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SNA mercenaries in Azerbaijan: the Visual Evidence

 akmckeever  October 26, 2020  article





Bu metin Dünyadan Çeviri tarafından [Türkçeye](#) çevrilmiştir.

In late September 2020, unconfirmed reports began to circulate on social media alleging that members of the Syrian National Army (SNA), Turkey's proxy forces in

northern Syria, had been sent to Azerbaijan. Initially, as there was no definitive evidence and there appeared little reason for Turkey to send mercenaries to Azerbaijan, a country with a sizable and well-equipped military not engaged in any combat at the time, these reports seemed to be nothing more than unsubstantiated rumors. This changed the morning of September 27th, when Azerbaijan launched major military operations against the Armenian-controlled territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. In the follow days and weeks, a number of videos and images, in addition to testimonies given by fighters present, were published by local Syrian and international media outlets. While Azerbaijani and Turkish partisans have continued to vigorously deny the presence of SNA fighters in the conflict, analysis of the visual evidence clearly demonstrates the validity of these reports. Below I have compiled this information, beginning with the strongest examples, with the intentions of publishing it all in one place for others to examine.

Geolocations of Syrian National Army fighters in Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh

The first fully confirmed media showing SNA fighters in Azerbaijan was geolocated to the town of Horadiz, several kilometers from both the Armenian frontlines and the Iranian border. [This video](#) shows a group of fighters listening to what was identified as a song about SNA faction Furqat al-Sultan Murad, while speaking to the camera in

Arabic. Their uniforms, later seen in all media of SNA in Azerbaijan, have an aqua tint and, previously had never been worn by combatants on any side of the Syrian Civil War.



Riam Dalati  @Dalatrm · Oct 3, 2020



Replying to @Dalatrm

The fighters, who are playing Sultan Murad Brigade chants on their radio, continue to joke around.

'We're at the [border] crossing with #Armenia' One says, before another one corrects 'It's Libya, Libya'.

Geolo experts

@JulianRoepcke @obretix can perhaps settle their differences



Julian Röpcke 

@JulianRoepcke

Gotcha b*tches! Um, sorry. Noble fighters of the Free Syrian Army - the best of the best, reis Erdogan decided to fight for a better world.

Not in Syria, but why would they care?! ... ok, sorry.

#NewsMap

SNA mercenaries at an Azeri base in Horadiz, 6 km from the #Karabakh front.





11:04 AM · Oct 3, 2020



204 185 Copy link to Tweet

Another video was published the same day, filmed by a Syrian fighter named Mustafa Qanti showing himself and another on several frontline locations, under fire from Armenian artillery. One of the three scenes contained in this video was shown to be shot at the same location as a video published by the official Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense several days later.



Samir @obretix · Oct 6, 2020



geolocation of a bunker/barrack on the front-line in Nagorno-Karabakh near Horadiz youtu.be/WvoExPh88js?t=... (WorldView-3 satellite image dated 3 Oct 2020) satellites.pro/#39.393044,47....



Ryan O'Farrell
@ryanmofarrell

As good an illustration as I think is possible with the quality of video from the SNA fighter





Elizabeth Tsurkov @Elizrael

Replies to @sfrantzman @Istanbultelaviv and @amberinzaman

Here is the video with a different watermark. The watermark indicates who managed to obtain the video. This does not indicate the video was filmed in Syria. The speaker clearly states in the end that they are in the "nests of the Armenians".





Heart 9 Comment 4 [Copy link to Tweet](#)

Another scene in the video, showing the interior and exterior of a captured Armenian ammunition bunker, was similarly matched to an Azerbaijani MoD video.

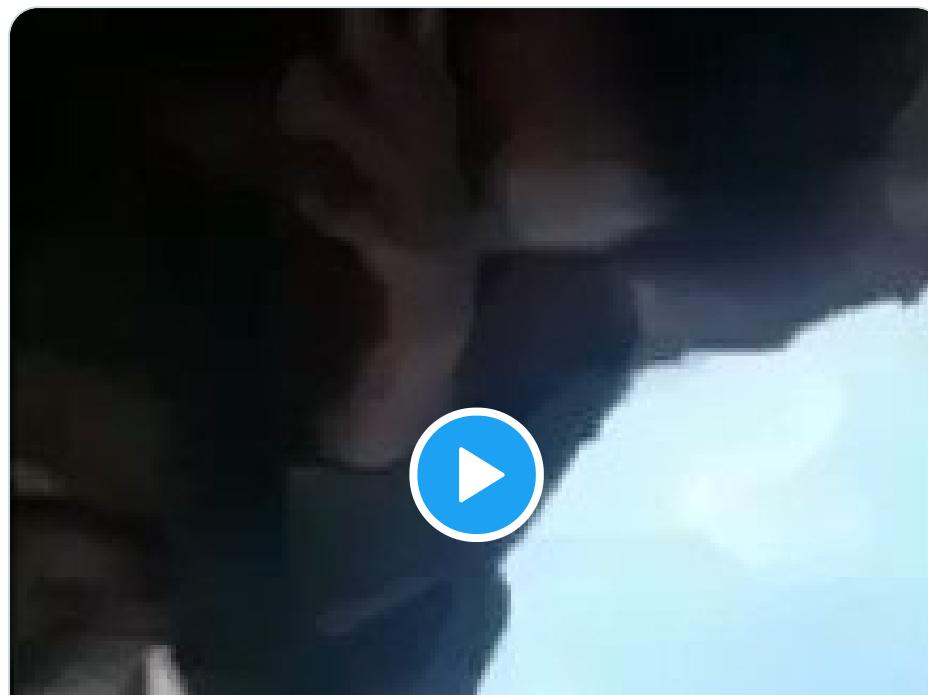


Elizabeth Tsurkov  @Elizrael · Oct 3, 2020



Replying to @sfrantzman @Istanbultelaviv and @amberinzaman

Here is the video with a different watermark. The watermark indicates who managed to obtain the video. This does not indicate the video was filmed in Syria. The speaker clearly states in the end that they are in the "nests of the Armenians".





Samir
@obretix

the same ammunition bunker appears in this video
youtu.be/WvoExPh88js?t=... published by the Ministry of Defense
of Azerbaijan



7:05 PM · Oct 3, 2020



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Stills from the interior of both videos show an almost identical configuration of ammunition boxes.



Left: Still from the video filmed by an SNA fighter

Right: Still from the Azerbaijani MOD video

Sometime within the first week of October other videos were shot and published by SNA fighters, two showing the scenes of an Armenian trench after its capture. This

was geolocated to the village of Marjan/Marjanli, several kilometers west of Horadiz. In the video the man filming speaks in Arabic. He identifies himself as part of Furqat al-Hamza subgroup Liwa' al-Farouq before bragging about the dead Armenian 'pigs' visible at the scene.



Alexander McKeever
@AKMcKeever



I believe the location is 39.379327, 47.234393 in Marjan, a frontline village captured by Azerbaijan a couple days ago



Alexander McKeever @AKMcKeever

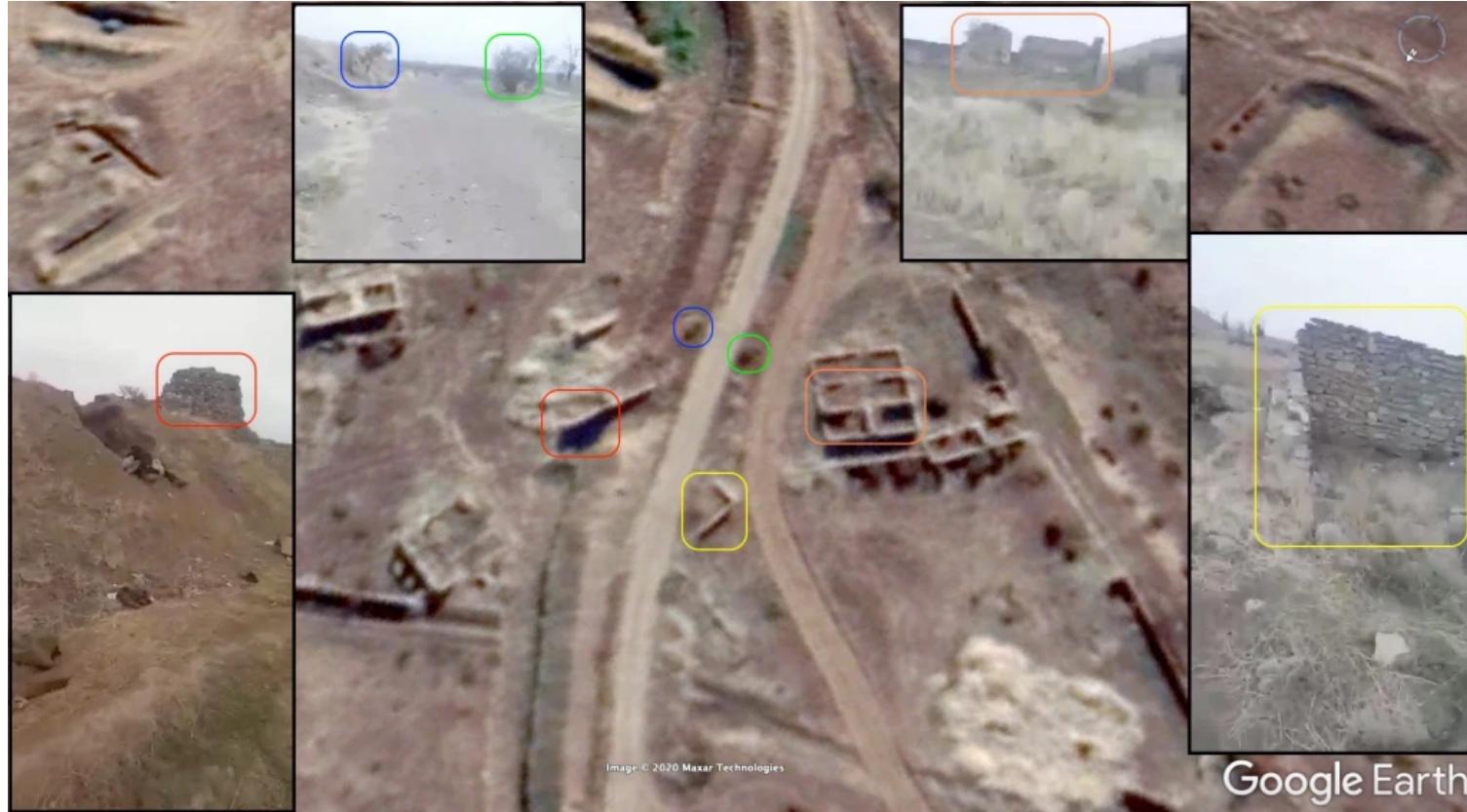
another video of SNA mercenaries in Nagorno-Karabakh



5:31 PM · Oct 10, 2020



132 67 Copy link to Tweet



Google Earth

Location: 39.379370, 47.234291

Other Visual Evidence of SNA fighters in Azerbaijan

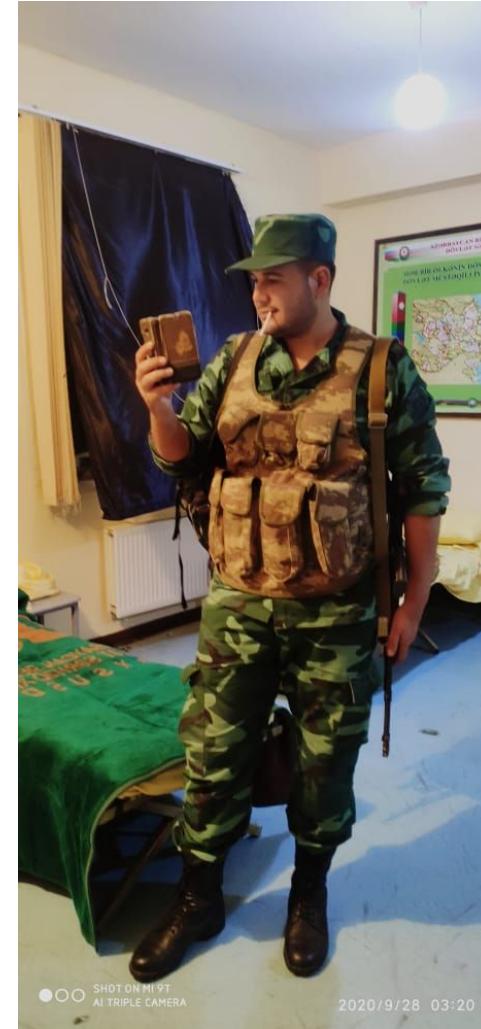
While none of these images or stills from video below have been geolocated, they offer further evidence of SNA members in Azerbaijan. The first image was published on September 30th by Jesr Press, a media outlet from eastern Syria, reportedly showing the dying breathes of a man named Abdul Razzaq ('Abu Hurairah') from the

largely Turkmen-populated village of Tasnin (Homs Governorate). Five others wearing the same aqua-tinted fatigues with mismatched webbing are seen in the photo, as well as another dressed in a digital camouflage pattern used by both the [Turkish](#) and [Azerbaijani](#) military.





Another set of photos appear to have been published by various outlets the same day, with a timestamp indicating they were taken two days earlier. While the men in them are not identified, they are wearing the same combination of aqua-tinted fatigues and digital camouflage webbing as seen in the photo above. In the background one can see posters featuring the Azerbaijani flag as well as a map of Azerbaijan.



UPDATE

Armenian-based military news website [razm.info](#) has pointed out the similarities in the room seen in the images above to that the State Border Guard's military unit headquarters in Horadiz. While it is safe to say that these photos were taken in a room belonging to the State Border Guard and this Horadiz location appears to be quite likely, there is not enough evidence available to definitively say.

 **Razm.info** @razminfo · Oct 27, 2020 

Replying to @razminfo

2. The photos published on September 30th by Idlib Post (@IdlibEn) show armed men in new uniforms of SBGS of Azerbaijan. They are not shaved, which suggest that they are not SBGS troops.

 **IDLIB POST** @IdlibEn

The uniform of the Syrian mercenaries fighting with #Azerbaijan, photos from one of the Azerbaijani military bases.





3. The room where the #Syrian #mercenaries have taken the selfies is in the military unit of the SBGS of #Azerbaijan, located in #Horadiz. The same room was previously shown in 2015 TV report about that border military unit.



ESGER 36-CI VERILIS DSX HORADIZ

Abone OL: <https://goo.gl/W99fFm> Copyright © ARB

ŞəkiSayt: <https://goo.gl/NfKDw5> Facebook: ...

youtube.com

3:51 PM · Oct 27, 2020



54 21 Copy link to Tweet

On October 11th, Jarabulus News al-Kabous, a Telegram channel local to northern Aleppo, published yet another video of SNA fighters purportedly in Nagorno-Karabakh. This one shows three men in the same fatigues in front of a border sign written in Armenian, Russian and English. After one says that the area's been 'liberated' and another points out the Iranian border not far away, one of the Syrians makes the 'Grey Wolves' salute, a hand gesture used by Turkish ultranationalists. The flat terrain in the video appears to be somewhere in the vicinity of the Horadiz/Fizuli frontlines to the south of Nagorno-Karabakh.



Only one video has been published so far showing SNA mercenaries engaged in combat in Nagorno-Karabakh. This came out around approximately the same time as the video above, showing men firing a variety of weapons at unknown targets at a slightly higher elevation.



While the video was not geolocated, one of the vehicles present represents a substantial clue as to where it was shot. In the still to the bottom right an Israeli-produced AIL Storm armored vehicle is visible. This vehicle isn't present anywhere in Syria, and is not used by the Turkish military.



Both the AIL Storm, as well as the other armored vehicle – a Turkish-produced Otokar Cobra, are actively used by the Azerbaijani military. Below are images (via Wikipedia) showing both types of vehicles at a military parade in Baku.



Left: an Azerbaijani military AIL Storm at a Baku military parade.

Right: an Azerbaijani military Otokar Cobra at a Baku military parade.

Visual evidence related to the transportation of SNA fighters to Azerbaijan

On September 24th and 25th, [an image](#) and [a video](#) of uniformed men at a training camp were published on Telegram channels local to northern Syria. The fatigues they are seen in are the same aqua-tinted uniforms appearing in images geolocated to Azerbaijan.





This was later geolocated to the military border crossing from Syria to Turkey at Hawar Kilis, Aleppo. This facility was previously the point of departure for SNA fighters sent to Libya, in addition to reportedly being a military base and command center for Furqat al-Hamza, an SNA faction involved in Azerbaijan operations. Multiple testimonies given by SNA fighters sent to Azerbaijan mention this border crossing as where they were assembled prior to departure.



Samir
@obretix



geolocation of SNA mercenaries t.me/ahtemlat/6903 training at Hawar Kilis military crossing on the border to Turkey maps.google.com/maps?ll=36.671... allegedly prior to their deployment to Azerbaijan (h/t [@AKMcKeever](#))





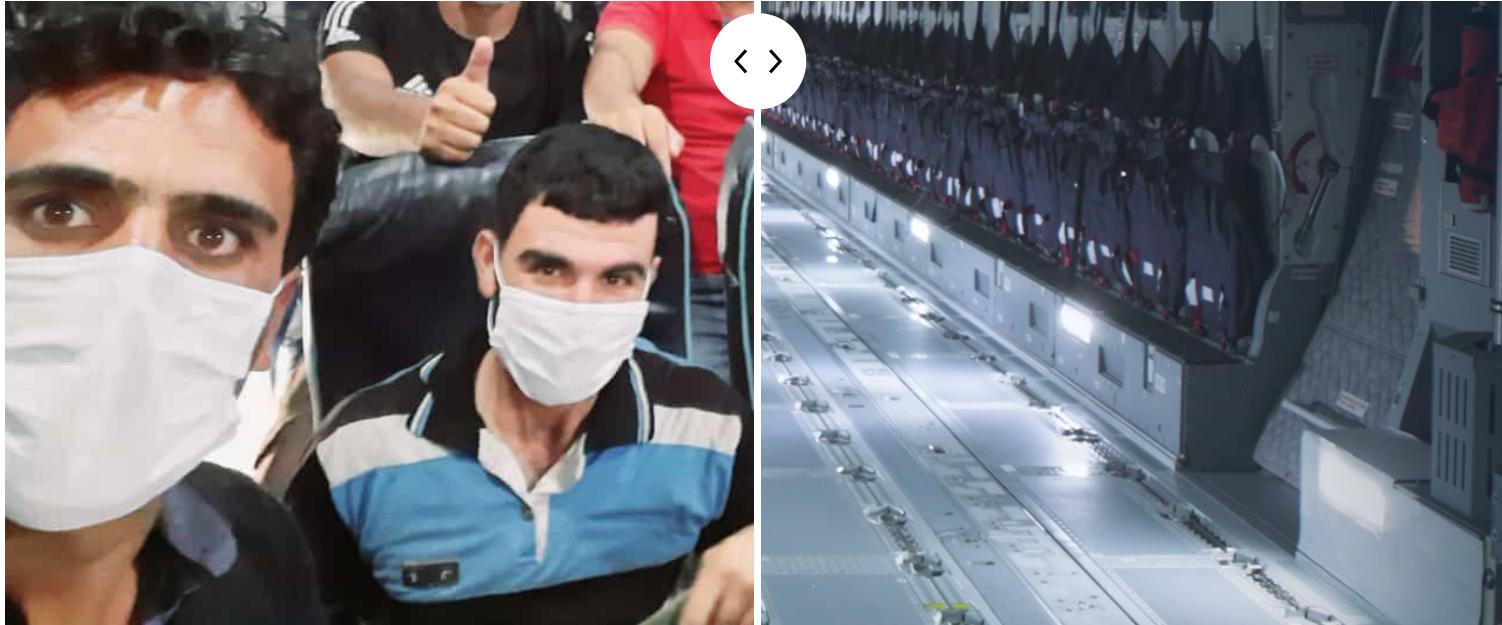
6:22 PM · Oct 8, 2020



143 110 Copy link to Tweet

On September 22nd, reporter Lindsey Snell shared a photo of men within the cargo hold of a transportation aircraft. She identified them as members of Furqat al-Hamza in the process of being transported from Ankara to Baku that day. However, the only verifiable detail in this image is that the plane is an A-400M, a transportation vehicle operated by the Turkish Air Force.

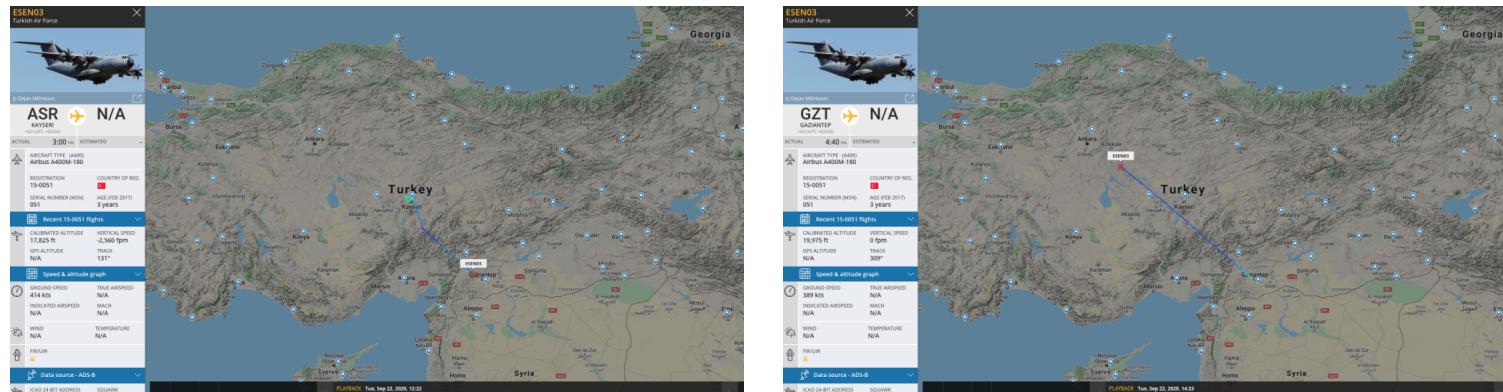




Left: Men reportedly Furqat al-Hamza fighters, in an A-400M.

Right: Still of a video from the Airbus website, showing an empty A-400M cargo hold.

While not definitive evidence, two TuAF A-400M flights were recorded on FlightRadar24 that day. The first departed from Kayseri, where TuAF A-400M's are often stored, before landing in Gaziantep, close to the Syrian border. Several hours later, the same aircraft left Gaziantep, flying northwest. FlightRadar24, which primarily tracks commercial aircraft, lost the plane's signal meaning we can't be sure whether the plane landed in Ankara or Istanbul. This pattern, A-400Ms flying from Kayseri to Gaziantep to Istanbul or Ankara, resembles the transportation process carried out by Turkey while deploying SNA mercenaries to Libya.



UPDATE

A source claiming to be on the same flight [told Syrians for Truth & Justice](#) that this image was not taken in September of SNA fighters en route to Azerbaijan. Rather, it was taken months earlier, in June, and shows members of the Syrian Interim Government-affiliates police being transported by Turkey to the Libyan city of Misrata.

Further information on the circulated photo reported to be of Syrians on Turkish A400 military aircraft

The source supplied this image from the cargo hold of an A-400, alleging that it was that it was taken on the same June 24th flight.



Analysis of Uniforms worn by SNA fighters in Azerbaijan

Soon after the first images of SNA mercenaries in Nagorno-Karabakh came out, Twitter users identified the unique camouflage pattern they were observed in as that of the Azerbaijani State Border Service (Dövlət Sərhəd Xidməti).





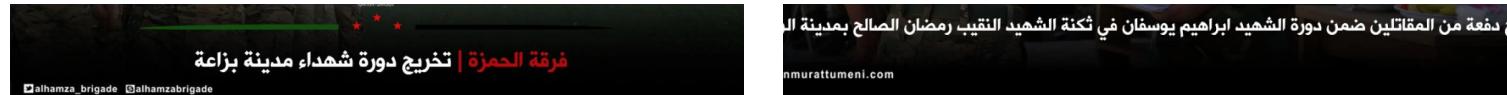
Interestingly, in one of the images geolocated to the Hawar Kilis military crossing, one can observe both these Azerbaijani Border Service fatigues worn by men training in the background, as well as [Turkish multicam](#) fatigues worn by several SNA fighters reportedly deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh. This implies that the SNA fighters received these new uniforms in Syria, prior to transiting through Turkey to Azerbaijan.





Examples of both Furqat al-Hamza and Furqat al-Sultan Murad fighters in the same multicam pattern can be seen below:





Geolocation of unidentified fighters in Azerbaijan, suspected to be SNA members

The first video purported to be SNA mercenaries in Azerbaijan was filmed by a civilian in the frontline town of Horadiz. In it one can see a convoy of 22 vehicles. 21 of these are pickup trucks; all carrying fighters in the back, and at least some outfitted with machine guns. The other vehicle in the convoy is an AIL Storm, the aforementioned Israeli-produced armored off-road vehicle used by the Azerbaijani military. While it has not been verified that these were in fact SNA fighters, it appears likely as the use of pickup trucks for troop transportation is not typical behavior of the Azerbaijani military. The location is also in close proximity to the October 3rd video of SNA fighters in Horadiz highlighted above.

Samir
@obretix

geolocation of a video of pickup trucks driving down a road in Horadiz [twitter.com/LeonL62342286/...](https://twitter.com/LeonL62342286/) current satellite image matches the location satellites.pro/#39.453072,47...



 **Leon L.** @LeonL62342286

Replying to @LeonL62342286

Red marks the location I assume the video was made from. The landmark through which I found the location was the tower of some sort in the background. It is marked in blue in the sat. image. Also of note is the white box on the other side of the street.



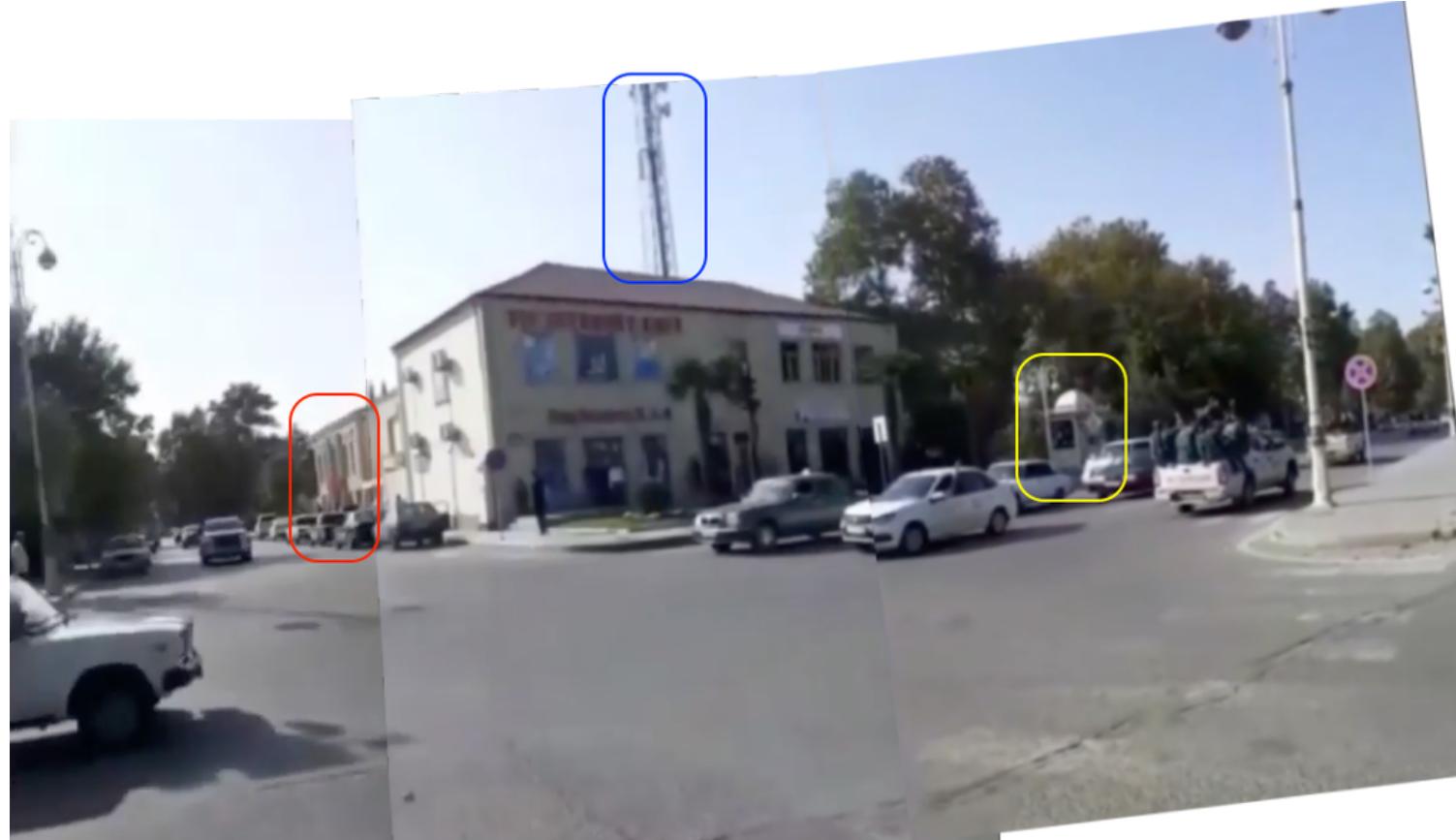


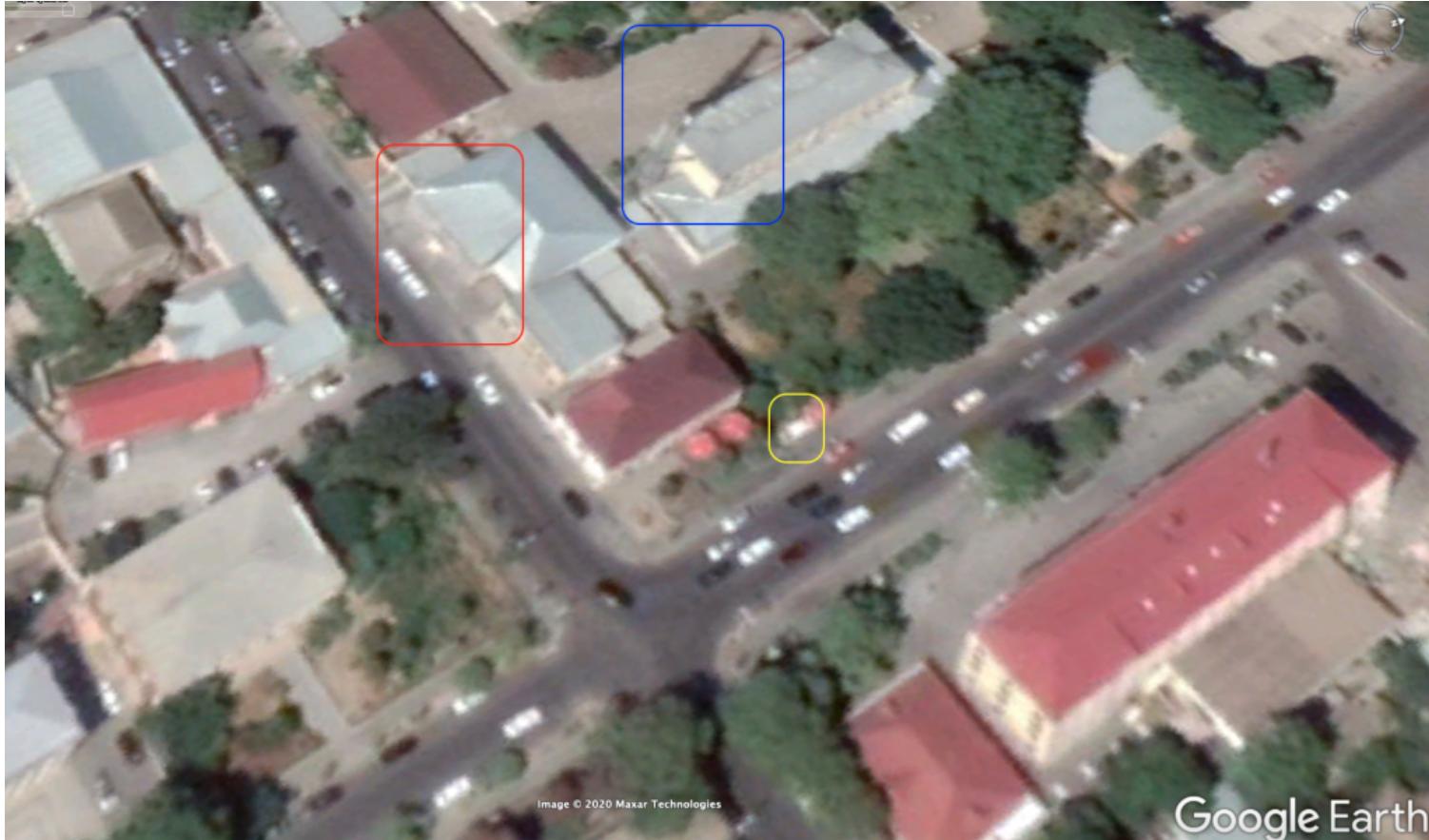
2:29 PM · Sep 28, 2020



87 61 Copy link to Tweet

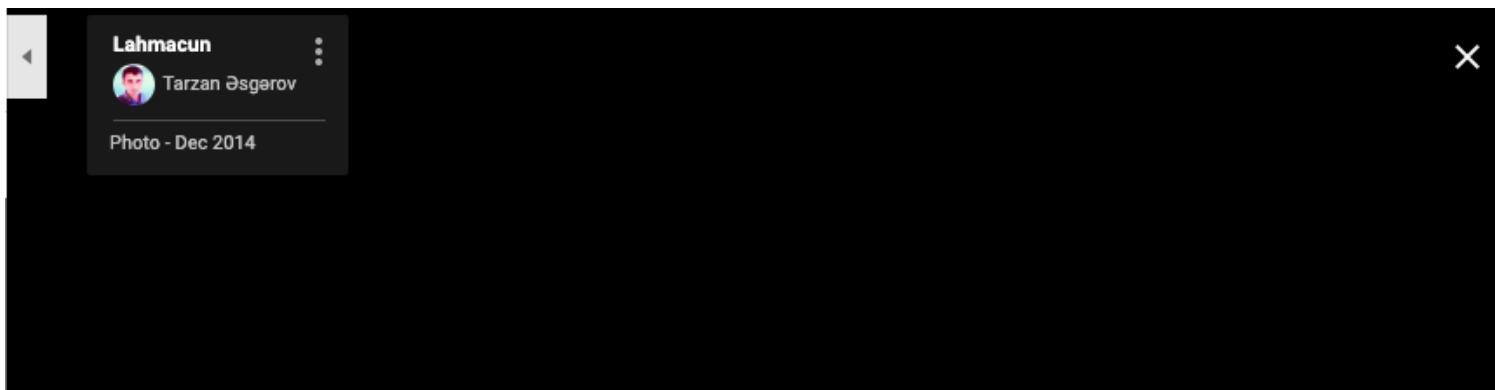
Another video filmed by an Azerbaijani civilian was published around October 1st, showing pickup trucks similarly being used to transport men in fatigues. This was geolocated to the city of Barda, just east of northern Nagorno-Karabakh. As was the case with the first convoy video above, it has not been verified whether these men were SNA fighters. In addition, the location near the northern fronts of the war makes it an outlier from the actually verified SNA media, all of which that has been geolocated taking place in the far south.





Google Earth

Location: 40.384038, 47.124070



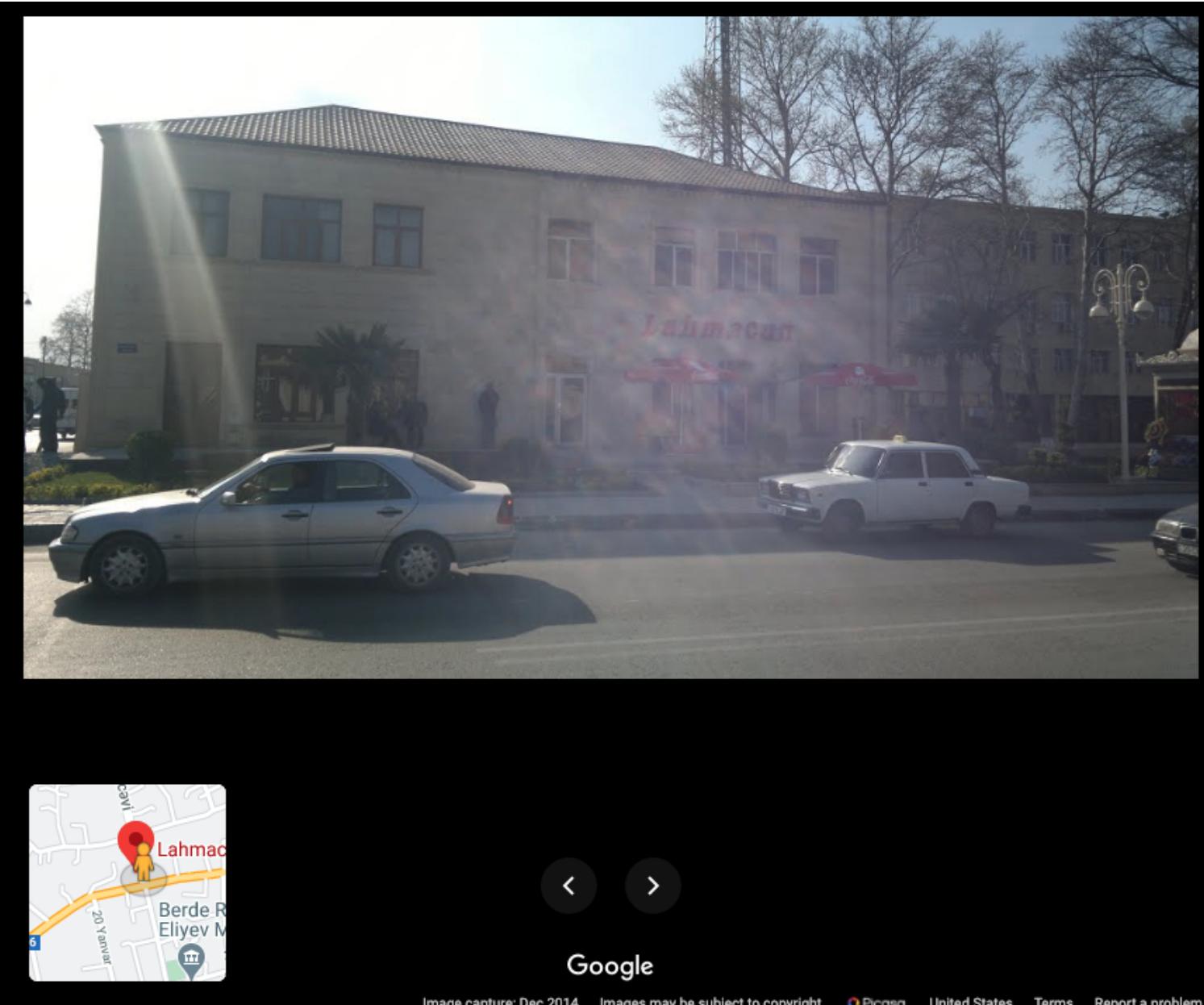


Image posted of the same building in the background of the shot, uploaded by a Google user in Dec 2014.

Footage published by the Armenian Ministry of Defense

In mid-October, the Armenian Ministry of Defense Press Secretary shared two videos on Twitter as further evidence of the SNA deployment to Nagorno-Karabakh. In both, groups of men can be seen wearing the aqua Border Service uniforms. Further identification of these fighters is not possible from these videos.

 **Shushan Stepanyan**
@ShStepanyan 

Mercenary terrorists in the uniforms of the Azerbaijani border guard troops... you can imagine what happened to them.



2:14 PM · Oct 18, 2020 

2.9K

2.4K

Copy link to Tweet



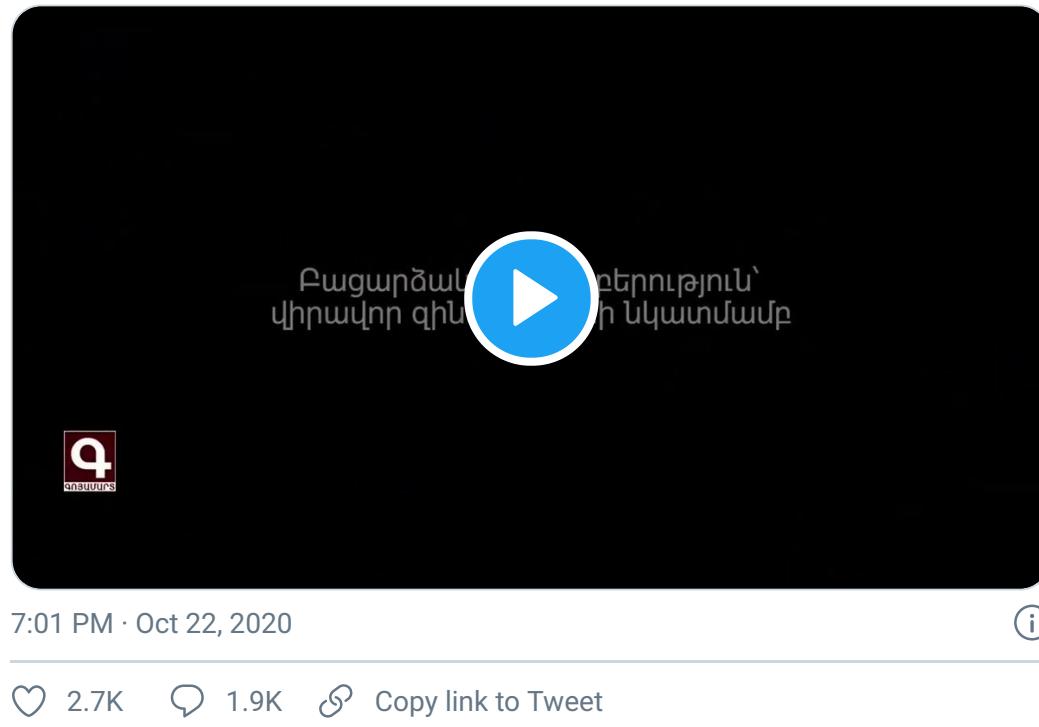
Still from the security camera footage published by the Armenian MOD on October 18th. Note the Border Service uniforms with the mismatched webbing.



Shushan Stepanyan
@ShStepanyan



New video testifying to the presence of mercenary terrorists in the conflict zone



In conclusion there is significant visual evidence verifying the presence of SNA mercenaries in the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh war. A number of videos filmed by men speaking Syrian Arabic, sometimes identifying the factions they're affiliated with, have been geolocated to southern front of the conflict. Further video and imagery shows men identified as Syrians all in the same Azerbaijani Border Service fatigues. In addition to this, numerous researchers and media outlets have collected

testimony from fighters in Azerbaijan themselves, as well as from their family members, representing further evidence of this deployment directly from those involved.

UPDATE (Further geolocations of suspected SNA fighters in Azerbaijan/Karabakh)



Alexander McKeever
@AKMcKeever



Not super important now that the war's over, but came across some more photos allegedly showing SNA mercs in Azerbaijan from earlier in the month. Geolocated to Jabrayil, same building shows up in a video of Aliyev

Location: 39.387485, 47.035425



4:35 PM · Nov 20, 2020



312

168

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Alexander McKeever @AKMcKeever · Nov 20, 2020



Not super important now that the war's over, but came across some more photos allegedly showing SNA mercs in Azerbaijan from earlier in the month. Geolocated to Jabrayil, same building shows up in a video of Aliyev

Location: 39.387485, 47.035425



Alexander McKeever
@AKMcKeever





4:35 PM · Nov 20, 2020



55



30



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Nagorno Karabakh Observer
@NKobserver



1/3 - After some research, we found this to be from an **#Azerbaijan** State Border Service military base in Horadiz. A previous finding by **@JulianRoepcke** also showed what appeared to be foreign...

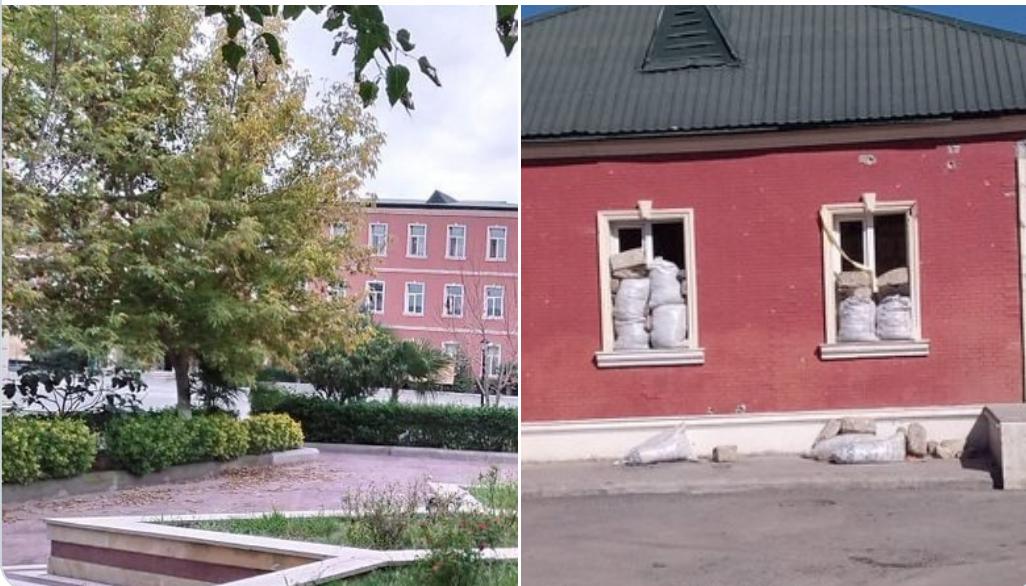
#nagornokarabakh #armenia #russia #turkey
Coordinates here: [google.com/maps/place/39%](https://google.com/maps/place/39%...)...





 **Lindsey Snell**  @LindseySnell

Not unimportant. They're still there for now. Here are a couple photos of where Hamza Division was housed with Sultan Murad (and some AZ soldiers) in Oct [twitter.com/AKMcKeever/sta...](https://twitter.com/AKMcKeever/status/130000000000000000)



3:19 AM · Nov 21, 2020



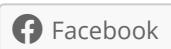
 18  14  Copy link to Tweet

See also:

<https://citeam.org/syrian-mercenaries-in-karabakh.html>

Government Policies Contributing to Growing Incidence of Using Syrians as Mercenary Fighters

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