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Armenia PM Blames Russian Peacekeepers for Karabakh Blockade

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Russian peacekeepers at an outpost established along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin Corridor mountain pass. **Alexander Ryumin / TASS**

Armenian Prime Minister Nikolai Pashinyan accused Russian peacekeepers Thursday of failing in its mission to unblock a key road that links Armenia to the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Pashinyan last week accused Armenia's neighboring arch-nemesis Azerbaijan of blocking the Lachin corridor, Yerevan's sole road link to the Armenian-populated separatist enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, and cutting off residents from food, gas and medicine.

"De facto it turns out that the obligation [...] to control the Lachin corridor isn't carried out by the Russian peacekeeping contingent either," Pashinyan said at a cabinet meeting Thursday, according to the Armenpress news agency.

"Of course, this is happening as a result of the unlawful actions of Azerbaijan, but the situation doesn't change from this," Pashinyan added.

“Because that’s what the key meaning of the Russian peacekeeping contingent is — to not allow for such unlawfulness to happen and particularly to keep the Lachin Corridor under control.”

Moscow stationed peacekeepers in the parts of Karabakh that remained under Armenian separatist control, including the Lachin corridor, after a six-week war between Yerevan and Baku ended with a Russian-brokered truce in late 2020.

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Azerbaijani activists have blocked the key road since early last week to protest what they claim is illegal mining causing environmental damage.

Baku claims the protest was spontaneous, but Yerevan has accused it of staging the demonstrations.

The Kremlin rejected the accusations against Russian peacekeepers Thursday, telling reporters on a conference call that they “act exclusively in the spirit and letter” of ceasefire agreements with Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Russia’s representative at the UN Security Council said this week she expects transport via the Lachin corridor to be restored “in the very near future” and urged both countries not to increase tensions.

U.S., British, Irish and Norwegian diplomats called on Azerbaijan to restore free movement along the route.

AFP contributed reporting.

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