

“ INFORMATION WAR BETWEEN ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN ”



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SUMMARY

Information war between the two former republics of the Soviet Union, located in the strategic region of the South Caucasus, has been going on non-stop for over 30 years. This war began in the late 1980s, at a time when both countries were Soviet republics, and, accordingly, were part of the USSR. Some researchers believe that the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh served as a catalyst for the eruption of other conflicts in the territory of the USSR, which in turn accelerated the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The main developments began in 1988 when rallies were held in Yerevan demanding the reunification of Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region of the Azerbaijan SSR, which at that time was predominantly populated by Armenians. Despite the fact that NKAO did not have a common border with the Armenian SSR, the Armenian side demanded that this administrative unit be transferred to Armenia, but the central authorities, fearing a precedent that could create dozens of similar flashpoints in the territory of the USSR, refused to change the borders of the union republics in favor of Armenia. Rallies in Yerevan provoked rallies in Baku. This was followed by the expulsion of the Azerbaijani population from Armenia, and then from most of the NKAO, and later hundreds of thousands of Armenians living in Azerbaijan were forced to leave the republic. The Soviet authorities, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the army, and the all-powerful KGB showed their complete inability to prevent or resolve the conflict, thus allowing the conflict to escalate into an open armed confrontation. After gaining independence, the two countries entered into an open armed conflict, as a result of which Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent Azerbaijani regions, in total about 20% of the territory of Azerbaijan, were occupied by Armenia.

Since 1994, the Karabakh conflict has remained generally frozen, although there were occasional fighting upsurges, as, for example, in April 2016.

In September - November 2020, full-scale hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan resumed. As a result of the 44-day war, Azerbaijan managed to liberate part of the occupied territories, including the strategic city of Shusha. The war ended with signing of a tripartite statement by the presidents of Azerbaijan, Russia, and the prime minister of Armenia. According to the statement, the territories outside the borders of the former NKAO, which by that time still remained under the control of the Armenian armed forces, were returned to Azerbaijan. Russian peacekeepers were deployed on the rest of the former NKAO territory (about 3% of the territory of Azerbaijan) for a period of 5 years and with a possibility of extending their mission. Baku declared its victory, and Azerbaijani officials, as well as a number of experts and politicians, considered the tripartite statement signed by Armenia to be an "act of capitulation." In this report, the Tarand expert group examines the informational component of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.



The foundation for the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis was laid by the Russian Empire almost immediately after the conquest of the territories, which comprise now modern Armenia and Azerbaijan. This conflict had several active phases, which were in 1905-6, 1918-20, 1988-1994, and 2020.

In this report, the Tarand expert group of experts will mainly focus on the events that took place in the information field in 2020. But for better understanding of them, the experts, of course, will also discuss the events that took place before 2020.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which erupted when there was no Internet or television, is very interesting from the point of view of demonstrating the evolution of information wars, their transition from offline to online.

The first instruments of information warfare were undoubtedly newspapers, magazines and books. Each side tried to advance its point of view in newspapers, magazines, leaflets and books that they published. Over time, the Armenian side, not without the help of large Armenian diaspora, got ahead in this race.

At the very beginning of the Karabakh conflict, the Armenian side published in the Western media a number of articles about the historical ownership of Nagorno-Karabakh and necessity of its transfer to Armenia.

Within the USSR, "Perestroika" and "Glasnost" - the new policies declared by the party elite, allowed the intelligentsia and journalists in both republics to raise, at first cautiously, and the more persistently, the Karabakh issue in the union republic media. As the time passed, the Karabakh issue and what was happening around it made its way into the central media of the Soviet Union, and while initially the central media tried to adhere to the policy of "friendship of peoples" and "socialist construction", gradually the sympathies of Moscow journalists and public figures shifted to the Armenian side.

Such pro-Armenian bias caused strong resentment both among the Azerbaijani intelligentsia and the broad segments of Azerbaijani society. One-sided coverage of the Karabakh issue by the central media played a certain role in rise of the anti-Soviet movement in Azerbaijan. The culmination of this movement was the tragedy in Baku on the night of January 19-20, 1990, when the Soviet army was deployed to suppress the protests in the city. It was a rare occurrence in post-war history, when the Soviet army stormed a Soviet city, and the Minister of Defense of the USSR Dmitry Yazov was in charge of the operation. As a result of this operation, which was simultaneously carried out in other cities of Azerbaijan as well, up to 170 civilians, including women and children, were killed by the Soviet troops, and more than 800 people, including women and children, were injured. This event left a deep psychological mark on the collective conscience of Azerbaijani society and affected the course of the Karabakh conflict. It was preceded by the Armenian pogroms in Baku, which took place against the backdrop of complete indifference of the Soviet army and internal troops stationed in Baku. The Azerbaijani and Armenian sides prefer a selective approach when discussing and describing the January 1990 events in Baku. The Armenian side focuses on the Armenian pogroms in Baku, while the Azerbaijani side focuses on the events on the night of 19-20 January. It should be noted that by January 1990, the process of the expulsion of Azerbaijanis was almost completed in Armenia, and some Azerbaijanis living in the NKAO were also expelled. Two years before the events in Baku, in late February 1988, the events which the Armenian side calls "Sumgait pogrom" took place in the industrial city of Sumgait north of Baku. As a result of the riots in Sumgait, 26 Armenians were killed.

The events in Sumgait became at the time a major trump card in the hands of the Armenian propaganda, which helped, on the one hand, to suppress the reports about expulsion and massacres of Azerbaijanis in Armenia, and, on the other hand, to demonstrate the "impossibility" for Armenians to live together with Azerbaijanis. This was a powerful argument in favor of the transfer of the NKAO to Armenia. To this day, Sumgait events are extensively used by the Armenian side to justify the occupation of Azerbaijani territories and ethnic cleansing of their population. The Azerbaijani side draws attention to suspicious circumstances of the Sumgait events. In particular, to the fact that an Armenian resident of Sumgait, Eduard Grigoryan, participated in pogroms, killed and raped Armenians, while pretending to be an Azerbaijani. Attention is also drawn to the fact that the pogroms were selective, as rioters broke into the homes of some Armenians, but avoided others. There is an opinion in Azerbaijan that the Sumgayit events were organized by the Soviet KGB with involvement of local criminal elements, with the aim of discrediting the independence movement in Azerbaijan. There is also a theory that the Sumgayit events were organized by the Soviet KGB in order to discredit "Perestroika" started by Gorbachev. In any case, these events were widely publicized by the Armenian side, and the coverage was often accompanied by distortion of facts and racist attacks against Azerbaijanis.

The USSR legally ceased to exist in late 1991, and Armenia and Azerbaijan regained their independence 70 years after they lost it in the 1920s. Now the conflict in Karabakh has legally turned into a war between two independent countries. After December 1991, some units of the Soviet army still remained on the territories of Armenia and Azerbaijan (later, they would be completely withdrawn from the territory of Azerbaijan, and Russian military bases would be established in Armenia). Both sides used these units, in effect, as mercenaries, and both sides accused each other of using the Soviet army units.

During the first Karabakh war, new names began to emerge in the field of information wars. These were foreigners who sympathized or openly worked for one of the sides of the conflict.

Among them, one can mention such personalities familiar to the public of both countries as Baroness Caroline Cox, Thomas Goltz, Galina Starovoitova, Dana Mazalova, Elena Bonner, Academician Andrei Sakharov, and others. The overwhelming majority of foreign nationals involved in the conflict were people who supported the Armenian point of view.

Some in Azerbaijan believe that Russian activists who supported the Armenians also hampered the spread in Russia of an alternative point of view about what was happening around Karabakh.

During the first Karabakh war (1991-1994), both countries produced en masse low-quality propaganda products in the form of documentary and feature films, books, and scientific monographs. History, culture, cinema, and media became the next "line of defense" for the parties to the conflict.

Historians of both countries, in articles, scientific monographs, and books, were proving to each other ownership of Karabakh and autochthony of their people in these lands.

The Karabakh conflict was also accompanied by mass killings of the civilian population and ethnic cleansing. During the hostilities, the armed forces of Armenia and the armed units of Karabakh Armenians, in addition to almost 95% of the territory of the NKAO, also seized 7

Azerbaijani provinces surrounding the NKAO; Armenians have never lived in these territories. Thus, hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis, i.e. population several times bigger than the entire Armenian population of Karabakh, became refugees. The attack and subsequent capture of the Azerbaijani city of Khojaly, and the massacre of civilians became one of the most notorious war crimes committed during the first Karabakh war. Fearing accusations of aggression and genocide, the Armenian side hastily launched a propaganda campaign with the purpose of deflecting accusations from itself. The old, well-known strategy was chosen, when the victims were blamed for what happened to them.

The Khojaly tragedy was the culmination of this strategy. According to the Azerbaijani authorities, 613 Azerbaijanis were killed as a result of the capture of Khojaly.¹ More than a thousand persons, including women and children, were taken prisoner or wounded. Commenting on Khojaly massacre, Serzh Sargsyan, one of the Armenian field commanders who later became the President of Armenia, said: "Before Khojaly, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We needed to put a stop to all that. And that's what happened. And we should also take into account that amongst those boys were people who had fled from [the anti-Armenian pogroms in] Baku and Sumgait." Sargsyan made this statement in his interview to British researcher Thomas de Waal.² De Waal, in turn, quoted Sargsyan's words in his the book "Black Garden". Both sides used the book for selective quoting. To this day, quotes from de Waal's book are actively used in the information war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. From time to time, de Waal faces accusations of bias from both sides, and depending on the situation, both sides present their arguments in support of de Waal's alleged bias.

As part of the propaganda campaign on the Khojaly issue, the Armenian side has created a number of propaganda websites and documentaries. The most well-known and largest web project dedicated to Khojaly is perhaps the site xocali.net, created by the Center for Public Relations and Information of the Presidential Administration of Armenia in 2011 (at that time, Serzh Sargsyan was the President of Armenia).³ As the project coordinator Armine Adibekyan stated in February 2020, "Ten years ago we dealt a strong blow to the Azerbaijani propaganda machine, exposing and presenting on the Xocali.net website all the disinformation and falsifications, which Azerbaijan has been promoting for years to substantiate the claims of the so-called genocide".⁴

The site is available in 6 languages, and every year on February 25-26 the Armenian media and bloggers involved in the information warfare cite and share the site's materials. In a joint analytical article for the BBC, the authors Grigor Atanesyan and Maharram Zeynalov, analyzing the methods and techniques of propaganda and myth-making in both countries, also mention this project: "The employees of the center at the administration of the President of Armenia

1 "Khojaly Genocide - "The Tragedy of the 20th Century"," n.d., <http://www.supremecourt.gov.az/en/static/view/174>.

2 Том де Ваал, "Глава 11. Август 1991 - май 1992 гг. Начало войны," July 11, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/in_depth/news-id_4673000/4673953.stm.

3 "Проект «Xocali.net» раскрывает азербайджанские фальсификации о событиях Ходжалу," February 25, 2016, <https://armenpress.am/rus/news/837342/proekt-xocalinet-raskriyvaet-azerbaiydzhanskie-falsifikacii.html>.

4 "Армине Адибекян: Запуском Сайта Xocali.Net Мы Нанесли Сильнейший Удар По Азербайджанскому Агитпропу," 02 2020, <https://www.panorama.am/ru/news/2020/02/26/Армине-Адибекян-Xocali-net/2245977>.

ran the sites xocali.net, xocali.tv, karabakhrecords.info, etc. The center wrote books and shot documentaries accusing Azerbaijan of genocide and denying the guilt of the Armenian troops over Khojaly.

While denying the guilt, the authors at the same time hinted that the murders of Khojaly residents were revenge for the suffering of Armenians. The photo album "Khojaly: effects of one cause" from the Facebook page of the xocali.net website contains collages that combine photos of Armenians wounded and killed in Stepanakert in January 1992 with the victims of the attack on Khojaly in February of the same year. Each collage is adorned with the epigraph: "The effect is contained in the cause, as the flower and the eventual fruit are contained in the seed."

The director of the center in 2009-2017 was Ara Saghatelyan, then head of the parliament administration. A documentary film about the events in Khojaly was produced by his nephew Arman Saghatelyan, who advanced from captain of the New Armenians KVN team to a parliament deputy from the ruling party.

In parallel with the presidential administration, the Khojaly conspiracy theory was promoted by the Foreign Ministry. It was voiced by the representative of Armenia to the UN in 1997. In 2014, this claim was repeated by Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian. Referring to the same interview with Mutalibov, he accused the Azerbaijanis of the massacre. In 2018, the minister recalled this version again.

Finally, in November 2019, this claim was repeated by the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan. "Even the former President of Azerbaijan said in his interview that the events of Khojaly (Armenian pronunciation – editor's note) were organized by the Azerbaijani opposition in order to make changes and a coup in Azerbaijan," Pashinyan said.

On February 15, 2020, during a debate with the President of Azerbaijan at the Munich Security Conference, Pashinyan repeated this claim.⁵

The main leitmotif of the site is that "the Azerbaijanis themselves killed the residents of Khojaly in order to blame the Armenians for that" and "all materials and information provided by the Azerbaijani side, are disinformation and propaganda".

One of the main arguments in support of this theory, used by the Armenian side, is the interview by the first President of Azerbaijan Ayaz Mutallibov to the pro-Armenian Czech journalist Dana Mazalova. Mutallibov's interview was published in April 1992 in the Russian "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" newspaper. According to the interview, Mutallibov accused the Popular Front of Azerbaijan, which at that time was in strong opposition to him, of committing the Khojaly massacre. Mazalova concluded that Mutallibov blames Azerbaijanis for the Khojaly massacre. After this resonant interview, Mutallibov gave several refutations, and accused Mazalova of distorting and falsifying his words, to which Mazalova stated that she had an audio recording of the interview with Mutallibov. However, since 1992 until her death in 2020, Mazalova did not provide the audio recording of the interview with Ayaz Mutallibov.⁶

⁵ Григор Атанесян and Магеррам Зейналов, "Как Азербайджан и Армения Распространяют Теории Заговора о Карабахском Конфликте," February 26, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-51549094>.

⁶ "Фальсификации На Тему Ходжалы. Дана Мазалова и Интервью Аяза Муталибова.," n.d., http://xocali.org/index.php?p=dana_mazalova_ayaz_mutallibov.

The absence of the promised audio recording did not prevent the Armenian side from pushing this claim and using it as the main trump card in the Khojaly issue.

Mistakes of the Azerbaijani media and state websites with the use of photographs of the Khojaly massacre victims, as well as amateurism of some Azerbaijani journalists and activists also play into the hands of the Armenian propagandists in denying Armenia's responsibility in the Khojaly massacre.

The Azerbaijani side, in turn, appeals to the video and photo evidence at its disposal, documented eyewitness accounts, as well as reports of such organizations as Memorial and Human Rights Watch.

In general, in the information war, the sides, in addition to the pogroms in Baku and Sumgait and the massacre in Khojaly, present a number of "historical facts".

For example, the Armenian side promotes the thesis that Stalin allegedly transferred Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan. Apparently, it is assumed that since Stalin is considered a "villain," then everything he did should be perceived negatively by default.

The Azerbaijani side responds to this claim by pointing to the fact that the decision of the Caucasian Bureau on granting the status of autonomy to the mountainous part of Karabakh does not contain the word "transfer", it says "leave Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan". It means that originally Karabakh was a part of Azerbaijan, which is reflected in the document. The document is in the public domain and anyone who knows Russian can check it.

This claim, circulated by Armenian propaganda and lobbyists, made its way into some authoritative Western media, for example, The Christian Science Monitor,⁷ Vox.com,⁸ The Washington Post⁹ and a number of others.

From there, the claim that "Karabakh was transferred to Azerbaijan by Stalin" found its way into scholarly articles and books published in the West. Their authors refer to publications in the Western media, and not to historical documents.

In connection with the claims of "transfer of Karabakh to Azerbaijan by Stalin", the Azerbaijani side raises from time to time the issue of transfer of some territories in western Azerbaijan to Armenia after the occupation of both countries by Soviet Russia. After the end of the second Karabakh war, such statements began to be voiced more and more often in Baku.

If we analyze the trends of the information war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, we can come to a conclusion that from 1988 to September 27, 2020 Armenians had the lead, and Azerbaijan often just responded to the "information bombardment" from the Armenian side. This allowed Armenia to keep the opponent under pressure and create a favorable publicity for itself.

⁷ Raffi K Hovannisian, "Karabakh Still Suffers Under Stalin's Legacy," 03 1992, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1992/0331/31191.html>.

⁸ Alex Ward, "The Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Explained," July 10, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/21502327/armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-war-explained>.

⁹ Marc Champion, "Why Stakes Are Raised in the Azeri-Armenian Conflict," October 10, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/why-stakes-are-raised-in-the-azeri-armenian-conflict/2020/10/09/19089a8c-0a3e-11eb-8719-0df159d14794_story.html.

Everything changed on September 27, 2020¹⁰ when at dawn hostilities resumed along the entire line of contact. Even during the first hours, a powerful element of information warfare could be observed on both sides.

In the early morning of September 27, Azerbaijan reported an intensive shelling of Azerbaijani settlements by the Armenian Armed Forces, and immediately after, Baku announced the start of a "counter-offensive operation". The message from Baku was clear and simple: "we were attacked on our territory, and we have the right to kick the enemy out of it". In response, the Armenian side declared "the Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression against Artsakh (the term used by the Armenian side to refer to Karabakh)." Thus, Yerevan put itself in a disadvantageous position in this informational duel from the very beginning. There is no country or territory by the name of Artsakh on the world map, no large presence of Turkish troops in Karabakh was observed, and the hostilities were taking place in the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan. Baku promptly took advantage of this misstep of Armenia, consolidating its successes on the battlefield as well.

The first week of the war was a turning point. As the myths about the "invincibility of the Armenian army" and "impregnability of Karabakh," created by Armenia and the diaspora for almost 30 years, were crumbling, the initiative passed to Azerbaijan. It became increasingly difficult for the Armenian side to defend its positions, even despite widespread support in the Western media.

It is worth noting that during the frozen phase of the conflict, whole armies of "friends" emerged on both sides (politicians, scientists, public figures, journalists, lobbyists, bloggers, and former heads of state and high-ranking officials from various countries). Often these are either people who have a financial interest in supporting a particular country, or people who openly sympathize with one of the parties to the conflict. If "friends of Armenia" were well known and their intentions and capabilities were not a secret to anyone, then on the Azerbaijani side there was a very different picture. Some of the people sympathizing with or openly working for Azerbaijan were known, but at the same time, over the decades of preparation for the war, Azerbaijan managed to create a secret and influential network of "friends" who could act at Zero Hour without fear of reprisals from the Armenians and their allies. This ace up the sleeve of Baku came as a complete surprise to the Armenians.

During the hostilities, hitherto unknown "information warriors" from among sympathetic or paid foreigners also emerged on both sides.

Though some of them were and remain active exclusively in social networks, some have access to large TV channels, primarily in Russia.

It should be noted that top officials of both countries also took an active part in the information war. Verbal duels between Ilham Aliyev and Nikol Pashinyan took place even before the war, during interviews with foreign media, and at international events.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan started the discussion in absentia, when in August 2019, during his speech at a rally in Khankendi/Stepanakert,

¹⁰ "Fighting Erupts between Armenia, Azerbaijan over Disputed Region," September 27, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/27/heavy-fighting-erupts-in-disputed-nagorno-karabakh-region>.

he stated that “Artsakh (the Armenian name for Karabakh) is Armenia, and that's it!”¹¹ These words of Pashinyan triggered a sharp reaction from both the Azerbaijani authorities and the Azerbaijani society.

On October 3, 2019, in the presence of the President of Russia and several other heads of state, speaking from the rostrum of the Valdai Discussion Club, Ilham Aliyev touched upon the Karabakh issue, made a short historical excursion, and criticized Pashinyan's statement about Karabakh's being a part of Armenia. Regarding the ownership of Karabakh, Ilham Aliyev said: “Karabakh is Azerbaijan – exclamation mark”.¹² This expression of Ilham Aliyev was instantly picked up by the Azerbaijani media and users of social networks.

Later, on February 15, 2020, at the Munich Security Conference, a discussion panel entitled “An Update on Nagorno-Karabakh” was held with participation of Nikol Pashinyan and Ilham Aliyev.¹³ Both leaders presented positions of their countries and “historical realities.” But Pashinyan, who had a poor command of English and was difficult to understand, and who tried to twist the norms of international law to adapt it to the interests of Armenia, looked less convincing in comparison with Aliyev. That certainly did not go unnoticed by foreign observers and users of social networks. Taking advantage of Pashinyan's poor English, Aliyev caught him several times on his mistakes and inaccuracies, publicly mocking the Armenian prime minister. Azerbaijani users of social networks turned Pashinyan's words and remarks into memes.

Verbal duels of the heads of states continued during the war. Series of Pashinyan's interviews with the Russian media showed that Pashinyan's command of the Russian language was insufficient for effective communication, same as his knowledge of English. Pashinyan gave his later interviews with assistance of a translator. This fact attracted attention of observers, as well as the societies of both countries, especially in contrast with Ilham Aliyev, who is fluent in Russian, which certainly helped him win the sympathy of the Russian-speaking audience.

In addition, when giving interviews to the Western media, Ilham Aliyev would often enter into discussions with journalists, and in response to their criticism, pointed out similar shortfalls in the Western countries.

One of the main arguments of Armenia and its allies was the presence of “Syrian mercenaries” in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan. In their turn, Baku and Ankara indicated that Kurdish mercenaries were fighting on the side of Armenia in Karabakh.

It is noteworthy that some Western media outlets, claiming the involvement of Syrian mercenaries, referred either to dubious sources of questionable impartiality, or to “telephone conversations” with the alleged mercenaries. The terminology also differed; while Western

¹¹ Ирина Джорбенадзе, “Пашинян: Арцах — это Армения, и все!,” August 8, 2019, <https://www.rosbalt.ru/world/2019/08/08/1796164.html>.

¹² “Речь Ильхама Алиева На Пленарной Сессии XVI Ежегодного Заседания Международного Дискуссионного Клуба «Валдай»,” March 10, 2019, <https://ru.president.az/articles/34358>.

¹³ “Conversation ‘An Update on Nagorno-Karabakh,’” February 15, 2020, <https://securityconference.org/en/medialibrary/asset/conversation-an-update-on-nagorno-karabakh-20200215-1830/>.

experts and journalists talked about "Syrian mercenaries",¹⁴ their Russian colleagues mentioned "Islamic terrorists".¹⁵

Through the efforts of the Armenian propaganda, "presence of Syrian mercenaries in Azerbaijan" acquired many extra "details", in particular, a number of pro-Armenian Telegram channels spread reports about alleged conflicts between the Syrians and the local Azerbaijani population. It was claimed that the Syrians wanted to introduce Sharia law in Azerbaijani settlements. Despite the refutation by a number of independent sources, these claims made their way into the Armenian media and were voiced by Nikol Pashinyan.

For example, on September 28, 2020, the largest Armenian news agency Armenpress, citing the fake website Free Azerbaijan, created by the Armenian side for propaganda purposes, reported clashes between "Syrian militants and Azerbaijani population."¹⁶

Quote: "Syrian militants raise hell. It is reported that clashes between local residents and Syrian militants continued for two days. Militants from the Middle East treat villagers bad, in particular, they insult and threaten, do not allow women to leave the house without a hijab. In addition, "guests" attack, rob local shops, and do not allow sale and consumption of alcohol. In other words, the militants enforce Sharia law."

It is noteworthy that at that time a large number of Azerbaijani and foreign journalists were present in the settlements near the war zone, but there was no photo or video evidence of not only the confrontation between the Syrians and the locals, but even of at least one Syrian.

The Armenian, as well as a number of Western and Russian media, distributed photos and videos of people wearing the uniform of Azerbaijani border guards. The Armenian side claimed that "Syrians fighting on the side of Azerbaijan wear the uniform of the border guards of the country." Against this background, on October 25, 2020, at noon, the press secretary of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia Shushan Stepanyan posted on her Facebook page photos of Defense Minister David Tonoyan, who met with the Armenian military personnel in Karabakh. On the photographs, "Syrians wearing Azerbaijani border guards' uniform" were sitting nicely next to the minister, together with other Armenian soldiers. Stepanyan deleted the photos a few minutes later, but vigilant users managed to save them and take screenshots.¹⁷

Azerbaijani social media users suggested that Armenian soldiers, disguised as Azerbaijani border guards, were in fact filming special propaganda videos, posing as Syrians. But before meeting the minister, they forgot to take off their Azerbaijani uniforms.

¹⁴ Ed Butler, "The Syrian Mercenaries Used as 'cannon Fodder' in Nagorno-Karabakh," October 12, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-55238803>.

¹⁵ Артемий Шарапов, "Турция Начала Мобилизовать Исламистов Для Войны в Карабахе," September 22, 2020, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/09/22/turciya-nachala-mobilizovat-islamistov-dlya-voyny-v-karabakhe.html>.

¹⁶ Анна Григорян, "Сирийские Наемники Устроили в Азербайджане Переполюх: Сообщают Азербайджанские СМИ," September 28, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/rus/news/1029205.html>.

¹⁷ "Шушан Степаян Раскрыла Тайну Армянского Фейка Про Сирийских Наемников в Азербайджане," October 26, 2020, https://gazeta.az/schushan-stepanyan-raskryla-taynu-armyanskogo-feyka-pro-siriyskih-naemnikov-v-azerbaydzhane-foto/?__cf_chl_managed_tk__=pmd_7bf3_eY83qrQ3HXb49pWtVPt4.ZLtKOHkI01QuNnBQU-1633072085-0-gqNtZGzNAyWjcnBszRZR.

This is also supported by the fact that Armenia brought several thousand Armenian settlers from Syria to Karabakh. These people usually speak Arabic and are not much different in appearance from other ethnic groups inhabiting Syria.

Azerbaijani counter-propaganda immediately picked up this fact, while almost all leading Azerbaijani media made publications about it, and a huge number of ordinary Azerbaijani users of social networks, as well as bloggers and experts shared screenshots of this post on social networks.

During the war and for a while after its end, "Syrian mercenaries" were one of the main topics in the information war between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The Armenian side also used in its propaganda statements of the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Sergei Naryshkin,¹⁸ and French President Emmanuel Macron.¹⁹

Also, in an attempt to rally international support, the Armenian side tried to present the war in Karabakh as "aggression of Turkey and Azerbaijan against Artsakh and Armenia".²⁰

Addressing nation on October 3, 2020, Nikol Pashinyan stated that "Azerbaijan and Turkey want to carry out a genocide of Armenians" and that "despite massive strikes, Azerbaijan was unable to achieve tactical success." However, as the analysis of events shows, by October 3 the Azerbaijani army had already broken through the defense line of the Armenian troops, captured a number of strategic heights and settlements in the northern and southern directions. In the air, Azerbaijan also had complete dominance.

In the same speech, Pashinyan claimed that 150 Turkish advisers and Turkish special forces were present on the Azerbaijani side,²¹ however, the Armenian side was not able to provide any proof of that neither during, nor after the war.

During the hostilities, the Ministry of Defense of Armenia and Armenian politicians also spread information about an alleged downing of an Armenian military aircraft by Turkish F 16 warplanes, which were stationed at that time in Azerbaijan.

The history of the issue takes us back to August 2020, when, shortly before the resumption of hostilities in the Karabakh conflict zone, Turkey and Azerbaijan held large-scale military exercises. Turkish F 16 military aircraft also took part in the exercises.²² After the end of military exercises, some of them remained in Azerbaijan. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said later that "Turkey left its aircraft in Azerbaijan as a demonstration of moral support."²³

¹⁸ "Нарышкин Рассказал, Откуда у СВР Данные о Сирийских Боевиках в Карабахе," June 11, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20201106/karabakh-1583322208.html>.

¹⁹ John Irish and Michel Rose, "France Accuses Turkey of Sending Syrian Jihadists to Nagorno-Karabakh," January 10, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-azerbaijan-putin-macron-idUSKBN26L3SB>.

²⁰ Джошуа Кучера, "Тема Сирийских Наемников Доминирует в Армяно-Азербайджанской Информационной Войне," February 10, 2020, <https://russian.eurasianet.org/тема-сирийских-наемников-доминирует-в-армяно-азербайджанской-информационной-войне>.

²¹ "Пашинян Счел Геноцид Армян Целью Обострения Конфликта в НКР," March 10, 2020, <https://www.interfax.ru/world/729829>.

²² Ruslan Rehimov, "Турецкие F-16 в Небе Над Азербайджаном," July 31, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ru/мир/турецкие-f-16-в-небе-над-азербайджаном/1928205>.

²³ "Алиев Объяснил Моральной Поддержкой Наличие в Азербайджане Турецких F-16," October 26, 2020, <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5f96ad8e9a794730332782f0>.

In Armenia, both the Ministry of Defense²⁴ and personally Prime Minister Pashinyan²⁵ made repeated statements about participation of Turkish F 16ss in the hostilities, but neither provided any evidence in support of these statements. The Azerbaijani side considered these claims to be propaganda tricks, the purpose of which was internationalization of the conflict.

It is worth noting that the Armenian side, making claims about involvement in the hostilities of the Turkish military and their F 16s, as well as the Syrian mercenaries, was able to attract to its side a certain segment of anti-Turkish public, both in social networks and in the expert and journalistic circles. This was undoubtedly a success of the Armenian side, however, it was a tactical success, which, for a number of reasons, did not turn into a strategic advantage.

In general, if the Armenian side relied during the war on traditional media (and online media that have already become traditional), then Azerbaijan, which has weak capabilities in this regard, focused more on social networks. However, it should be noted that Azerbaijani users, as well as state institutions, had to carry out their activities on social networks under the restrictions imposed by the Azerbaijani authorities from the very start of the war.

The country blocked access to such sites as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Twitter, Zoom, Skype and a number of instant messengers, such as Telegram, Signal, WhatsApp etc.²⁶ Access to downloading and purchasing VPN programs was also restricted. However, this did not prevent hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani users from bypassing Internet limitations and using blocked services.

In Armenia, the Internet access was not restricted, but a sort of Internet censorship, regulated by martial law, was imposed.

For example, Armenian peace activist Georgi Vanyan was subjected to police harassment and fined for his post on Facebook, in which he criticized the war and called for peace with Azerbaijan.²⁷

Azerbaijani media and social networks users immediately reacted to this news, and many considered it to be a "crackdown on calls for peace in Armenia."

Analyzing the methods and tactics of waging the information war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Tarand expert group came to a conclusion that in addition to pursuing state policy and coordination on the part of government institutions, there was also an element of self-organization that came about in the process, when ordinary citizens of both countries, living in the country or abroad, self-organized and grouped around activists or media personalities and thus coordinated their work.

24 Павел Аксенов, "Армения Утверждает, Что Турецкий Истребитель Сбил Ее Су-25. Можно Ли Доказать, Что Он Был?," January 10, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-54370498>.

25 "Пашинян Подтвердил, Что Турецкий F-16 Сбил Су-25 ВВС Армении," September 29, 2020, <https://nsn.fm/policy/pashinyan-podtverdil-chto-turetskii-f-16-sbil-su-25-vvs-armenii>.

26 "Social Media Restricted in Azerbaijan amid Clashes with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh," September 27, 2020, <https://netblocks.org/reports/social-media-restricted-in-azerbaijan-amid-clashes-with-armenia-over-nagorno-karabakh-pA5LMj87>.

27 "Armenian Police Fine Peace Activist over Anti-War Post," August 11, 2020, <https://oc-media.org/armenian-police-fine-peace-activist-over-anti-war-post/>.

For example, Armenian blogger Ruben Yesayan, who before the war was engaged in production of humorous videos, became during the war one of the unofficial coordinators of the activity of Armenian users on the Internet.

One of the main directions of activity of the "online warriors" he coordinated was to appeal to celebrities with requests to "call for stopping the war." Among the celebrities they approached were such stars as Selena Gomez and Cardi B.²⁸ As a result, some world famous pop stars actually made posts on social networks, calling for an end to the war, or for taking part in fundraisers of the Armenian diaspora in support of Armenia... But some of them, such as Cardi B and Elton John, removed these posts after the massive criticism they received from Azerbaijani users, and expressed their regrets.^{29 30}

Kim Kardashian, who is of Armenian descent, also joined the information war on the side of Armenia, and actively used her Instagram account with more than 250 millions of followers for these purposes. Kardashian mostly posted stories calling for an end to the war, messages in support of Armenia, and promoted fundraising campaigns for Armenia. Azerbaijani and Turkish users in their comments accused Kardashian of "supporting and sponsoring Armenian terrorism."

Also in Armenia, active users of social networks formed large communities on Facebook, "cyber armies", "media fighters", and the number of members of some of such groups reached 100,000 users. As a rule, these groups coordinated the use of hashtags, distribution and translation of content, as well as organization of campaigns of mass reporting of Azerbaijani and pro-Azerbaijani accounts and social media profiles.³¹

On the side of Azerbaijan, there also were some individuals who set the tone for such activities and, to an extent, coordinated and directed the efforts of Azerbaijani users of social networks. Among them were tech blogger Farid Pardashunas and singer and songwriter Murad Arif.

Some well-known individuals on both sides, to the best of their abilities, also took part in verbal duels. For example, some comments by Azerbaijani writer and influencer Natella Osmanli, left on Facebook pages of Russian news agencies, received 4-5 thousand likes. Subsequently, Osmanli's profile was blocked by a number of well-known Russian journalists, as well as major media outlets.

On October 8, 2020, Facebook announced detection and taking down of a pro-government network in Azerbaijan. According to an official Facebook post, the network was associated with

²⁸ Gayane Mkrtchyan, "Taking the Karabakh Conflict Online," October 22, 2020, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/taking-karabakh-conflict-online>.

²⁹ Laura Zornosa, "Cardi B Apologizes for Misstep and Asks for Peace in Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict," July 10, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2020-10-07/cardi-b-armenia-fundraiser-twitter-apology>.

³⁰ "Azerbaijanis Take up Virtual Arms in Global Information War with Armenia," November 10, 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijanis-take-up-virtual-arms-in-global-information-war-with-armenia>.

³¹ Christopher Giles and Upasana Bhat, "Nagorno-Karabakh: The Armenian-Azeri 'Information Wars,'" October 26, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54614392>.

the youth wing of the ruling party and comprised 589 Facebook profiles, 7,665 Facebook pages and 437 Instagram accounts.³²

Besides Instagram, Facebook and mass media, an information war also broke out on Twitter. In general, Twitter is not very popular in Armenia and Azerbaijan, but it is ideal for delivering political messages to foreign audiences. And apparently both sides realized that.

Azerbaijani and Armenian users, as well as foreigners, sympathetic to the parties or working for one of the countries, rallied around the hashtags of the parties.

Below are some of them.



In addition to these hashtags, there was also about a dozen of less popular ones on each side. Each side tried to promote its hashtag, fill it with as many tweets as possible, even if often repetitive.

Research by Tarand expert group showed that tweets promoting the Armenian point of view were mostly created not in Armenia, but in countries such as Russia, the United States and France.

In case of Azerbaijan, the vast majority of the tweets were created in the country itself (despite Twitter being blocked), and also in Turkey and Russia. The official Twitter accounts @Armenia and @Azerbaijan also joined the Twitter battle from the first hours of the war. Travel and cultural tweets were replaced by battle front reports.³³

³² Nathaniel Gleicher, "Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior," August 7, 2020, <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/07/removing-political-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior/>.

³³ John Beck, "What Comes First — the Tweet or the Drone Strike?," November 10, 2020, <https://restofworld.org/2020/tweet-and-a-drone-strike/>.

It was also widespread tactics when the parties used each other's hashtags in order to confuse the audiences and jam the "enemy hashtag" with their propaganda.

On February 23, 2021, i.e. several months after the end of active hostilities in Karabakh, Twitter announced detection and taking down of an Armenian network of 35 accounts. According to the official Twitter statement, these fake accounts impersonated well-known Azerbaijani politicians and officials, as well as imitated accounts of news agencies of that country. The main goal of the network was to promote the Armenian point of view. Twitter's investigation revealed the network's connection to the Armenian government.³⁴

A special role in the information war between the countries was played by contradicting claims about control over a particular location. Throughout the war, reports about liberation by Azerbaijan and loss by Armenia of cities and strategically important settlements were of highest significance, both for the public and propaganda of the warring countries, and for their allies and foreign observers.

An intense information battle took place with regard to claims of control over the cities of Hadrut and Shusha.

Regarding Hadrut, the parties, as well as outside participants in the information war, working or sympathizing with one of the parties, fiercely argued for several days over who actually controlled Hadrut. The Azerbaijani side published a video from dominant heights over Hadrut, in response to which Shushan Spepanyan published a video taken on a road leading to Hadrut, and claimed that the city was still under the control of the Armenian forces.

Eventually, the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan posted on October 16 video footage from the center of Hadrut. The footage showed that the center of the city, with minor exception, was intact, the city was quiet, one could not hear even remote sounds of gunfire or artillery cannonade, and there were cars parked on the streets. The experts who analyzed this video came to a conclusion that the Armenian forces, apparently realizing that they could be surrounded, surrendered the city without a fight, hastily retreated, and by the time this video was made withdrew deep into the territory under their control.

A similar situation, i.e. an information battle, was waged with regard to Shusha. It is worth noting that this city is a citadel, and has a great ideological and strategic importance for both sides. It is believed in this region that "whoever controls Shusha controls entire Karabakh". Both sides also use this belief for their propaganda.

In the second half of October, the Azerbaijani army and special forces launched various attacks, including diversionary maneuvers, trying to make the Armenian command believe that their main goal was to block the Lachin corridor (the main road that connects Karabakh with Armenia). However, by the end of October, the Azerbaijani special forces began to concentrate around Shusha. Subsequently, the Azerbaijani forces managed to take under control both the Lachin corridor section and Shusha.

³⁴ "Disclosing Networks of State-Linked Information Operations," February 23, 2021, https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2021/disclosing-networks-of-state-linked-information-operations-.

On October 29, the "president" of the self-proclaimed NKR stated that Azerbaijani forces were within several miles from Shusha. This information hit like a bombshell in the information space of Armenia and Azerbaijan, instantly producing differing accounts.

On November 4-6, fierce battles were fought around the city, with both sides making vague statements, which did not reflect the real situation at the battlefield. Obviously, the Armenian side tried to conceal its precarious situation, while the Azerbaijani side did not want to give its public undue expectations before the completion of the operation. In parallel, on the night of November 3-4, an advance unit of the Azerbaijani special forces penetrated the city and managed to gain a foothold there. On the night of November 6-7, after the arrival of reinforcements, the Azerbaijani army finally established full control over the city, kicking the Armenian army out. The Armenian forces launched several counterattacks, but they were unsuccessful. With the exception of a very small circle of people, the Armenian society in general did not have a complete picture of what was happening in Shusha and its environs. The Armenian authorities continued to claim that they had the upper hand.

On November 8, when the Flag Day was celebrated in Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev announced the liberation of Shusha during his address to the nation. By that time, the city had already been under the control of Azerbaijan for a few days, the battles were fought outside its limits and were not intense, and the Armenian troops were retreating, abandoning weapons and equipment.

Against this background, the representative of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia Artsrun Hovhannisyan continued to refute the statements of Baku and claimed that there were street battles in Shusha. The next day, i.e. November 9, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense demonstrated video footage of Shusha. This video completely dispelled any doubts about who controlled the city.

As a consequence of these two episodes, the Azerbaijani side was able to turn the victory on the battlefield into the victory in the information space. With consideration to other known facts, we can make a conclusion that although the Azerbaijani side was able to convert the victory on the ground into the victory in the information field, this did not result in the absolute information dominance of Azerbaijan over Armenia.

We mentioned the limited awareness of the Armenian public about the real situation in Karabakh. This was partly due to the propaganda spread by the Armenian authorities since 1991.

This propaganda had two main theses:

1 "Armenian warrior is invincible"

2 "Azerbaijanis do not know how to fight"

Over the years of massive propaganda brainwashing, a whole generation has grown up in Armenia that took these propaganda myths for truth.

Therefore, even if isolated reports of serious failures in the battlefield reached Armenia, most of the society did not take them seriously.

In turn, the Armenian military command also tried to prevent dissemination of information that did not conform to the information policy of the Armenian authorities. For example, the Armenian general Movses Hakobyan stated that already on the fifth day of the war the Armenian army had 1,500 deserters, which were gathered and retained in Karabakh, relatively far from the front line, and were not allowed to cross into Armenia. This was done in order to prevent the soldiers from revealing what was actually happening at the front when returning to Armenia. Indeed, given the moderate size of Armenia's territory, and small population (about 2 million permanent residents), 1,500 deserters posed a greater threat in informational regard than the entire Azerbaijani propaganda.³⁵

Also during the war, Ilya Azar, a correspondent for the Russian "Novaya Gazeta", had his accreditation withdrawn by the Armenian Foreign Ministry because of his reporting from Karabakh.³⁶ It is worth noting that in 2011, the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry blacklisted this journalist due to illegal visits to Karabakh.

In the case of Ilya Azar, the Armenian side was unhappy with his reporting from Karabakh, when Azar touched upon the issue of a missile strike by Azerbaijani forces on the "House of Culture" in Shusha.

On October 4, the Azerbaijani army struck the "House of Culture" in Shusha. According to the Azerbaijani side, at the time of the strike, a large number of Armenian military personnel, including high-ranking officers of special police units, who arrived from Yerevan, gathered in the "House of Culture".

The Armenian side presented its own version regarding this strike, according to which women and children were hiding in the building at that time.³⁷ In his report from Shusha, Ilya Azar confirmed that there were indeed Armenian military in the "House of Culture" when Azerbaijani army struck it. Azar quoted in his article local Armenians, who provided two figures of military personnel inside the building, 300 and about 600. The Armenian authorities did not like that and decided to revoke Azar's accreditation.

It is particularly worth emphasizing the position taken by a number of Russian media outlets and experts. In their opinion, Turkey was to blame for the war, and therefore Ankara was subjected to a large-scale and systemic anti-Turkish campaign by the Russian media and experts.³⁸

This chorus of Russian experts and journalists was joined by some Western experts and journalists, motivated not so much by a pro-Armenian attitude, but rather by their anti-Turkish agenda.

³⁵ "Армения: Генерал Обвинил Премьера Пашиняна в Грубых Ошибках в Войне в Карабахе," November 19, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-55005875>.

³⁶ "Журналист Илья Азар Рассказал, Что МИД Армении Лишил Его Аккредитации Из-за «негативного Общественного Резонанса» После Репортажа Из Нагорного Карабаха," August 10, 2020, <https://zona.media/news/2020/10/08/azar>.

³⁷ Наира Налбандян, "Жители Шуши Говорят, Что До Последнего Человека Останутся в Городе," July 10, 2020, <https://rus.azatutyun.am/a/30880791.html>.

³⁸ Barış Kirdemir, "Karabakh War in Online News and Social Media: Representation, Confrontation and Maneuvers of Information," January 15, 2021, <https://edam.org.tr/en/karabakh-war-in-online-news-and-social-media-representation-confrontation-and-maneuvers-of-information/>.

Commenting to Al Jazeera on the information war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russian expert Pavel Luzin said the following: “This is classic Greater Middle East, when the warring sides exaggerate their successes on the battlefield,” “These are not even deliberate lies or disinformation, but part of centuries-old culture”. In reality, Luzin expressed the opinion of a certain part of the Russian expert community, which, when it comes to this conflict, resorts to superficial assessments and labeling.³⁹

The Tarand expert group in their study also touched upon the coverage of events, described in this report, in the Western media.

After analyzing and comparing about 100 articles and reports of major Western media from 2020, Tarand expert group identified several patterns. For example:

When Western media discuss Crimea, they use the terms "occupation" and "annexed", and similarly, when the same media report about the territories of Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), they also use the term "occupation".

With regard to Karabakh, most Western media try not to use the term "occupation", for the most part, the media use "territory controlled by Armenian forces", but do not specify how exactly this territory came under the control of the "Armenian forces" and what happened to the Azerbaijanis, who once lived in these territories.

Some media outlets also use the term “disputed” when referring to Karabakh's ownership, although the UN and other international organizations, countries of the world (and indirectly Armenia itself) recognize Karabakh as the territory of Azerbaijan.

A similar situation could also be observed during the first Karabakh war. In addition, some media outlets tried to present the war not as a conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but between Azerbaijan and ethnic Armenians living in Karabakh. Obviously, this was done in an attempt to cover up involvement of the Armenian armed forces in the conflict and their presence on the territory of Azerbaijan.

Some researchers believe that the reason for this selective approach of the Western media lies in the religious factor. Armenians are Christians, and Azerbaijanis are Muslims.⁴⁰ Despite the fact that Azerbaijan is a secular country, when covering the conflict, some Western experts and journalists are guided by their religious feelings, and not by the principles of impartial journalism.

³⁹ Mansur Mirovalev, “Armenia, Azerbaijan Battle an Online War over Nagorno-Karabakh,” October 15, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/15/karabakh-info-war>.

⁴⁰ Abbas Malek and Anandam Kavoori, *The Global Dynamics of News: Studies in International News Coverage and News Agenda*, n.d.

An American expert Michael Rubin, who published an article in the National Interest, also to a certain extent appealed to the religious sentiments. Rubin is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.⁴¹ He was previously known for praising Azerbaijan and calling it a “key American ally”, but after the second Karabakh war in 2020, he made a sudden U-turn and started attacking Azerbaijan and its leadership on every opportunity.⁴²

A similar attitude can also be observed in the Foreign Policy podcast entitled “Rolling With the Putins”. Even though most of the podcast was dedicated to the discussion of Armenia and the Karabakh conflict, the host of the podcast, Amy Mackinnon, decided not to present the position of the Azerbaijani side, and presented only the views of two Armenians, one of whom turned out to be an employee of the Foreign Policy, while the other guest was her cousin. Also, Mackinnon felt it necessary to emphasize during the conversation that “Armenians are Christians and Azerbaijanis are Muslims”.⁴³

Also, some Western media outlets employed the tactics of "understatement" in the coverage of hostilities, for example, when Ganja was shelled with ballistic missiles, some media outlets, without reporting the fact of the shelling, rushed to publish a statement from the Ministry of Defense of Armenia, in which the Armenian side denied its involvement in the missile strikes.⁴⁴ It is a nonsense for the professional media in general, and for the media that consider themselves independent in particular, to publish a refutation of an event that was not covered by these media at all.

Another example is Open Society Foundations. This organization hosted on November 8, 2021 an event called “Human Rights Challenges a Year After the 44-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh”. The moderator and two speakers at the event were Armenians, and MEP Heidi Hautala, known for her pro-Armenian views, was another speaker. The position of the Azerbaijani side was not presented.⁴⁵

Based on the facts, arguments and analysis presented in this report, the Tarand expert group came to the conclusion that the information battle between Armenia and Azerbaijan has long transcended not only the limits of these countries, but also the limits of the region, and has actually become a global phenomenon that involves many non-regional players. Despite the modest size of these countries, due to involvement of large foreign, including Western, players, the information component of the conflict lives its own distinct life.

Taking into account a number of factors and indicators, one can come to the conclusion that the Armenian side still leads in the "information war race", however, over the past few years, Azerbaijan has managed to improve its position and somewhat reduce lagging behind Armenia.

⁴¹ Michael Rubin, “Israel’s Azerbaijan Mistake,” November 29, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/israel-s-azerbaijan-mistake-173476>.

⁴² Michael Rubin, “Is Putin’s Next Move Against Azerbaijan?,” Commentary Magazine, August 8, 2014, <https://www.commentary.org/michael-rubin/is-putins-next-move-against-azerbaijan/>.

⁴³ Amy Mackinnon, “Rolling With the Putins,” Foreign Policy (blog), December 15, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/podcasts/foreign-policy-playlist/worldaffairs-ray-suarez-putin-russia/>.

⁴⁴ Yusuf Özkır, “ANALYSIS - Western Media’s Approach to Nagorno-Karabakh Rife with Bias and Prejudice,” October 23, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-western-media-s-approach-to-nagorno-karabakh-rife-with-bias-and-prejudice/2016909>.

⁴⁵ “Human Rights Challenges a Year After the 44-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh,” Open Society Foundations, November 8, 2021, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/events/human-rights-challenges-a-year-after-the-44-day-war-in-nagorno-karabakh>.

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