

Beat: Miscellaneous

Fears of conflict as Azerbaijan downs Armenian helicopter

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USPA News - A military helicopter belonging to the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) crashed Wednesday after it was shot by Azerbaijani troops in a border area, officials from both sides confirmed, but Azerbaijan's foreign ministry claimed that it happened after its troops came under attack. The incident happened at approximately 1:35 p.m. local time when the Mil Mi-24 aircraft, belonging to the NKR Air Force, crashed close to the heavily guarded line of contact that surrounds the disputed region, which is controlled by ethnic Armenians but is internationally recognized as being part of Azerbaijan.

Nagorno-Karabakh Republic's defense ministry said its military helicopter crashed in the vicinity of the line of contact after a "violation of ceasefire regime" by the armed forces of Azerbaijan. A brief statement from the ministry said the helicopter was carrying out training flights, but provided no details about casualties. Local reports said three crew members were killed. Azerbaijan's foreign ministry provided a different version of events, accusing Armenia of repeatedly violating the 1994 ceasefire during "provocative combat flights" as part of military exercises over the past three days. It claimed that the NKR helicopter was shot down after Azerbaijani troops came under attack. "On November 12, as a continuation of the provocative combat flights observed during the last three days, two helicopters of the air forces of the Republic of Armenia, attacking front defense positions of the troops of Azerbaijan, opened fire," Azerbaijan's foreign ministry said. "With return fire, one helicopter was shot down and another one was forced to leave the fire zone." Artsrun Hovhannisyan, a spokesman for Armenia's defense ministry, rejected the allegations and warned that Azerbaijan would suffer "severe consequences" for what he described as an unprecedented provocation. "After the wreckage has been examined, it will be clear that the helicopter was not armed at all," he said. Armenia and the NKR defense ministry both claimed that Azerbaijani forces continued to fire after the helicopter had crashed. "From rifle weapons of various calibers, the enemy continues intensively shooting the place of incident," the ministry said, while Hovhannisyan added that Armenian investigators were unable to reach the crash site due to ongoing small arms fire. Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway region on Azerbaijani territory with a predominantly ethnic Armenian population, has remained under Armenian control since the late 1980s, when the region claimed independence from Azerbaijan to join Armenia. The conflict is estimated to have left more than 30,000 people dead on both sides between 1988 and 1994, when a ceasefire was reached.

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