

An Execution in Hadrut

 [bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2020/10/15/an-execution-in-hadrut-karabakh](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2020/10/15/an-execution-in-hadrut-karabakh)

October 15, 2020

Editor's note: This article contains imagery which some readers may find disturbing

Despite a recent Russian-mediated ceasefire, fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces still rages in Nagorno-Karabakh. The fighting, which began on September 27, has since escalated into a full-scale war. It is the most serious, and the most deadly, spate of violence since the 1988-1994 war, which resulted in Karabakh Armenian control of this South Caucasus territory.

The Azerbaijani military has launched attacks across the front line, with particular focus on flat terrain in the South of Nagorno-Karabakh. One town in this area is Hadrut, which is now connected with one of the most disturbing pieces of footage to have emerged from the conflict so far.

On October 15, two videos began circulating on Azerbaijani Telegram channels. We examined them and identified that the first shows the apparent capture of two Armenians by Azerbaijani soldiers. The second video showed the summary execution of what appeared to be the same two men.

Video One: Capture

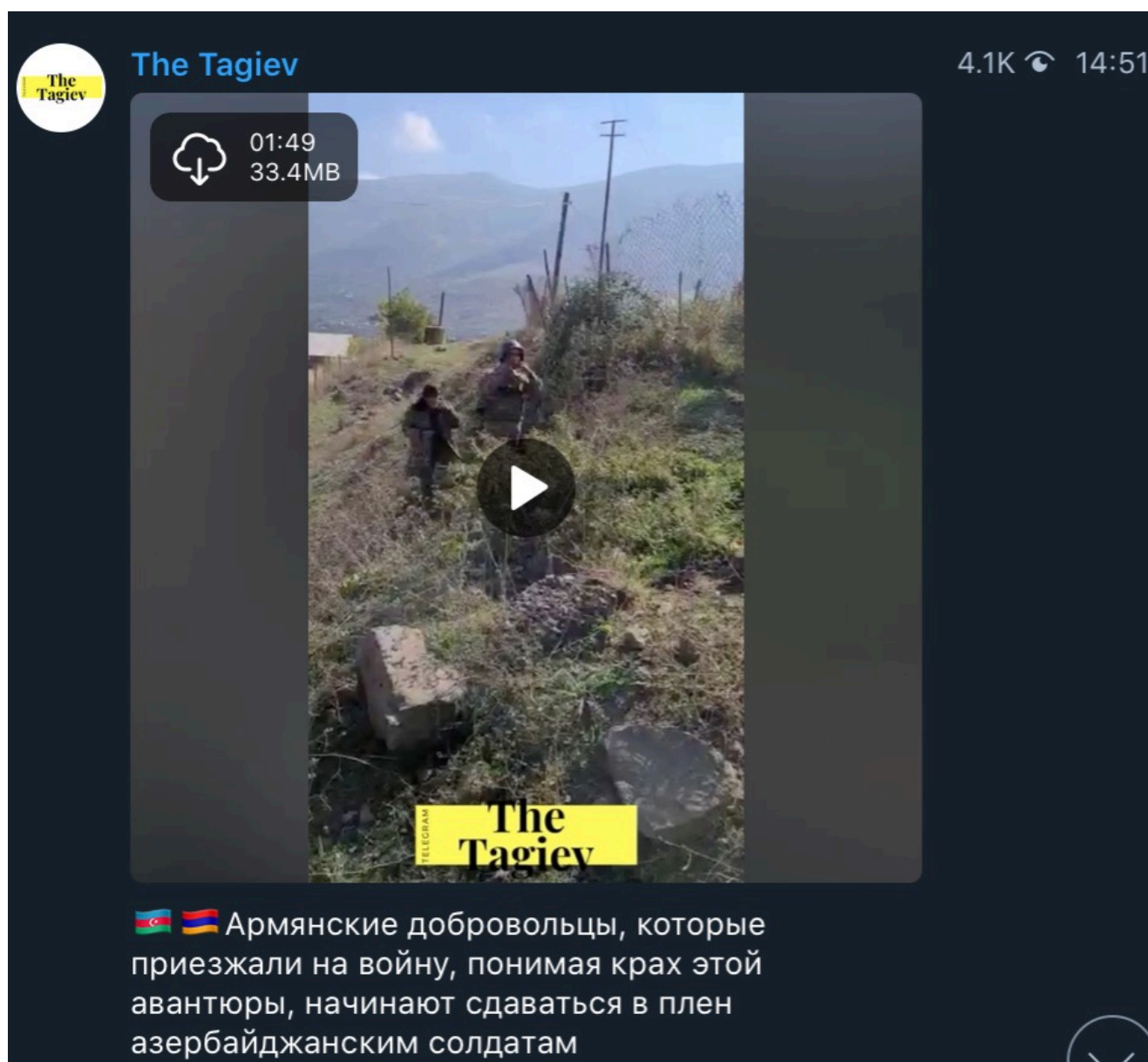


Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/zkQXy3fG9BY>

In this video, we see two men being detained by several soldiers. One of the men is elderly and has difficulty moving across the rough ground. Both are dressed in camouflage and neither are armed. At the beginning of the video, the younger man takes off his helmet and body armour.

This video appears to have been initially posted by Azerbaijani Telegram channels alongside a description stating that the two men were captured Armenian soldiers.

Many of these posts were later deleted or replaced with claims from the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defence that the videos were fake. For example The Tagiev, a popular Azerbaijani Telegram channel, deleted the post below and instead claimed the videos were staged because the detainees “fell too neatly”.



Screenshot from The Tagiev Telegram channel stating that Azerbaijani forces had captured two Armenians

Nevertheless, there are many grounds to suspect that the video is genuine.

The soldiers who detain the two men appear to have been armed with an SVD and AK-74(M) rifle, at least one with a Rakurs sight.



Video one: Clockwise from top right: SVD, AK-74M, AK-74M with Rakurs sight

At least one is wearing a Gentex-style helmet, which does not cover the ears. This style of helmet is distinct from that usually worn by the Azerbaijani military, which has a more traditional shape and covers the ears. However, photos published by Azerbaijani media indicate that the Gentex-style of helmet is certainly worn by Azerbaijani Special Forces.



The soldiers' camouflage appears to be a mixture of different patterns. It is difficult to be certain about the exact patterns due to the low quality of the video, and as such it does not allow us to identify the soldiers involved.



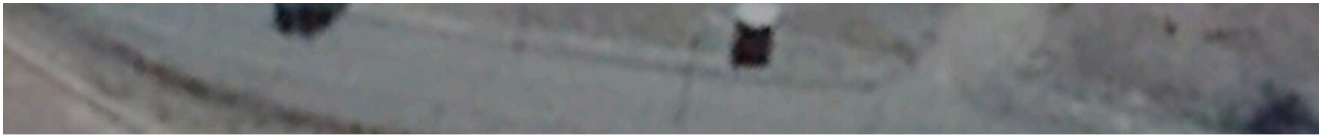
The language being spoken to the detainees is Russian, however we have confirmed that the soldiers also speak to each other in Azerbaijani.

Claims that the video show Armenian soldiers because one of them is wearing a red arm-band do not hold up to scrutiny. Azerbaijani soldiers have previously been pictured wearing red arm bands.

Location

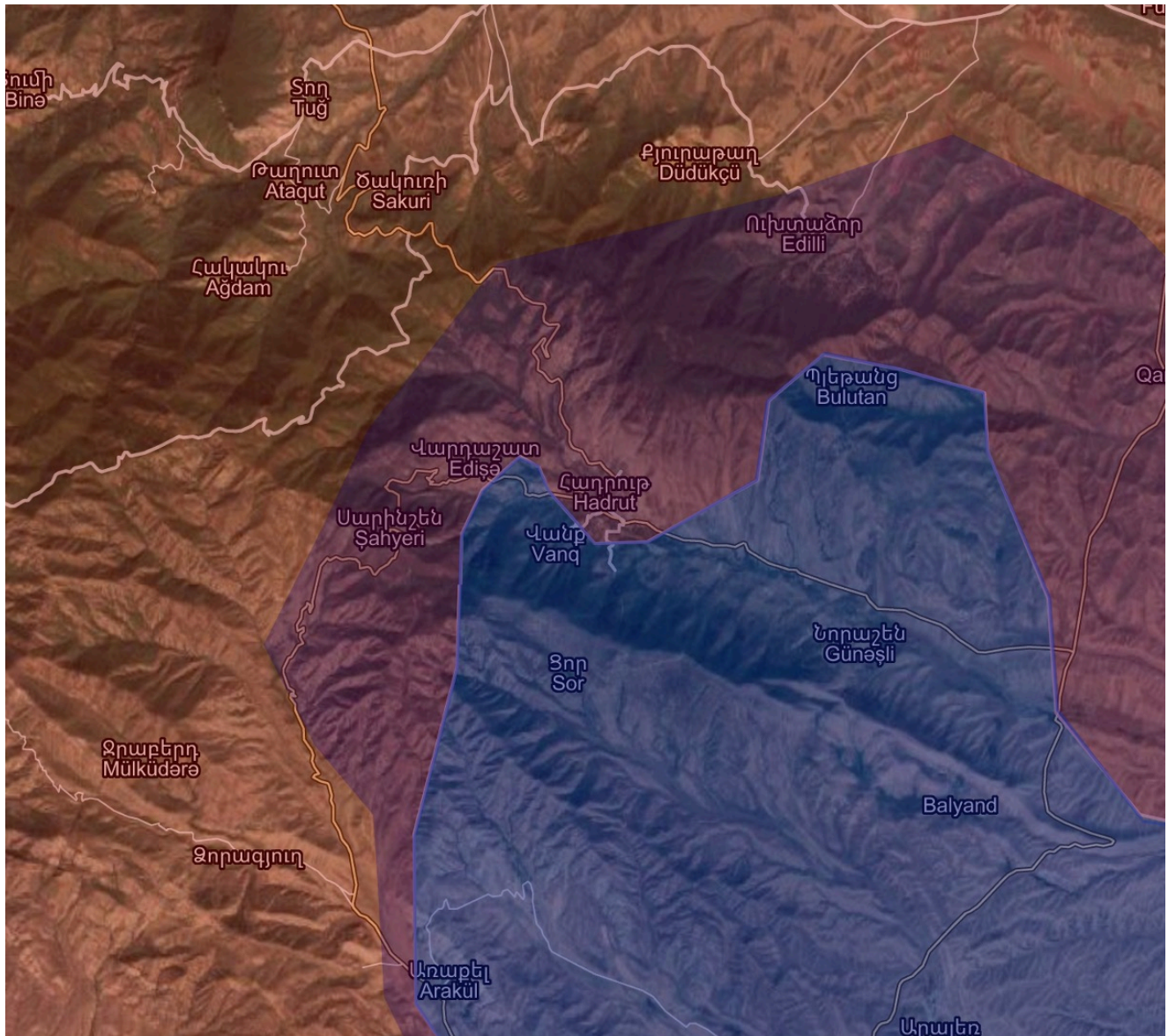
Multiple individuals online have geolocated this video to 39.524118, 47.027827.





Top: panoramic of video one, Bottom: satellite imagery of this location (courtesy of Google/CNES/Airbus)

This location is on the North edge of the town of Hadrut, which Azerbaijan has repeatedly claimed to have captured. These claims have been contested by Armenia and there appears to have been continued fighting around the town. Azerbaijani forces approached the town from the South-East, while Armenian forces hold the areas to the North of Hadrut.

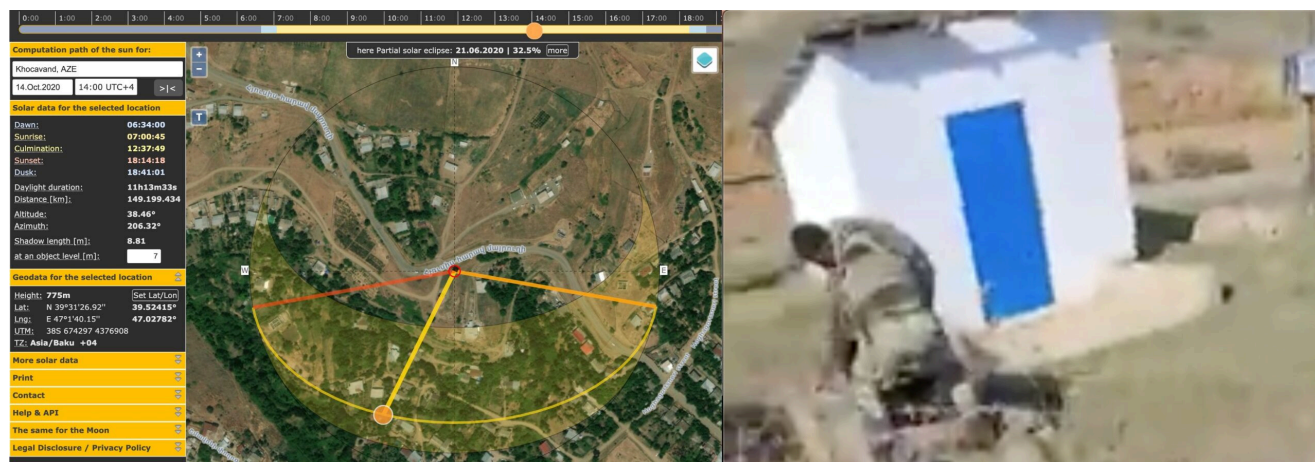


Rough map of disposition of forces around Hadrut. Red: held by Armenia, blue: held by Azerbaijan, purple: contested (Google Maps screenshot)

Date and time

The initial claims of Hadrut being captured by the Azerbaijani army were made on October 9. It therefore seems likely this video was made between October 9 and October 15. For the purposes of shadow analysis, we will set the date as October 14. This may result in some inaccuracy. However, given the small date range this is likely to be minimal.

A shadow analysis of video one using SunCalc gives a time of about 14:00. It should be noted that due to the lack of clear landmarks, this is a rough assessment, with a margin of error of an hour or so.



Video Two: Execution

The second video, which we will not share due to its graphic nature, shows two people sitting on a wall with their hands bound behind them. Both are draped in Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) flags. Men behind the camera shout and a fusillade of both single shots and automatic fire is heard. The men collapse onto the floor. There are multiple splashes consistent with small arms fire.

Although it is not possible to see the faces of the two people in video two, they are wearing clothing consistent with the two men seen being detained in video one.

The man on the left is wearing camouflage trousers and a blue t-shirt.



Left: video one, Right: video two

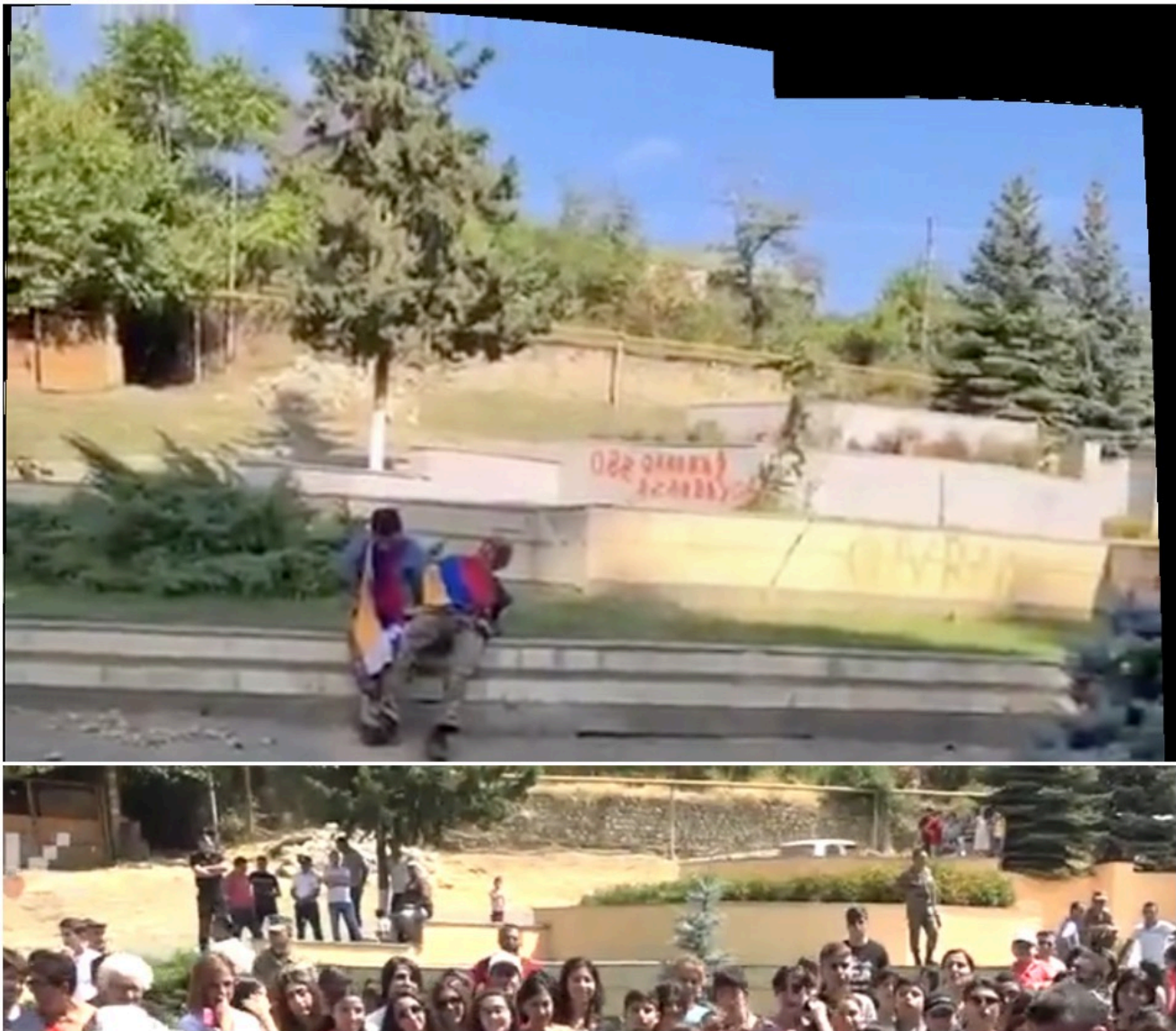
The man on the right is more indistinct but does appear to be wearing a black or dark top underneath a jacket which appears to have been pulled down to his arms.



Left: video one, Right: video two

Location

As with the first video, many individuals geolocated this video to a small park in the south of Hadrut at 39.514944, 47.033749. The video of the execution matches exactly with a video which depicts that park.

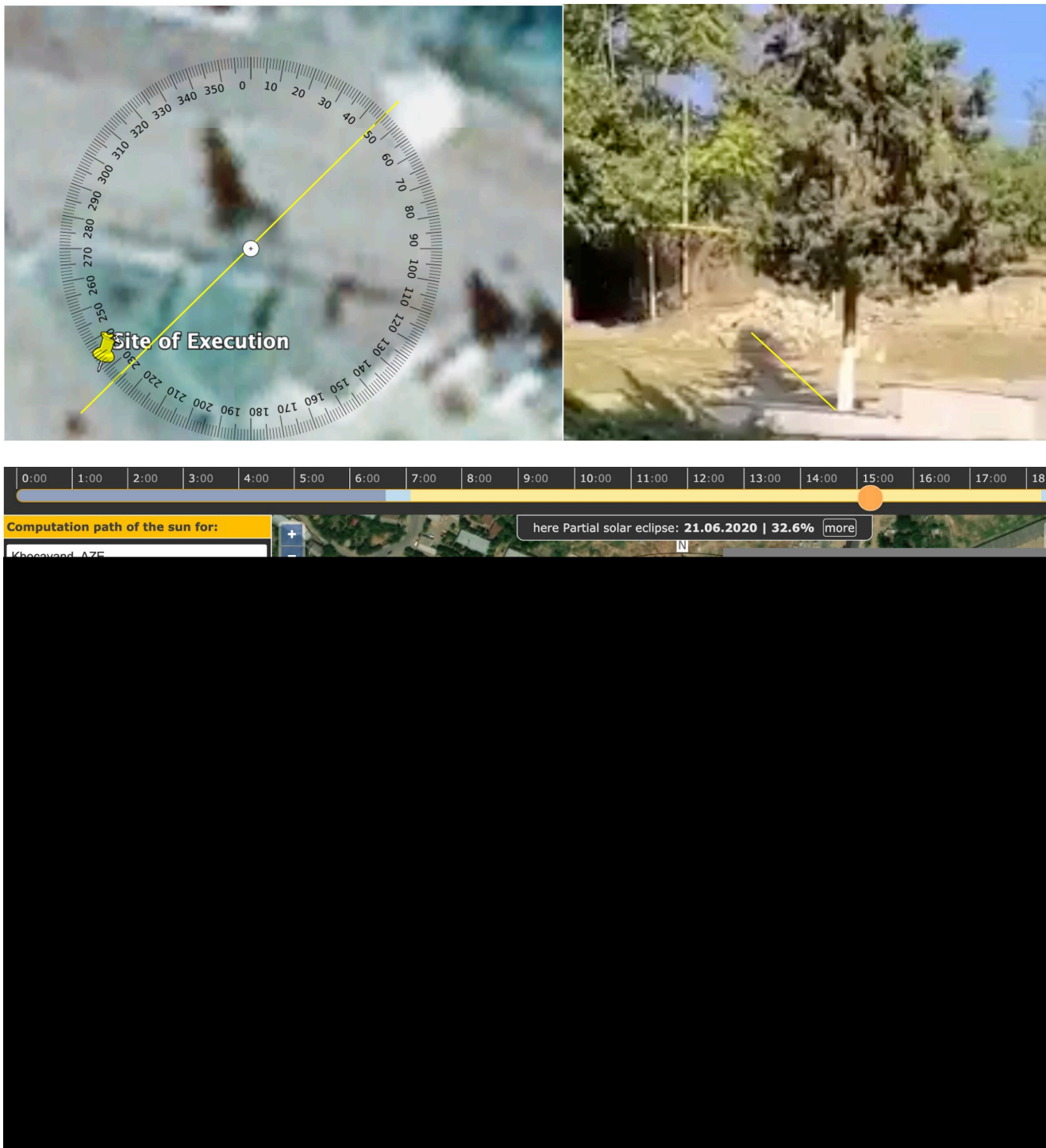


Top: Panoramic of video one. Bottom: still from an Artsakh Public TV video depicting this park, August 2019

The word 'Qarabağ' (the Azerbaijani-language spelling of Karabakh) appears to have been spraypainted, in red, onto a wall above the two men's bodies.

Date and time

A shadow analysis of video two, again assuming it was taken on October 14, gives a time of 15:11. It is possible to be more confident with this assessment as the shadow of a tree in this video passes over a pile of rubble which is visible on satellite imagery. The angle of this shadow is therefore approximately 45 degrees, which in turns gives us an azimuth of 225 degrees, and so a time of 15:11.



Analysis

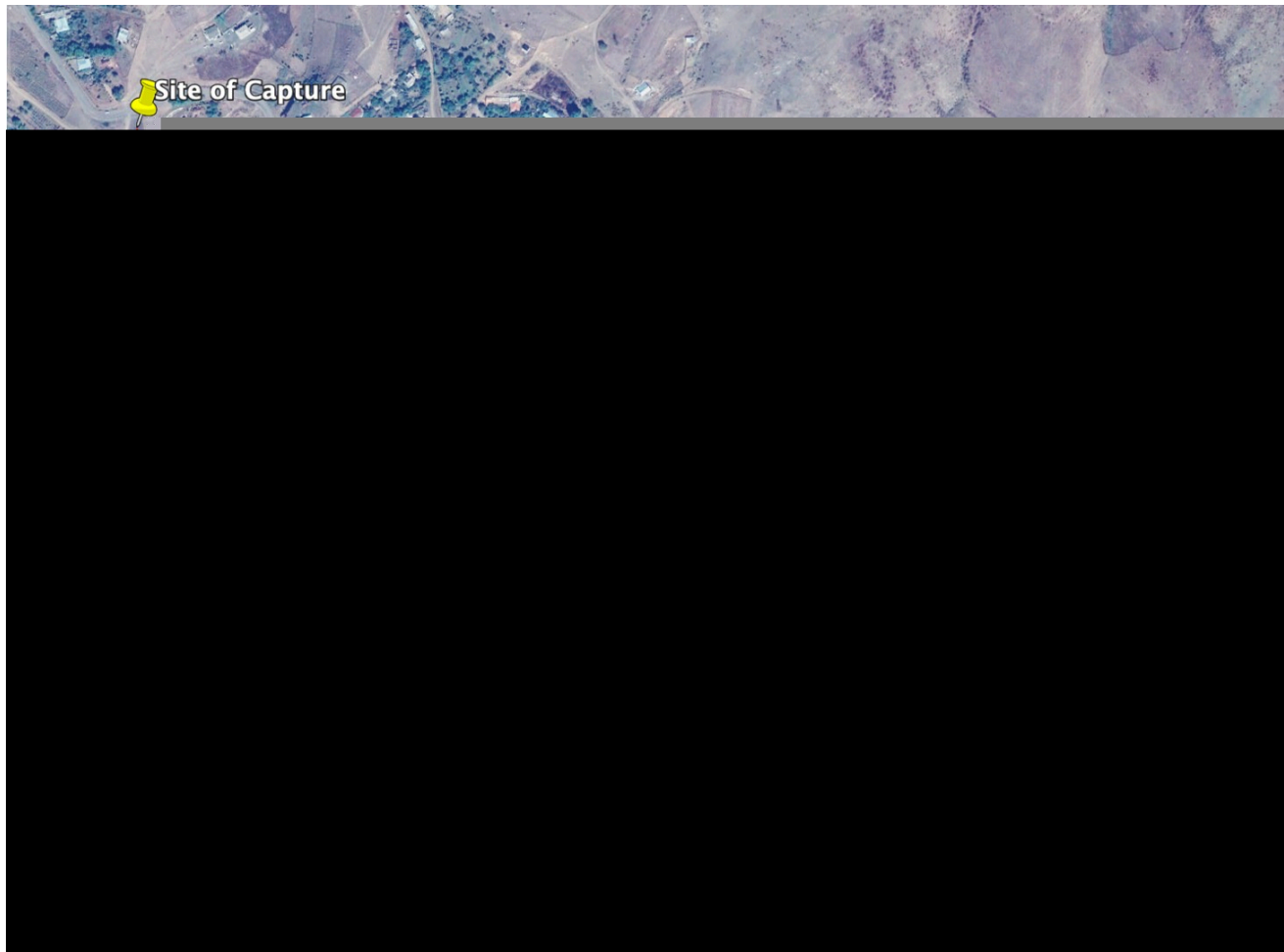
The first video appears to show two men being detained, followed by what appear to be the same two men being executed in a second video.

Although the camouflage patterns and weapons of the soldiers who initially detain these two men is mixed and relatively inconclusive, they are clearly speaking Russian to the detainees and Azerbaijani to each other. The distinctive helmet of one of the soldiers may indicate that

they are special forces.

Although the status of Hadrut is contested, the execution takes place just over a kilometre to the South-East of the initial site of capture, on the South side of Hadrut. Indeed there is even a video from Azerbaijani forces, also posted by The Tagiev, which show Azerbaijani personnel driving past the location of the execution.

Therefore the detainees appear to have been transported away from Armenian lines and towards Azerbaijani lines before they were executed.



Courtesy of Google/CNES/Airbus

The videos, which were initially posted on Azerbaijani Telegram channels, have since been removed. The Azerbaijani Ministry of Defence, meanwhile, still maintains that the videos were staged. This denial has also been shared on the same Telegram channels where the videos first appeared.

However, the analysis detailed here, as well as the initial claims posted with the videos, would appear to indicate that these two men were indeed Armenian combatants who were captured between October 9 and October 15 by Azerbaijani soldiers, possibly special forces,

and likely executed a short time later.

This post was written in conjunction with the Bellingcat Investigative team, with thanks to @CalibreObscura for weapons ID.