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Russia Confirms Secret Talks With U.S., EU on Eve of Nagorno-Karabakh War

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Russian peacekeepers patrol populated areas in Nagorno-Karabakh. **Russian Defense Ministry**

Senior Russian, United States and European Union diplomats met in secret on the eve of Azerbaijan's lightning campaign to retake the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Kremlin confirmed Wednesday.

Politico Europe reported Wednesday that U.S.-EU-Russia talks on pressuring Baku to end its nine-month blockade of Karabakh took place on Sept. 17 in Istanbul.

Two days later, Azerbaijan's forces launched a two-day "anti-terrorism" offensive, setting off Nagorno-Karabakh's dissolution as an unrecognized breakaway state and a mass exodus of ethnic Armenians to Armenia.

"Certain contacts on Karabakh indeed took place," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Wednesday.

"It wasn't exactly as described [in Politico Europe]. There are many inaccuracies and mistakes

in this material," Peskov added without elaborating further.

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Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova characterized the meeting as a "regular exchange of views" earlier Wednesday.

"There was nothing secret about this meeting," Zakharova told reporters, saying Moscow had been approached by Washington and Brussels.

She confirmed that Igor Khovayev, the Foreign Ministry's special representative on Armenian-Azerbaijan normalization was Moscow's envoy at the talks.

The United States dispatched Louis Bono, senior adviser for Caucasus negotiations, while the European Union sent its representative for the region Toivo Klaar, according to Politico Europe.

Such meetings have become rare in the 19 months since Russia invaded Ukraine and fell under Western sanctions and diplomatic isolation.

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