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Russia Ready to Mediate Talks Between Armenia, Azerbaijan

By AFP

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Armenia and Azerbaijan both accuse the other of starting the shelling that has continued sporadically for several days and so far claimed a total of 17 lives. **Aziz Karimov / AP / TASS**

Russia said Friday it is prepared to mediate peace talks between ex-Soviet rivals Armenia and Azerbaijan after fighting escalated along their shared border.

President Vladimir Putin and members of Russia's Security Council expressed "extreme concern" over the flare-up in fighting between the South Caucasus countries that erupted last week, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

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Putin alongside senior Russian government officials "emphasized an urgent need for the parties to adhere to a ceasefire, and voiced a readiness to mediate efforts," Peskov said,

quoted by Interfax.

The two rivals have been locked for decades in a conflict over Azerbaijan's southwestern separatist region of Nagorny Karabakh, which was seized by ethnic Armenian separatists in a 1990s war that claimed 30,000 lives.

Negotiations mediated by Russia, the United States, and France since 1994 have failed to bring about a lasting resolution to the stalemate.

The most recent flare-up in fighting began on Sunday, with both sides accusing the other of starting the shelling that has continued sporadically for several days and so far claimed a total of 17 lives.

Armenian government spokesman Artsrun Hovhannisyan said Friday that fighting subsided overnight and that "the situation remains calm, there is no shooting."

Azerbaijan's defense ministry said "overall, situation remains tense."

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