The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Armenia PM Says Raised Peacekeeper 'Problems' with Putin

By AFP

March 14, 2023



Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. **primeminister.am**

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said Tuesday he had complained to President Vladimir Putin about "problems" with Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, warning of an escalation in the restive Caucasus region.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have fought two wars for control of the Armenian-majority region and the latest conflict in 2020 ended with the deployment of Moscow's forces.

Pashinyan's comments are the latest sign that Armenia, which relies on Russia as a security guarantor, is growing frustrated with the Kremlin whose attention is focused on Ukraine and confrontation with the West.

"In a phone conversation with Putin yesterday, I spoke of a possible escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh and said that there are problems in the zone where Russian peacekeepers are

responsible," Pashinyan said during a press conference.

"Azerbaijan's rhetoric is becoming more and more aggressive every day," he said, denouncing a blockade of the so-called Lachin corridor, which is Karabakh's sole land link with Armenia.

Since mid-December, a group of self-styled Azerbaijani environmental activists has barred traffic in the Lachin corridor to protest what they say is illegal mining.

Pashinyan on Tuesday described the disruptions along the route as "preparation for ethnic cleansing of Armenians."

Waning influence

Yerevan has claimed that the blockade has led to a humanitarian crisis and was aimed at driving Armenians from Karabakh, which Baku has denied.

Armenia, which hosts a permanent Russian military base on its territory, is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that includes several pro-Moscow ex-Soviet republics — but not Azerbaijan.

Last week Yerevan refused to assume the rotating top post in the security bloc — partly in a show of frustration over the peacekeepers' failure to prevent Karabakh's blockade.

"It is not that Armenia is leaving the CSTO, the CSTO is leaving Armenia, which is of a great concern to us, Pashinyan said.

Yerevan's distancing from the bloc marked another sign of Russia's waning authority in its traditional sphere of influence.

At least three Armenians died in the latest border clashes at the beginning of March.

"I want to underline that this happened in the zone of responsibility of Russian peacekeeping forces. This worries us," Pashinyan said Tuesday.

Progress, problems, red lines

Pashinyan also said that Armenia recently received Baku's response to proposals for a full peace treaty, which Yerevan submitted in mid-February.

He noted some progress in the peace process, but said "fundamental problems" remain because "Azerbaijan is trying to put forward territorial claims, which is a red line to Armenia."

Yerevan has accused Baku forces of occupying — after the 2020 war — some 150 square kilometers in Armenia, along the countries' shared border.

On Feb. 20, the European Union deployed an expanded monitoring mission to Armenia's volatile border area as Western engagement grows in the region seen by the Kremlin as its geopolitical backyard.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, ethnic Armenian separatists in Karabakh broke away

from Azerbaijan. The ensuing conflict claimed around 30,000 lives.

Another flare-up in violence in 2020 left more than 6,500 dead and ended with a Russian-brokered truce.

Under the deal, Armenia ceded territories it had controlled for decades and Russia deployed its peacekeeping contingent to oversee the fragile ceasefire.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/03/14/armenia-pm-says-raised-peacekeeper-problems-with-putin-a80476