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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Nagorno-Karabakh Briefing | Nov. 16

November 16, 2020



Nagorno-Karabakh's main town, Stepanakert, would have been captured by Azerbaijani forces had a peace deal not been signed, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said. **Stanislav Krasilnikov/TASS**

Almost a week into the latest truce between Armenia and Azerbaijan and there remains no flare-up of fighting. Russian peacekeeping deployments continue to establish their positions, while the exact role Turkey will play remains unclear. Political unrest heightens in Armenia with an alleged assassination plot against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Nov. 16: what you need to know today

- The ceasefire is still in place as Russian peacekeeping forces establish more positions across Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russian Defense Ministry said, as reported by state-run news agency TASS. Russia said more than 120 military flights had taken soldiers and equipment to the region since the peace deal was struck last week. A total of 1,960 Russian soldiers will be deployed under the agreement. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told Armenian MPs that the Lachin corridor, connecting Armenia with the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region will be operational Monday, Open Caucasus media reported.
- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan asked parliament Monday to authorize sending

soldiers to Azerbaijan to establish a "peacekeeping center" with Russia, AFP reported. Russia has repeatedly said that no Turkish troops will be on the ground as part of the deal — a factor that would inevitably be met with fierce resistance from Yerevan. However, Ankara will be part of a joint peacekeeping center, few details of which were outlined in the truce agreement. The Turkish deployment would be active for one year, AFP reported, with its size determined by Erdogan.

- Azerbaijan said Sunday it had agreed to extend a deadline for Armenia to withdraw from the disputed Kalbajar district, which Armenian forces are to vacate as part of the peace agreement. Azerbaijan has now given Armenia until Nov. 25 to leave the area — one of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh which has been under Yerevan's control since the 1988-94 conflict.
- Armenian authorities said they foiled an assissnation plot against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan over the weekend. The former director of the National Security Service was detained along with opposition politicians who were alleged to be involved in the plan. Pashinyan's woes continued to mount Monday as four MPs, including a top aide to the deputy prime minister, abandoned his governing coalition over a controversial Facebook post that "caused uproar and bewilderment in the country," Jam News reported. In the post, Pashinyan said he was "proud" of the soldiers who had fought in Karabakh, adding: "I am waiting for you in Yerevan. For the ultimate solution to the problems of the whiners" — statements which were interpreted by some as a call for the soldiers to take up arms against Pashinyan's opponents, Radio Free Europe reported.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin said more than 4,000 people had died as a result of the six-week conflict. Armenia announced Saturday that 2,317 of its soldiers had been killed. Azerbaijan has not released a public tally.
- Ethnic Armenians continued to burn their houses and property as they left behind territories ceded to Azerbaijan as part of the deal.

With reporting by AFP, Al Jazeera, Jam News, Open Caucasus Media, Radio Free Europe, Sky News and TASS.

Nov. 16: Analysis

- Journalist Cavid Aga explains the changing mood in Azerbaijan over recent days as society splits into groups satisfied with the peace deal, those who wanted more military gains, and apprehension over the presence of Russian peacekeeping forces.

Embed:

> Since the announcement of ceasefire, Azerbaijani public has gone from one mood to other. At first, naturally they celebrated, made feasts, paraded.
>
> — Cavid ◙ (@cavidaga) November 16, 2020

Nov. 13

- The ceasefire continued to hold with no reports of fighting flaring up in Nagorno-

Karabakh or the surrounding territory. A delegation from Moscow is in Ankara on Friday to discuss the details of a joint Russian-Turkish ceasefire monitoring center.

- The deployment of almost 2,000 Russian peacekeepers continues. The state-run TASS news agency reported that troops entered the Nagorno-Karabakh capital Stepanakert on Thursday evening and were also establishing positions around the second-largest town, Shusha. Stepanakert will remain under the control of Armenian-backed forces under the agreement, while Shusha, which sits around 10 kilometers to the south is controlled by Azerbaijan. Russian troops have now established 10 of the 16 observation posts mandated under the peace agreement, Russia's defense ministry said Thursday.
- Hundreds of Armenian civilians are packing their belongings and leaving parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories which are to be ceded to Azerbaijan under terms of the peace agreement. The BBC filmed one family burning down the house they had built and lived in so that Azerbaijanis could not move in. "A peace agreement may have ended the war, but the hatred keeps burning," the report concluded.
- Azerbaijan has started opening new branches of the country's state security services in towns gained as part of the ceasefire agreement, Open Caucasus Media reported. An office in Shusa, Nagorno-Karabakh's second largest town will reportedly be operational in a few days. Telecoms firm Azercell also said it was installing a 4G mobile network in the city, according to reports in the local Azerbaijani media.
- The United States welcomed the ceasefire agreement Thursday, but said it was "deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation on the ground." It also suggested that countries other than Russia and Turkey should be involved in the ceasefire agreement. The U.S. ambassador to the OSCE said Thursday: "We will need to address the role of the international community and the OSCE itself in maintaining a transparent peace."
- Armenian courts on Friday freed a number of opposition leaders who had been arrested and faced a decade in prison for "illegal violent mass disorder," in relation to the protests which erupted after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced he had signed the peace deal, AFP reported. Judges ruled the detentions lacked legal basis. Anger continued in Yerevan over the deal, with 3,000 people converging on the streets Thursday evening, chanting "Nikol the traitor" and "Nikol, resign!"

With reporting by AFP, Azertag, BBC, Open Caucasus Media and TASS.

Nov. 13: Analysis

"The current peace deal is unspeakably painful because better arrangements than what are being secured today were attainable through diplomacy years ago," former U.S. ambassador and co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group Carey Cavanaugh writes for The Moscow Times. "The latest agreement put into place what was required to halt the fighting. It is not, however, a sustainable comprehensive peace agreement."

Nov. 12

- The peacefire in Nagorno-Karabakh appeared to hold for a second full day. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in a press conference Thursday there are "no indications that anybody is trying to disrupt the agreement," Russia's TASS news agency reported.
- A Russian delegation will visit Turkey on Friday to discuss the creation of a joint center

for monitoring the truce deal, the Turkish foreign minister said as reported by AFP.

- Turkish involvement in the settlement is seen as highly contentious given Yerevan and Ankara's centuries-old bitter rivalry. The two sides have virtually no diplomatic relations and the border between the countries has been closed since 1993. Turkey backed Azerbaijan in the recent conflict and has provided hi-tech military equipment to Baku for years — a factor which proved decisive in Azerbaijan's military victory, experts say. There was no explicit mention of Turkey's involvement in the public details of the nine-point ceasefire agreement, which stated only that "a peacekeeping center shall be deployed to exercise control over the ceasefire," according to the texts published on the Azerbaijani president's official website and by the Kremlin.
- Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the details about the joint Russian-Turkish center's functions and operations will be discussed Friday "with a delegation coming from Russia," AFP reported. The center "will completely control whatever happens on the field, whether or not there are any violations, with the help of drones and other elements," he told a press conference in Baku carried by Turkish broadcasters.
- But Lavrov said there will be no Turkish peacekeepers present in Karabakh as part of the deal, and said Turkish representatives will only be present in a monitoring center located in Azerbaijani territory, TASS reported.

Embed:

> Good @EurasiaNet map pic.twitter.com/Iu2Qd9vLOZ
>
> — Bruno Maçães (@MacaesBruno) November 11, 2020

- Armenia arrested 10 opposition figures Thursday for "organizing illegal violent mass disorder," authorities said. Protests are scheduled to continue Thursday in opposition to the ceasefire deal, following the storming of government buildings in the hours after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced the agreement and handover of most of the disputed territory previously controlled by Armenia. More than 2,000 demonstrators turned out in the center of Yerevan on Wednesday to protest the deal, AFP said.
- Arayik Harutyunyan, the Armenian-backed president of Nagorno-Karabakh said Armenia was "betrayed" by its soldiers, heavily criticizing the commitment of reserve troops who were called up to defend the region, he said in a speech cited by Open Caucasus media. Harutyunyan backed the peace deal and said without it the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh would have fallen into Azerbaijan's hands. According to provisional maps published by various media outlets showing the new situation in the region, Armenian-backed separatists will keep control of the majority of the core Nagorno-Karabakh region, while ceding all the surrounding territory which was previously also under their control. He urged people not to protest against Pashinyan or the settlement and called for civilians who had previously fled the conflict — estimated at more than 60% of the population even before Azerbaijani forces had captured the second-biggest city of Shusha and the region's capital Stepanakert was evacuated — to return and help rebuild.

With reporting by AFP, Eurasianet, Open Caucasus Media, TASS and Washington Post.

Nov. 12: Analysis

Thomas de Waal, a long-time expert on the region, argued the deal is a "precarious" settlement for Armenia. "The repercussions will be felt for years to come," he said. Eurasianet's Caucasus editor Joshua Kucera also said the deal "leaves as many questions as answers," particularly over the future status of the region and the role of Turkey.

De Waal said he expects Aliyev to now tone down his aggressive, militaristic rhetoric in an attempt to appear moderate and curry international support for the deal — and Baku. There was little sign of this in his victory speech to the nation earlier this week, when he said Baku had "taught [Pashinyan] a lesson." The Armenian leader had to sign the agreement "in a closed place, in a locked-up room, far from the cameras, in a cowardly and treacherous manner. He is not signing it of his own free will. He is signing it under pressure from the iron fist," Aliyev said.

BBC Moscow correspondent Steve Rosenberg analyzes how the Russian newspapers have reacted to the deal, and their take on the geopolitical rivalry between Moscow and Ankara:

Embed:

> Today one Russian paper warns that "Erdogan is a bigger danger to Russia" after the #Karabakh peace deal & that "Turkey will try to elbow its way to a wider zone of influence." #ReadingRussia @BBCNews @BBCWorld pic.twitter.com/YQ7QaCXfnl
>
> — Steve Rosenberg (@BBCSteveR) November 12, 2020

Nov. 11

- The first Russian peacekeepers have been deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding regions, the Russian military confirmed Wednesday, AFP reported. More than 400 servicemen arrived in Armenia, senior General Staff official Sergei Rudskoy said, adding that the peacekeepers were now in control of the Lachin corridor, a key connection between Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh breakaway region. In total almost 2,000 Russian troops will guard the conflict zone.
- Reaction from global leaders and organizations began to pour in on the deal, the fourth attempt to end fighting since the conflict flared up in late September.
- The United Nations' Secretary General is "relieved" that an agreement had been struck, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing Tuesday. The organization said it welcomed the deal and was "grateful" to Russian authorities for brokering the ceasefire. The UN also said it is now in contact with Moscow to see how it can be involved, particularly with regard to alleviating the refugee crisis in the region. "The sense of relief is really about the hope that this will end the suffering of civilians," Dujarric said.

- The European Union welcomed the "Russia-brokered ceasefire," it said in a statement, calling it a "first step toward a comprehensive settlement."
- But analysts have questioned what the deal means for the EU in the region. Wolfgang Ischinger, chairman of the influential Munich Security Conference and a former German ambassador to the U.S. asked Tuesday: "Question to EU friends: Why is it that once again, this time in the Caucasus — our neighborhood — the EU has turned out to be completely irrelevant, strategically and operationally?"
- French President Emmanuel Macron called for a "lasting political solution" to the conflict and urged Turkey to "end its provocations," AFP reported. The future status of the core Nagorno-Karabakh region — much of which was left under the control of Armenian-backed separatists — was left unaddressed in the deal which was struck early Tuesday morning. The deal also sidestepped France which had previously been a key mediator in the conflict as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, along with the U.S. and Russia.
- Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has defended the agreement in the face of outrage and protests in Yerevan. Pashinyan said Stepanakert, the region's capital, would have fallen under Azerbaijan's control had he not struck a ceasefire agreement, Russia's TASS news agency reported.
- Armenian police retook control of government buildings stormed by protestors Tuesday morning, AFP reported. But Pashinyan's position remains precarious. Even before the ceasefire agreement there was mounting anger against Armenia's military losses, and the agreement has been seen as a capitulation. Armenian police arrested several dozen opposition politicians in advance of fresh protests against Pashinyan that were planned for Wednesday, Russia's TASS news agency reported. The arrests were broadcast in real time on local media, it added.
- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Tuesday that Turkey and Russia would jointly supervise the implementation of the ceasefire deal through a monitoring center, AFP reported following a call between Erdogan and Putin. There was no mention of any Turkish troops or military presence being deployed to the region — a factor which analysts say would be unacceptable to Yerevan given hostile relations between Armenia and Turkey and Ankara's vociferous support for Baku during the conflict.

Nov 11: Analysis

The deal, while welcome, falls short of a "sustainable peace," the International Crisis Group said in a statement, adding that it would be a "bitter pill to swallow" for Armenia. "A deal that Armenians view as capitulation will not be a reliable foundation for more sustained peace. While it will be hard for them to accept it, steps should be taken to mitigate the blow and to prevent Azerbaijani overreach," the group said.

Analysts interviewed by The Moscow Times were divided over whether the ceasefire agreement is a victory for Russia — some said it would expand Moscow's influence over the South Caucasus and shows it is still the most influential voice in the region, while others highlighted Russia's inability to support its ally Armenia and the fact that it was only able to broker a deal after Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey, had already achieved its major strategic objectives for the conflict.

Nov. 10

- A peace deal was struck between warring Armenia and Azerbaijan overnight to end weeks of bloody fighting for control of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories. The deal, brokered by Moscow, is seen as a victory for Baku, which will reclaim control over the seven Azerbaijani districts which surround Nagorno-Karabakh as well as land inside the separatist region, first seized by Armenian forces in the 1988-94 conflict.
- After a frenzied day of fighting Monday which saw Armenia admit Azerbaijani forces had claimed the vital mountain-top city of Shusha inside Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan accidentally shoot down a Russian military helicopter over Armenia, a late-night peace agreement was struck.
- Hostilities were immediately halted at 01:00 local-time Tuesday morning and a Russian peacekeeping force was deployed hours later to ensure hostilities do not flare up again. Three previous ceasefire agreements have fallen through within minutes.
- As of Tuesday morning, the ceasefire appeared to be holding. A spokesperson for Armenia's Defense Ministry said "active combat operations on the whole frontline are suspended. Relative calm is being maintained from 06:00. Deployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Artsakh [the Armenian name for the separatist-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh region] continues."

Related article: Deal Struck to End Nagorno-Karabakh War

- Angry protests erupted in Yerevan overnight, immediately after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced the peace deal on Facebook, with hundreds of protestors storming government buildings. The speaker of Armenia's parliament Ararat Mirzoyan was dragged from his car and beaten Tuesday morning by protestors, Russia's TASS news agency reported. He required surgery, but his life was not in danger, Pashinyan said during a live stream published on his Facebook page calling for calm.
- Under the deal Azerbaijan will keep all its military gains since the start of the conflict and over the next month Armenia will return other Azerbaijani territory surrounding the core Nagorno-Karabakh region that it has been in control of for the last three decades. Baku will also keep some gains inside Nagorno-Karabakh, Azeri refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) will be allowed to return to the Nagorno-Karabakh republic, which remains under the control of Armenian-backed separatists. Azerbaijan will also gain a Russian-guaranteed corridor across Armenia to its Nakhchivan exclave, which is separated from the mainland.
- Crucially, the parts of the deal which have been publicly released do not address the long-term future of the Nagorno-Karabakh region — internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but historically an Armenian-majority region — much of which will remain under the de facto control of Armenian-backed separatists.
- The deal was apparently brokered by Moscow unilaterally, without the input of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)'s Minsk Group — a joint U.S., Russian and French effort which had previously been the main forum for discussing the conflict and future status of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, many aspects of the deal — such as the establishment of respective land corridors for both Armenia and Azerbaijan — build on plans first put forward almost 20 years ago during negotiations in

Florida, U.S., Carey Cavanaugh, a former co-chair of the Minsk Group said.

- Russian President Vladimir Putin said the agreement was "in the interests of both the Armenian and Azerbaijani people" and that it would be the foundation for a "long-term settlement.
- Turkey, which has vociferously backed Baku since the start of the conflict and hailed Azerbaijan's "significant gains" in the deal Tuesday morning will be involved in the ceasefire alongside Russia through the establishment of a joint ceasefire monitoring center, Russia's Interfax news agency reported. Ankara will also gain a direct land connection to Azerbaijan through the new Nakhchivan corridor which will be established.

With reporting by AFP, Interfax and TASS.

Nov 10: Analysis

NPR Moscow correspondent Lucian Kim summarizes the winners and losers from the deal.

Embed:

> Winners of Nagorno-Karabakh peace deal:
> -Russia. Defends hegemony in region with introduction of peacekeepers;
> -Azerbaijan. Keeps territorial gains of past 6 weeks;
> -Turkey. Enters equation as Azerbaijan's protector.
> Loser:
> Armenia. Ally Russia was looking out for own interests.
>
> — Lucian Kim (@Lucian_Kim) November 10, 2020

Russian analyst Konstantin Eggert disagreed that Russia was a "winner," however, arguing the victory of Azerbaijan over Russia-allied Armenia shows Moscow's waning control over the post-Soviet space.

Embed:

> The Karabakh War showed that: 1) you can launch a war in the post-Soviet space without Putin's sanction - and win; 2) Alliance with Russia does not protect you from anything; 3) modernising the armed forces pays; 4) Erdogan forgot or forgave nothing to Putin.
>
> — Konstantin Eggert MBE (@kvoneggert) November 9, 2020

After a night of protests and what is being seen as a humiliating capitulation, analysts wonder

how long Pashinyan, who swept to power in a series of pro-democracy peaceful protests two years ago, can remain in power, and what it means for Armenia's fragile democratic transition.

Embed:

> Whatever else may happen, one thing is for damn sure red lights flashing on Armenia's experiment with democracy. It is in peril and may not survive this. I hope I am wrong. I pray I am wrong.
>
> — Dr. Artyom Tonoyan (@ArtyomTonoyan) November 10, 2020

Nov. 9

- Azerbaijan shot down a Russian military helicopter which was flying over Armenia, near the border with Azerbaijan, Monday evening, killing two Russian service personnel, Baku has confirmed.
- Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry apologized to Russia in a statement cited by Russian news agencies, calling it a "tragic incident, which was accidental and not directed against the Russian side."
- "The flight took place in close proximity to the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, at a time when active military clashes are ongoing in Nagorno-Karabakh," Baku said, adding that it was "dark, [flying] at a low altitude outside the air defense radar detection zone … [and that] Russian helicopters had not previously been seen in the area."
- "In the context of these factors and in light of the tense situation in the region and increased combat readiness … the team on duty decided to open fire to kill."
- Minutes before Baku admitted responsibility for the downing of the Mi-24 military helicopter, Russia's Defence Ministry said that a helicopter had been shot down by a surface-to-air missile and confirmed the two fatalities. A third crew member was taken to hospital with "moderate" injuries.
- The incident happened "in the airspace near the Armenian settlement of Yeraskh, near the border of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic," an Azerbaijani exclave located on the border between Armenia, Iran and Turkey, a Defence Ministry statement said.
- Russia said it will conduct an investigation to establish responsibility for the downing of the Mi-24 military helicopter. The helicopter was escorting a convoy from Russia's 102nd military base, located in Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city, when it was shot down by a portable anti-aircraft missile system (MANPADS), the Defense Ministry said.
- Azerbaijani forces have gained control of Shusha, the second-largest city in Nagorno-Karabakh and key strategic vantage point, Armenian-backed separatists confirmed Monday afternoon.
- "Shushi is entirely outside of our control," Vahram Poghosyan, spokesperson for the president of the Armenian-backed authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh, said in a Facebook post Monday, referring to the city by its Armenian name.
- Azerbaijani forces were also closing in on the main city of Nagorno-Karabakh, separatist

authorities said. "The enemy is on the outskirts of Stepanakert and the existence of the capital is already in danger," said Poghosyan.

- The capture of Shusha, known to Armenians as Shushi, is seen as a major victory for Azerbaijan. The town sits atop a mountain and is seen as a fortress, control of which will be decisive in the outcome of the conflict. *The Moscow Times previously highlighted the importance of Shusha in the Nov. 5 and Nov. 6 updates (below on this page) with comments and analysis from regional experts.*
- Flag-waving Azerbaijanis celebrated in the capital Baku after Aliyev's announcement in an address to the nation Sunday, with cars honking their horns as residents crowded city streets despite coronavirus restrictions.
- Local Armenia-backed authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh also reported fighting around the region's capital Stepanakert, which is located just north of Shusha. Various reports over the weekend, including from Ukraine's independent Hromadske news site, reported mass evacuation of the city, and footage shared on social media by independent journalists and picked-up by other independent outlets covering the conflict such as Eurasianet purported to show cars with Armenian license plates backed-up on the main road leaving Stepanakert.
- The sides could be close to agreeing a new "meaningful ceasefire deal," Middle East Eye reported, citing Turkish sources. It would involve Armenia withdrawing from some areas and the deployment of peacekeeping troops from both Russia and Turkey. Three previous ceasefires, along with an agreement not to target residential areas with missile strikes have already failed since hostilities broke out at the end of September. Dmitri Trenin, the well-connected director of the Carnegie Moscow Center said Sunday that "Russia and Turkey are finalizing modalities of ceasefire, Armenian withdrawal, corridors, and peacekeepers. New regional order is being sealed."
- Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev has given a lengthy English-language interview to the BBC. He said he would call off Azerbaijan's advance if Armenia withdrew its forces from the Armenian-occupied territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, but said he sees no chance of striking a peace deal with Armenia's current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Before the outbreak of hostilities Armenia was in control of seven districts internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, in addition to the official Nagorno-Karabakh region. Baku has recaptured a number of cities and towns within those regions since the conflict started. The interview was conducted before Baku said it had taken control of Shusha.
- Aliyev also denied Azerbaijan had used banned cluster munitions or that it was targeting civilian areas in Nagorno-Karabakh, despite multiple reports from international media outlets, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International which said they have evidence both sides are using banned weapons and have killed civilians.

With reporting by AFP, BBC, Eurasianet, Hromadske, Middle East Eye and The Guardian.

Nov. 9: Analysis

The BBC's Orla Guerin, who interviewed Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, posts photos of celebrations in Baku after Aliyev announced the capture of Shusha in an address to the nation Sunday. Olesya Vartanyan, senior south Caucasus analyst at Crisis Group, recounts stories of civilians killed in the conflict.

Embed:

> 1/ In two weeks I spoke to over 15 civilians who had just come from #NagornoKarabakh. They provide an important account of developments from those parts of region, which stay inaccessible due to security situation.
>
> (photo credit: https://t.co/QD0YzqI2m0) pic.twitter.com/BjoXYCGS4I
>
> — Olesya Vartanyan (@Olesya_vArt) November 8, 2020

Nov. 8

- Azerbaijan said Sunday its forces had captured the key town of Shusha from Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh, but Armenia insisted that fighting for the strategically vital area was ongoing. The capture of Shusha would be a major victory for Azerbaijan six weeks after new fighting erupted over Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave that broke away from Azerbaijan's control in the 1990s.
- Armenia acknowledged "ferocious fighting" around Shusha, but denied the mountain-top town, a key strategic settlement of huge cultural importance to both Azerbaijan and Armenia, had fallen into the hands of Baku's forces. "Intensive combat has been waged in the Shushi-Karintak sector," Armenian defense ministry spokeswoman Shushan Stepanyan said on Twitter on Monday morning, AFP reported, referring to a village at the base of cliffs on which the town sits. "The enemy has retreated, while friendly forces have occupied more favourable lines," she said.
- Azerbaijan and Armenia are close to agreeing on a ceasefire deal, Turkish sources told the London-based Middle East Eye outlet.

With reporting by AFP.

Nov. 8: Analysis

"With the world's eyes on U.S. elections, war in #NagornoKarabakh reaches a decisive point. Russia and Turkey are finalizing modalities of ceasefire, Armenian withdrawal, corridors, &peacekeepers. New regional order is being sealed," Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center tweeted on Sunday.

Nov. 7

- Armenia reported Saturday that "fierce combat" with Azerbaijani forces took place overnight near the town of Shusha, a key stronghold in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, AFP reported. Armenian defence ministry spokeswoman Shushan Stepanyan reported "especially intensive and fierce combat" overnight outside Shusha, adding that numerous attacks from Azerbaijan were thwarted. Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry denied the claims.
- The mountain-top town is a key stronghold for the Armenian-backed forces controlling Nagorno-Karabakh and has been thought to be the focus of Azerbaijani attention since the start of their military campaign six weeks ago.

- Shusha, located on a main road that links the unrecognized republic's capital, Stepanakert, with Armenia proper is Nagorno-Karabakh's second largest city, dubbed an "'unassailable mountain fortress," by Radio Free Europe. A week ago, Armenian-backed authorities of the de facto state said Azerbaijani forces had advanced to within five miles of the city. Military analyst Rob Lee geolocated fights earlier this week to within 1.5 miles, but pinpointing live positions of forces is exceptionally difficult.
- The conflict for Shusha could be a particularly "bloody battle," Caucasus expert Thomas de Waal reported.
- Like many of the settlements Azerbaijan is now trying to recapture, the city was controlled by Azerbaijan prior to the 1988-94 conflict. During that war it fell under Armenian control when Azerbaijani forces "abandoned" their positions in the "cliff-top citadel," de Waal wrote.

Nov. 7: Analysis

"If Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh army do not launch a successful counteroffensive in the coming days, they will lose a critical supply line and a threat to the unrecognized republic's capital will emerge," Meduza reported Saturday. If that happens, "it will be impossible to hold on to remaining territory and the hope for a compromise political solution to the conflict will be lost completely," the news site argued in an analysis of the military situation around Shusha.

With reporting by AFP and Meduza.

Nov. 6

- No decisive breakthrough has been reported since the end of last week, when Armenia first said Azerbaijan was close to Shusha, but Azerbaijani forces have been making "major advances" in edging closer in recent days, Asia Times reported Friday morning. A looming battle for the Armenian-held stronghold could be a decisive moment in the conflict, which has been raging for more than 40 days. Analysts previously said a stalemate could be setting in, and with winter approaching, military maneuvers in the region will become increasingly tricky as the temperatures drop and weather deteriorates.
- Up to 80 local and international journalists are "trapped in Stepanakert," the region's main city, Reporters Without Borders said Thursday. The organization said the journalists could not flee to Armenia without coming "under fire from Azeri forces" along the main road connecting Armenia proper with the separatist-held territory. Stepanakert, the region's largest town, just north of Shusha, has come under heavy shelling throughout the conflict. Sustained attacks on the city continued Thursday evening, Reuters reported, and overnight, Armenian-backed forces claimed Friday morning.

With reporting by Asia Times, Eurasianet, Radio Free Europe and Reuters.

Nov. 6: Analysis

Long-time Caucasus expert Thomas de Waal fears a potentially "bloody battle" could be about to unfold for the Armenian-controlled city of Shusha, while Radio Free Europe analyzes

the history of the city and explains its strategic importance to the current conflict.

Oct. 28

- Azerbaijan said Wednesday an Armenian missile strike on its Barda district near the Nagorno-Karabakh frontline killed 21 civilians, but Yerevan denied carrying out an attack, AFP reported. It would be the deadliest reported attack on civilians since new fighting over the disputed region broke out a month ago and the second in two days that Azerbaijan says killed civilians. An Armenian spokesperson called the claims "groundless and false."
- Yerevan also accused Azerbaijani forces of deadly new strikes on civilian areas of Karabakh, as both sides claim the other is increasingly targeting civilians after weeks of fierce frontline clashes.
- U.S. President Donald Trump said he was "disappointed" in the breakdown of the latest ceasefire and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who negotiated the deal, pressed both Baku and Yerevan to honor the agreement.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke by phone Tuesday evening about the conflict — the latest international showdown which sees the two powers backing opposing sides. According to a summary of the call published by the Kremlin, Putin expressed "deep concern" over the "growing involvement" of fighters from the Middle East in the region.
- Iran announced it was increasing its air defenses along its northern border, which it shares with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, hours after Tehran also increased troop levels in the region. Iran has also offered to join diplomatic efforts to end the fighting alongside Russia and Turkey.
- Before publishing statements of Wednesday's claimed attacks, Azerbaijan said 69 civilians had been killed since the fighting broke out, while Armenia claims 37 civilian deaths on its side. Overall, Putin said last week that almost 5,000 people have died in the fighting — a significantly higher toll than publicly claimed by either Armenia or Azerbaijan.
- In an address to the nation delivered Tuesday evening, and published on the Armenian government's official YouTube channel, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan pledged to launch a "destructive" counterattack to recapture territory lost by Armenian-backed forces since the start of fighting last month.
- Russia has reportedly set up a small military outpost on the border of Armenia in an apparent attempt to keep Azerbaijan's offensive from spilling over into Armenian territory, Eurasianet reported.

With reporting from AFP, BBC, Channel 4, Eurasianet, Newsweek and TASS.

Oct 28: Analysis

The Financial Times' Moscow bureau chief Henry Foy explains how Azerbaijan's expensive, modern military equipment has overwhelmed Armenia's outdated defenses.

Journalist Arzu Geybulla, originally from Azerbaijan and now based in Istanbul, reports how the campaign is taking its toll on Azerbaijan despite the military gains, and predicts President Aliyev will find it hard to agree to a diplomatic solution given fervent support for the

campaign at home. The full Twitter thread starts here.

Journalist Adrian Hartrick, who left regional capital Stepanakert in the last few days, covers the mood in the city as it prepares for a "last stand," and the myriad conflicting reports over how the conflict is going for either side. On a similar theme, analyst Ryan O'Farrell outlines how he is mapping the latest battlefield positions and trying to cut through the propaganda, claims, counter-claims and denials from official sources in both Baku and Yerevan for an article in Eurasianet.

Nov. 5

- Azerbaijani leader Ilham Aliyev announced a new round of territorial gains achieved by his forces since the start of the conflict, all of which were already known and had been reported by various media outlets.
- Nagorno-Karabakh authorities reported shelling on the key town of Shusha on Thursday morning, according to the Civilnet media outlet, which said the town's air raid alarms were also sounding. Military analyst Rob Lee geolocated the latest fights between Azerbaijani and Armenian-backed forces to within 1.5 miles of the town — around half the distance reported by Armenia last week when it highlighted the strategic importance of defending the settlement. The human rights ombudsman for Artsakh — the Armenian name for the Nagorno-Karabakh region and de facto state — said there had been "material civilian damage" though no reported casualties so far, in a statement.
- Armenian-backed forces also reported shelling on the smaller town of Lachin on Thursday morning.
- The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) will not intervene in the multiple requests to take action over alleged human rights abuses which have been lodged by both Armenia and Azerbaijan over recent weeks, it said in a statement Thursday. The ECHR said many did not fall under its jurisdiction or were covered by its previous calls for both sides to "refrain from actions" which breach human rights conventions governing military conduct and the protection of civilians in times of war. It also encouraged both Armenia and Azerbaijan to provide fresh information on prisoners captured during the conflict.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday "Russia is doing everything in our power to end the conflict in the South Caucasus as quickly as possible and to save lives," the state-run TASS news agency reported. Moscow, which will be a key player in any deal to resolve the conflict, said it was considering an Iranian peace proposal, Reuters reported, following the failure of three separate peacefire agreements brokered by the U.S and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)'s Minsk Group, made up of Russia, France and the U.S., since the start of the conflict in September.

With reporting by Civilnet, Reuters and TASS.

Nov. 5: Analysis

Eurasianet reports on the 40,000 civilians who have fled Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia since the outbreak of the war six weeks ago. They are being put up in schools, hotels and homes of volunteers.

The Caucasus War Report open source Twitter account explains Azerbaijan's military options

regarding Shusha — a key town under shelling Thursday morning, the capture of which would mark a significant victory for Baku.

Nov 4

- Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said almost 2,000 Middle Eastern fighters have been dispatched to Nagorno-Karabakh and expressed his concern over the "internationalization" of the conflict in an interview with Russian daily Kommersant. Armenian officials have for weeks accused Turkey of supporting Azerbaijani forces with mercenaries from Syria.
- Negotiations between Moscow and Yerevan over the "size and type" of Russian military assistance are ongoing, an Armenian MP and head of a parliamentary committee on foreign relations has said, according to Open Caucasus Media. Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan formally opened discussions with Moscow — with whom Armenia has a collective defense pact — over the weekend about possible military support.
- Iran continues to step up its efforts to be a key player in resolving the conflict, which has brought fighting close to its northern border. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Tuesday that Armenian-held territory in Azerbaijan "must be returned" and warned the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was threatening regional security, AFP reported. Iran, which has good relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and is home to 10 million ethnic Azeris by some calculations, also warned Baku over the use of Syrian mercenaries, saying it would not tolerate a "terrorist" presence "in proximity to our borders."
- Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Hikmet Hajiyev told reporters at a press conference Tuesday that Nagorno-Karabakh was probably the most militarized region in the world at the moment, journalist Cavid Aga reported.
- Analysts say something of a stalemate could have set in, with Azerbaijani forces having been close to the strategically-important second city of Shusha since the end of last week. Fighting continued there overnight, the Armenian-backed local authorities reported. However, journalist Neil Hauer noted the clashes between the two sides have been getting gradually closer to the city in recent days, and that a major entry road to the region has been closed to civilian traffic. Meanwhile, up to 40% of the region's main city, Stepanakert, has been destroyed and the city's mayor told News.Am that 70% of its residents have left.
- Baku claims it has recaptured enough territory to resettle 500,000 people, British paper The Daily Telegraph reported. The UN counts that around 860,000 Azeris became refugees — or internally displaced persons (IDPs) — as a result of the 1988-94 conflict, fleeing either Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh.

With reporting by AFP, Al Jazeera, Kommersant, News.Am, Open Caucasus Media and The Daily Telegraph.

Nov 4: Analysis

The Nagorno-Karabakh Observer analyses the possible military stalemate that could have set in after weeks of Azerbaijani advances.

Nov 3

- Reports of "indiscriminate" attacks on civilians by both sides could amount to "war crimes," the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said Monday evening. The international organization said "reports that cluster munitions have been used by both parties" were "deeply troubling." Both Armenia and Azerbaijan had pledged to stop targeting civilian and residential areas in a new agreement struck Friday — though that appeared to fall through over the weekend. "Such attacks must stop and those responsible for carrying them out, or ordering them, must be held to account," Bachelet said.
- In a statement published on its website, the UN also said it was alarmed by "deeply disturbing" videos which appeared to show Azerbaijani troops executing two Armenian soldiers. While warning of the proliferation of fake images across social media, the UN said independent investigations had found the videos to be "compelling."
- Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke with the leaders of both Armenia and Azerbaijan separately Monday evening, the Kremlin said in a statement.
- Fighting continued overnight and into Tuesday morning, according to reports from both sides. Armenia claimed Azerbaijani shelling killed one civilian Monday evening, AFP reported.
- Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan compared the terror attack in Vienna which occurred Monday evening with the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in a tweet published Tuesday morning. "Nagorno-Karabakh has been fighting against the Azerbaijani-Turkish terrorist tandem for over a month now. I share the grief of the people of Austria," Pashinyan said. He added that Nagorno-Karabakh was "at the front of the anti-terrorist war ... without exaggeration, the fate of civilization is decided here."

With reporting by AFP.

Nov. 3: Analysis

A Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty video report looks at claims of cluster munitions attacks.

Nov. 2

- The two sides pledged to not target civilians or "non-military objects," the OSCE Minsk Group — co-chaired by the U.S., France and Russia and tasked with mediating the conflict — said. The loose agreement was struck at talks between the sides in Geneva, though fell far short of a new ceasefire deal, three of which have already collapsed. Armenia and Azerbaijan also pledged to provide a list of prisoners who had been captured since fighting broke out more than a month ago.
- However, within hours both sides had accused the other of targeting residential areas with ongoing missile strikes, Al Jazeera reported.
- Moscow said it would provide "necessary" support to Armenia should the conflict spill out from the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh territory, AFP reported. It came after Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan formally requested consultations with Russia within the framework of their collective defense treaty. Russia has so far adopted a cautious approach to the conflict, unlike rival Turkey which has vociferously backed its ally Azerbaijan.

- Baku said there would be no need for Russian intervention because it was not threatening Armenian territory, AFP reported. Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan but has been under de facto control of Armenian-backed separatists since 1994.
- Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev pledged to fight "to the end," should any diplomatic talks fail to result in Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding regions being put under Baku's control, Reuters reported.
- No side reported achieving any major territorial gains over the weekend, after Armenia said Azerbaijan was closing in on the region's second largest city, Shusha, at the end of last week.
- Armenia claimed Azerbaijan used white phosphorus — a chemical weapon restricted under the Geneva Convention — in an attack Saturday morning, Russia's TASS news agency reported. Azerbaijan denied the claims and said Armenia had been transporting white phosphorus into the area, Al Jazeera reported.
- U.S. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said Turkey should play no role in a peacekeeping force in Nagorno-Karabakh and said he was working with Scandinavian governments to put together a potential peacekeeping mission, Armenian public radio reported. Russia said it had not received details on the proposal, news site RBC reported. As of Saturday, Sweden said it had not received any official request from the U.S. to send peacekeeping troops to the region.

With reporting from AFP, Al Jazeera, Open Caucasus Media, RBC, Reuters and TASS.

Nov 2: Analysis

Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh's main city could become "another Sarajevo," if Azerbaijani forces manage to capture it, Neil Melvin, director of international security studies at the RUSI think tank in London told Reuters in a piece assessing Baku's military options.

Academic and analyst Samuel Ramani summarizes the view of Andrey Kortunov, director general of the Russian International Affairs Council, a foreign affairs think tank close to the Kremlin, on how Russia is approaching the stand-off between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Oct. 30

- Azerbaijani forces were closing in on the town of Shusha, the second largest in the region, on Thursday evening, the leader of Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh said. Its capture would mark a turning point after a month of fighting. "Whoever controls Shushi controls Artsakh," he said, using the Armenian names for the town (Shusha) and Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), AFP reported. Both sides reported continued missile strikes overnight and into Friday morning.
- Talks are set to take place in Geneva on Friday with the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group — the main body involved in peacekeeping efforts in the region made up of representatives from France, Russia and the United States. Russia's state-run Sputnik News reported Thursday, citing an Armenian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, that the two sides would not meet bilaterally, but would each hold separate talks with the Minsk Group's co-chairs. The meetings were originally agreed as

part of the latest U.S.-brokered ceasefire deal which was struck last weekend but almost immediately collapsed.
- Russia is open to Azerbaijan reclaiming seven areas surrounding the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh that Armenia has controlled for 26 years, President Vladimir Putin said Thursday.
- Armenia either directly used internationally-banned cluster munitions or supplied them to Armenia-backed forces in Nagorno-Karabakh for an attack on the Azerbaijani city of Barda, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reported. Azerbaijan claimed the strikes Wednesday killed at least 21 civilians, but Armenia denied responsibility. Human Rights Watch called on Yerevan to "immediately cease" using the banned weapons and destroy its stocks.
- The U.S. said it believes "there is no military solution to this conflict," following a phone call between National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Thursday evening, according to a U.S. statement released after the call. O'Brien said Armenia was "taking the brunt of the casualties" and called for renewed negotiations and a ceasefire.

With reporting by AFP, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Open Caucasus Media and Sputnik News.

Oct. 30: Analysis

The Warsaw-based Center for Eastern Studies assesses the extent of Azerbaijan's military gains since the start of the conflict.

Oct. 29

- Azerbaijani authorities announced that the bodies of 30 Armenian soldiers that died in ongoing fighting were handed over to the Armenian side early in the day, thanking Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu for the associated mediation efforts. Armenian Defense Ministry spokesman confirmed the handover and said that Armenia is ready for a reciprocal humanitarian gesture.
- Azerbaijan launched its heaviest missile strikes in a month of fighting on Stepanakert, the largest city in its Armenian-populated breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh, separatist officials said. "Azerbaijan struck Stepanakert for several hours, tens of missiles hit the city," Karabakh's rights ombudsman Artak Beglaryan told AFP. "Civilians were injured as a result of the strike, the heaviest during the recent fighting," he said.
- A planned meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers scheduled Thursday in Geneva has reportedly been postponed until Friday, according to Russian state-run news agencies RIA Novosti and Sputnik News, citing unnamed diplomatic sources in Baku. The meeting was agreed as part of the U.S.-brokered ceasefire which rapidly collapsed earlier this week.
- U.S. Presidential candidate Joe Biden called on Donald Trump to stop the flow of military equipment to Azerbaijan and urge Turkey and Russia to also stop supplying the sides with weapons. In a statement posted on his campaign website, Biden added that "a large-scale humanitarian disaster is looming for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh."
- The United Nations said Wednesday more than 130,000 people have been displaced by

the fighting and that more than 70 schools and kindergartens had been damaged. Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for the UN Secretary General said the body strongly condemned attacks on population centers, pointing to the reported Armenian strike on Barda, 20 miles from the frontline, earlier this week which Azerbaijan claims killed at least 20 civilians — the most reported in a single attack since the conflict resumed.
- Reports from witnesses to that Wednesday rocket attack on Barda continued to emerge overnight, including a first-hand account and photos of the aftermath from New York Times reporters who were caught up in the attack. Armenia has denied responsibility.
- Both sides accused the other of launching new attacks Thursday morning, though no major fatalities were reported.

With reporting from AFP, RIA Novosti, Sputnik News, The New York Times, France 24 and Azadliq Radiosu.

Oct. 29: Analysis

Laurence Broers, Caucasus program director at London-based peacebuilding organization Conciliation Resources who has written widely about Armenia, Azerbaijan and the conflict assesses the stakes as foreign ministers were due to meet in Geneva — a meeting which has now been postponed until Friday.

“Now the situation is close to turning into a protracted war — a war of attrition,” Vladimir Novikov, a senior researcher at the Institute of Socio-Political Studies of the Black Sea-Caspian Region told The Moscow Times. “There are no diplomatic solutions to the conflict yet. Both sides have taken tough positions.” He added that a key factor in whether Russia will become more involved is the geography of the conflict — Moscow will find it harder to refuse its obligations under a collective defense pact if fighting extends into Armenia proper.

Both Pashinyan and Aliyev would face significant domestic repercussions should they be seen to back down, Andrey Suzdaltsev, dean of the faculty of world economy and world politics at the Higher School of Economics told Russia’s state-run RIA Novosti agency. "If Stepanakert is captured, there will be a wave of refugees — more than 100,000 people who will flood Yerevan and all the cities of Armenia. Then Pashinyan will be turned from a defender of sovereignty to a loser. If Aliyev loses, he will suffer heavy consequences. There is strong opposition. A victorious war was needed to strengthen his power and pass it on to his inheritor. He needs victory."

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