Armenia Lashes Out at 'Bystander' Russia Over Karabakh Blockade

By [AFP](#)

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Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan **kremlin.ru**

Armenia on Thursday accused Russian peacekeepers of failing to protect ethnic Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and called for a multinational peacekeeping force to step in.

"The behaviour of Russian peacekeepers is unacceptable to us. They have become silent bystanders [in Karabakh]," Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said.

Moscow has rebuffed the criticism.

Russia deployed peacekeepers in Karabakh under a ceasefire it brokered in 2020 to end a six-week war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the long-disputed enclave.

Earlier this month Armenia accused Azerbaijan of creating a humanitarian crisis in Karabakh by blocking the sole land link connecting the mountainous enclave to Armenia.

Karabakh's 120,000 inhabitants are mostly ethnic Armenians and depend on the vital land link, called the Lachin corridor.

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The blockade has resulted in shortages of foodstuffs and medicines in the enclave, which has been controlled by Armenian separatists since the territory broke away from Azerbaijan in 1991 and has been disputed by the two countries ever since.

"Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh expect Russia to say how it plans to get the Lachin corridor unblocked," Pashinyan told a meeting of his government on Thursday.

Pashinyan said Russia had "undertaken to ensure the security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh."

Seemingly implying that Moscow was either unable or unwilling to fulfil its obligations, Pashinyan said it should either seek a UN mandate for its peacekeepers, which would give them more authority to act, or allow a "multinational peacekeeping contingent" into the region.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova rejected Pashinyan's accusation.

"The criticism of Russian peacekeepers in this situation is unacceptable," she said.

"Russian peacekeepers are doing everything possible to improve the situation on the ground."

Azeri environmental activists have been blocking the Lachin corridor for over two weeks to protest at what they say is illegal mining in Karabakh.

The Azeri government says the protest is spontaneous and civilian transport is able to move freely in both directions between Armenia and Karabakh.

But Yerevan has accused Baku of staging the demonstrations.

On Thursday, the Armenian separatist authorities in Karabakh said they were suspending gold and copper-molybdenum mining by an Armenian industrial group in the enclave.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Karabakh broke away from Azerbaijan. Around 30,000 people died in the ensuing conflict.

Armenia and Azerbaijan fought another war over the territory in autumn 2020.

The fighting claimed more than 6,500 lives and ended with a Russian-brokered truce that saw Yerevan cede to Baku territories it had controlled for decades.

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