



Briefing: Azerbaijan attack on the Line of Contact with Nagorno-Karabakh

The initial attack

In the early hours of Sunday 27th September, Azerbaijan forces attacked the line of contact with Nagorno-Karabakh. It soon emerged that this was a major offensive which has seen engagement take place along the entire border¹.

Azerbaijan claims that these attacks were in a response to a ceasefire violation from Armenia but has yet to make a convincing supporting case for this version of events. This explanation also fails to explain the rationale for this level of response or its ability to deploy such a large mobilisation at short notice. Claims of ceasefire violations from both sides are a common occurrence yet they have not previously resulted in largescale mobilisations of this kind.

Key Points

- * Azerbaijan has mounted a sustained diplomatic campaign in recent months to undermine the OSCE Minsk Group peace talks
- *The material and circumstantial evidence that this was a pre-prepared and coordinated attack by Azerbaijan has been accepted by most objective international observers
- *This attack marked the start of a concerted effort to change facts on the ground by force on the part of Azerbaijan²
- * Turkey's involvement marks a new development in the conflict and bears a large share of the responsibility for this latest clash – its diplomatic and material support has emboldened the leadership in Azerbaijan to launch this attack

¹ <https://oc-media.org/live-updates-stepanakert-reportedly-hit-from-the-air-as-fourth-day-of-fighting-begins/>

² <https://eurasianet.org/as-fighting-rages-what-is-azerbaijans-goal>



* Turkey's involvement and the spread of fighting beyond the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia has the potential to destabilise the entire South Caucasus

* The EU must therefore appreciate that this is a mounting crisis in its Eastern Neighbourhood and push Turkey to withdraw its support. At a moment of US disengagement this is a moment for the EU to make good on its aspirations to being a serious foreign policy power

Evidence for pre-planning on part of Azerbaijan, including collusion with Turkey

A large body of material and circumstantial evidence has since emerged to support the case that this attack was initiated by Azerbaijan. The evidence exhibits not only pre-planning but also the direct collaboration and support of Turkey. Official statements from Turkey do little to doubt its role in the conflict and willingness to assist Azerbaijan.³

The picture to emerge from these reports is a planned, steady build-up of forces and equipment ready for an attack. From the calling up of previously dismissed reservists and the commandeering of military trucks on the part of Azerbaijan⁴, to a coordinated agreement with Turkey to channel Syrian fighters to assist in the offensive.⁵

Verified reports of Syrian troops reaching Azerbaijan are yet to emerge but confirmation of their recruitment and plans for deployment their have⁶ - proof in itself of pre-planning and collusion.

Furthermore, these elements cannot be considered in isolation. Alongside the proof of these practical steps, recent weeks have also seen a steep increase in aggressive rhetoric from the senior leadership of Azerbaijan against Armenia.⁷

³ <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-will-provide-support-if-azerbaijan-requests-it-fm-cavusoglu-158724>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-54282373>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/28/syrian-rebel-fighters-prepare-to-deploy-to-azerbaijan-in-sign-of-turkeys-ambition>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/Elizrael/status/1310902655196200960>

⁷ See timeline included as part of this release below



Selection of Reports attesting to these facts

Why did they summon those dismissed to the reserve in Azerbaijan?

BBC Russia – 24th September⁸

<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-54282373>

New Armenia-Azerbaijan fighting a long time in the making

Eurasianet – 28th September

<https://eurasianet.org/new-armenia-azerbaijan-fighting-a-long-time-in-the-making>

Turkey deploying Syrian fighters to help ally Azerbaijan, two fighters say

Reuters – 28th September

<https://www.reuters.com/article/armenia-azerbaijan-turkey-syria-int/turkey-deploying-syrian-fighters-to-help-ally-azerbaijan-two-fighters-say-idUSKBN26J258>

Nagorno-Karabakh clashes: Turkey sends Syrian mercenaries into combat against Armenians

The Times – 29th September

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nagorno-karabakh-clashes-turkey-sends-syrian-mercenaries-into-combat-against-armenians-wz6cqjc57>

⁸ See English translation provided separately to this document

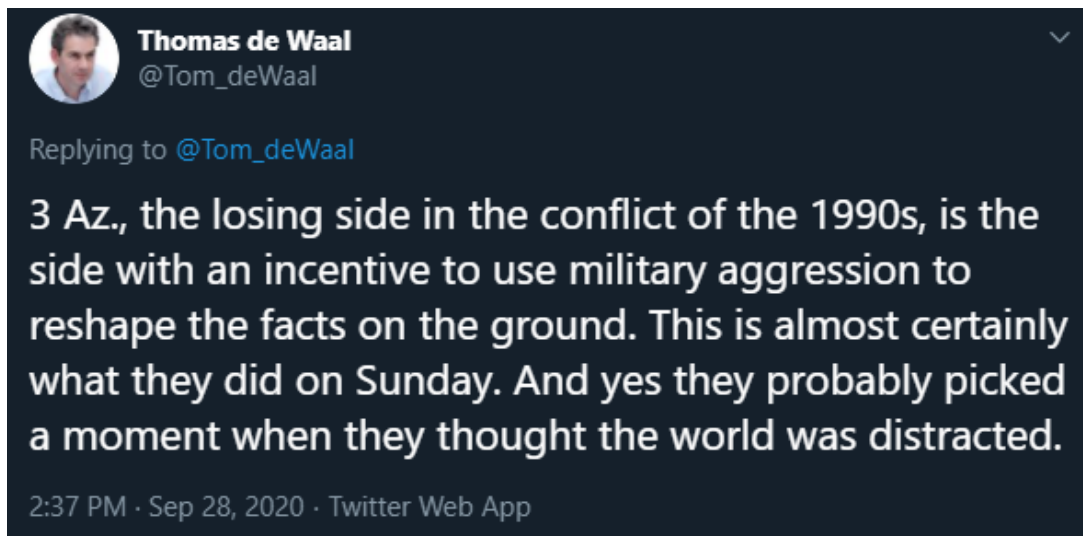


Syrian rebel fighters prepare to deploy to Azerbaijan in sign of Turkey's ambition

The Guardian – 28th September

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/28/syrian-rebel-fighters-prepare-to-deploy-to-azerbaijan-in-sign-of-turkeys-ambition>


What the experts say



Thomas de Waal – Senior Fellow at Carnegie Europe – [click her for link](#)

[Click here to read the full thread for wider context](#)



 **Laurence Broers**
@LaurenceBroers

Replying to @LaurenceBroers

Operation probably seeks redress for July 2020 + to establish new status quo before pandemic-related hard times ahead + to act on offers of Turkish support. Also channels deep Azerbaijani frustration, long-standing but especially visible in July, with ineffective diplomacy. 5/9

9:45 PM · Sep 27, 2020 · Twitter Web App


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Laurence Broers - Caucasus Programme Director at [Conciliation Resources](#) and Associate Fellow at [Chatham House](#) – click for links

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Elizabeth Tsurkov – Fellow at the Centre for Global Policy – [click here for link](#)

[Click here to read the full thread for wider context](#)

 **Elizabeth Tsurkov** ✓
@Elizrael

Some clarifications on the Syrians apparently being shipped by Turkey to fight in Azerbaijan (previous thread here: [twitter.com/Elizrael/statu...](https://twitter.com/Elizrael/status...))

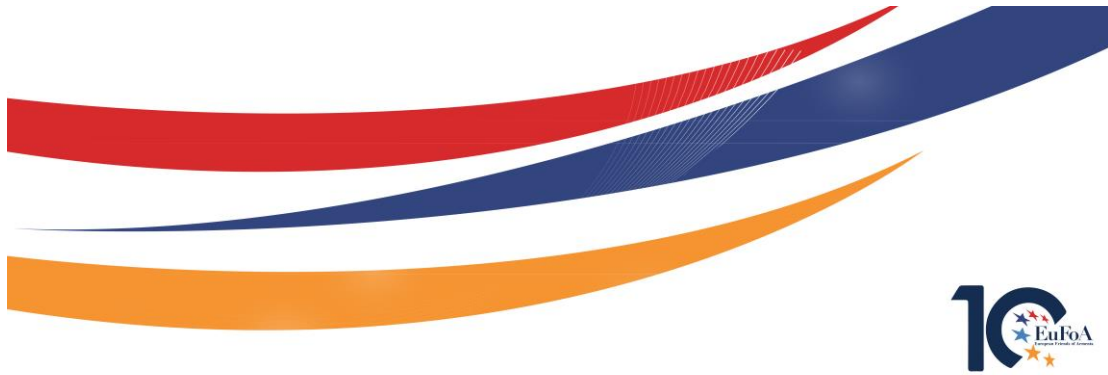
I know some of the men who've signed up to go & spoke to relatives & friends of men who've left (but no confirmation of their arrival)

 **Elizabeth Tsurkov** ✓ @Elizrael · Sep 27

I have not been able to verify the arrival of Syrian fighters from the Turkish-backed factions (SNA) in Azerbaijan as of now. I can confirm that dozens of fighters from NW Syria (outside of regime control) left Syria via Turkey in an unknown direction about a week ago.

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1:22 PM · Sep 29, 2020 · Twitter Web App



The Diplomatic Offensive – a timeline

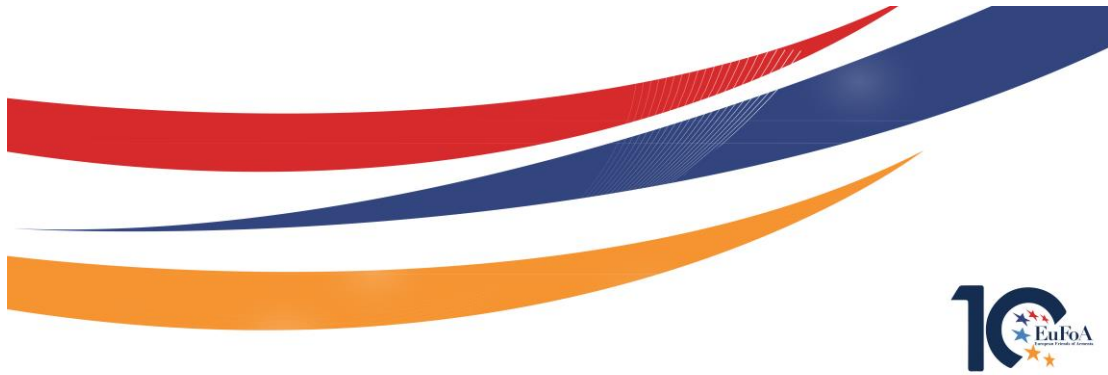
<i>Date (2020)</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Source</i>
6 th July	President Aliyev labelled the long established OSCE peace negotiations " <i>meaningless</i> " – These comments were accompanied by a series of negative comments in which he called Armenia a " <i>fascist dictatorship</i> " peopled by " <i>criminals, thieves, and bribe takers</i> ".	⁹
12 th – 16 th July	Clashes broke out between Azerbaijan and Armenia following the presence of Azerbaijani troops in Armenia’s Tavush Province. This was a rare clash along the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan rather than the line of control with Nagorno-Karabakh.	<i>Matter of general public record</i>
13 th August	Defence Minister of Azerbaijan, Zakir Hasanov in discussing Azerbaijan’s links with Turkey that " <i>The Turkish armed forces have demonstrated their power to the world in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. With the support of the Turkish military Azerbaijan will fulfil its sacred duty.</i> "	¹⁰
17 th September	Deputy Prime Minister Ali Ahmadov gave an interview in which he said that " <i>If mediators and diplomats do not cope with their work, the heroic Azerbaijani army will fulfil its noble mission. The battles in April 2016 and July 2020 showed what our army is capable of. There is no doubt that our servicemen will lead to the triumph of justice.</i> "	¹¹
20 th September	Following a series of routine yet unprecedentedly large joint military exercises between Turkey and Azerbaijan, President Aliyev made intimidating remarks as part of a TV interview. " <i>We conduct military exercises every year. There is nothing unusual here. Yes, this time it coincided with the Tovuz incident. Armenia should think about whether it was coincidence or not. These drills once again demonstrate our</i>	¹²

⁹ <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijani-president-calls-into-question-negotiations-with-armenia>

¹⁰ <https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3284126.html> (Russian)

¹¹ <https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/169003.html>

¹² <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-azerbaijan-military-drills-intimidate-armenia-president-aliyev-says>



	<i>unity. There are only 80 kilometers between the Azerbaijan-Armenia border in Nakhchivan and Yerevan. Armenia knows it, and this intimidates them. I think that they stress out because of this fear,”</i>	
24 th September	President Aliyev delivered a highly charged address to the UN General Assembly in which he devoted over half of his speech to the issue of Nagorno Karabakh. This included a run through the entire history of the conflict and can be read as a justification for war in light of subsequent events and his repeated references to frustrations with the peace process.	13
24 th September	The Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a series of so called provocations against Azerbaijan by Armenia since the election of Prime Minister Pashinyan. This included a number of false accusations including that Armenia had adopted “New Wars for New Territories” doctrine as part of its updated national security strategy. This is not the case.	14

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Wednesday 30th September

¹³ https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/10.0010/20200924/we2wQ8CowvRE/UcHaYOBat38E_en.pdf

¹⁴ <https://mfa.gov.az/en/news/6865/view>