

2 November 2020



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

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

*More than 2000 Syrian fighters sent to Azerbaijan by Turkey last  
September, 150 Caucasian jihadists got there ahead of them in July*

## Executive summary

This detailed report provides information corroborated by statements, photos and videos on the transfer of Syrians and Caucasians to Azerbaijan to engage in its ongoing military conflict with Armenia in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh (also known as Artsakh). Reportedly, in the second half of September 2020 hundreds of Syrians (civilians and militaries) were transferred through Turkish territory to Azerbaijan to fight as mercenaries alongside the government forces.

Earlier, three batches of Caucasian jihadists arrived in Azerbaijan on three different dates of July. Those Caucasians, whose number was 150, affiliated to Afnad al-Kavkaz/ Soldiers of the Caucasusian Jihadi Islamic fundamentalist rebel group active in northern Syria, primarily in the mountainous, forested areas of northern Latakia province (Turkmen Mountain and Mountain of the Kurds) and parts of the province of Idlib controlled by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.

As for the Syrians enlisted, STJ has confirmed that their number reached at least 2000 on 13 October 2020; the date of finishing this report, and that they were taken to Azerbaijan in three transfers (250 fighters in each). We have also verified that most of them are affiliated to the Syrian National Army (SNA) of the Istanbul-based National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces – the political umbrella of the Syrian opposition forces –, while the others are civilians who were prompted by the woeful economic situation in Syria to accept the 'Turkish offer', though they have never carried a weapon before. Recruitment took place mainly in areas held by Turkey and allies, including Afrin area (Olive Branch Areas).

Statements provided by STJ field researchers and officers of the SNA confirmed that Turkey's security forces began writing name lists of those wanted to fight in Azerbaijan in early September 2020, but the official registration process, however, started on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the same month. That process was led by armed groups known to have close ties with the Turkish government, including: the Sultan Murad Division – whose fighters are mostly Turkoman – the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat), the Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd and the Sham Legion/Faylaq al-Sham.

Later, the registered fighters were transported from a gathering point at the Hawar Kilis military border crossing to another gathering point on the Turkish territory to be then taken to airports and flown to Azerbaijan by military aircrafts mainly A400. According to information obtained by STJ, the first flight was on 22 September 2020; five days before the start of the most violent military operations ever in the disputed territory.

This report is only a part of a broad effort by STJ to monitor the ongoing recruitment of Syrians to fight as mercenaries in conflicts they are alien to. We will report any new reliable information provided on this subject.

## Methodology

For this report, we interviewed 19 sources, among them senior leaders in the SNA and registrars of the fighters – who are known as ‘brokers’ and are associated with armed groups and Turkish intelligence –, fighters who have already been transferred into combat and others on the waiting lists, among them civilians, in addition to relatives of fighters killed recently in Azerbaijan.

Further, our researchers have verified dozens of photos and videos shared via the internet on the subject matter.

Besides, our digital forensics tracked the Turkish military aircraft flights which transported fighters from Turkey to Azerbaijan, as reported by officers and fighters who were on those flights. Our team collected information and open-source evidence, analysed it and presented it in a simplified way.

### 1. Transfers of Caucasian jihadists to Azerbaijan during July 2020

According to a statement given exclusively to STJ by an officer in the SNA, Caucasian jihadists were transferred with their families from Syria to Azerbaijan through Turkey, upon the Sochi Agreement between Turkey and Russia reached on 22 October 2019, under which Turkey undertook to remove foreign fighters from Syria’s northwest. Nevertheless, only Caucasian fighters were removed exclusively to Azerbaijan almost a year after signing the agreement.

The same source confirmed that those Caucasian fighters were stationed in Turkmen Mountain and Mountain of the Kurds in rural Latakia and that they were transported to Turkey through a land military crossing in Latakia and then taken to Azerbaijan by Turkish military aircraft in three flights on 5, 18 and 23 July 2020 (about two months before the start of the last military operations in the Karabakh region in September) the source, however, did not mention the departure and landing points of the plane.

According to STJ’s digital forensics:

- On 18 and 23 July 2020 commercial flights were carried out by civil aircraft between Turkey and Azerbaijan, back and forth. While on 5 and 23 July 2020 several flights were conducted from Turkey to Baku, Azerbaijan, by Turkish A400 military aircrafts.
- **civilian external commercial flights**
  - On 18 July, two commercial flights from Istanbul to Baku were monitored; one on Azerbaijani Airlines and the other on Turkish Airlines.

On the same day, there were multiple internal flights by an A400 military plane, took off from [Kayseri Erkilet Airport](#), which is a military airbase and public airport, towards Gaziantep and then to Istanbul and then returned to Gaziantep and then to Kayseri.

STJ suggests that there is likely a link between these internal flights and the abovementioned commercial flights between Turkey and Azerbaijan, which may have carried Caucasian jihadists.

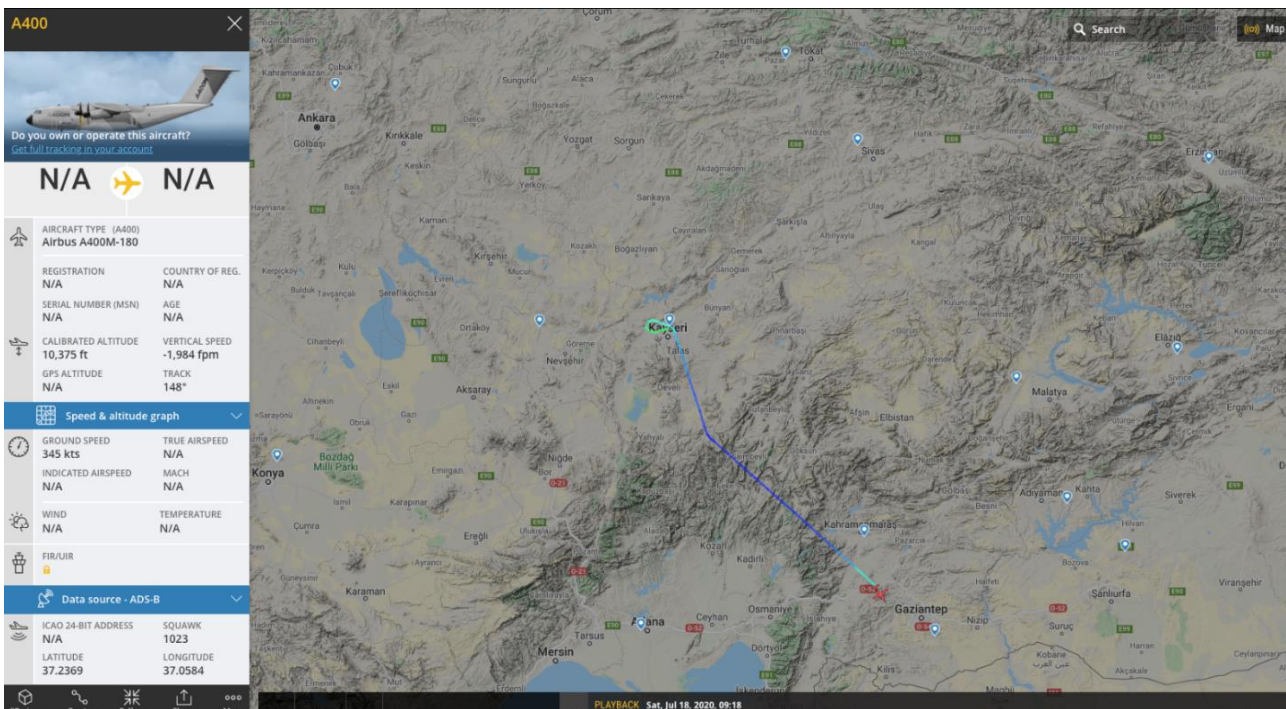


Image 1: data of a flight took off from Kayseri air base towards Gaziantep on the morning of 18 July 2020, the day in which Caucasian jihadists transferred to Azerbaijan, according to our military source. Credit: Flightradar24 website.

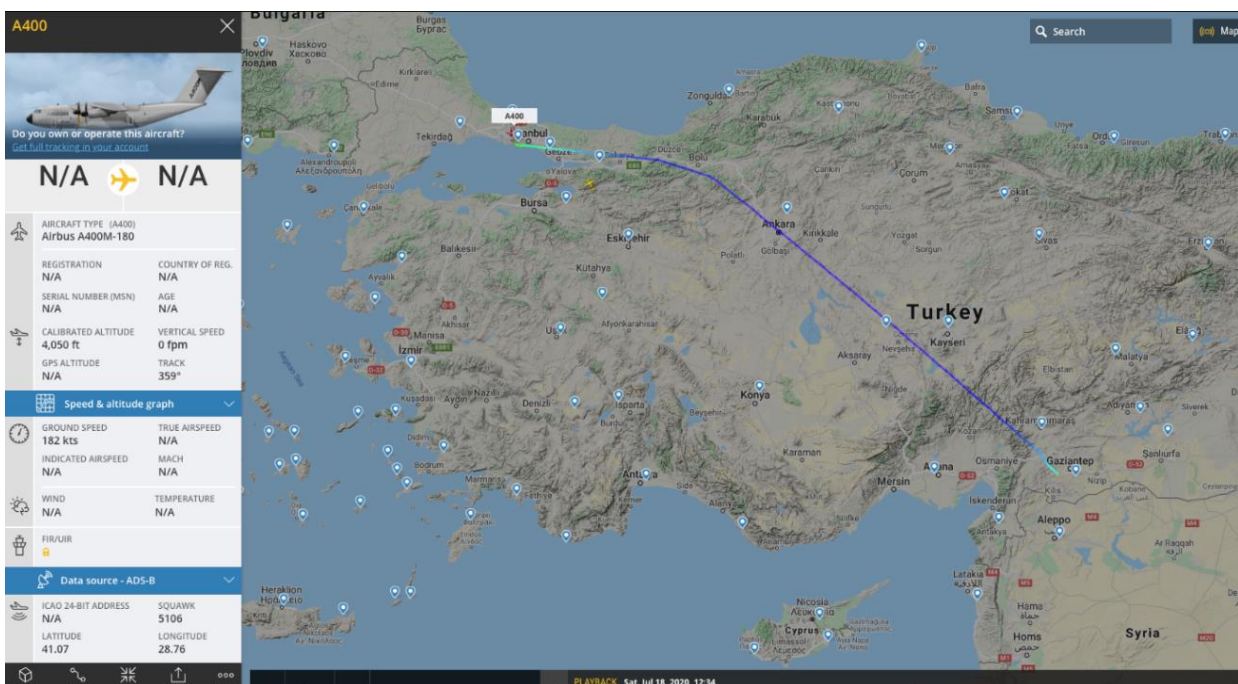


Image 2: data of a flight by an A400 aircraft took off from Gaziantep towards Istanbul in the afternoon of 18 July, a few hours after its arrival from Kayseri. We believe that this flight carried Caucasian jihadists to Istanbul. Credit: Flightradar24 website.

The Kayseri Erkilet Airport is known to have the largest number of A400 military aircrafts.



Image 3: four photos taken on different dates, showing an A400 military aircraft at [Kayseri airport](#), from where military aircraft take off mainly.

- On 23 July, three commercial flights departed from Istanbul to Baku, two of them were on the Silk Way West Airlines (an Azerbaijani company), while the third was on the Azerbaijani Airlines.
- **Military flights by Turkish A400 aircraft**
  - On 5 July a Turkish military cargo plane landed in Baku, which was reported by the Turkish TRT TV. channel in a post on its [Twitter account](#) saying that a Turkish A400 airplane arrived in Azerbaijan carrying medical aid for Coronavirus response. STJ could not verify if there were Caucasian jihadists on this flight or not.



Image 4: a photo published by TRT TV. on 5 July confirming the arrival of an A400 military aircraft in Baku.

- Flightradar24 website tracked a Turkish military A400 aircraft that took off from Ankara on 22 July 2020 at 21:19 pm and landed in Baku, to take off again on 23 July 2020 at 02:08 am towards Afghanistan and return to Turkey at 09:08 am the same day. STJ suggests that the Istanbul-Baku flight carried Caucasian jihadists.

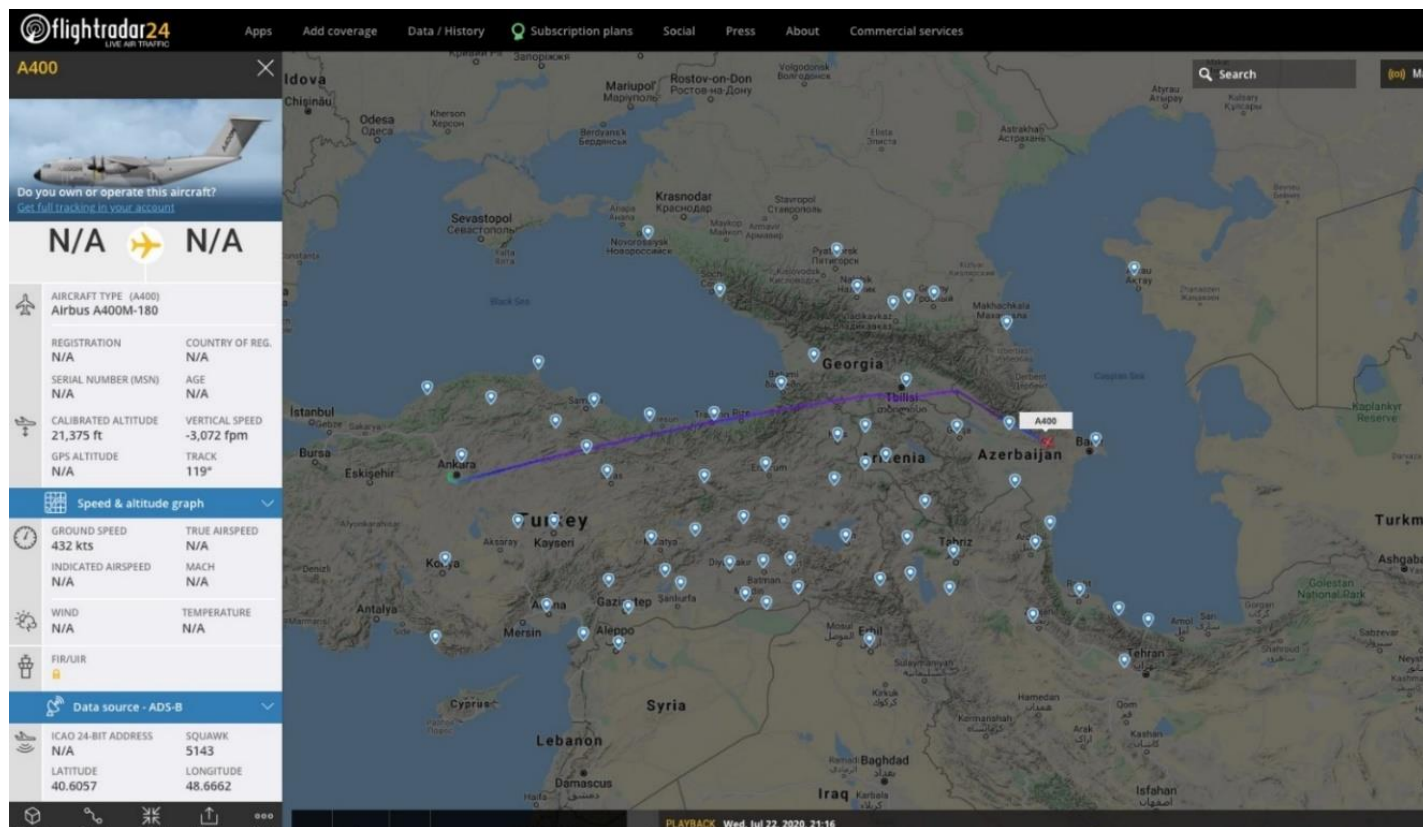


Image 5: data of a flight took off from Ankara towards Azerbaijan on 22 July by Turkish A400 military aircraft. Credit: Flightradar24 website.

## 2. Enlisting Syrians to Azerbaijan

### A. The Syrian armed groups involved

A former leader in the SNA told STJ that the Turkish government instructed its proxies in Syria to recruit people (militaries and civilians) to fight in Azerbaijan in early September 2020 prior to the offensive which was launched on the 27<sup>th</sup> of the same month in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. But the leader's statement refutes what was stated by Ziad Haj Ubaid, a current officer in the SNA, in a program named 'The Talk is Syrian' on the US-based Alhurra news TV channel on 7 October 2020, as he said that the Syrian fighters sent to Azerbaijan were recruited by Turkish security companies.<sup>1</sup> Numerous sources and witnesses,

<sup>1</sup> "Syrians fuel the war raging in Nagorno-Karabakh", 'The Talk is Syrian', 7 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAPckb6UJF8>, (Last visited on:12 October 2020). See the clip on the role of security companies <https://twitter.com/alhurranews/status/1314702180394430471?s=21>.

however, confirmed that Turkey's government and security forces are directly involved in these recruitments and excluded the possibility of the security companies' engagement in that,<sup>2</sup> the officer explained:

**"The recruitment of Syrian fighters to Azerbaijan went in the same procedures followed in recruitments to Libya, but with stricter conditions, as Turkey refused to recruit people under the age of 18 and over 45 and it stipulated their pass to a medical examination proves their physical ability to be into combat, and accordingly they given the approval from the Turkish security/intelligence services and transferred to Turkey."**

A broker, one of those responsible for registering fighters, detailed STJ about the recruitment procedures saying:

**"Those who want to go to Azerbaijan can register directly at one of the headquarters of the Sultan Murad Division or the Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd in the Olive Branch areas, or through people who have strong ties with the Turkish intelligence. In Idlib and the internally displaced persons camps, the Sham Legion/Faylaq al-Sham is primarily responsible for the registration process; civilians and militaries came individually or in groups to registration centres, gave their ID information and their phone numbers to be contacted later."**

He added;

**"The fighters transferred through the Hawar Kilis military border crossing to Turkey, where they were subjected to a full search by the Turkish intelligence which confiscated their cell phones. Then they undergo a medical examination and attend a lecture given by a Turkish officer about their mandated tasks in Azerbaijan. Initially an officer stated that the fighters' mission in Azerbaijan is watching the Turkish bases there, which was refuted then by another officer who said that the mission would be guarding the borders with the Turkish soldiers and lastly, it was said that mission in Azerbaijan would be fighting alongside the Shia'a without any Turkish forces there."**

The source added that the registration for the mercenary fight started on 13 September 2020, and the first batch of fighters arrived in Azerbaijan on the 22<sup>th</sup> of the same month; five days before the launch of military confrontations in Nagorno-Karabakh. Regarding this, a senior officer in the SNA said:

**"On 21 September 2020, the Turkish intelligence sent us a list of 1500 names of Syrians approved to go to Azerbaijan. Indeed, they were transferred there through Turkey in batches; 250 fighters in each."**

He added:

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<sup>2</sup> SADAT is one of Turkish security companies which earlier recruited Syrians to fight in Libya as mercenaries alongside the Turkish-backed forces of the Government of National Accord.



“Requirements to fight in Azerbaijan are stricter than those stipulated in the Libyan case; for instance, Turkey refused to recruit youths born after 2003. There are several registration centres, among them the headquarters of the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division in the village of Kaljibrin and headquarters of the Suleiman Shah brigade in Afrin. However, some people registered through the commander Ahmed al-Duj at the Hawar Kilis military border crossing.”

STJ field researchers confirmed that headquarters of the SNA in Afrin are the main registration centres for the recruitment in Azerbaijan, which was led directly by the Sultan Murad Division, the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat), the Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd and the Sham Legion/Faylaq al-Sham.



Image 6: on the top right emblem of the Sultan Murad Division, on the top left emblem of the Glory Corps/Faylaq al-Majd. On the bottom right emblem of the Sham Legion/Faylaq al-Sham. On the bottom left emblem of the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat).

Information provided by STJ field researchers, officers in the SNA and local activists contradicts the statements made by president of the Syrian National Coalition Naser al-Hariri to the state-run Turkish TV, TRT HABER, as he said: “These fighters have nothing to do with the National Coalition, the Syrian Interim Government or the SNA, so we cannot say that those Syrians fighting in Karabakh affiliated to the opposition.”<sup>3</sup> He added that the

<sup>3</sup> Naser al-Hariri denies the opposition's link to Syrian fighters in Azerbaijan”, Orient website, 8 October 2020, [https://www.orient-news.net/ar/news\\_show/184968/0/%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-](https://www.orient-news.net/ar/news_show/184968/0/%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9-)

armed groups involved in the recruitments are directly linked to the Ministry of Defence of the Interim Syrian Government, one of the organs of the Syrian opposition coalition; as the Sultan Murad Division is a part of the SNA's 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps while the Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya flows within its 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps.

A source in the Liwa Samarkand/Samarkand Brigade confirmed that on 12 September 2020, the Free Police in Afrin sent about 400 of its elements to Azerbaijan to serve as border guards for a monthly salary ranges between 1700 USD and 2000 USD.

## B. Armed groups defraud fighters to make money

In its recruitment drive to Azerbaijan, Turkey offered almost the same inducements with which it has lured Syrian fighters to go Libya; a monthly salary of 2000 USD, financial compensation of up to 40.000 USD in the event of the death of the fighter/mercenary, and promises to grant Turkish nationality to the families of the dead, which has not happened so far (as of 13 October 2020), although credible information says that families of two Syrian fighters died in Libya have commenced procedures to obtain Turkish nationality. However, STJ found that the Syrian opposition groups have not provided pecuniary compensation to families of those killed in the military confrontations in Libya.

A register (broker) said to STJ that Turkey signs a three- or six-months contract with the fighter, stipulates a monthly salary of 3.000 USD and a compensation of 75.000 USD to his family if he died. He asserted, however, that the armed group does not give all this money to the fighter, it rather extorted part of it in exchange for giving him an immediate approval of travel.

He added: "the armed groups always breach the contracts and give the fighters salaries between 800 USD to 1400 USD. The fighter receives only 300 USD in Azerbaijan and the rest of the money given to his family in Syria. As for the death compensation, the groups agree with the fighter to give his family only 50.000 USD out of the 75.000 USD stipulated in the contract, with a pledge to bring his body to be buried in Syria in the event of his death.

The previous information was confirmed by another source, who is a senior leader in the SNA:

**"The armed groups offer different payments, for instance, the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division gives the fighter a monthly salary of 800 USD with an immediate approval to travel, while the Suleiman Shah Brigade gives 1400 USD. It is certain that the groups take away from the fighters' money and give them only a part of it.", he said.**

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[%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86](#) (Last visited: 12 October 2020).  
The original news link in Turkish: Suriye Ulusal Koalisyonu Başkanı al-Hariri: Karabağ'da Suriyeli muhalifler savaşıyor. 7 October 2020. Last visit: 10 October 2020. <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/suriye-ulusal-koalisyonu-baskani-al-hariri-karabagda-suriyeli-muhalifler-savasmiyor-521605.html>

A fighter in the Sultan Murad Division who is now in Azerbaijan talked to STJ and saying:

**“They offered us a monthly salary ranges between 1500 USD and 2000 USD; determined depending on the fighter's specialty, in addition to a compensation of 40.000 USD in the event of death, 30.000 USD in the event of an amputation of a limb and disability, and 15.000 in the event of serious injury (without amputation), beside promises to give Turkish citizenship to the families of the dead, the extent to which this was genuine was uncertain.”**

Each of the armed groups tries to register the largest number of fighters in order to consume part of their salaries or of the financial support provided to them by Turkey. for more information regarding this STJ conducted an online interview with a witness resides in northwest Syria, he said:

**“I went to the headquarters of the Sultan Murad Division with 20 young men, and expressed our willingness to go to Azerbaijan. They offered 1400 USD as a monthly salary to the fighter, 3000 USD to the battalion leader and 2500 USD to his deputy. Then we went to the headquarters of the Suleiman Shah brigade and met the recruiting official, Hatem Diab, who said that they offer the fighter 1800 USD, 4000 USD to the battalion leader and 3000 USD to his deputy.”**

STJ field researcher talked to Syrian fighters who are currently in Azerbaijan and they detailed us about the enlistment process and their mandated tasks; a fighter – he asked anonymity – who is originally from south Damascus stated:

**“I went to register for joining the fight in Azerbaijan at the Sultan Murad Division headquarters where I saw fighters affiliated to other groups also registering to come here through the Division. They gathered us at the Hawar Kilis crossing border point, we were about 250 people, and transferred us to Turkey and from there to Azerbaijan where we arrived on 24 September.”**

Another fighter, who asked to nickname him as Abu Omar, said:

**“After reaching the Hawar Kilis military crossing, we were taken by buses to an airport inside Turkish territory, and then flown to Azerbaijan. When we arrived there, they put us in underground vaults and confiscated our cell phones. They kept only one phone with every 15 Syrian fighters.”**

A fighter from the Levant Front/al-Jabha al-Shamiya, justified his come to Azerbaijan with his poor living conditions:

**“I cannot secure my children's needs, especially those of my adult girls. The Levant Front gives me only 400 Turkish Lira each 50 days. Therefore, I decided to go to Azerbaijan to secure a decent and dignified life for my family.”**

### C. Gathering fighters at the Hawar Kilis border crossing point between Syria and Turkey

On 24 September 2020 Syrian news pages [circulated](#) the next image saying that it is for mercenaries of the SNA, some of them, however, claimed that it was taken in Azerbaijan, while others said that it was taken in an unidentified gathering place before their go.

It must be noted that the fatigues worn by the soldiers in the picture has never been worn by fighters of the Syrian opposition groups, specifically those of the SNA.



Image 7.

On 25 September 2020, Syrian opposition pages on social media published a [footage](#) which they claimed shows fighters of armed groups affiliated to the SNA in a training camp (it was not mentioned when or where the footage was filmed).



Image 8: a screenshot from the abovementioned [footage](#) shows a fighter sitting on the ground wearing a light camouflage military uniform with white spots in its pattern and another standing wearing the same uniform with a red hat matching that worn by members of the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division and the Sultan Murad Division.

Nevertheless, later on 8 October 2020 a digital forensic was [able](#) to [geolocate](#) the circulated footage and photo at (36.671596, 37.216536), which is a military training camp of the SNA at the Hawar Kilis border point.



Image 9: matching the photo and video with a satellite image by our digital forensic.

STJ compared all published photos to see if the fatigues worn by fighters seen at the Hawar Kilis border point, matches those of the SNA.



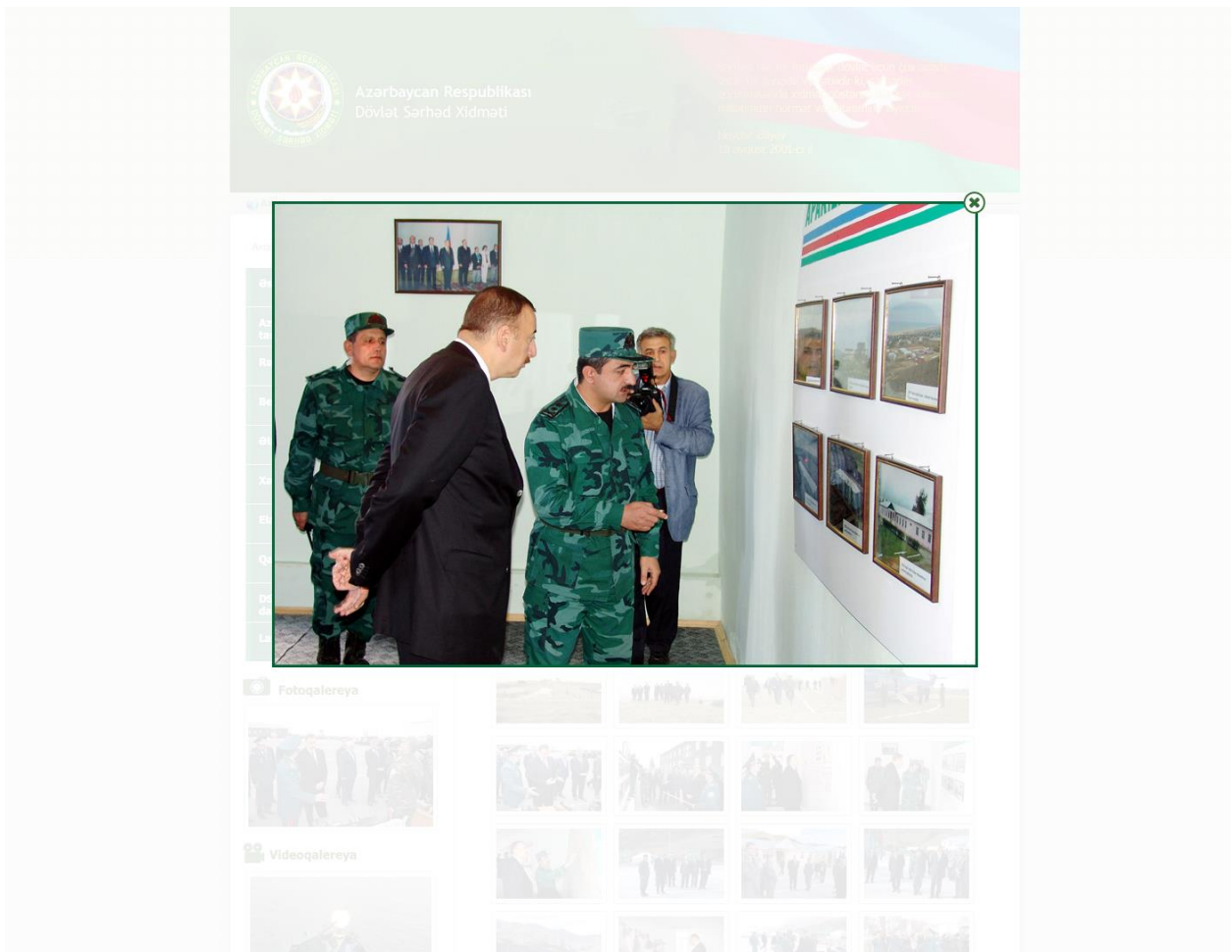
Image 10.

[Digital forensics](#) concluded that the uniform worn by the soldiers who appear in the aforementioned footage and photo matches that of the Azerbaijani border guards.



Image 11: a collage of published photos verified to be of Syrian fighters in [Azerbaijani border guard uniform](#).





From the [Azerbaijani State Border Service](http://www.dsv.gov.az) (Dövlət Sərhəd Xidmətinin) website.



Image 13: a Syrian fighter identified to be Abd al-Razzaq/Abu Hurairah killed in Azerbaijan hostilities.  
Published on 30 September 2020.

Credit: [Jesr](#) website.



Image 14: a collage of published photos of Syrian fighters in Azerbaijan.

Credit: a [Telegram](#) post.

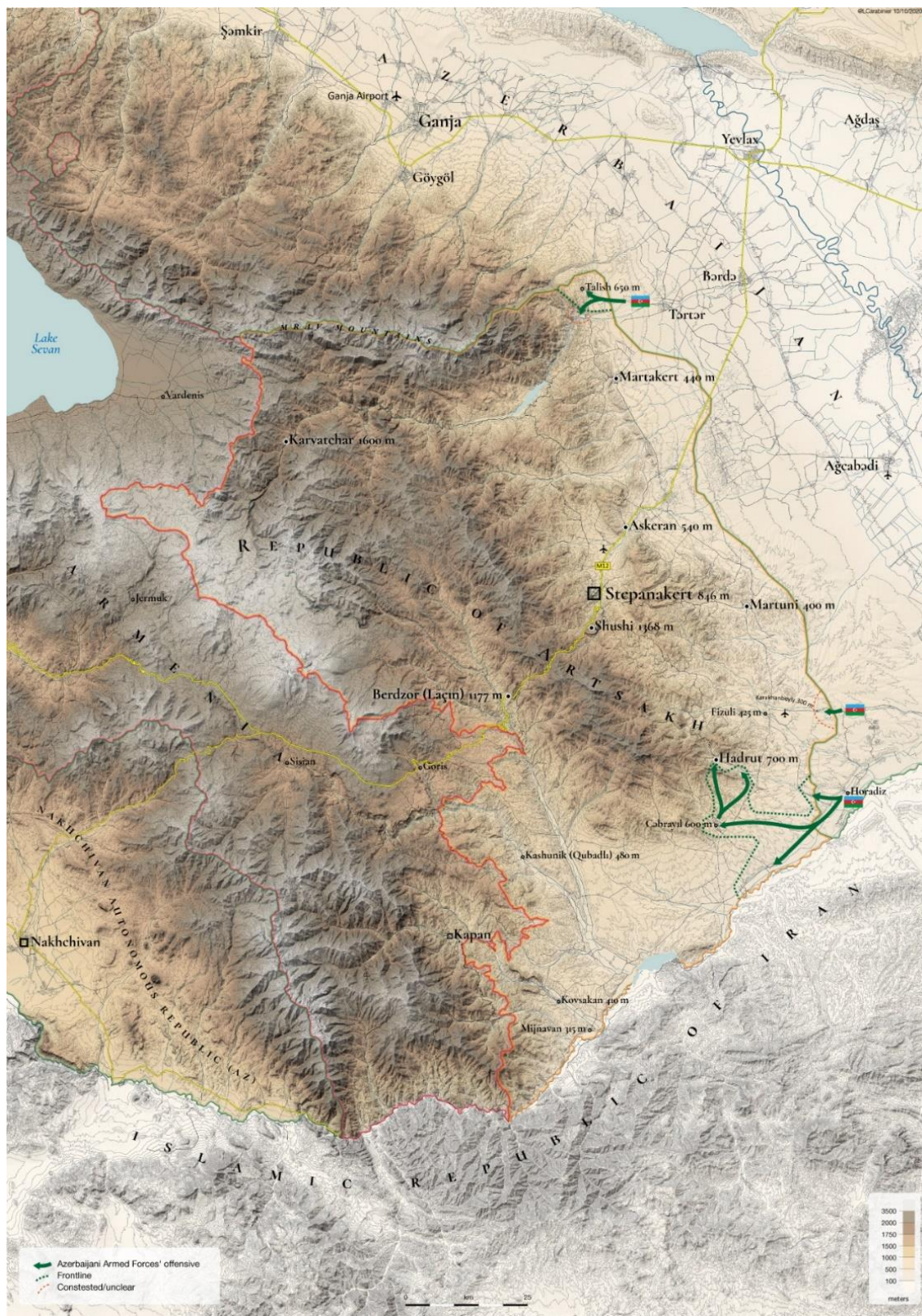


Image 15: a map of the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh (also known as Artsakh) shows the advancement of the Azerbaijani forces with the support of Syrian mercenaries as of 13 October 2020). Credit: a [Twitter](#) post.

#### D. Applicants got rejected

On the other hand, STJ met militaries and civilians who did not obtain the approval from the Turkish intelligence to go to Azerbaijan due to age issues, and others who were accepted but reversed their decision to go at the last minute. One of them – he asked anonymity – told STJ:

**“A member of the Sultan Murad Division called Abu Ayad asked me to bring 150 people to be used in Azerbaijan hostilities for a monthly salary ranges between 1200 USD and 1500 USD. Indeed, I was able to draw the requested number; among them were 25 people from Deir Ballout displacement camp. I went with the recruits to the headquarters of the Sultan Murad Division in Afrin, then in the following day we were taken to the Hawar Kilis military border crossing, but they took us back and asked us to wait until Thursday for there was a batch of fighters there waiting to enter Turkey. On Thursday we returned to the border crossing where the Turkish intelligence inspected our applications and thus approved 148 of us; me and another man were rejected because we are over 50 years old.”**

A fighter, 50, of the Sultan Murad Division who resides in north Syria, revealed:

**“Turkish intelligence refused to send me to Azerbaijan with others because I am over 45 years old. They reject all those under 18 and over 45, as well as those with chronic diseases or war injuries.”**

There are, however, people who reversed their decision to go to Azerbaijan at the last minute, among them a man called Abu Samer, who justified:

**“I registered for the fight in Azerbaijan with my 18-year-old son, Samer, driven by our bad conditions. They claimed that our task there would be guarding the Turkish bases, but we then discovered that was untrue and that we are taken to participate in hostilities, that is why me and my son refrain from that go.”**

### 3. Itineraries of the flights carried Syrian fighters to Azerbaijan

According to numerous statements given by STJ field researchers, witnesses, sources, fighters and officials, including a senior in the SNA, 1500 Syrian fighters/mercenaries were transferred from Turkey to Azerbaijan in six flights by Turkish military aircraft on 23, 24 and 25 September 2020.

STJ digital forensic tracked the mentioned flights and confirmed the occurrence of other flights on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> of the same month:

#### A. Flights on 22 September 2020

Flightradar24 website tracked an A400 Turkish military aircraft which took off from its usual base at the Kayseri airport at 12:22 pm, Turkish time, towards Gaziantep where it stopped for two hours and then departed towards Ankara.

STJ suggests that this plane took fighters gathered in Gaziantep to Ankara to be transferred to Azerbaijan later. Flightradar24 website did not detect any other movements of the same plane on this day, but it monitored a flight from Ankara to Azerbaijan the next day; 23 September 2020.

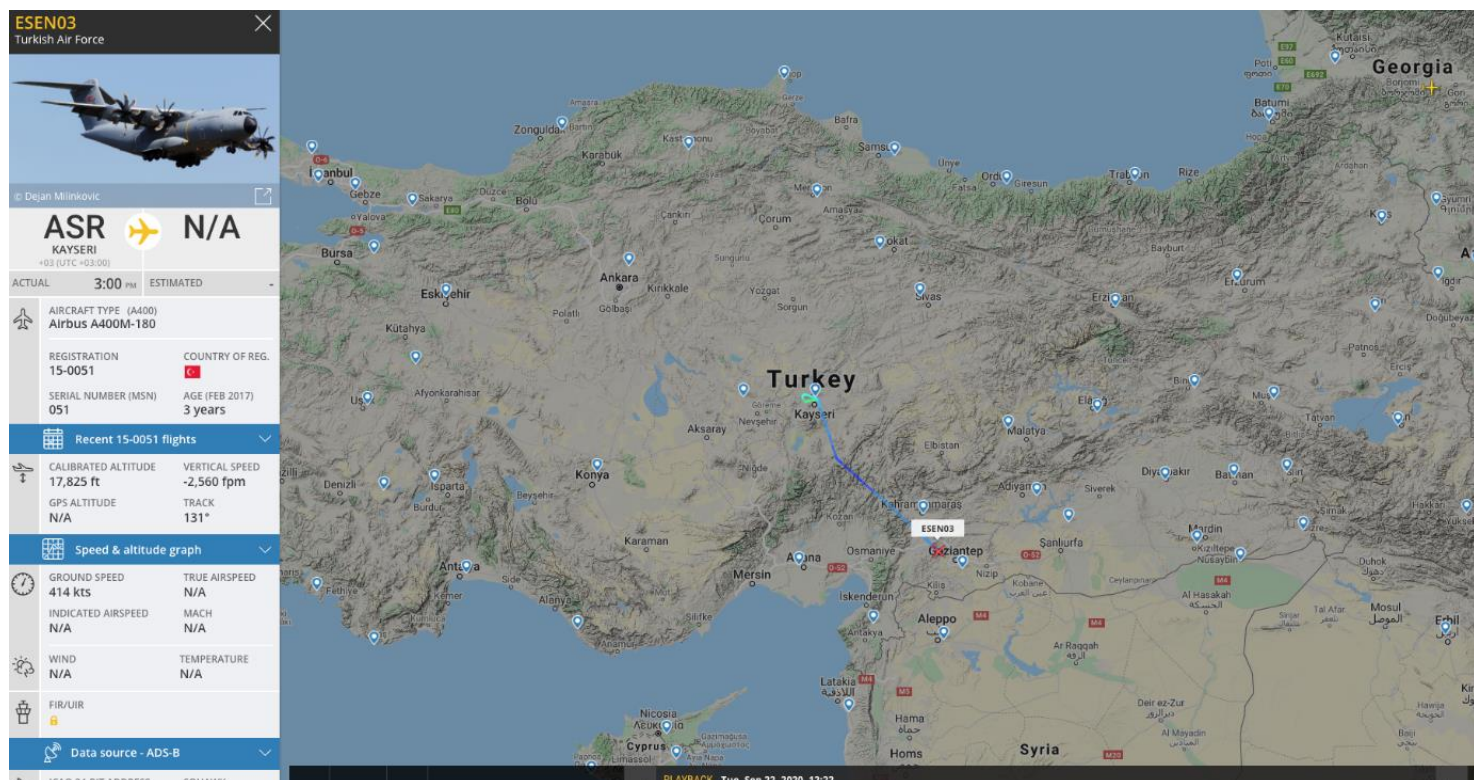


Image 16: data of a flight took off from the Kayseri base towards Gaziantep, Turkey, conducted by a Turkish A400 military plane on 22 September 2020.

Credit: Flightradar24.

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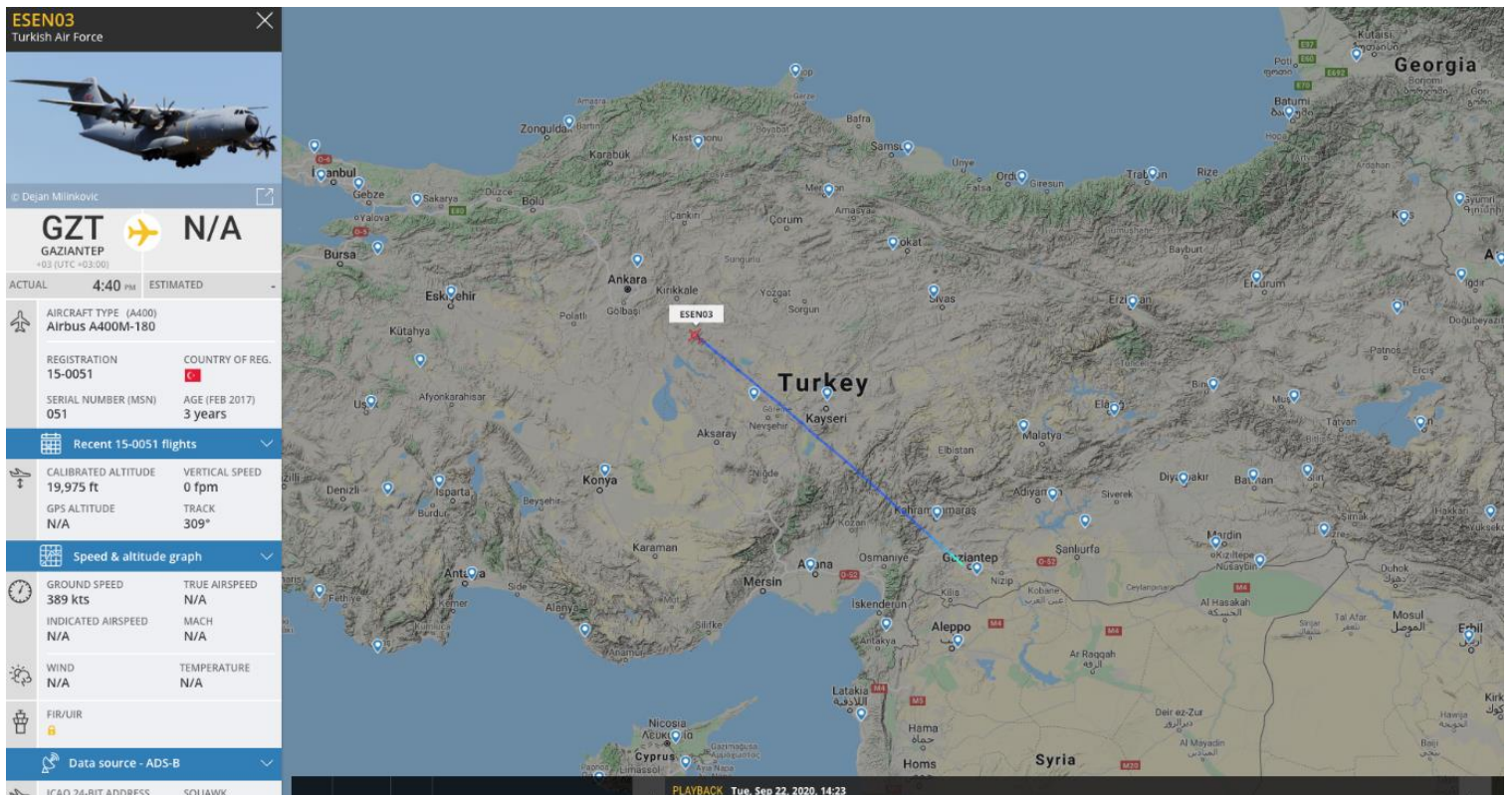


Image 17: data of a flight took off from the Kayseri base towards Gaziantep and then headed to Ankara, Turkey, conducted by a Turkish A400 military plane on 22 September 2020.

Credit: Flightradar24.



Images 18 & 19: The top image's date is unknown but it was first shared online on 22 September 2020. The image at the bottom shows an A400 plane from inside and it is clear that it matches the plane in the above image. Most of the sources who published the photo on social media said that it belongs to Syrian fighters who were recruited to fight as mercenaries in Azerbaijan. We have not received any further information about these photos, but we will post any updates as soon as we get them.



## B. Flights on 23 September 2020

According to the aforementioned sources, including a military source in the SNA, a Turkish military aircraft carried a batch of fighters from Turkey to Azerbaijan on that day. Nonetheless, he refrained from disclosing the type of aircraft and the place from where it took off.

The digital forensic, monitored a single flight by a Turkish C-130 military aircraft that departed from Merzifon, Turkey, to Ganja near the front lines in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, at 10:43 am Turkish time.

Given the location from which the plane took off, we can't say for certain it was carrying fighters, but it likely transported military equipment.

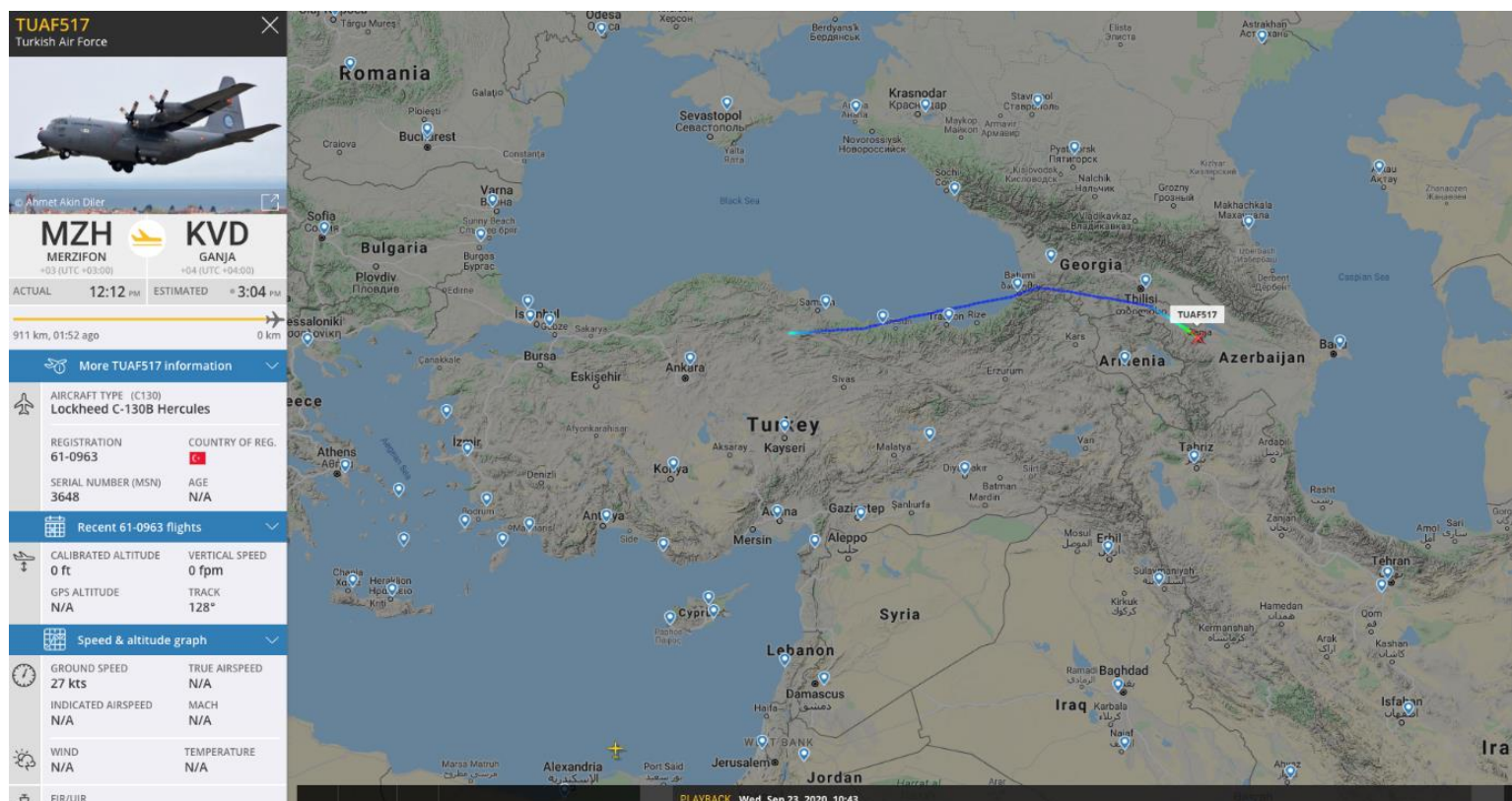


Image 20: data of a flight took off from Merzifon, Turkey, towards Ganja near the front lines in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, conducted by a C130 Turkish military aircraft on 23 September 2020.

Credit: Flightradar24.

## C. Flights on 24 September 2020

STJ's military source confirmed the departure of four flights from Turkey – he did not mention the model of the planes nor their departure or landing points – carrying 250 fighters each, to Azerbaijan. One of those flights took off from Tekirdagh military base and transported military equipment with the fighters.

Indeed, STJ’s digital forensic tracked four flights, one of which took off from Tekirdagh military airport. An A400 Turkish military aircraft was tracked landing at the Tekirdagh airport in western Istanbul at 10:45 a.m., however, Flightradar24 website tracked it between Ankara and Kayseri, so we are not sure about its departure point. Later in the same day, Flightradar24 tracked the same plane flying from the Tekirdagh military airport to Azerbaijan at 14:20 Azerbaijani time, but it could not detect its landing point.

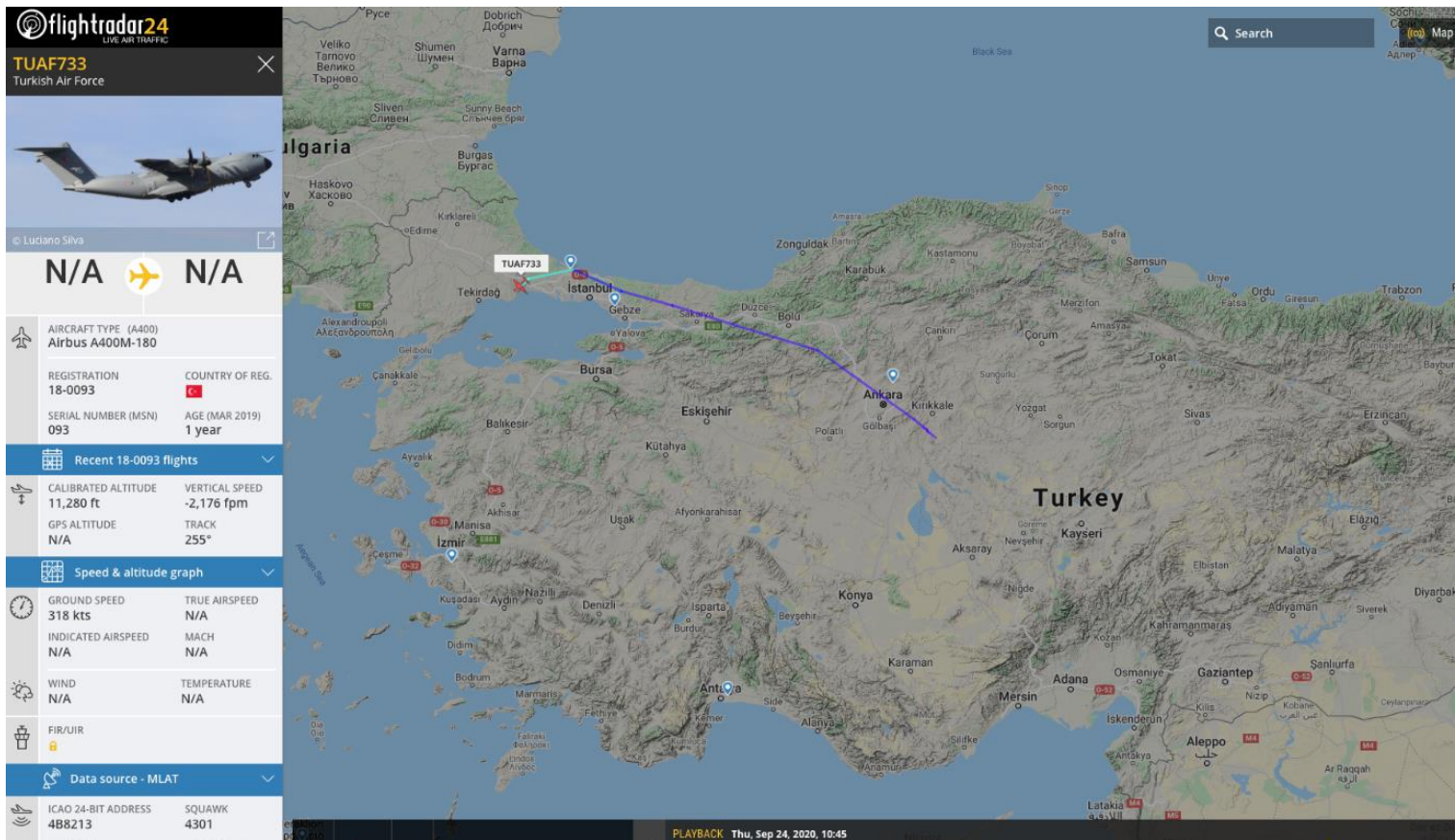


Image 21: data of a flight conducted by an A400 Turkish military aircraft, landed in Tekirdagh military airport in western Istanbul on 24 September 2020 at 10:45 am.

Credit: Flightradar24.

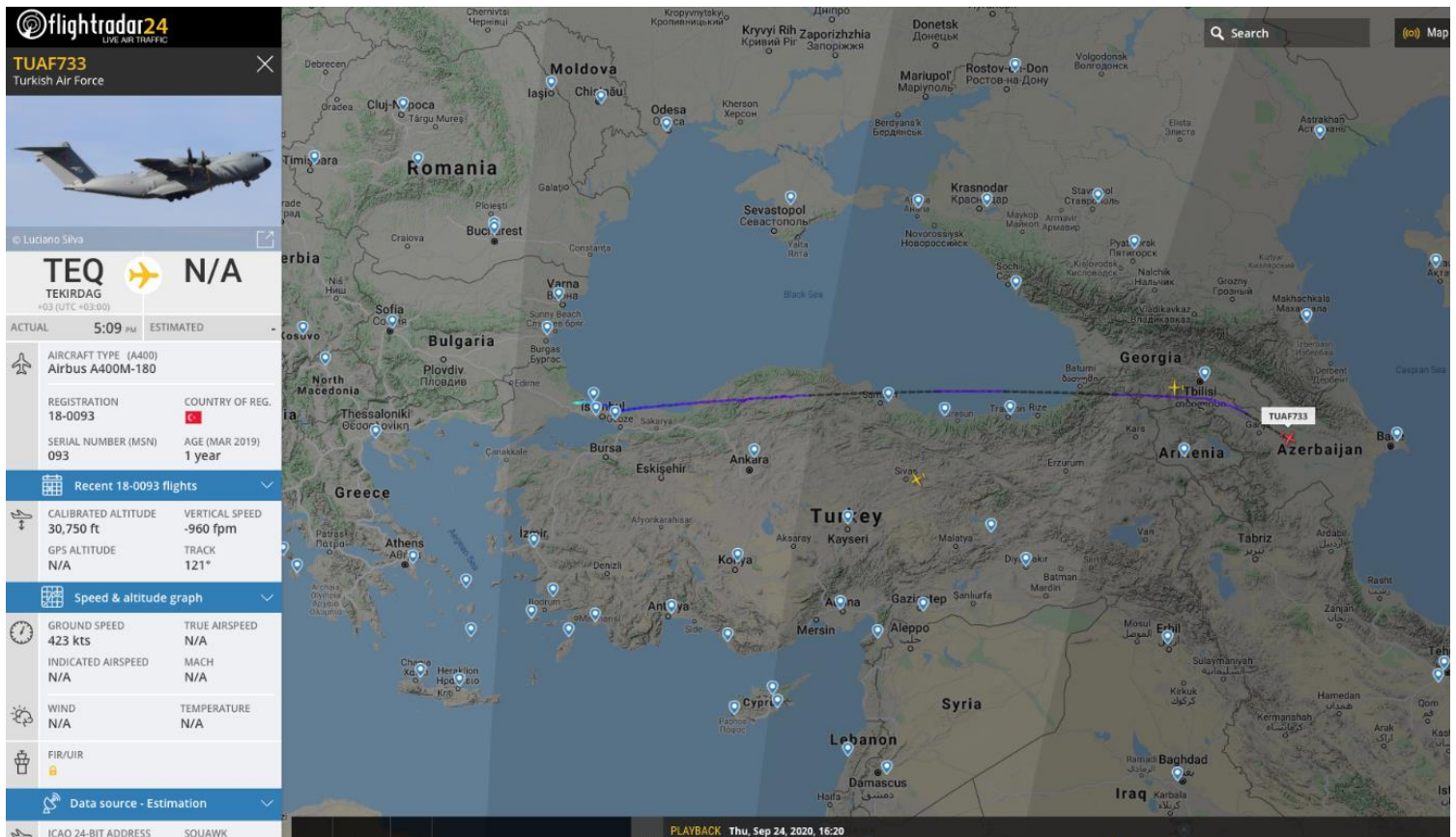


Image 22: data of a flight took off from Tekirdag military airbase towards Azerbaijan, conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 24 September 2020 at 14:20 Azerbaijani time.

Credit: Flightradar24.

On the same day, our digital forensics tracked three flights conducted by A400 military aircrafts headed from Turkey to Azerbaijan.

Two of these aircrafts landed in Baku, while the third landed in Yevlakh near the Nagorno-Karabakh front lines. The three planes followed the same air route and returned the same evening to Kayseri, Turkey.

The following three images show data of the flights conducted by three A400 aircrafts as detected by Flightradar24 website.

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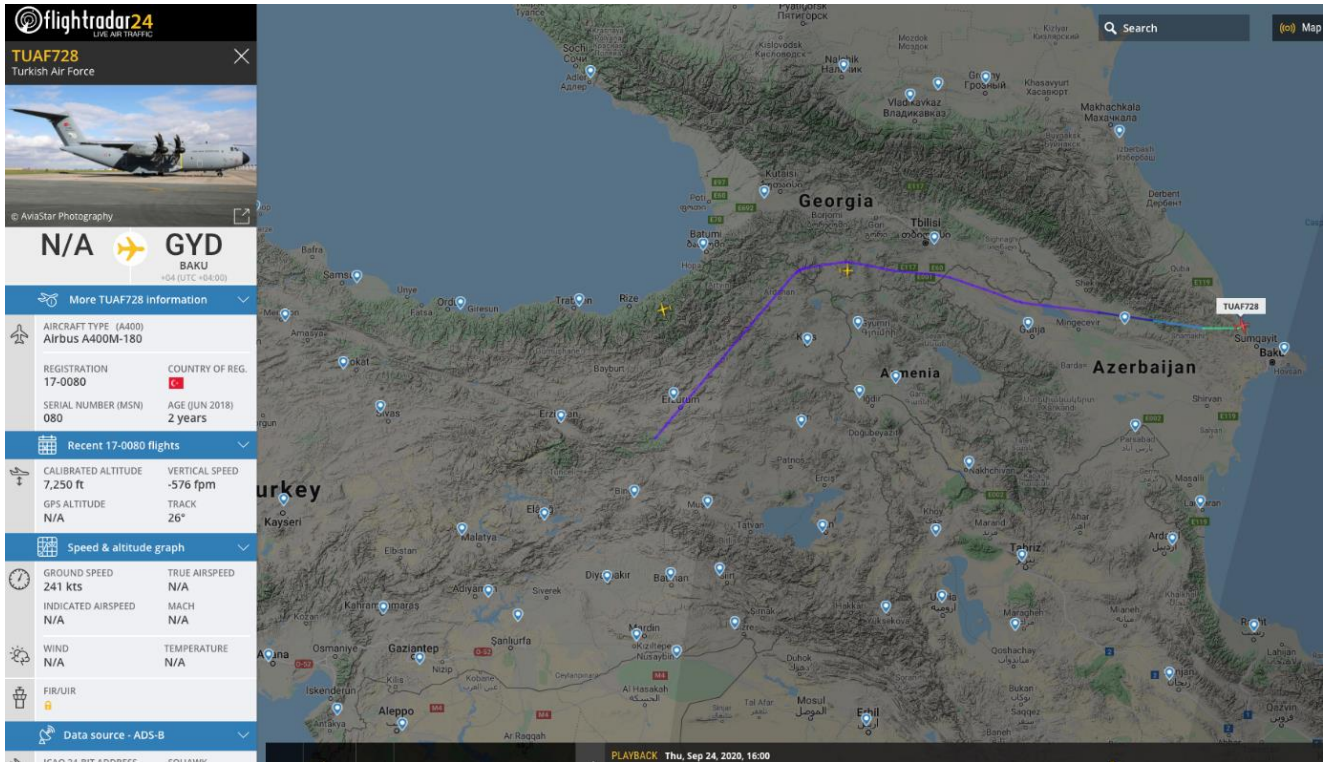


Image 23: data of a flight took off from unknown point in Turkey to Baku, Azerbaijan, conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 24 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.

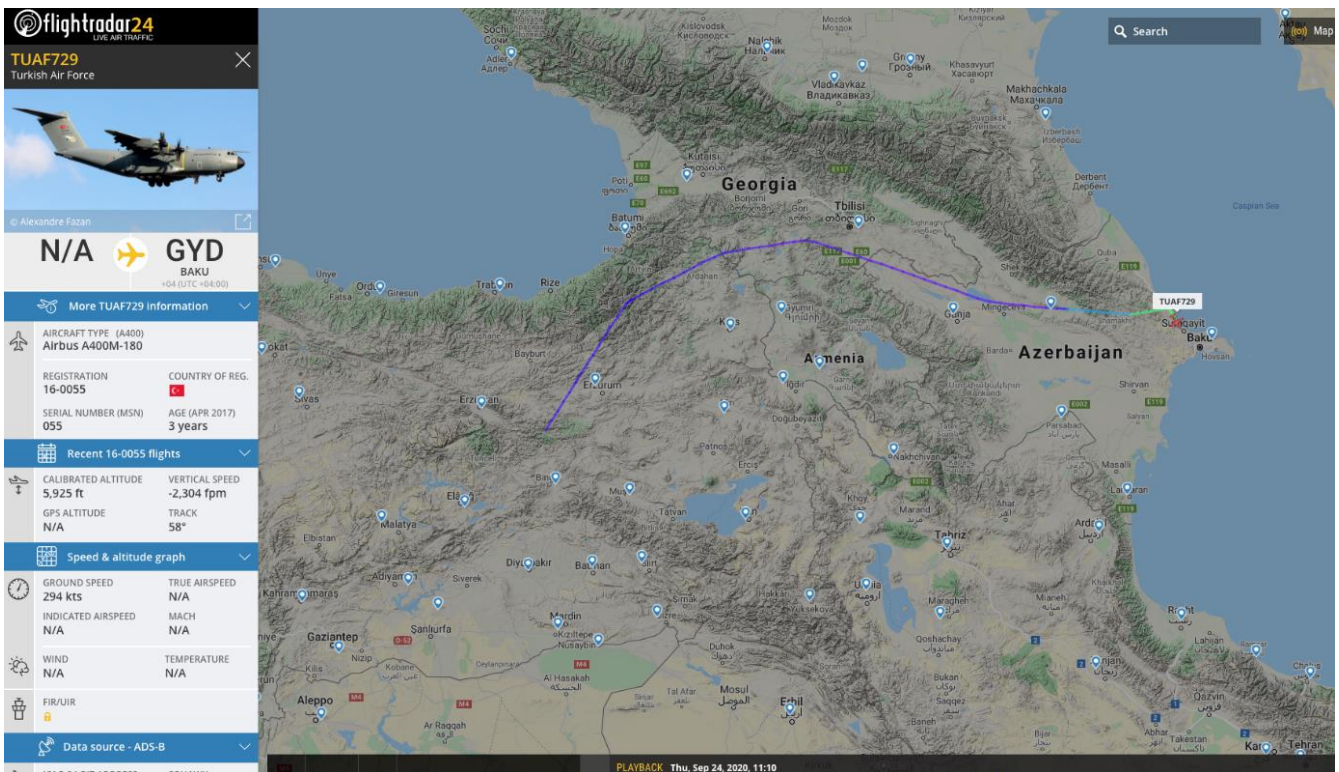


Image 24: data of a flight took off from unknown point in Turkey to Baku, Azerbaijan, conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 24 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.

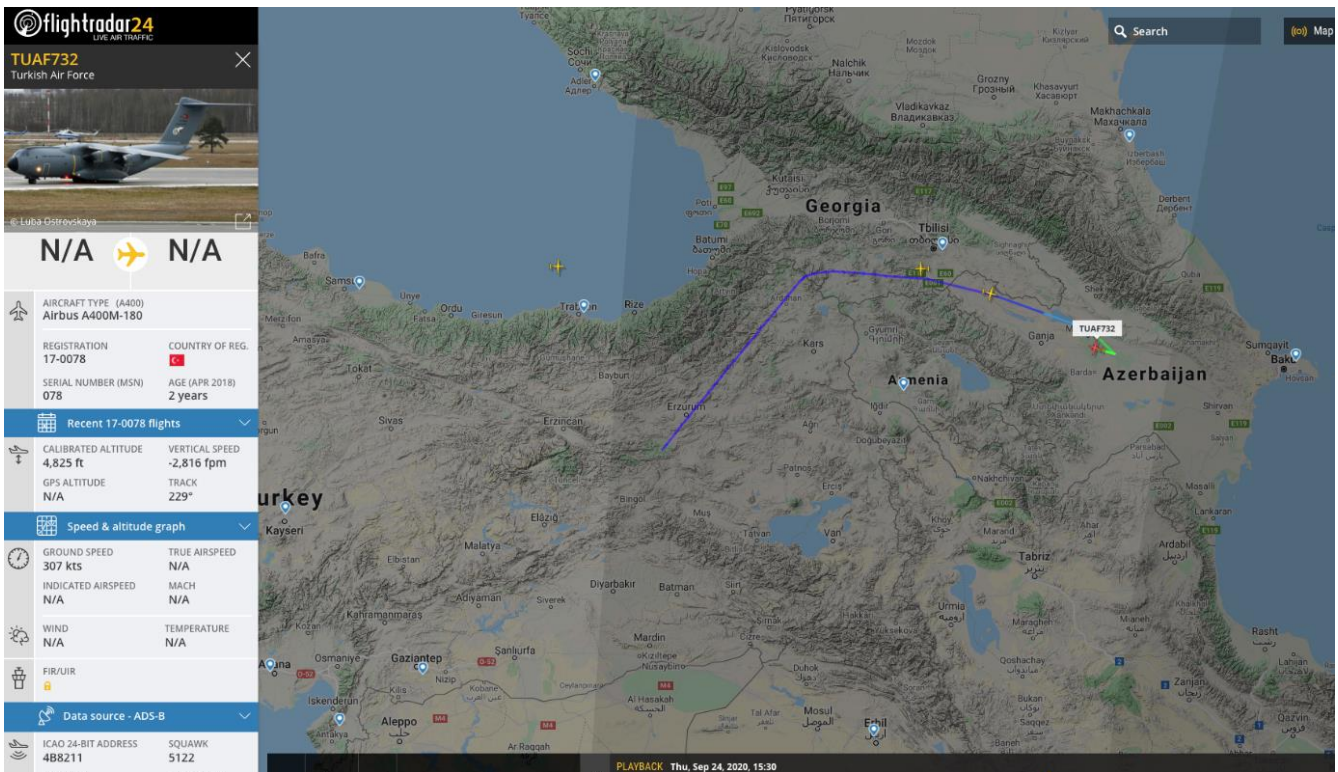


Image 23: data of a flight took off from unknown point in Turkey to **Yevlakh**, Azerbaijan, conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 24 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.

The following three images show the return flights of these aircraft from Azerbaijan towards Kayseri in Turkey the same evening.

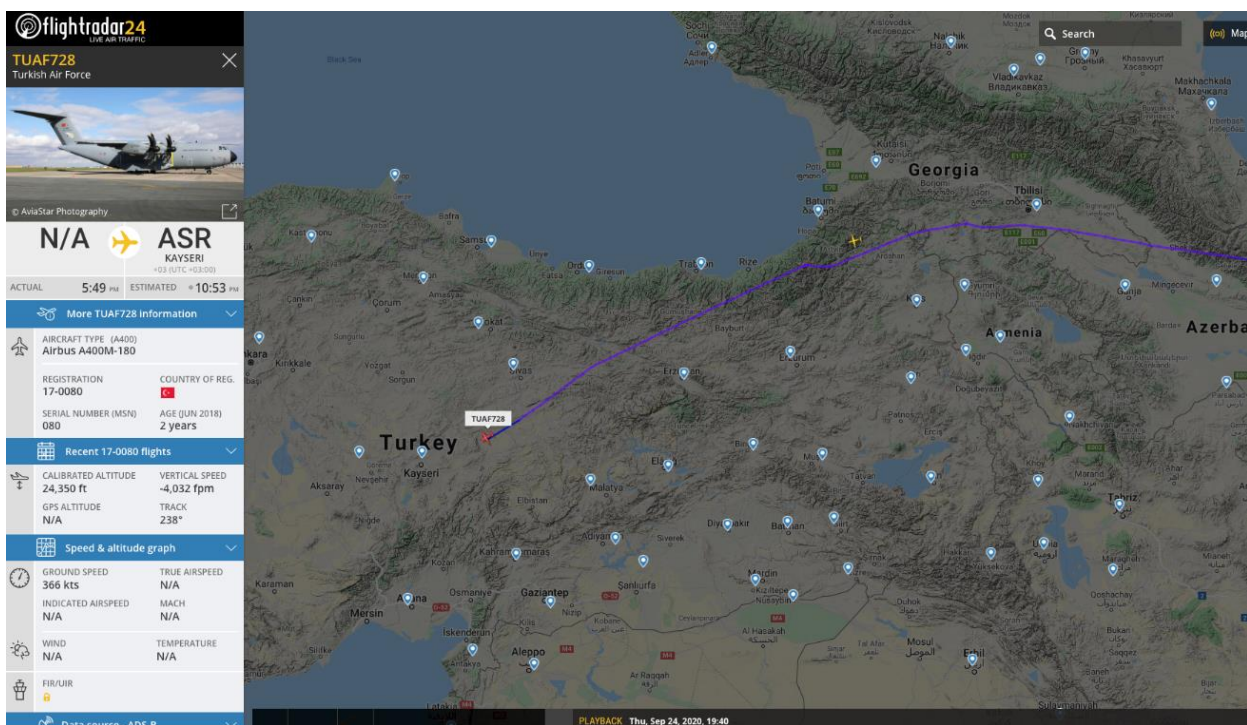


Image 26: data of a flight took off from unknown point in Azerbaijan to Turkey conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 24 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.

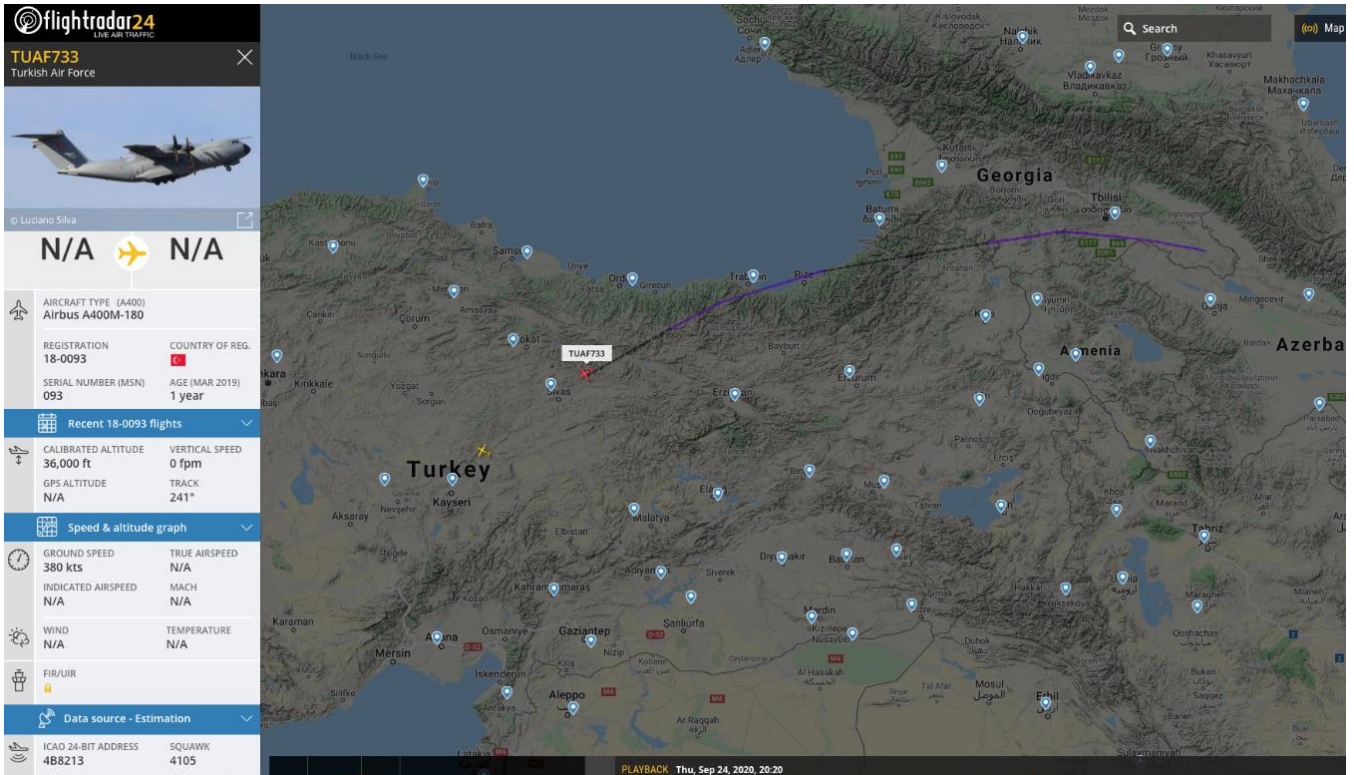


Image 27: data of a flight took off from unknown point in Azerbaijan to Turkey conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 24 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.

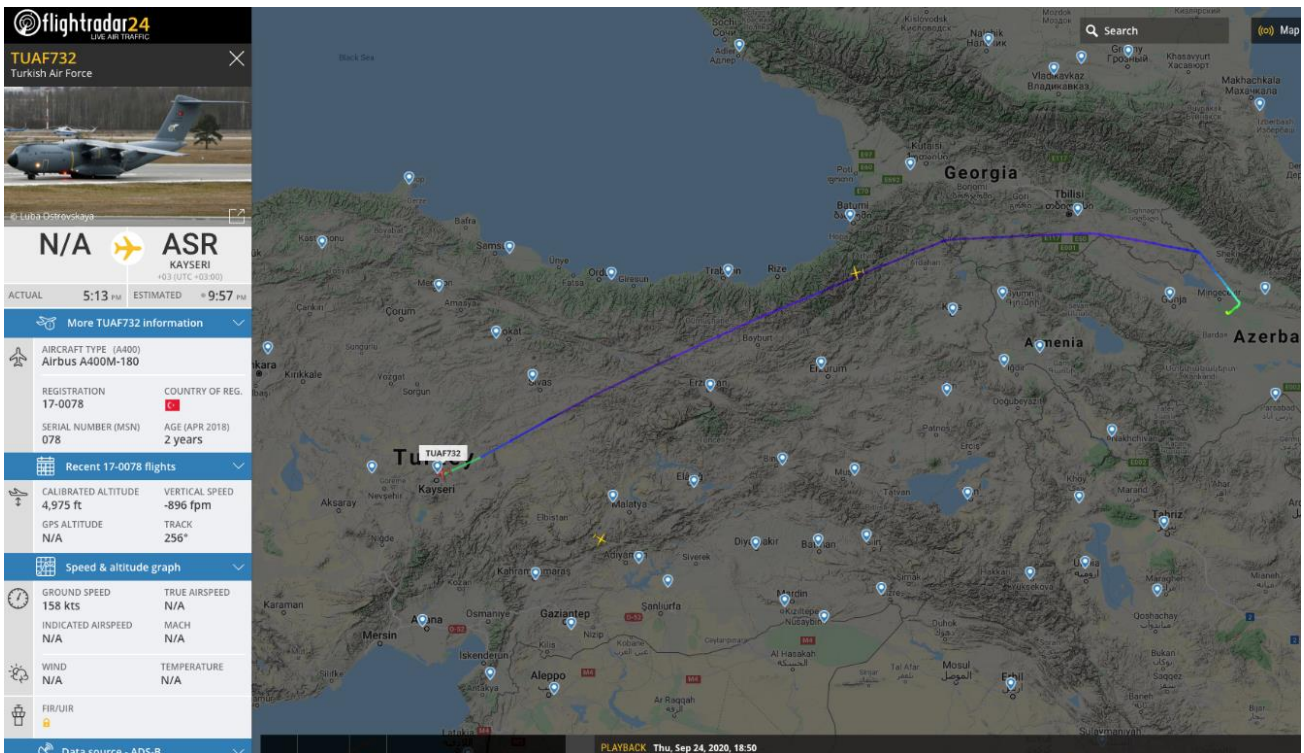


Image 28: data of a flight took off from unknown point in Azerbaijan to Turkey conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 24 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.

### D. Flights on 25 September 2020

According to our private military source, the plane that carried fighters on this day also carried officers and soldiers residing in the officers' camp in Syria, which houses soldiers and officers defected from the Syrian regular army.

The same source confirmed that this plane took off from Tekirdagh military airbase and landed in the Hajji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev airport, but our digital forensics, nevertheless, could only detect its departure point and tracked it when on its way back to Turkey.

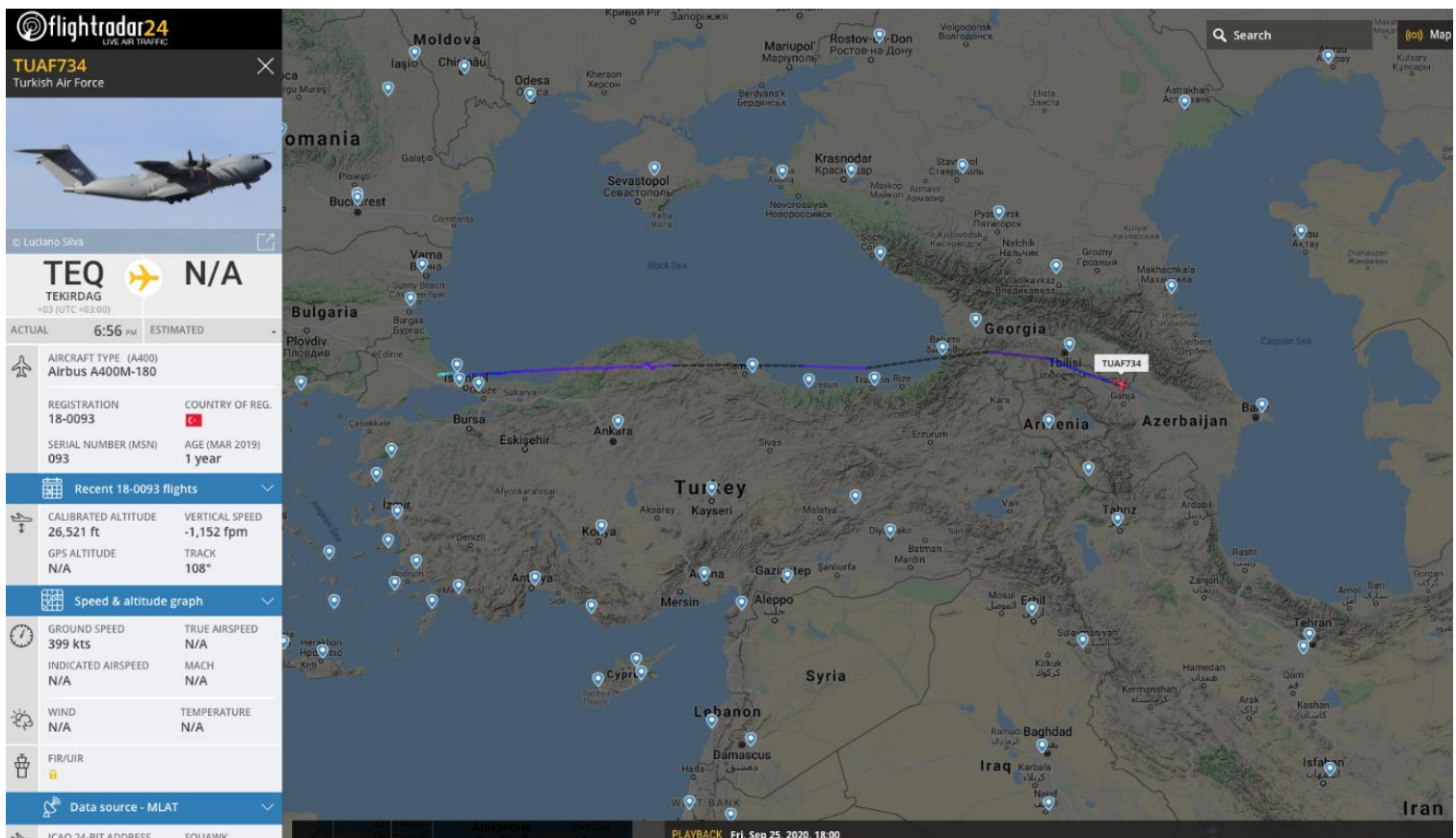


Image 29: data of a flight took off from Tekirdagh airbase, Turkey, towards Azerbaijan conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 25 September 2020.

Credit: Flightradar24.

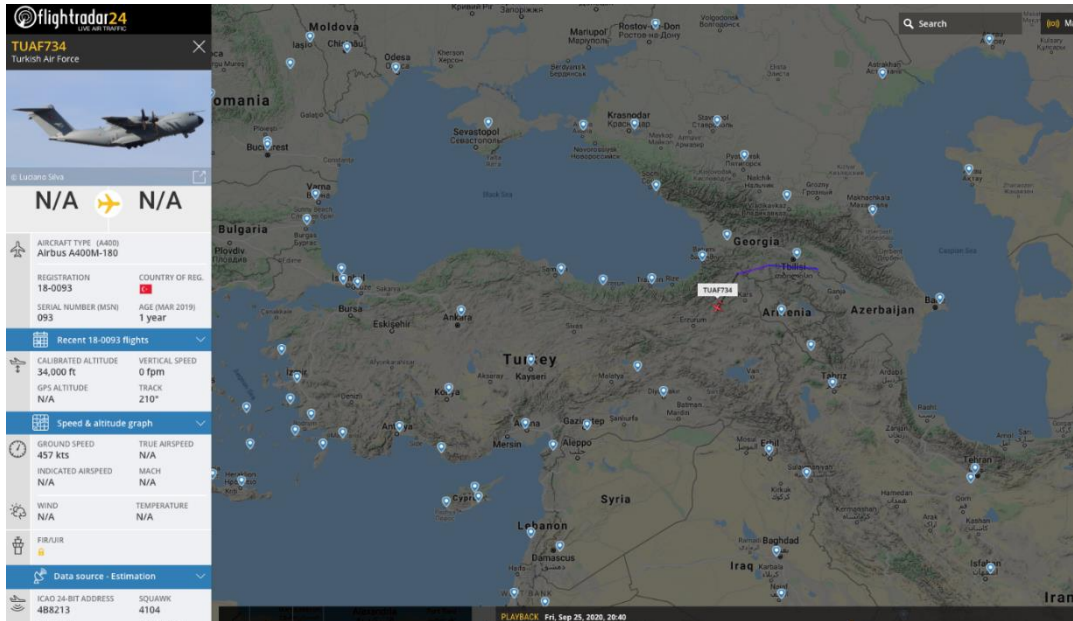


Image 30: data of a flight from Turkey to Azerbaijan conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 25 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.

### E. Flights of 26 September 2020

On this day, Flightradar24 spotted a Turkish A400 military aircraft flying from Kayseri to the Tekirdag air base in Istanbul, Turkey and then took off from there to Yevlakh in Azerbaijan, and it was then tracked on its way back from Azerbaijan to Diyarbakir, Turkey.

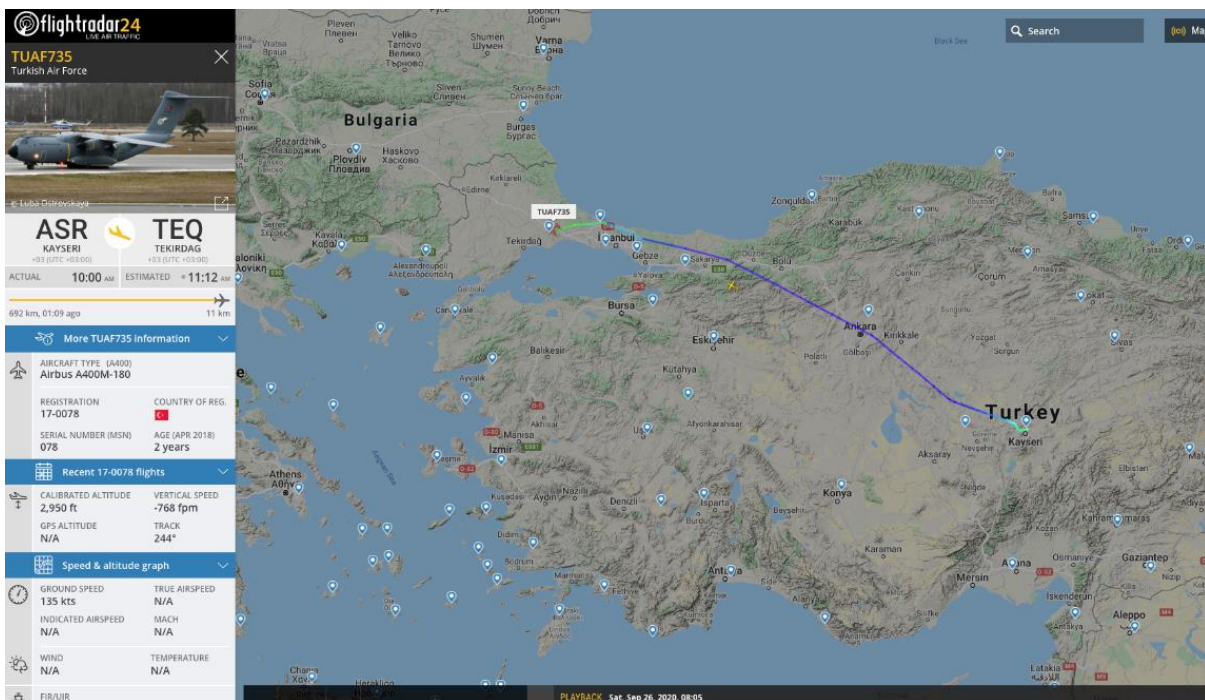


Image 31: data of a flight from Kayseri airbase to Tekirdag airbase, Turkey, conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 25 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.



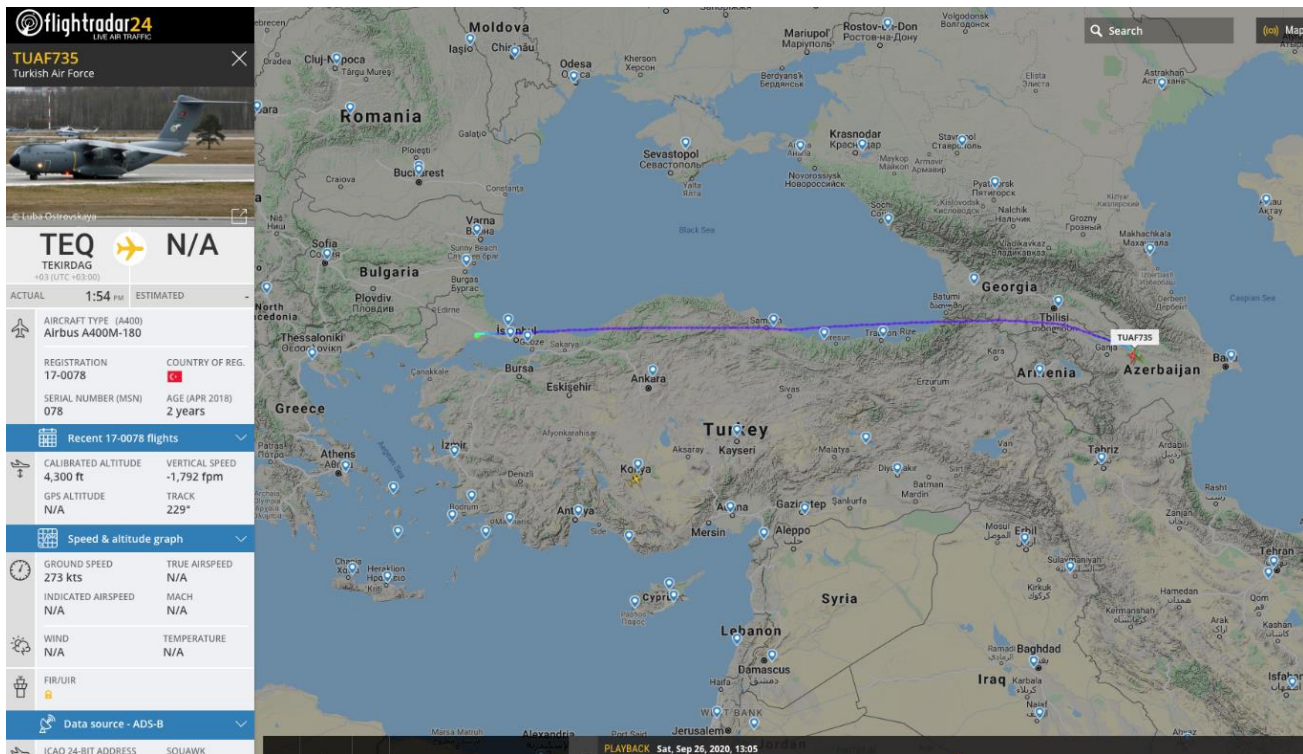


Image 32: data of a flight from Tekirdagh airbase, Turkey, to Azerbaijan conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 26 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.

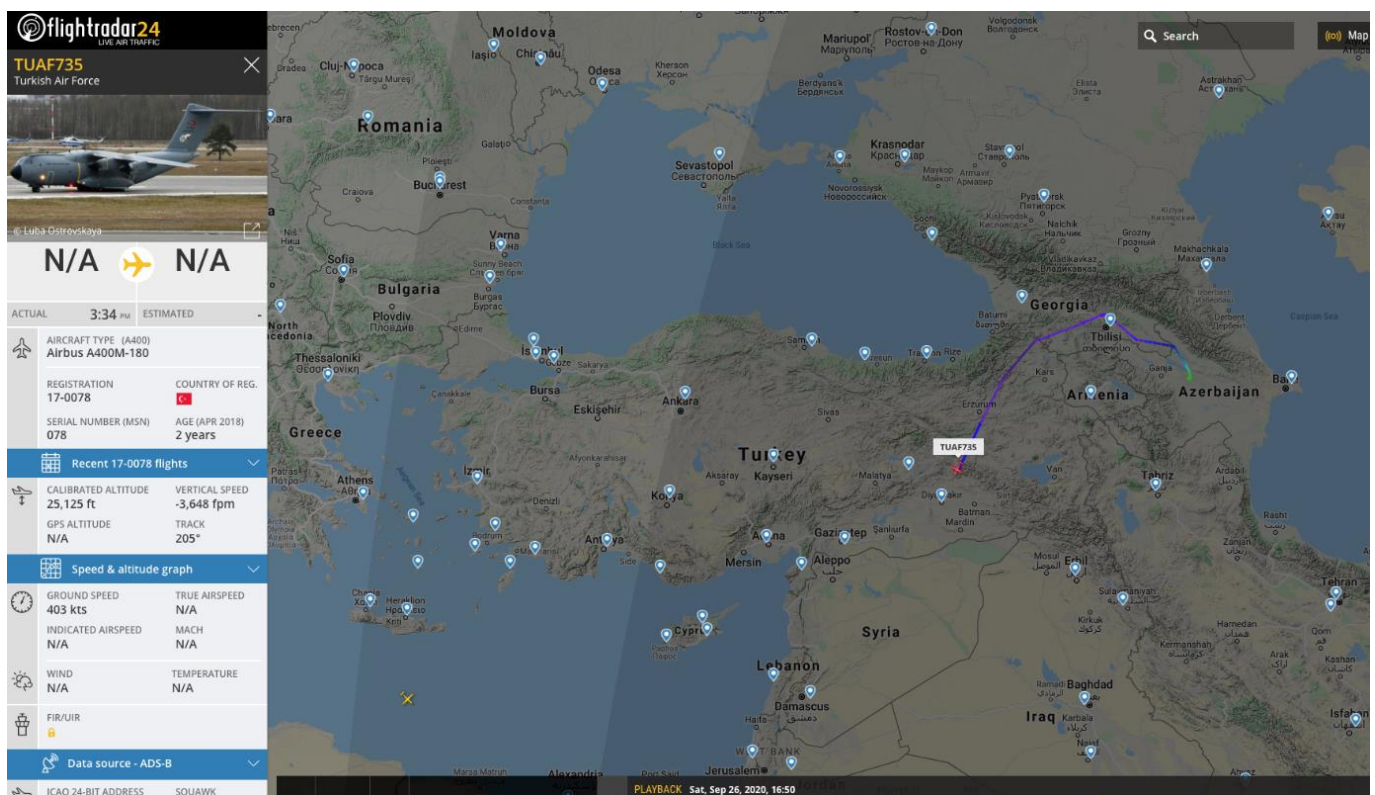


Image 33: data of a flight from Azerbaijan to Tekirdagh airbase, Turkey, conducted by a Turkish A400 military aircraft on 26 September 2020. Credit: Flightradar24.

## 4. Dozens of Syrians died in Azerbaijan, their bodies handed over to their families

Soon after the arrival of the first batch of the Syrian fighters to Azerbaijan, local Syrian media outlets started reporting dozens of deaths resulted from bombing a post of them in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh and then photos and videos of the bodies were leaked.

On 4 October 2020, videos have been circulated showing bodies of fighters killed in Azerbaijan, they were then handed over to their families in Syria by the SNA.

STJ interviewed relatives of a number of those dead in Azerbaijan, some of whom received the bodies of their sons and others have not yet.

In late September, STJ field researcher went to Hawar Kilis border crossing, where the fighters' bodies gathered before being handed over to their relatives. Our researcher obtained information confirming the existence of 64 bodies awaiting the hand over. He quoted a commander at the border crossing saying:

**"We inform families about their sons' death as soon as it occurred and we ask them to set a condolence tent for him immediately, even before they take their bodies; we bring bodies from Azerbaijan every 15 days in a bunch not each alone."**

STJ field researcher also met a relative of the fighter Muhammad Khaled al- Shihnah who hails from the city of Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, Idlib, and recently died in Azerbaijan, he stated:

**"Muhammad moved between several factions before he joined the Suleiman Shah Brigade (also known as al-Amshat) and went to Azerbaijan through it. I last saw him on 15 September and he told me then that he was going to Azerbaijan. On 19 September he phoned us saying that he was still in Turkey and that his flight was the next day and we have not heard from him since then. Two days ago, however, the leader of his group told us that he was killed and they will send us his body, we received it on October 4<sup>th</sup>. "**

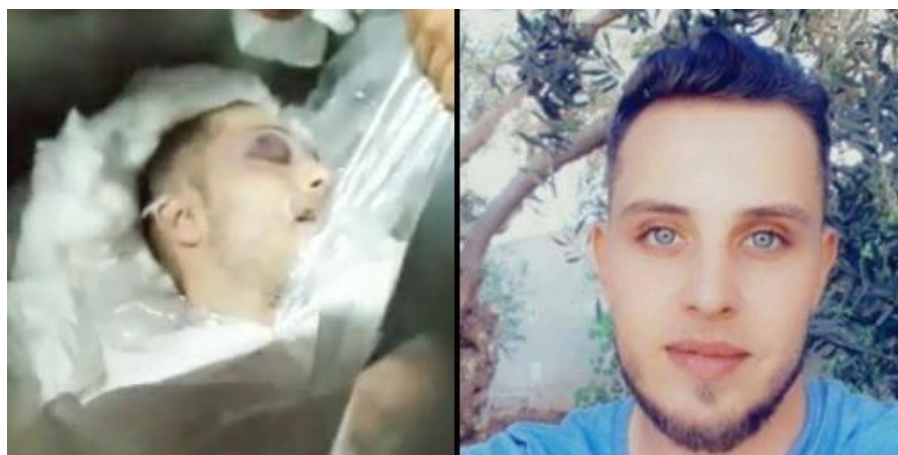


Image 34: the fighter Muhammad Khaled al- Shihnah before and after his death in Azerbaijan.

Reportedly, several deaths among the Syrian fighters/mercenaries in Azerbaijan occurred; STJ verified the reports and confirmed the death of:

1. Abd al-Razzaq, known as Abu Hurairah, and Abu Shadi al-Akkari from the Sultan Murad Division.
2. Mahmoud al-Najjar and Abd al-Hanan Abd al-Razzaq from the Mu'tasim Division.
3. Kinan Farzat, battalion commander in the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division.
4. Yasser Farzat from the Malik Shah group.
5. Bilal al-Taybani from the 112<sup>th</sup> Division.
6. Walid al-Ashtar from the Sham Legion/Faylaq al-Sham.
7. Abu Jassem Al-Zaghloul from the Sultan Murad Division.
8. Saddam Droubi from the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division.
9. Muhammad al-Sha'alan, a commander in the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division and his escort guard Hussein Talha.

STJ field researcher met a fighter in the al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division who is present in Azerbaijan; he disclosed:

**“Muhammad al-Sha’alan was a commander in the Thwar al-Sham/ Revolutionaries of the Levant, he left the group several weeks ago and joined al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division with his battalion in order to go and fight in Azerbaijan. However, when he arrived there, he had a dispute with Saif Abu Bakr, leader of al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division, for he asked to return to Syria with his battalion because he did not sit well with the situation there, and that contravenes the Division’s laws. Following that, Abu Bakr detained al-Sha’alan for several hours, and released him under pressure from his battalion which was then transferred with him to the Armenia-Iran border, where Muhammad al-Sha’alan and his escort guard Hussein Talha were killed as a result of the fierce battles there.”**



On the right Muhammad al-Sha’alan. On the left Hussein Talha.

A Syrian fighter in the Sultan Murad Division ranks in Azerbaijan told STJ that there are fighters who arrived in Azerbaijan but refused to take part in hostilities, since they were told that their mission would be guarding the Turkish bases and borders there.



Image 37:

From the top right: Yasser Abu Omar Farzat, Qasim Mustafa al-Jathmour, Abd al-Hanan Abd al-Razzaq and Bilal al-Taybani.

From the middle right: Muhammad Shaalan, Mahmoud Najjar, Haitham Ali Salman and Hussein Talha.

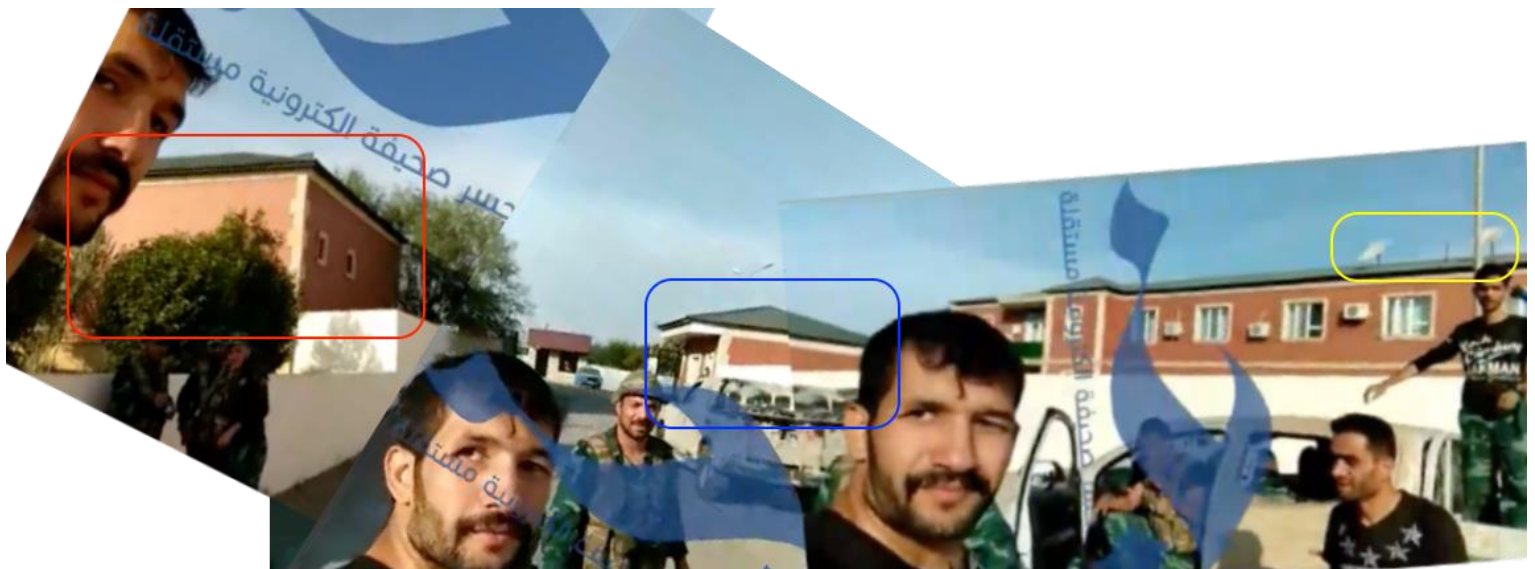
From the bottom right: Major Kinan Farzat, Walid al-Ashtar/Abu Basil, Muhammad Khaled al-Shihnah (before his death), Muhammad Khaled al-Shihnah (after his death).



Kinan Farzat before and after his death in Azerbaijan.

## 5. Analysis of open-source photos and videos

Geolocated video of SNA in Horadiz:





-Location: 39.441490, 47.343645

- On 3 October a video was shared around the internet showing Syrians wearing the same Azerbaijani fatigues and standing by two trucks. According to [Jesr Press](#), the song the men are listening to is praising the SNA faction Furqat al-Sultan Murad, and that are originally from Eastern Ghouta. The video was [soon geolocated](#) (**include this credit to the person who geolocated**) to a group of buildings in the Azerbaijani town of Horadiz, only several kilometres from both the front lines of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Iranian border. This is the clearest evidence of SNA fighters being deployed to Azerbaijan.
- Other videos have been shared to social media showing Syrians active in the conflict. One such video, containing several clips, included locations that matched shots from [a video published by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense](#) on October 3. Two of these show a small structure apparently used by Armenian forces to store ammunition. One, shot from the outside, shows the front of the structure having been decorated with unique markings.



([source](#))

The second clip, filmed by a man in the same uniforms seen on SNA fighters, shows boxes of ammunition stacked up inside the small building. When compared with shots from the MoD video, it becomes clear that this is the same structure.



[\(source\)](#)





However, it must be stated that some of the ammunition boxes in the second clip appeared to have been moved in between when the two separate videos were filmed.

Another video clip circulated on social media shows a Syrian man dressed in the Azerbaijani Border Guard fatigues hiding behind a building before then running out past it. Well the low quality of the video prevents us from being 100% certain, various respected analysts on social media believe this location is the same as one scene in another clip published by the Azerbaijani MOD.

*(note: We don't have access to this recent satellite imagery, so this case will be hard to show...we either have to screenshot both these shots and explain how they relate, or maybe just link to it)*



<https://twitter.com/obretix/status/1313608639656144897>



<https://twitter.com/ryanmofarrell/status/1313627197962416130>

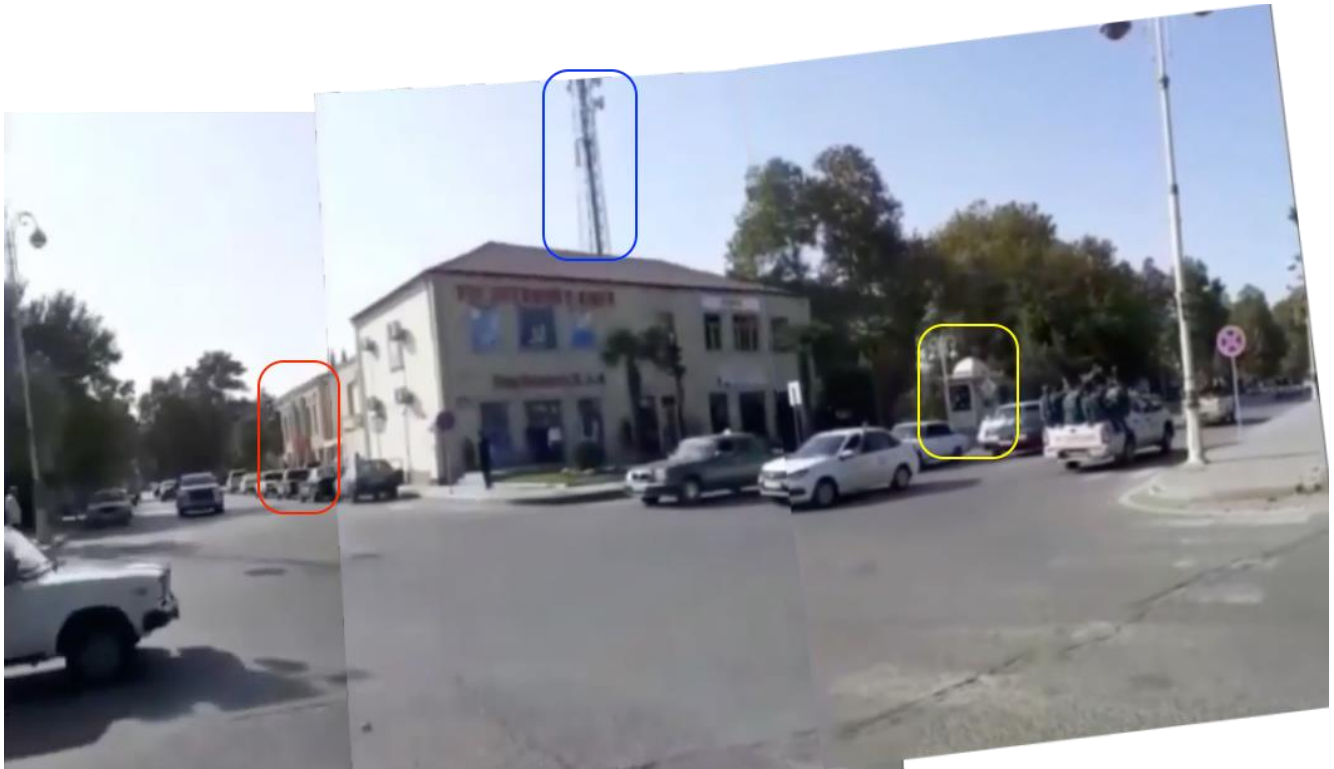
- **Two possible convoy videos**

Two other videos leaked potentially showing SNA fighters in Azerbaijan as well. Both of these were filmed by Azerbaijanis on the street and show convoys of civilian pickup trucks carrying unidentified fighters and have been geolocated. One, [published on 27 September](#), the day the Azerbaijani offensive began, filmed in the southern town of Horadiz.



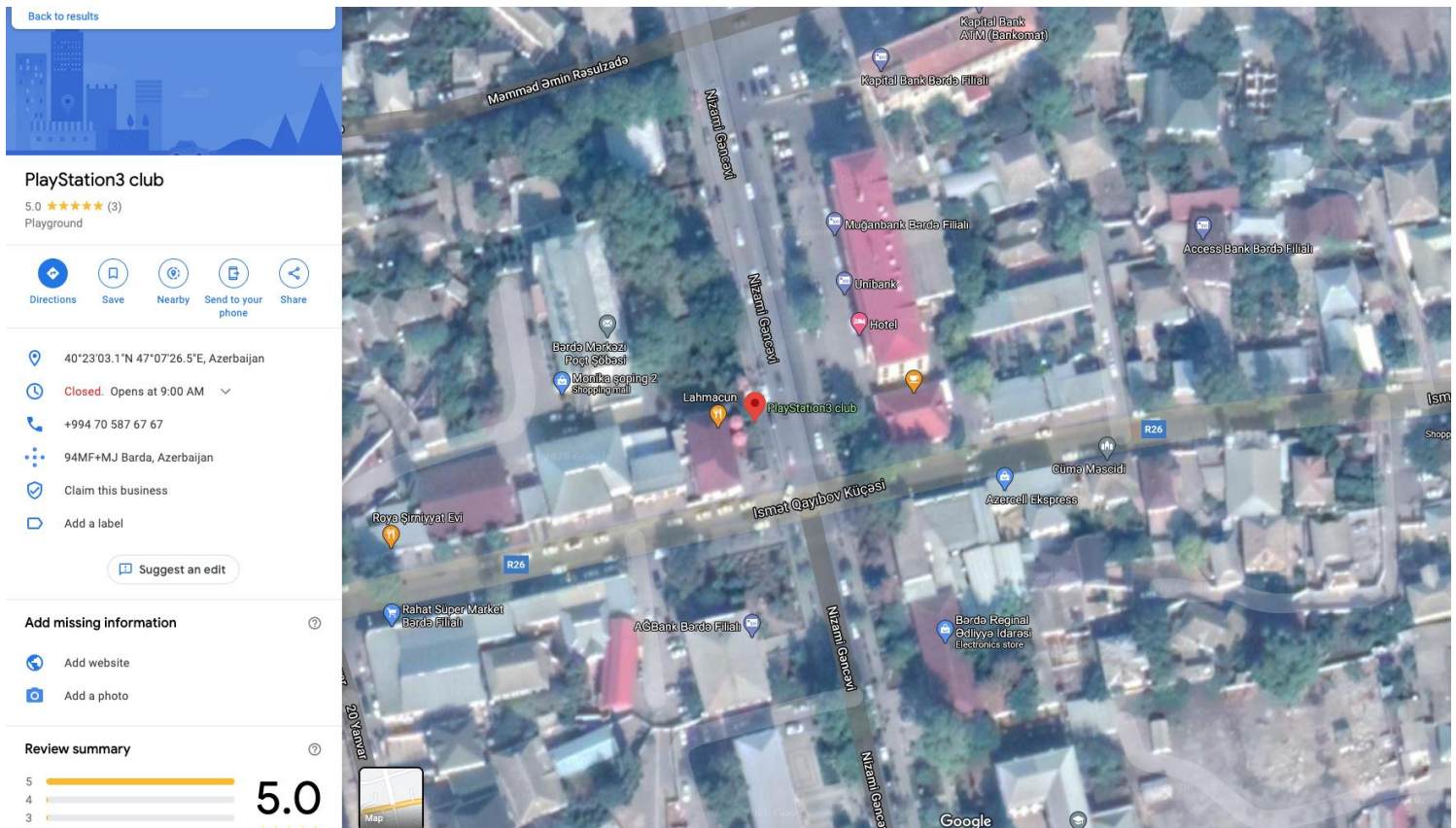
Location: 39.453033, 47.334649 ([original source](#) - please credit)

[The other](#) was shot in the town of Darda near the northern front lines of Nagano-Karabakh and circulated on social media 1 Oct.



Location: 40.384025, 47.124205

The [video game store](#) that can be seen in the video is marked on Google Maps.



We cannot conclusively say that the fighters in either of these videos are Syrian. However, it would be unusual for a well-equipped conventional army like that of Azerbaijan to transport soldiers in civilian vehicles such as these, and there has been no evidence of them doing so.

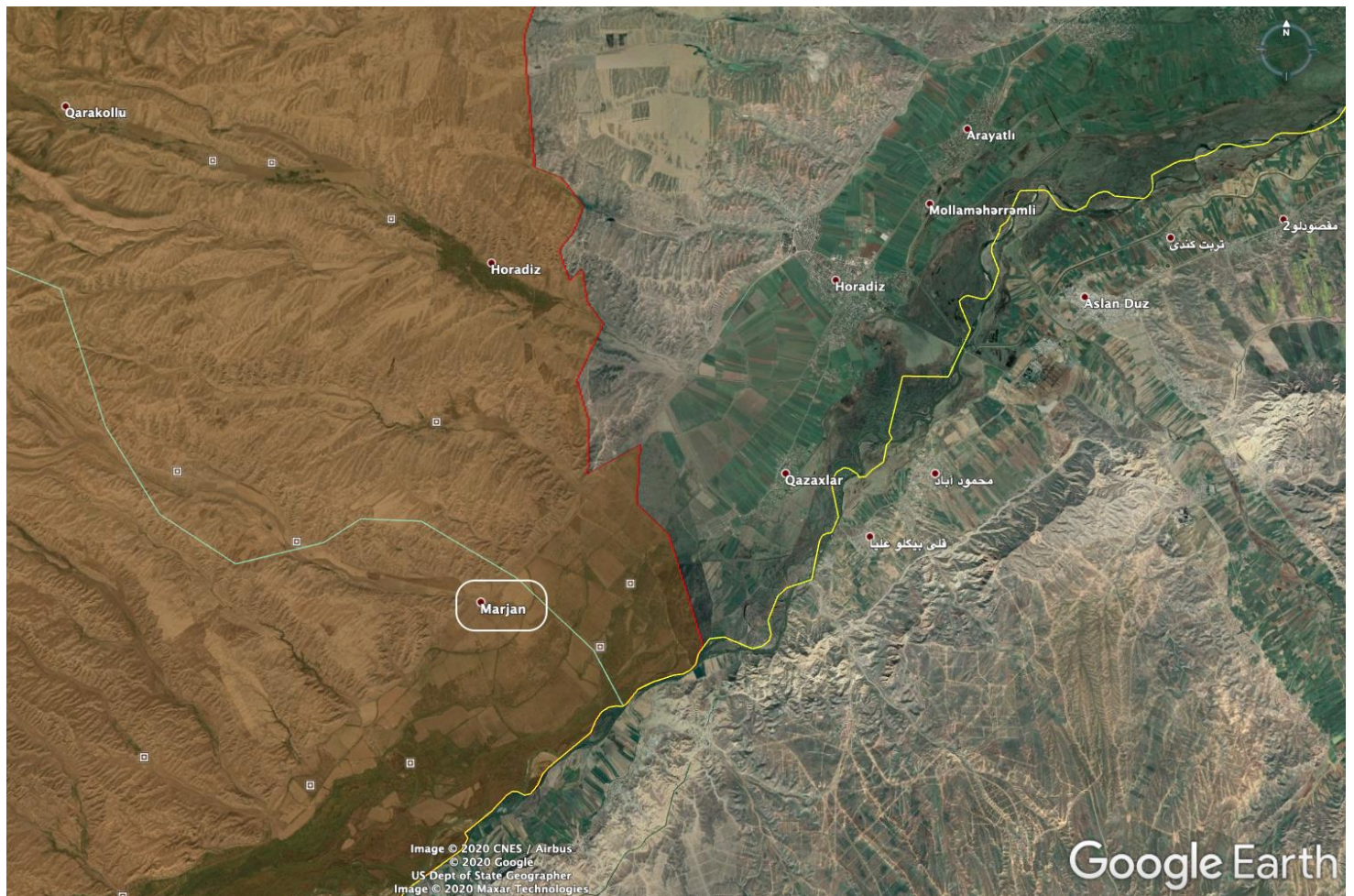
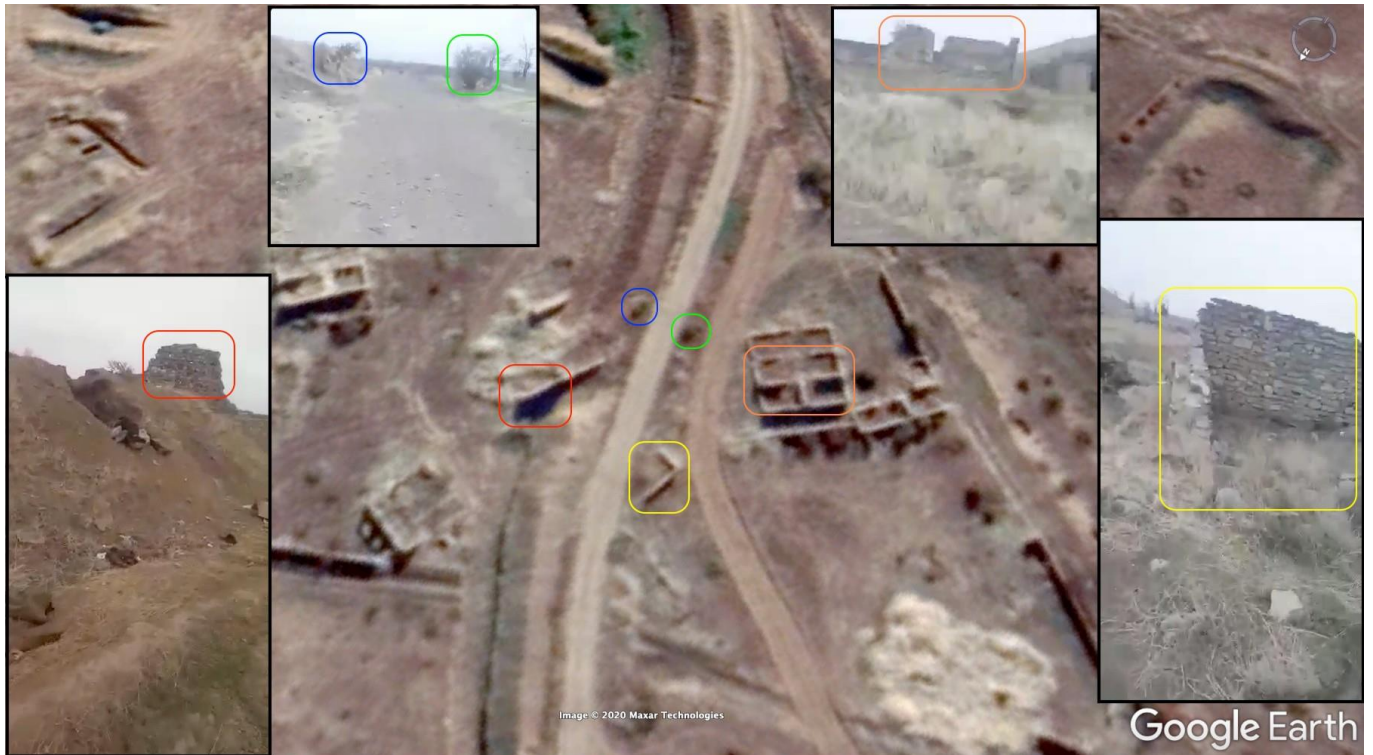
Other videos have been published on social media showing the dead bodies of Armenian soldiers and appear to be narrated by men speaking in Syrian Arabic, one referring to the bodies as the ‘pigs of the Armenian Army.’

On 10 October 2020 social media circulated a [video](#) in which a fighter of al-Hamza/al-Hamzat Division (The Farouq Brigades/Abu Zaid Group) saying in a Syrian dialect:

**“Alhamdulillah (thank goodness), we could step (kill) those Arminian pigs”** he referred to a box of ammunition found beside a fighter body as a spoil.

**“Thanks be to God for all these carcasses. Thank heaven, there are mass carcasses Allahu Akbar.. Allahu Akbar”.** He added: **this is real, this video is not fabricated. Look, these are their carcasses.** He then repeated that he is affiliated to the **al-Hamza Division** and added **“May God enables us to kill every pig and every infidel...”**, he added.

Our digital forensics was able to geolocate the video and provided us with the following images:



geolocation: 39.379392, 47.234368 (village of Marlan, 5km from the frontlines).

Village was captured by Azerbaijan in the first week of fighting, unclear when exactly the video was filmed.

On 10 October 2020, another video was circulated on social media showing Syrian mercenaries participating in hostilities.



3 vehicles visible. Turkish-made Otokar Cobra on the left, Israeli-made IAF Storm on the right, both types of vehicles are owned and operated by the Azerbaijani military







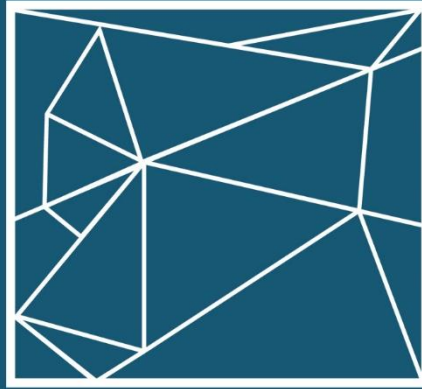
3 vehicles visible. Turkish-made Otokar Cobra on the left, Israeli-made IAF Storm on the right, both types of vehicles are owned and operated by the Azerbaijani military

On 11 October 2020 a [video](#) published to social media – firstly by the Jarabulus al-Kabous group on Telegram – shows Syrian fighters, one of them making the Grey Wolves sign, promising to liberate Armenia, and a voice can be heard saying: “Iran is over there”, which indicates their proximity to the Iran-Azerbaijan border.



A Syrian fighter in Azerbaijan making the Grey Wolves sign.

سوريون  
من أجل  
الحقيقة  
والعدالة  
Syrians  
For Truth  
& Justice



## History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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