

Russian peacekeepers extend control following skirmish near Hadrut

OC Media · OC Media · 2020-12-14

Russian peacekeepers have extended their area of control in Nagorno-Karabakh after fighting between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces over two villages in the south.

According to the head of the peacekeeping force, Rustam Muradov, fighting broke out over the villages of Khtsaberd (Chaylaggala) and Hin Tagher (Kohna Taghlar) in southern Nagorno-Karabakh's Hadrut region on 11 December.

According to the Nagorno-Karabakh Infocenter, Azerbaijani forces broke the ceasefire and during the ensuing battle, managed to enter Hin Tagher and the vicinity of Khtsaberd. Six Armenian soldiers were reportedly injured during the fighting.

In a statement released on 13 December, Azerbaijan's Defence Ministry said that the Azerbaijani military conducted an 'anti-terrorist operation', in response to Armenian forces they claimed had remained 'in forested areas' and had carried out attacks.

The ministry's statement specifically claimed that one attack on 26 November, 'in the Sur village of the Khojavend region' in which three Azerbaijani soldiers were killed and two injured. They also cited an alleged attack near Hadrut on 8 December, in which one soldier was killed and one civilian injured.

Shortly after the fighting ended, Russian peacekeepers entered Khtsaberd and Hin Tagher.

According to the previous maps released by the Russian Government, Hin Tagher and Khtsaberd fell on the Azerbaijani side of the 'line of contact' between the two sides, and were outside of the mandate of the peacekeeping forces.

However, the tripartite peace declaration stipulates that within the boundaries of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, both sides would remain at their positions as of the date of the declaration.

Following the arrival of peacekeepers to Hin Tagher and Khtsaberd, a new map was released by Russian authorities on 13 December showing Armenian-controlled territory extending to the South in a narrow strip of territory that includes the two villages.

Unconfirmed reports on Telegram claimed that Azerbaijani forces captured at least two POWs during the skirmish. The apparent POWs are pictured in several videos uploaded to Telegram. The videos are undated and unverified. The Armenian authorities have not made mention of any POWs captured during the ceasefire violation.

On Sunday, Armenia's Ministry of Foreign also reported that Azerbaijani forces had broken the ceasefire near the Armenian controlled villages of Mets Shen (Boyuk Galadarasi) and Hin Shen (Kirov), which are located near the Azerbaijani controlled city of Shusha (Shushi). Azerbaijani authorities have not commented on this statement, and there has not been further information on the status of, or situation in, the two villages.

For ease of reading, we choose not to use qualifiers such as 'de facto', 'unrecognised', or 'partially recognised' when discussing institutions or political positions within Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and South Ossetia. This does not imply a position on their status.

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