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Armenian Leader Questions Russian Peacekeeping Role in Karabakh

By AFP

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Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinin at a meeting with Putin at the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg. **kremlin.ru**

The prime minister of Armenia on Tuesday questioned the role of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh as he discussed a blockade of the breakaway region with President Vladimir Putin.

Since mid-December Azerbaijani activists have been blocking the Lachin corridor, the only road between Armenia and Karabakh, to protest what they claim is illegal mining. As a result of the blockade, the mountainous region of some 120,000 people is running short of food, medicines, and fuel.

Baku claims the protests are spontaneous but Yerevan accuses Azerbaijan of orchestrating the demonstrations in order to push Armenians to abandon the disputed territory.

Meeting Putin on the sidelines of a regional summit in St. Petersburg, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said he wanted to discuss the "crisis" and its possible solutions.

Pashinyan said that despite it being Moscow's responsibility, "the Lachin corridor is not under the control of Russian peacekeepers."

Related article: Explainer: What Is Russia's Role in the Current Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis?

Azerbaijan and Armenia have already fought two wars over Karabakh. The most recent fighting, in 2020, claimed more than 6,500 lives and ended with a Russian-brokered truce that saw Yerevan cede territories it had controlled for decades.

As part of the deal, Moscow has stationed peacekeepers in Karabakh. Since the start of the blockade, Armenia has repeatedly accused Russian peacekeepers of failing their mission in Karabakh.

Speaking in front of journalists, Putin said that the settlement of tensions in the South Caucasus was the "main issue."

He said the leaders began discussing the issue on Monday evening but did not provide further details.

Ilham Aliyev, the leader of Armenia's arch-enemy Azerbaijan, was also present in St. Petersburg for the regional summit.

Moscow has sought to maintain its role as a powerbroker between the former Soviet republics despite being bogged down in its own military campaign in Ukraine.

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