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Hostages Still Held as Standoff Continues in Armenian Siege — Updates

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Armenian police and special force secure the area around a police station in Yerevan, Armenia, July 17, 2016. **Aram Kirakosyan / PAN Photo via AP**

An armed opposition group holding four police officers hostage in the Armenian capital of Yerevan are continuing their standoff with authorities, the Sputnik news agency reported. A third officer from the group of seven initial hostages was released on Monday afternoon.

The attackers, who took control of a city police station on Sunday morning, are demanding the resignation of the country's president, Serzh Sargsyan, and the release of "political prisoners."

One officer was killed and three more wounded when the armed gunmen seized the building.

The gunmen, who have been identified as members of the opposition group Founding Parliament, issued a statement on Facebook demanding the release of their leader Zhirayr

Sefilian. The
opposition politician was arrested last month on charges of weapons possession.

The group released a video on Facebook showing several men in flak jackets armed with assault rifles, as well as several hostages inside the police compound.

In the video, they urge Armenians to take to the streets and overthrow the government. Their call to action has so far received no noticeable response, Radio Liberty reported.

Armenia's National Security Service (NSS) issued a statement Sunday accusing supporters of Founding Parliament of "spreading misinformation about an armed rebellion and of buildings being seized. The information is incorrect."

The Founding Parliament group, whose supporters regularly hold protests demanding the resignation of President Sarkisian, are especially critical of the government's response to the continuing conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The break-away republic is claimed by both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and dozens have died in clashes between the two sides this year.

The NSS held negotiations with the hostage takers during the night of July 17, but failed to resolve the standoff, the Radio Liberty news website reported.

General Hunan Poghosian, first deputy chief of the Armenian police force, said that Sefilian would not be released and urged the hostage takers to surrender, Radio Liberty reported.

"If they don't listen to our appeal we will neutralize them, because killers cannot be dealt with in any other way," he said Sunday.

Sefilyan, a fierce government critic, was jailed for 18 months in 2006 after calling for a "violent coup against the government." He was arrested again last year along with several of his supporters on suspicion of planning a coup but was released shortly afterwards.

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