

# Russian-brokered ceasefire in Azeri-Armenian war collapses

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12 October 2020

Russian President Vladimir Putin's attempt to broker a truce in the two-week-old war between Azerbaijan and Armenia collapsed over the weekend. Fighting erupted between the two former Soviet republics in the Caucasus five minutes after the agreement reached by Azeri and Armenian diplomats in Moscow was to go into effect, at noon on Saturday. Bombings of civilian targets on both sides, and bloodshed along the front and in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region all continue to mount.

The Kremlin had invited delegations from the Azeri and Armenian foreign ministries on October 9 to Moscow, declaring: "The President of Russia is issuing a call to halt the fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh on humanitarian grounds in order to exchange dead bodies and prisoners." French President Emmanuel Macron, who has aggressively backed Armenia, also called for a ceasefire.

Armenian officials went to the talks, reversing their stated position that they would only attend talks if a ceasefire was first agreed to. Shortly before talks began in Moscow, however, officials in both Azerbaijan and its main regional backer, Turkey, said they would make no compromises.

Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin bluntly predicted that the Moscow talks would be a failure. "If they're calling only for a ceasefire, if they're working only towards a ceasefire, it will be nothing more than a repeat of what went on for the last 30 years or so," he said. Restating the Turkish government's position that Armenia illegally occupies the Karabakh, Kalin added: "It is almost certain to fail if it doesn't also involve a detailed plan to end the occupation."

Azeri President Ilham Aliyev gave a televised address to the nation insisting he would make no concessions to Armenia. Aliyev said, "Azerbaijan's use of force had changed the facts on the ground" and that has "proved there was a military solution to the dispute," Reuters

reported. He added that these negotiations were Armenia's "last chance" to peacefully resolve the conflict.

Aliyev added that Azeri forces had taken the communities of Hadrut, Chayli, Yukhari Guzlak, Gorazilli, Gishlag, Garajalli, Afandilar, Suleymanli and Sur in the Karabakh, calling it a "historic victory." He reported that Armenian-held Fuzuli province in Azerbaijan had also been surrounded, and that Azeri forces had left a small escape route through which Armenians were leaving.

After a ceasefire was briefly announced for noon on Saturday, fighting soon re-erupted on both sides. Armenian officials charged Azeri troops with launching an assault at 12:05 p.m., while Azeri officials charged Armenia with bombing civilian targets. Fighting intensified on Sunday, with AFP reporting artillery fire targeting the Azeri city of Barda and the Armenian-held city of Stepanakert in the Nagorno-Karabakh. An Armenian missile also hit Azerbaijan's second-largest city, Ganja, killing nine people and wounding 34.

On Monday, Azeri and Armenian forces traded accusations of ceasefire violations, while both claimed to respect it, with Azeri forces accused of shelling the conflict zone and "large-scale hostilities" near Hadrut, and Armenian forces accused of shelling front-line areas of Azerbaijan.

Moscow and Tehran both fruitlessly called upon Azerbaijan and Armenia to abide by the ceasefire. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said: "Iran calls on the two parties to exercise more self-restraint, condemns the missile attacks on the vital infrastructure, the residential areas of cities, and the killing of civilians." Khatibzadeh also said Iran could offer to host talks to achieve a "permanent and sustainable peace and solution."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, "We

expect that the decisions that have been adopted will be rigorously observed by both parties,” adding that he hoped that the “all-night vigil” during which the cease-fire agreement was reached would “not be in vain.”

It appears, however, that both Azerbaijan and Armenia have shrugged off the cease-fire and are set to escalate a conflict that is indissolubly bound up with the disastrous consequences of the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In 1921, in the early years of Soviet Russia, Nagorno-Karabakh was a majority-Armenian region surrounded by Azeri areas. It was granted autonomous status within Azerbaijan. In the lead-up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism, however, armed conflict erupted amid the rise of ethnic nationalism and separatism in the Soviet bureaucracy. Azeri and Armenian forces fought over the Nagorno-Karabakh, which also declared its independence, leading to a 1988-94 war that saw 30,000 dead and over 1 million displaced.

Over the last three decades, the conflict has periodically re-erupted, defying all attempts to negotiate a lasting settlement, and underscoring the reactionary and unviable nature of the nation-state system. Ethnic-Turkic Azeri forces sought to retake the Karabakh, which Armenian forces have controlled since 1994. This conflict is now exacerbated by all the ethnic and military tensions provoked by three decades of US-led imperialist wars in the region since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The Caucasus—nestled between the Caspian Sea, Central Asia and China to the east; Iran and Turkey to the south; the Black Sea and Europe to the west; and Russia to the north—is now the focal point of explosive geostrategic tensions. These point to the very real danger that multiple wars and conflicts in the region could coalesce and escalate into a global war between the great powers.

Not least among these is the US war drive threatening China, as Beijing develops its “Belt and Road” global infrastructure plan. In an October 1 Harvard University briefing titled “US Should Keep an Eye on Rising Chinese Investment in the South Caucasus,” analyst Daniel Shapiro wrote that China’s presence in the region “can impact U.S. energy security and other important interests.” He added that for Chinese firms, the region is an “excellent logistical hub for expansion to Caucasus, EU and Central Asian markets.”

Shapiro charged that China’s activities in the region “threaten several US vital interests,” including maintaining “a balance of power in Europe and Asia [compatible] with a continuing US leadership role” and

ensuring the “stability of major global systems” including oil and financial markets.

US officials have not made major statements on the current Karabakh war, as chaos erupts in the US political system over President Donald Trump’s threat not to respect the outcome of next month’s presidential election. However, they have given a substantial \$100 million in military aid to Azerbaijan, which made major weapons purchases from Israel and Turkey, at least partially reversing the military balance with Armenia, according to certain analyses. Armenia has for its part relied on Russian and French support.

Reports that Syrian Islamist “rebel” militias and Turkish security firms are sending fighters to Azerbaijan, on the borders of both Russia and Iran, further inflame these tensions. Tehran and Moscow, which have backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime against these militias in the decade-long NATO war in Syria, fear these fighters could spread Turkish-nationalist or Islamist demands in Azeri-majority regions of Iran or Muslim regions of the North Caucasus in Russia.

French imperialism’s support for Armenia is part of its broader conflict with the Turkish government, which has backed militias opposed to France’s proxies in the Libyan civil war triggered by the 2011 NATO war in that country. This escalated in recent years into a conflict over oil resources not only in Libya, but also in undersea oil deposits in the Mediterranean, where Turkey, Greece and Cyprus have made rival claims. In this, France has aggressively backed Greece, which recently purchased billions of euros in French fighter jets and military supplies to prepare for war with Turkey.

This conflict again flared yesterday, when Turkey announced that it would send the oil drilling vessel *Oruç Reis* to explore for oil in waters also claimed by Greece. The Foreign Ministry of Greece, whose vessels repeatedly came close to firing on Turkish ships this summer, called this a “new serious escalation.”

The entire region is a tinderbox, with multiple conflicts each threatening to erupt into a general conflagration, underscoring the urgent necessity to unify the working class across national lines in an international anti-war movement against capitalism and imperialism.



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