province, causing damage, including a blackout in Khodafarin. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh warned against all violations of Iranian territory and called for a negotiated settlement.

In this war, the reactionary implications of the ethnic nationalism promoted by the Soviet bureaucracy in the run-up to capitalist restoration in 1991 are coming together with the explosive geopolitical tensions caused by the three subsequent decades of US-led wars in the region. The United States, France and Russia had brokered earlier talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet period, as well as discussions with Turkey. However, relations between these powers have collapsed amid bloody proxy wars across the region, from Libya to Syria and Iraq.

The European powers and Russia have repeatedly but ineffectually called for de-escalation. On Friday night,

after Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio expressed “concern over the clashes [and] the risk of military escalation,” the Elysée palace in Paris reported that President Emmanuel Macron telephoned both Aliyev and Pashinyan to call for talks. “He reiterated calls for a ceasefire and called to begin a process and a method that would lead to a return to negotiations,” the Elysée said, adding, “Work is beginning this evening.”

Whatever “work” on negotiations Paris believed was occurring promptly ended, however, with the dramatic escalation of the fighting this weekend.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called Pashinyan yesterday to stress that “all parties must immediately stop clashes and start negotiations,” spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer said.

The Turkish government has ruled out any ceasefire, pledging to continue backing Azeri claims on the Nagorno-Karabakh region. After Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared that Turkish support for Baku was part of its broader defense of the “oppressed” in the Caucasus, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu told the Italian daily *La Stampa*, “Superficial demands for an immediate end to hostilities and a permanent ceasefire will not be useful this time.”

Global geopolitical tensions are exploding, particularly amid growing US war threats against Iran. Multiple reports have emerged of CIA-backed Syrian Islamist militias sending troops from Syria via Turkey to Azerbaijan, on the border of both Iran and Russia, marking a major new escalation of regional tensions. Washington is also angry at China’s growing commercial ties in the region and recently bombed Iranian-linked forces in Iraq.

Significantly, Washington has made few public efforts to halt the Armenian-Azeri war. While it gives millions of dollars in military aid to both countries, it boosted aid to Azerbaijan last year amid its war planning against Iran. It gave \$100 million to Azerbaijan to heighten maritime security against Iran, while leaving military aid to Armenia at \$4.2 million. Azerbaijan purchased large numbers of Israeli SkyStriker drones used in the recent fighting, according to the *Jerusalem Post*.

There has been speculation in diplomatic circles internationally that some US officials see Armenia as too close to Iran and Russia. Last year, discussing US military aid to Azerbaijan, Russian analyst Pavel Felgenhauer told Eurasianet.org: “American-Iranian relations have worsened quite quickly, so Azerbaijan finds itself in Washington’s focus and Armenia, not. Armenia is seen,

probably, as an Iranian ally.”

Under these conditions, the Turkish government has apparently felt free to reject calls for Armenian-Azeri talks, bucking warnings from Russia and the European Union.

In France, already on the verge of an open clash with Turkey in Libya and the Mediterranean, calls are growing for a more aggressive policy. Yesterday, 173 French lawmakers, mostly from areas of southern France with large Armenian communities, called on Paris to “abandon this absolutely untenable position of neutrality.” They asserted that the Azeri offensive’s goal is “the disappearance of Armenian populations from this region.”

This followed publication by the French right-wing daily *Le Figaro* of a long interview with Pashinyan. The Armenian premier said Azerbaijan “is using drones and Turkish F-16s to bomb civilian areas in Nagorno-Karabakh,” and that “Turkish military commanders are directly involved in the conflict.”

Pashinyan explosively charged Azeri and Turkish forces with planning genocide, declaring: “The situation is much more serious [than earlier border clashes]. It is more appropriate to compare it with what happened in 1915, when more than 1.5 million Armenians were slaughtered in the first genocide of the 20th century.” Pashinyan was referring to the mass murder of Armenians in Turkey during World War I. “The Turkish state, which continues to deny the past, is once again venturing down a genocidal path,” he added.

One cannot oppose war and ethnic cleansing, however, by supporting either of the contending bourgeois camps, both of which have vast amounts of blood on their hands. The 1988-1994 war led to over 20,000 deaths and the displacement of over a million people, a large majority of them Azeris fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh amid the Armenian victory. What these conflicts show is the reactionary nature of the nation-state system.

Averting further wars and massacres, which could escalate into a devastating conflict between the major powers, requires uniting workers—in Armenia, Azerbaijan and around the world—in a socialist and anti-imperialist movement against war and the capitalist system.



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