
Clinton Urges Final Push For Karabakh Peace In Baku, Yerevan

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Armenia - Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian welcomes US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Yerevan, 04Jul, 2010

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urged Armenia and Azerbaijan to finalize a framework agreement to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as she visited the two South Caucasus states on Sunday.

Clinton spoke of 'promising' signs in the protracted peace process after holding talks with President Serzh Sarkisian in Yerevan, where she arrived from Baku earlier in the day. In what appeared to be a warning primarily addressed to Azerbaijan, she also strongly condemned threats to end the bitter dispute by force.

'As I said earlier today in Baku, the United States remains committed to a peaceful resolution based on the Helsinki Principles of non-use of force or threat of force, territorial integrity and the equal rights and self-determination of people,' Clinton told a joint news conference with Armenian Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian. 'President Obama reaffirmed this commitment in a joint statement with [Russian] President Medvedev and [French] President Sarkozy after a recent G8 summit in Canada.'

'We stand ready to help both Armenia and Azerbaijan achieve and implement a peace settlement,' she said. 'We know this will not be easy. But we think it is the necessary foundation for a secure and prosperous future.'

Armenia - US State Secretary Hillary Clinton is arriving to Yerevan in a two-day visit, 04Jul, 2010

When asked whether she is more hopeful about Karabakh peace after her talks with the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders, she replied: 'It is promising that the [OSCE] Minsk Group process is engaged very intensively, and ... there is a recognition on the part of both Armenia and Azerbaijan that any settlement must be based on the Helsinki Principles.'

'And now we would hope to see real progress made on completing the Basic Principles to enable the drafting of a final peace settlement,' Clinton added, echoing the June 26 joint appeal of the leaders of three powers co-chairing the Minsk Group.

Chances of that happening in the coming months were called into question by the worst Armenian-Azerbaijani ceasefire violation in Karabakh since 2008 that was reported on the night from June 18-19. Four Armenian troops and one Azerbaijani soldier were killed in what Yerevan says was an Azerbaijani commando raid on a Karabakh Armenian outpost in the disputed territory's north.

Clinton said she expressed her concerns to both Aliyev and Sarkisian about this and other 'unacceptable violations of the 1994 ceasefire agreement' that stopped the Armenian-Azerbaijani war. 'The United States strongly condemns the use of force or the threat to use force,' she stressed.

Aliyev and other Azerbaijani leaders regularly threaten to win back Karabakh and Armenian-controlled districts in Azerbaijan proper surrounding it by force if the long-running peace talks yield no results soon.

The deadly firefight occurred the day after Aliyev and Sarkisian held talks in Saint Petersburg, Russia hosted by Medvedev. According to the Kremlin, the two leaders narrowed their differences of the basic principles of a peaceful settlement that were first formally proposed to them by the mediating powers in Madrid in 2007.

Armenian officials say Medvedev presented the two presidents with new proposals. Nalbandian referred to them as 'a new variant of Madrid principles.' He confirmed he and Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov will meet to discuss it in greater detail later this month.

According to the Armenian presidential press office, Sarkisian discussed the unpublicized document with the American, French and Russian co-chairs of the Minsk Group in Yerevan on Saturday. The three diplomats, who held talks in Stepanakert Friday, then proceeded to Baku and were due to brief Clinton there on the results of their latest tour of the conflict zone.

Meeting with Clinton, Sarkisian described the conflict's resolution as 'the most important challenge facing the Armenian people.' He indicated that a settlement must primarily reflect the will of Karabakh's predominantly Armenian population.
