

Azeri Defense Spending to Grow

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Azerbaijan's president has announced a sharp hike in military spending and again warned neighboring Armenia to pull out of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory.

President Ilham Aliyev said in remarks published Wednesday in state newspapers that this year's defense budget will rise to \$3.7 billion, up from \$3 billion last year.

Annual military spending increases have taken place amid persistent tensions between Azerbaijan and fellow former Soviet republic Armenia. Border skirmishes are relatively common, but there has been no return to the full-out conflict of the 1990s.

On Saturday, hundreds of people gathered in the capital, Baku, to protest the death this month of an 18-year-old conscript. Demonstrators said he died as a result of abuse.

In remarks addressed to the domestic opposition, Aliyev warned against smearing Azerbaijan's army.

(AP)

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