

Azerbaijan Troops Killed in Armenia Border Clash

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U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton speaking Monday in Armenia.

BAKU, Azerbaijan — Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry said Tuesday that five of its soldiers were killed in clashes with Armenian troops alongside the border separating the two countries, deepening tensions between the two nations.

The ministry said in a statement that exchanges of gunfire have been reported over the last two days at numerous points along Azerbaijan's western border. Armenia had said earlier that three of its soldiers died in the clashes.

Azerbaijan and Armenia have for two decades been at odds over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory, which lies within Azerbaijan but was taken over by Armenia during a six-year war that killed about 30,000 people and displaced 1 million.

The incidents come just as U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has embarked on a tour of the South Caucasus in the hope of mediating progress in territorial disputes in the region.

Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry said one clash took place near the village of Ashagy Askipara early Tuesday morning, after their soldiers were attacked by Armenian commandos. Four Azeri troops were killed in the fighting, officials said. Another soldier died in a separate incident, the ministry said.

Armenia on Monday said three of its soldiers were killed and another six were wounded in villages nearby.

Clinton decried the "senseless deaths of young soldiers and innocent civilians" as part of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict — just hours after Monday's border clash.

"I am very concerned about the danger of escalation of tensions and the senseless deaths of young soldiers and innocent civilians," Clinton said.

Warning that Azeri-Armenian tensions could escalate into a broader conflict, Clinton said the United States would continue to press for mediation efforts with France, Russia and others.

Violations of the cease-fire have been frequent, and diplomatic efforts to solve the conflict have failed. The U.S. hopes that Armenia and Azerbaijan can agree to the return of territories and people to their homes and a vote on the area's future.

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