

2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War

A case of triple D: Diplomacy, Drones and Deception

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Abstract

The role of information as a source of power in Russia's foreign policy and military actions has received increasing attention of Western scholars and policymakers, especially since the start of the current war in Ukraine. Their focus has been on the importance of the information domain in Russian foreign policies and military operations in Georgia and Ukraine as 'typical' case studies. This study aims to retrieve more insight in the nature of information operations by studying the atypical case of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan, in which Russia proliferated herself as a mediator. It offers an explorative analysis, based on diplomatic communication, social media and news reporting in conjunction with military operational developments between September 27 and December 31, 2020. From a comparison of various sources and angles, this study tentatively approaches the shifting perspectives in the Russian narratives' construction and their effects on the enhancement of Russian foreign political interests towards Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. This study argues that the Russian 'narrative' consists of a number of subvariants, tailored to various national and international audiences. In addition, although it is difficult to technically attribute artificial social media accounts and subsequent messaging and amplification of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Armenian narratives to Russia, these activities fit with Russian interests. Therefore, further research on Russian information operations should also focus on atypical cases in order to comprehend New Type Warfare as a broader activity.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey, Russia, Information operations, Narrative, Diplomacy, War, Drones, Deception, Armenia, Azerbaijan

14.1. Introduction¹

Contemporary debate in military strategic studies has seen a proliferation of modes of 'warfare', such as financial, legal, cyber, hybrid², deception or information warfare.³ Characterised as (mostly) non-violent or non-destructive forms of influence,

these modes are situated along the spectrum with on one end coercive force and compellence and on the other non-coercive presence.

While non-kinetic approaches to warfare are not new, the development of the information environment in the last decades has caused for Western military doctrine to redefine the role of information as a source of power. In this section, the ample use of ‘non’ reveals the challenge of defining these different forms of action in terms of ‘warfare’.

Among Western scholars and policymakers, Russia’s foreign policy and military actions have frequently been viewed from the perspective of broad influence, information operations and deception warfare. The Russian Ministry of Defence itself has defined information operations as “the ability to ... undermine political, economic, and social systems; carry out mass psychological campaigns against the population of a state in order to destabilize society and the government; and force a state to make decisions in the interest of their opponents.”⁴ As seen in the aftermath of the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH-17 over Ukraine in July 2014, Russia’s information operations were aimed at a broader international (Western) community.⁵ Its main aim was to diffuse and create ambiguity to challenge the legal investigation by the international Joint Investigation Team. In other cases, efforts are aimed more at misleading targeted audiences to adopt an alternative to their ‘truth’. Of course, truth itself is always partially subjective. ‘Misleading’ can thus best be understood in terms of relative effect: actors change perception, beliefs, and in turn also their actions.

An in-depth account of modern Russian deception warfare – as Western researchers have analysed it – is Bouwmeester’s dissertation *‘Krym Nash’* (Crimea is Ours).⁶ It presents an array of means and modalities that all underline the increasing importance of the information environment in Russian military operations in Georgia and Ukraine. Firstly, the Russo-Georgian armed conflict in 2008 was primarily a physical encounter only supported to a limited extent by information operations. Secondly, during the annexation of Crimea in 2014 information operations played a more central role as the perception of Russia’s opponent was manipulated while a surprise effect emerged. Although not attempting to reduce or simplify the case specific contexts and complexities in any way, despite many differences it was Russia’s intervention that triggered the conflict in both cases. Thirdly, although not always directly visible on the battlefield, the Russian ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine launched by Putin in early 2022, seems to open a new chapter in the development of information operations.

However, in order to reflect on the nature of information operations more thoroughly, studying an atypical case is relevant. In this respect, this chapter offers a preliminary analysis of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. In September 2020 war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of

Nagorno-Karabakh. Eventually, Russia was able to mediate and facilitate a cease-fire agreement between the belligerents. Russia also deployed peacekeeping troops and set up a joint monitoring headquarters with Turkey in Azerbaijan. Russia's involvement in this conflict was characterised by some NATO officials as a way of successfully 'consolidating Moscow's status as the key player in the [Caucasus] region'. The Russian Federation had pursued a similar strategy in the 1990s, when it had initiated Joint Control Commissions (JCCs) in Transdniestria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The term JCC evokes the feeling of organisations with good and peaceful intentions, but the history of the JCCs in the earlier mentioned regions showed that it had become nothing more than a cover for the Russian authorities to deploy troops and exert influence in the region. In other words, Russian authorities were repeatedly able to approach conflict situations differently and conjure up perceptions that pleased them. This raises the question of what can be learned from the Russian foreign activities in the information environment during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war?

Due to the recent nature of the conflict, this case study analysis is explorative and primarily focuses on diplomatic communication, social media and news reporting, in conjunction with military operational developments and events between September 27 and December 31, 2020. Apart from a short description of the military operations, a content analysis of official communiques is combined with a meta-study of relevant social and news media research. Firstly, the case is introduced, further describing the main actors in their historical and regional context. Secondly, the course of the Azerbaijani Operation Iron Fist in late-2020 and related military developments are discussed. Thirdly, relevant narratives related to the key actors in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia and some external influences are considered. Fourthly, identified key events and statements are synthesised with diplomatic and military developments and are placed in light of Russian information operation doctrine and more specific Russian deception methods. An additional postscript reflects on research findings in the context of the recent developments in Ukraine.

14.2. The conflict's origins and the First Nagorno-Karabakh War

The conflict originated between the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations and the region or enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, located in the centre of Azerbaijan, formed its epicentre. In the ensuing century (since 1918) the conflict involved Turkey, Russia and Iran as major geopolitical players, and France, the United States and Israel as minor ones.

Between May 1918 and April 1920 Armenia and Azerbaijan briefly formed independent states⁷, at a time when the Russian Empire was weak and struggling

with the Communist revolution that gave rise to the Soviet Union. The Armenian Republic became a refuge for survivors of the Armenian genocide under Turkish nationalists of 1915-1916.⁸

In this period, the first conflicts broke out between the states and populations of Azerbaijan and Armenia. After the expansion of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence over the areas south of the Caucasus in 1920-1923, both states were transformed into Soviet Republics. Stalin decided to turn the Nagorno-Karabakh region with an Armenian majority and Azerbaijani minority into an oblast, an autonomous area, in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. It became an enclave surrounded by seven Azerbaijani districts and separated from the Soviet Republic of Armenia. For seven decades the conflict remained frozen, as it were.

With deterioration of the Soviet Union in 1988, nationalist and ethnic tensions resurfaced in the Caucasus.⁹ The Armenian government had repeatedly, but in vain, proposed to President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union to transfer the oblast Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. In 1988, Armenians shattered a demonstration of Azerbaijanis in Stepanakert, resulting in two deaths.¹⁰ Subsequently, in several cities in Azerbaijan, pogroms broke out against the Armenian minorities, and afterwards also violence by Armenians against Azerbaijanis erupted in and around the enclave. President of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev proved powerless against the rapidly spreading violence in Azerbaijan and Armenia, and his officials and military commanders reacted slowly.¹¹ Hundreds were killed in the chaos resulting in the first waves of refugees of both populations. After the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, subsequently followed by referenda among their populations, Armenia and Azerbaijan proclaimed themselves independent republics. The following year, both joined the military alliance of former Soviet Republics led by Russia, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). However, Azerbaijan didn't opt for the renewal of its membership in 1999, although it maintains good ties with Russia.¹²

After the results of a referendum in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1991, in which the Armenian majority voted for independence and aimed for a long-term affiliation with Armenia, war broke out between the young Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹³ Between 1992 and 1994 the Armenian armed forces succeeded in capturing 14% of the Azerbaijani territory, namely the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding districts. Due to internal political struggles the Azerbaijanis were unable to properly defend their own territory. This situation was perpetuated by ceasefire negotiations during which Russia acted as a mediator in Bishkek in 1994.¹⁴ The Armenians converted the enclave Nagorno-Karabakh into the Republic of Artsakh, also called the Nagorno Karabakh Republic. Yet remarkably enough the Armenian Republic didn't formally recognise it. During this war, later known as the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, 350,000-700,000 Azerbaijanis fled Armenia, the enclave and the seven districts; and in turn 300,000 Armenians fled

Azerbaijan. The refugee Armenians often found shelter in villages and towns in and around the enclave. The seven districts turned into a severely depopulated area.¹⁵

14.2.1. Stagnated peace talks

As of 1993, the United Nations (UN) Security Council issued four resolutions urgently calling Armenia to return the conquered territories to Azerbaijan. The council also made efforts to negotiate to settle the conflict between the warring parties. The UN upheld the viewpoint that the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh belonged to Azerbaijan according to international law, which the Azerbaijani government also repeatedly invoked. Under the auspices of the Organisation of Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) emerged the Minsk Group, led by co-chairs Russia, the United States and France, which mediated peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Those negotiations were extremely difficult between 1994 and 2020.¹⁶ Many proposals, came to nothing, even after the adoption in 2007 of the promising 'Basic Principles for the Peaceful Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict'. Also known as the Madrid protocols, they encompass six principles: the return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for her security and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh; the future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of popular will; the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.¹⁷

During the failed negotiations a factor of importance was the way in which the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan conducted their talks behind closed doors, without any accountability to their parliaments. The two presidents also feared the impact of premature concessions on their parties and those of the opposition. For the Armenian government, the influence from Artsakh also played a role, where many of the political elite and presidents in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan, came from. Of importance was also the influence of the large Armenian communities as electorates in France and the United States, which regularly were suspected of dampening the negotiations' results.¹⁸

14.2.2. Turkey, alienation and hostility in a simmering conflict

In the region, Turkey forged good ties with Azerbaijan, relying on the Turkish origin of the Azerbaijanis. President Hayder Aliyev (father of the current president) expressed this warm relationship as 'two states, one nation'. For Turkey, Azerbaijan became of great strategic importance in a political, economic and social sense. After

Georgia, it offers Turkey access to brother peoples in Central Asia, such as those in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, via road and railways in a 60 km Azerbaijani land strip between Iran and Russia and the Caspian Sea.¹⁹ Close ties with Azerbaijan also fit Turkey's geopolitical aspirations in Central Asia, where it competes for influence with Iran and Russia, but also seeks affiliation with China, a trend that has accelerated since Recep Erdogan's presidency.²⁰

Parallel to this trend, relations between Turkey and Armenia broke down, with serious consequences for the economies of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Although both economies became enclosed by Azerbaijan and Turkey, and became more isolated, important passenger and goods traffic was still possible via Georgia and especially Iran, with which Armenia maintained good relations (much Russian freight traffic runs over the Caspian Sea and via Iran to Armenia).²¹ The increasing cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan aroused strong antipathy and existential feelings of insecurity among the Armenian population in Armenia and Artsakh, and the Armenian communities worldwide, because of the denials of the presidents of those states in public and the media of the Armenian genocide in 1915-1916. The Armenian state and the Armenian armed forces are therefore seen as important pillars for the survival of the Armenian population.²²

Meanwhile, both population groups in the neighbouring countries of Azerbaijan and Armenia grew apart due to nationalism, populism and the harrowing stories of refugee compatriots about violence and atrocities in the years 1988-1994. Mixed marriages of Azerbaijanis and Armenians, of which there were many before 1988, chose to emigrate to Russia, Central Asia and elsewhere. In the decades after 1994, younger generations grew up in social bubbles, becoming ignorant of large minority societies. Since the advent of mobile telephony and the Internet, the current social media has only reinforced this trend.²³

Both sides remained diametrically opposed. On the one hand, Armenia benefited from the status quo after 1994, she had consolidated her position in the seven conquered districts and Artsakh. In the long term, Armenia hoped for international recognition of Artsakh's independence. She also strove to keep the conquered districts as a buffer zone against Azerbaijan and possibly use them as negotiating cards for concessions from the Azerbaijani side. Azerbaijan, on the other hand, continued the negotiations, but carefully considered a military option to reverse the adverse strategic situation in the long run.²⁴

14.2.3. Military, diplomatic and political developments – the arms race

The revenues from the oil and gas industry and its exports, the major pillar of the Azerbaijani economy, enabled Azerbaijan to expend far more on defence than Armenia. These expenditures amounted to up to three times that of her nemesis. In

addition, Azerbaijan's larger population also meant that it could deploy more ready and reserve troops. Azerbaijan bought much Russian military equipment, such as artillery, vehicles, tanks and fighter planes, but certainly also Israeli armaments, i.e. artillery and drones. Azerbaijan also obtained from Israel the licenses to build certain drones. Israel became Azerbaijan's main arms supplier. In recent years, Turkey has become a top supplier too, with a crucial delivery in July 2020 of TB-2 Bayraktar drones, as will become apparent.²⁵

In contrast, Russia remained Armenia's main supplier delivering a wide range of arms and munitions, such as artillery howitzers, vehicles, tanks, mortars, and fighter planes, most of them at very affordable prices or even for free. This enabled Armenia, despite her smaller economy and defence budget, to keep abreast of its arms race with Azerbaijan. As a member of the CSTO, Armenia could count on Russia's support in the event of an attack on the territory of the State of Armenia. In order to strengthen her military ties, Russia founded a base in Armenia, Gyumri.²⁶ However, Artsakh and the captured districts fell outside the CSTO's assistance clause. After all, Russia made efforts through the OSCE Minsk Group to find a solution through diplomatic channels, and also repeatedly called on the UN Security Council and the Madrid protocols under the Minsk Group, co-chaired by Russia, the United States and France, to hand over the conquered districts to Azerbaijan.²⁷

14.2.4. Skirmishes and the planning for operation Iron Fist

The war in September-October 2020 was preceded by two major clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In April 2016, a four-day skirmish broke out between the two belligerents over Nagorno-Karabakh. The clash left twenty dead and dozens injured on both sides. In July 2020, another skirmish broke out with several dead and injured. Tensions were heightened by the statement of the Artsakh government to move its seat of government to Shusha, which Artsakh accomplished in June 2020. Meanwhile, large-scale exercises of the Azerbaijani together with Turkish armed forces in the summer of 2020 were underway, which ended in September 2020.²⁸

Aggravated by Artsakh's move and the ensuing heightened tensions within the Azerbaijan parliament and population, President Ilham Aliyev decided to carry out Operation Iron Fist. In previous years, Aliyev had abstained from a major offensive, because a failed operation would almost certainly jeopardise the very survival of his government. It appears that Aliyev was heading for the best-prepared, timely-placed operation. The operation's objectives were to liberate the Armenian captured districts around Artsakh, and to reach and cut off the Main Supply Route across Lachin between Yerevan and Artsakh. This would pose serious problems for the continuation of the Armenian defence in the entire region.²⁹



Fig. 14.1. Armenia and Azerbaijan (line of control prior to the 2020 war). Maps by kind permission of the NLD Inst of Military History.

In terms of terrain, the North and Central part of Artsakh and the seven districts are very mountainous with few roads crossing the area. Amidst the mountainous terrain are the cities of Stepanakert and Shusha. Stepanakert formed for a long time the administrative centre of the Armenian government in Nagorno-Karabakh. Shusha was for both belligerents the region's most important city historically, culturally, religiously³⁰. For both sides, Shusha had thus acquired a status comparable to that of the city of Jerusalem. The entire Eastern border plus the Southern part of the Armenian held territories, largely consisting of the occupied districts, is relatively flat and lends itself to manoeuvring. The focal point of the operation was a main attack over two approach roads from Southeast to Southwest along the Iranian border and then a bypass up North to reach the main road from the Armenian capital Yerevan to Lachin and Stepanakert.³¹ The attack would be accompanied by attacks from the North and East to tie up as many Armenian units as possible there. The Armenian defence of Artsakh and the seven districts was arranged in successive defensive lines and fortifications by troops from Artsakh and Armenia supported by command posts, artillery and reserves.³²

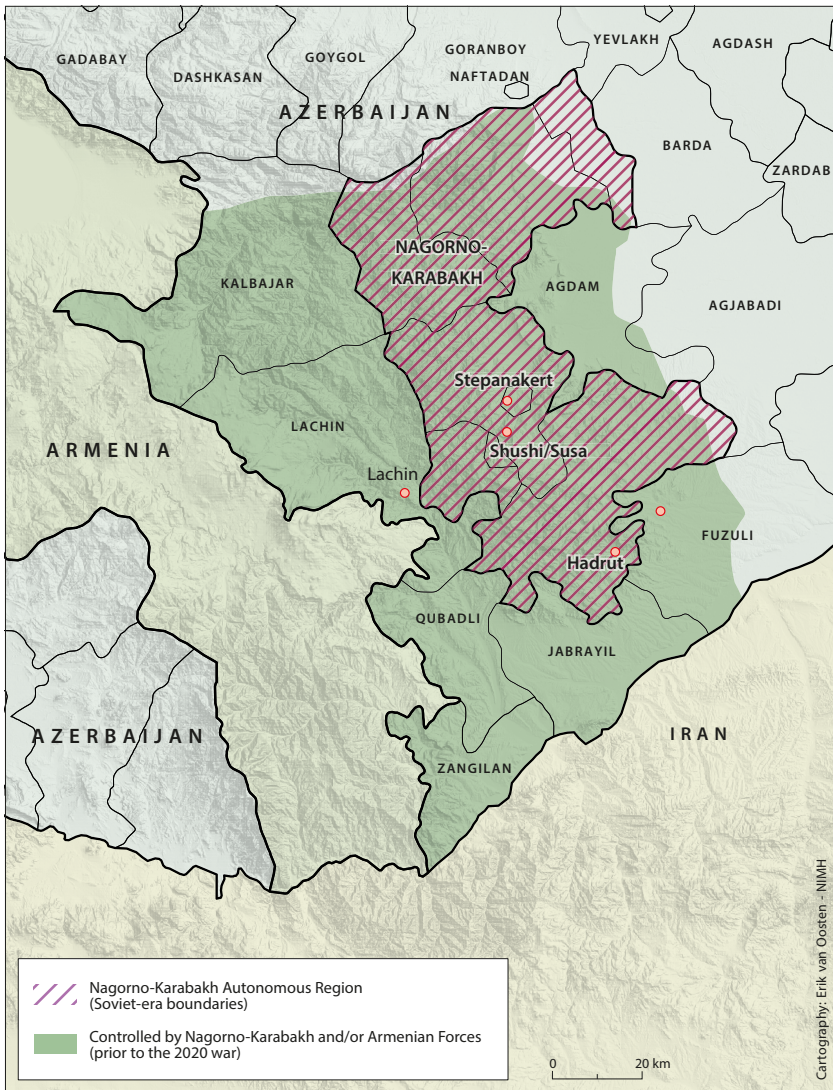


Fig. 14.2. Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Zone (line of control prior to the 2020 war).

It is important to mention that to October 2020 there have only been short articles and analyses of operation Iron Fist and the defence of Artsakh. However, the majority of these focus on the remarkable performance of the Turkish and Israeli drones during the campaign. An overall view of the military actions of the Azerbaijani attackers and Armenian defenders has yet to be published, but fortunately some

useful articles and reports from Amirkhanyan, Gressel, Postma, Rubin and Terzic provide us with first impressions of the Azerbaijani and Armenian conduct of the war.³³

14.2.5. The conduct of Operation Iron Fist

Operation Iron Fist started at 08:10 hours on September 27. According to the Azerbaijanis, they responded to an Armenian attack, and according to the Armenian armed forces, the Azerbaijani attack came immediately. For De Waal it is certain that the Azerbaijanis started it. After all, the Armenian defenders, in accordance with their political and military strategy, had no interest in initiating a large-scale war that could change the favourable status quo over the area and would jeopardise a long-term track of international recognition of Artsakh and perhaps the Armenian authority over the conquered districts too.³⁴

Gressel gives the best, albeit succinct, insight into the course of the Azerbaijani offensive. In a first phase of ground and air operations, Azerbaijan was able to gain air superiority over the area of operations. In a few days, Turkish and Israeli-made drones disabled several Armenian air defence systems, i.e. S-300 Surface to Air Missile batteries. Azerbaijani drones, tasked to conduct Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance missions, continually tried to locate the defenders.³⁵ The Azerbaijanis reportedly converted eleven obsolete Antonov An-2 biplanes into remote-controlled aircraft that tricked the Armenian Surface to Air Defence into turning on their tracking and targeting radar systems. The TB-2 Bayraktar drones disabled these systems with their rockets. Israeli loitering drones, able to search and crash on their targets, annihilated them too.³⁶ Striking is the low activity of the air forces of both belligerents; they kept their expensive fighter planes (about 50 aircraft in total) at bay.³⁷ Reciprocal shelling with artillery and rockets did take place at a few nodal points and cities, which would increase in importance in the beginning of October, but seem to have had no direct impact on the results of the ground offensive or the defence against it.³⁸

By gaining local air superiority with the help of drones, the Azerbaijanis created a breach in the Armenian Surface to Air Defence, after which in a second phase the drones could take the lead as flying artillery in detecting and taking out Armenian tanks, artillery, vehicles, mortar positions and other positions, but also attacking command posts and reserve units. In their role as artillery observers they assisted the Azerbaijani artillery in annihilating these targets as well.³⁹

In the third phase of combat, Azerbaijani mobile light infantry tank teams with well-organised fire support (artillery, rockets, mortars) managed to penetrate the drone-observed weak spots in the Armenian lines, and presumably even to break through these lines.⁴⁰ Drones blocked the approach routes for reserves,

command communications and fire support requests so that strong points could be taken by the mobile infantry tank units. Meticulously, the Azerbaijani land forces succeeded in taking line by line and area after area from Southeast to Southwest between 27 September until 13 October. Armenian reserve forces launched several large, concentrated counterattacks, but these were repulsed with the help of the Azerbaijani drones.⁴¹ On the one hand, losses of personnel for both sides during the campaign were high: at least 2,100 Azerbaijanis killed against at least 2,700 Armenians. On the other hand, the Armenian losses in rolling stock were appalling: hundreds of vehicles, tanks and pieces of artillery and mortars were knocked out, often by the Turkish TB-2s and the Israeli loitering drones.⁴²

Meanwhile, following the outbreak of hostilities, the UN and OSCE Minsk Group pushed for an immediate ceasefire. After the mediation of Russia, the United States and France, short-lived ceasefires were concluded on various dates in October, yet these were quickly broken, thus repeatedly led to the continuation of Azerbaijani offensive and subsequent Armenian losses of war materials and territory and demoralisation among the Armenian armed forces.⁴³

14.2.6. The campaign's end

The Azerbaijani Land Forces managed to reach and cut off the main road in the region, the Lachin Corridor, around November 8-10. They also captured the main city of Shusha, on November 8, with the help of light infantry commandos who first occupied a predominant hill just outside the city.⁴⁴ It was expected that the capture of Stepanakert would take a few more days. However, on November 9 under the auspices of Russia, a ceasefire was reached between Azerbaijan and Armenia, with President Putin receiving and hosting both President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan.⁴⁵ Russia negotiated the rapid deployment of a peacekeeping force of 2,000 Russian troops along the ceasefire line, the positions held by both sides until 9 November, and to secure the Lachin Corridor between Armenia and Artsakh. The Azerbaijanis thus retained territories in the enclave they had conquered in the North, East and South including the very important city of Shusha. This peacekeeping force would also patrol the transport road across Armenian territory along the Iranian border between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan in order to open the passage between the two Azerbaijani territories for goods and passenger traffic.⁴⁶ In addition, the Armenian troops had to completely evacuate Artsakh and the surrounding seven districts before the end of December 2020, including three districts that were still entirely in Armenian hands, which they did. Thus, the Russian peacekeeping force became the protector of the Armenian enclave including Stepanakert. It was clear that in terms of sovereign status, Nagorno-Karabakh remained *de jure* under Azerbaijan.⁴⁷



Fig. 14.3. Cease-Fire Agreement of November 9, 2020.

14.2.7. Implications of the Forty-Four Days War

After the forty-four days of war, the Azerbaijani population celebrated the victory exuberantly. During the war, public opinion in Azerbaijan was influenced by the camera images on electronic billboards and on social media of drones taking out positions, vehicles, artillery and tanks. Social media played a major role in Azerbaijan alongside traditional newspapers, radio and television stations. During the war, the press was strongly guided by the Azerbaijani state institutions. The victory boosted hopes of return among Azerbaijani displaced persons after the first war of 1988-1994 to their former homes in the seven districts and Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴⁸ Public opinion in Armenia, as in Azerbaijan, was strongly influenced

by positive images of the war in their media. The Armenian outcry was, however, fierce after the ceasefire on November 9, 2020. The rosy pictures during the defensive campaign did not reflect the actual course of the war for the Armenian armed forces. For example, the Azerbaijani conquest of Shusha on November 8 was masked from the Armenian population. However, the harsh reality of the city's fall came out on November 9. The ceasefire agreement and the Armenian defeat led to a storming and occupation of the parliament in Yerevan and calls for Prime Minister Pashinyan's resignation, which he was able to avoid though with great difficulty. At the same time, the desire among the Armenian population for protection from Russia increased.⁴⁹

Russia decided not to intervene in the forty-four-day war to punish the Pashinyan government for the earlier velvet, Purple Revolution in 2018, which took over power from a more Russian-minded government. She approached the assistance to Armenia solely from the agreements within the CSTO, namely only applicable if Armenian territory or Russian units there were attacked. Pashinyan's overtures to the West and Turkey in the intervening years were not appreciated by Russia. By eventually sending a peacekeeping force of 2,000 men, Russia was able to act not only as a mediator, but also as a peacemaker between the warring parties and to fulfil the role of protector of the Armenians in Artsakh.⁵⁰

Turkey was also alert not to intervene immediately, in order to avoid a direct conflict with Russia. After the intensive exercises in the summer of 2020, the Turkish air base with 6 F-16s therefore stayed out of the fray. Turkey was able to strengthen its position in the Caucasus by providing support to the host country with war material, in particular drones and military advisers in Azerbaijani command and control.⁵¹ After the military successes of the Turkish TB-2s in operations in Syria and Libya, as already mentioned, the deployment of these drones around Nagorno-Karabakh aroused amazement and admiration worldwide. The opening of a transport road from Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan also marked long-term economic success for Turkey. Russia had, however, thwarted the Turkish attempt to participate in the peacekeeping force, and the Turkish contribution has been limited to co-manning a joint monitoring headquarters to monitor compliance with the ceasefire using drones.⁵²

14.3. Different narratives: turning the kaleidoscope

Based on the analysis of official communiques, news reporting and social media, different narratives emerge on the military and political developments, shedding more light on how perceptions were shaped, and influence was exerted. Armenian, Azerbaijani, Turkish and Russian perspectives are discussed. To some extent

narratives can be linked together: Armenia traditionally receives support from Russia, both members of the CSTO, whereas Azerbaijan is backed by Turkey. As mentioned, although Turkey is a NATO member its relationship with Russia is complicated. Its delivery of drones to Azerbaijan in 2020 countered Russian interests. While for example Turkey's acquisition of Russian S-400 surface-to-air defence systems in 2017 strengthened ties, despite concerns from other NATO members. Furthermore, France, Russia and the United States co-chair the OSCE Minsk Group, which includes both Armenia and Azerbaijan as well. Moreover, broader global issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the election of Joe Biden as American president on November 3, 2020, have an indirect effect on the spread and impact of narratives on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This is particularly visible on social media.

For Armenia and Azerbaijan the narratives are generally consistent and illustrate strong polarisation, the two countries expressing the wish to remain peaceful, blaming the enemy for violations of agreements, encouraging patriotism, praising army successes.⁵³ In both countries the traditional media landscape is strongly dictated by official government statements, mostly by the Ministry of Defence, reproduced in national news reporting. Yet both heads of state also seek to reach their people directly, with Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan communicating via Facebook livestreams regularly, and Azerbaijani President Aliyev frequently using Twitter.⁵⁴

In the Armenian narrative a central theme was victimhood of violence, which historically related to the Armenian genocide that had taken place a century ago.⁵⁵ Nagorno-Karabakh constituted an essential part of modern post-Soviet Armenian history. One study shows how right after the start of hostilities 7,764 Twitter accounts were created, many with an artificial booster-like signature.⁵⁶ They made up a share of over 10% of relevant accounts at the time, mostly amplifying Armenian government officials and public figures. Legitimate and fake account postings on Armenian social media also appealed to Kim Kardashian and her partner Kanye West for support (which she gave), and petitions were launched to gain White House support and end US aid to Azerbaijan. Efforts to raise support and funds continued throughout the selected timeframe for this study.⁵⁷ In Armenian news and social media, pan-Turkism is framed as a threat to the region, and simultaneously Russia is portrayed as the sole protector. The latter aligns with statements by Prime Minister Pashinyan.⁵⁸

A major change occurred on November 10, 2020. With an official joint statement Pashinyan agreed to the ceasefire, accepting the new status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the withdrawal of troops and 'returning' the regions Kelbajar and Lachin to Azerbaijan.⁵⁹ As mentioned, this led to large scale protests in the Armenian capital as people called for his resignation. On social media Prime Minister Pashinyan was accused of accepting bribes to accede to Azerbaijan, selling

out Armenians. However, at that time, an apparent effort was also observed to regain public trust and pro-Kremlin sentiments among the Armenian population.⁶⁰

In Azerbaijani news reporting the question was also raised whether Pashinyan would be able to keep his job. The overall official government narrative in Azerbaijan had mainly focused on the success of military advancements, largely consisting of Ministry of Defence ‘operational updates’ reproduced by news media. The Azerbaijani President spoke of a clear and phased plan for Nagorno-Karabakh, and the two adjacent regions Lachin and Kelbajar.⁶¹ The overall theme was the ‘sacred duty’ of ending the ‘occupation’ of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding territories under Armenian control.⁶² Mutual coexistence of Armenian and Azerbaijani communities was the desired end state, although ‘the consequences of ethnic cleansing must be eliminated and all our internally displaced persons must return to their own homes’ the President stated.⁶³ A focal point was the ‘liberation’ of the symbolic Karabakh city of Shusha. Reporting in Turkish international news media in which Azerbaijani citizens were interviewed, emphasised the symbolic significance of Shusha, deemed ‘the diamond of Azerbaijan’.⁶⁴ On November 9 video imagery was trending on social media with the Azerbaijani President proclaiming Shusha’s liberation and victory in battle dress.⁶⁵

Another statement by the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan later that day is significant for its contrasting tone: Azerbaijan sincerely apologised for shooting down a Russian Mi-24 helicopter over Armenian territory.⁶⁶ It was carefully explained as a ‘tragic incident’ and ‘accident’. The act was ‘not directed against the Russian side’ and Azerbaijan offered apologies and ‘sincere condolences’, affirming its readiness ‘to pay appropriate compensation’. It shifted focus from the Azerbaijani-Turkish military operation to Russia’s interests and involvement. Only seven hours later, in the early morning of November 10, was the final ceasefire agreement declared in a joint statement by the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian leaders. In an address to the nation President Aliyev then emphasised decisiveness and completeness of the victory, a tone reflected in Azerbaijani social and state media as well.

*“I gave them an ultimatum. I said – you must leave, if you don’t, I will go to the end. Until the end! On November 8, I said in the Alley of Martyrs that I would go to the end, and no force could stop me. We won this victory on the battlefield.”*⁶⁷

Because the provided Turkish drones were crucial for the military success of Operation Iron Fist, Azerbaijan’s victory was partly also a Turkish one. The international media showed pictures of the victory parade with the TB-2 Bayraktar drones and their pilot crews in Baku. Furthermore, President Tayyip Erdogan was keen to express how ‘the joy of our Azerbaijani brothers and sisters, who have been liberating step by step their occupied cities and Karabakh’ was also ‘our joy’.⁶⁸

He further emphasised the strength of the connection, referring to ‘the ancient Turkish city of Shusha’, and the two countries acting internationally as ‘two states, one nation’.⁶⁹ Implicitly this referenced the broader idea of the ‘Great Turan’, emphasising the unity of all Turks. Against the broader background of Turkey’s regional position and ambition to increase its influence, also as a protagonist against ‘islamophobia’ in the world, the narrative on the Nagorno-Karabakh war emphasises how Turkey matters and takes responsibility. Foregrounding this in a phone call with Russian President Putin, Erdogan stated how ‘Turkey and Russia have together contributed a lot’ towards a lasting solution in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁷⁰ In addition he also suggested to further pursue cooperation in Syria. The creation of the Russian-Turkish Joint Centre in Azerbaijan coordinating the peacekeeping force signals an expansion of influence for both countries in the region.

Regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkish news and social media reproduce the Turkish official narrative to a large extent. Of significance is a spike of Turkish language Tweets between November 8-10, around the date of the ceasefire. This is a clear difference from English, Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian Tweets at the time. Most of these Turkish Tweets present a congratulatory tone in response to Azerbaijan’s victory.⁷¹ However, due to the tweet-retweet ratio and a six fold quantity above an average level of tweets, Kirdemir concludes (also in general) this included inauthentic activity, ‘coordinated with highly active political accounts, troll accounts, and automated bot accounts’.⁷² Of course, attribution of such activity is difficult. In any case, the celebratory tone and idea of a conclusive victory indicate an end-state being reached. An emphasis aligning also with Russian interests: to halt all military activities. Furthermore, another conclusion of the study was that in Russia-related Turkish-speaking channels, central themes were ‘Russian-Turkish cooperation, anti-NATO sentiments, and threat perception towards the West’.⁷³

This brings us to the Russian narrative, perhaps best described as consisting of a number of subvariants, tailored to various national and international audiences. Statements, speeches and reports on telephone conversations by President Putin published during the Nagorno-Karabakh war show a consistent effort to halt military action. Russia expressed continued support for Armenia throughout the conflict. Meanwhile, Russian and Armenian news and social media also enhance the notion of ‘pan-Turkism’ or ‘neo-Ottomanism’ as a threat and Russia as the sole protector for the country.⁷⁴

In a series of consultations Putin mobilised support among OSCE Minsk group co-chairs and the UN Security Council to express grave concerns, ‘condemn in the strongest terms the recent escalation of violence’, deploring the loss of human life.⁷⁵ Fears were articulated that foreign fighters from Syria and Libya were joining

the war against Armenia. Azerbaijan and Armenia were called upon to resume negotiations under the auspices of OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs Russia, France and the United States (thus not including Turkey as member). In an interview with Russian state media Putin emphasised military operations were 'not taking place in the Armenian territory', thus not activating Russian CSTO commitments.⁷⁶ On October 10 consultations between the Russian president and his Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts resulted in a humanitarian ceasefire to allow for the exchange of bodies and prisoners. An initiative later repeated by France and the US. Overall, Putin's central concern was 'stopping the bloodshed'.⁷⁷ At this time, Putin expressed 'hope' towards Erdogan that Turkey would 'make a constructive contribution to de-escalating the conflict', emphasising their cooperation on Syrian and Libyan affairs.⁷⁸ The use of the term 'hope' signals Russia's limits to influence developments. However, in Russian news sources a more critical and aggressive tone also circulates. Turkey's influence in the Caucasus is a threat to Russia and it should answer for its support to Azerbaijan.⁷⁹

Although less explicit, the shooting down of the Russian Mi-24 helicopter on November 9 does mark a change in Russian subnarratives as well. Although Russia formally accepted the Azerbaijani apology, the CSTO expressed deep concern over the incident. According to some, the symbolic value of the incident was used to Russia's advantage behind the scenes: Putin gave Azerbaijan an ultimatum that military operations must end after the recapturing of Shusha, or the Russian military would intervene.⁸⁰ Moreover, as mentioned, a peacekeeping force of 2,000 Russian soldiers was to be deployed on Azerbaijani held territory to monitor the cessation of hostilities and provide security for internally displaced persons and refugees to return home. Among ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh the story went that Russia would also hand out passports.⁸¹

In the months after the November ceasefire agreement Russia was keen to emphasise its leading role to the world. Before international fora that include American and European countries such as the UN Security Council and the OSCE Minsk group, more cooperative language is used. While with summits of Commonwealth of Independent States leaders and BRICS countries, or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a greater emphasis laid with Russia as sole initiator and facilitator of the negotiations. Regular Ministry of Defence press releases on the Russian peacekeeping force emphasised the providing of security, demining activities and assistance with the return of refugees.⁸² The Russian state media generally reproduced the official statements and reports. After turning the kaleidoscope several times, a number of developments were identified regarding the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Turkish perspectives that fit the Russian agenda.

14.4. Russian efforts – a reflection

In early 2015, the Chief of the Main Directorate Operations of the Russian General Staff, Colonel-General⁸³ Andrey Kartapolov held a presentation at the Russian Academy of Military Science that accurately reflected the key elements of New Type Warfare (NTW), the Russian approach to hybrid warfare. In his speech, Kartapolov stated that achieving goals in NTW is a combination of non-military means and the employment of armed forces. He distinguished several steps in NTW: it starts with indirect and non-kinetic methods such as intensifying diplomatic pressure and information operations, and if necessary, it can also shift to classical methods of waging war, using various types of weapons in combination with large-scale information effects.⁸⁴

This reflection shows how important information operations have become for Russian authorities during conflicts, whether it concerns the dissemination of disinformation, the manipulations of perceptions or the deployment of forces under the guise of conducting a peacekeeping operation. Most Russian authorities speak of information confrontation instead of information warfare, which includes a wide range of activities.⁸⁵ In their doctrine, the Russian government makes a distinction between information-psychological and information-technical approaches.⁸⁶ Cyber operations can be seen as the technical representation of information; it is about how information can be disseminated alongside other types of information media such as print, broadcast and social media, and, of course, diplomacy.⁸⁷ Russian information-psychological operations have been around for a very long time and were widely used during the Cold War. The main aim is to deceive the opponent or others, although this is often difficult to achieve, as one then needs to make an extensive analysis of the opponent to find out among other things, what the opponent's personal preferences, values and attitudes are. The Russian authorities therefore prefer to confuse an opponent regarding their true intentions rather than to deliberately mislead him.⁸⁸

In practice, Russian authorities create confusion by very one-sided information through their own media.⁸⁹ In most cases the Russian state-owned mainstream media disseminate the view of the Kremlin, which is taken over by social media causing a form of social amplification regarding public opinion. Moreover, the Russian authorities, especially President Putin, use so-called doublespeak to create ambiguity: saying A but doing or meaning B. It is actually a simple method of deception. Putin knows exactly how to distort and mirror the course of events, such as dubious activities carried out by Russian security services or agencies themselves in a conflict and subsequently condemning and attributing these activities to the opponent. In addition, he knows like no other how to frame activities favourably for himself. For instance, he labels acts of war as 'peacekeeping duties'. This way

of deception calls up strong associations with the activities of the 'Ministry of Truth' in George Orwell's dystopian novel '1984'. In his novel, Orwell wanted to make clear that the use of language strongly influences people's thinking, which in turn strongly influences politics. Orwell recognised that people who make heavy use of doublespeak may also suffer from doublethink, a form of schizophrenia in which a fractured human mind simultaneously accepts two contradictory beliefs as the truth, with all the consequences this entails.⁹⁰ During the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, Putin used doublespeak not only to deploy troops in the region to exert influence there under the guise of peacekeeping forces to observe the truce. In addition, another example during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh is that, on the one hand, he expressed Russian support for Armenia and warned, together with the Russian media, against pan-Turkism and 'neo-Ottomanism', but on the other he flattered Turkish President Erdogan by saying that he hoped that Turkey will contribute constructively to the de-escalation of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh. Putin was indulging in all sorts of language manipulations to keep Erdogan on his toes, but also to retain influence in the region. All in all, these contradictory statements have led to a confusingly complex situation that is hence best understood from multiple perspectives. Although it is difficult to technically attribute the creation of artificial accounts and the subsequent messaging and amplification of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Armenian narratives to Russia, these fabricated or inauthentic activities on social media provide a natural fit with Russian interests.

14.5. Postscript

The current war in Ukraine has added a new chapter to Russian NTW. The Russian narrative on Ukraine includes elements of a 2014 'coup d'état' and a 'special military operation' to 'fight Nazism' and protect Ukrainian brethren.⁹¹ More recently other themes have become more prominent, such as Western 'neo-colonialism' that needs to be stopped by a 'preventive war' to protect the unique Russian culture and geopolitical space (*Russkii mir*), and reestablishment of 'New Russia' after referenda in captured Ukrainian regions.⁹² However, Russia also seems to have met an enemy that punches above its military weight, facilitated by the creation of strong narratives and Western political and military support. The parallel fronts of international diplomacy and information operations have allowed Ukrainian president Zelensky to perform at his best.⁹³ His rhetorical skills as a former actor and the availability of social media allowed for effective and speedy communication from the first day of the war. It added to a broader Ukrainian narrative that exploited key events to strengthen morale and influence the physical battlespace – such as the sinking of Russian flagship Moskva or resistance at the Azovstal factory

in Mariupol.⁹⁴ Determining specific effects of narratives remains complex, also as some narratives – both true or fake – are not designed top-down but emerge as frames that resonate among audiences.⁹⁵

New studies on Ukrainian and Russian interacting narratives are highly relevant. However, complementing such typical with atypical case studies provides additional insights on Russian information operations, positions and interests. Renewed fighting in September 2022 among Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region triggered European, Russian and American diplomatic initiatives. Early October, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev met with French president Macron and president of the European Council Michel.⁹⁶ Later a trilateral summit was hosted in Sochi where they met President Putin.⁹⁷ At another meeting on November 8 in Washington, US Secretary of State Blinken hosted their foreign ministers.⁹⁸ As more visits and summits follow, a historic pattern continues that expresses commitment of OSCE Minsk Group chairs to re-establish regional stability and ‘stop bloodshed’. Meanwhile, Turkish President Erdogan underlined his support for Azerbaijan with a visit on October 21, physically embracing Azerbaijani President Aliyev and together opening a new airport on captured Nagorno-Karabakh territory.⁹⁹ While the war in Ukraine has changed perceptions of Russia in the (Western) world, narratives on Nagorno-Karabakh might also offer a different perspective on US-EU-Turkey-Russia relations, and how perceptions are shaped to exert influence. Linking narratives can nuance divides or the idea of all out polarisation as interests or positions align. In general, more emphasis on the emergence and impact of parallel narratives provides a better understanding of all dimensions of conflict and warfare.

Notes

- ¹ The authors want to thank cartographer Erik van Oosten of the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH) for drawing and contributing the three maps of the Nagorno-Karabakh region inserted in this chapter.
- ² Russian authorities do not use the term hybrid warfare (in Russian ‘gibridnaya voyna’, but rather prefer the term New Type Warfare (NTW) instead. Timothy Thomas, “The evolving nature of Russia’s way of war,” *Military Review*, July-August (2017): 34-42.
- ³ For example: Paul Ducheine and Frans Osinga eds., *Winning Without Killing: The Strategic and Operational Utility of Non-Kinetic Capabilities in Crises*, NL ARMS (The Hague: Asser Press, 2017).
- ⁴ Timothy Thomas, “Russia’s 21st century information war: working to undermine and destabilize populations,” *Defence Strategic Communications* 1, no. 1 (2015): 12; T. S. Allen and A. J. Moore, “Victory without casualties: Russia’s information operations,” *Parameters* 48, no. 1 (2018): 60.
- ⁵ Sebastiaan Rietjens, “Unravelling disinformation: The case of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17,” *The International Journal of Intelligence, Security, and Public Affairs* 21, no. 3 (2019): 195-218.

- ⁶ Han Bouwmeester, *Krym Nash: An Analysis of Modern Russian Deception Warfare*, PhD dissertation. Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2020, 403.
- ⁷ Svante Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Richmond, England: Curzon Press, 2001), 56, 57; Cory Welt and Andrew S. Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Congressional Research Service R46651, Version 1 New, January 7, 2021, 2. Preceded by a brief period, between February and May 1918, when Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia formed the Transcaucasian Federation. James J. Coyle, *Russia's Interventions in Ethnic Conflicts: The Case of Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 6-8.
- ⁸ In this period one million Armenians were killed during death marches into the Syrian desert. Armenian women and children were forcibly converted to Islam. Thomas de Waal, *Great Catastrophe. Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Cornell, *Small Nations*, 58, 59; Masha Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War. An Interview with Thomas de Waal," *Harriman Magazine* (Summer 2018): 30-43, 34, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/creative/epub/harriman/2018/summer/Black_Garden_Armenia_and_Azerbaijan_Through_Peace_and_War.pdf, consulted June 16, 2022.
- ⁹ Several groups in the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies armed themselves. Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 58-63. Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 33-34. Welt and Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia*, 2.
- ¹⁰ Ali Askerov, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. The Beginning of the Soviet End," in *Post-Soviet Conflicts: The Thirty Years' Crisis*, ed. Ali Askerov, Stefan Brooks, Lasha Tchantouridzé (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 55-80, 57, 58; Coyle, *Russia's Interventions*, 10, 11; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 35; Welt and Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia*, 2.
- ¹¹ Coyle, *Russia's Interventions*, 13-15; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 35, 36.
- ¹² Coyle, *Russia's Interventions*, 15-30.
- ¹³ The referendum was organised parallel to the referenda in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Askerov, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 58-61; Coyle, *Russia's Interventions*, 30-32.
- ¹⁴ Alec Rasizade, "Azerbaijan's prospects in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 72-94, 77-83, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10474552-1384882>; Cornell, *Small Nations*, 81-95; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 38.
- ¹⁵ Coyle, *Russia's Interventions*, 2; Welt and Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia*, 3, 4.
- ¹⁶ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 318; Rasizade. "Azerbaijan's Prospects," 83-89; Askerov, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 61-67.
- ¹⁷ Coyle, *Russia's Interventions*, 132-151; Cornell, *Small Nations*, 112-125; Welt and Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia*, 3, 4; Philip Remler, *The OSCE as Sisyphus: Mediation, Peace Operations, Human Rights*, IAI Papers 21/16. Instituto Affari Internazionali -IAI- 2021, 14, 15, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni-tag/all/363> [consulted June 16, 2022].
- ¹⁸ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 284; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 37, 40.
- ¹⁹ The so-called Ganja gap. Turan Gafarlı, *Operation Iron Fist: Lessons from the Second Karabakh War*, Discussion Paper, TRT World Research Centre, February 2021, 6, 7, <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Operation-Iron-Fist-1.pdf> [consulted June 16, 2022].
- ²⁰ Ibidem, 6, 7.
- ²¹ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 307, 308.
- ²² Coyle, *Russia's Interventions*, 15; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 34.
- ²³ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 310-316; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 37, 38.

- ²⁴ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 305-307; Coyle, *Russia's Interventions*, 132-151; Askerov, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 76-79; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 39, 40.
- ²⁵ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 305-306; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 40, 41; Anna Maria Dyner, and Arkadiusz Legiec, *The Military Dimension of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh*, PISM No. 241 (1671) 26 November 2020, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych-The Polish Institute of International Affairs, https://pism.pl/publications/The_Military_Dimension_of_the_Conflict_over_NagornoKarabakh, consulted June 16, 2022.
- ²⁶ Askerov, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 75, 76; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 39; Zhirayr Amirkhanyan, "A failure to innovate: the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War," *Parameters* 52, no.1 (Spring 2022): 119-134, 123, <https://doi:10.55540/0031-1723.3133>.
- ²⁷ Askerov, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 55, 56.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 73-75; Uzi Rubin, *The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War: A Milestone in Military Affairs*, Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 184, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, December 2020, 10, <https://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/184web-no-ital.pdf>, consulted June 16, 2022; Udensiva-Brenner, "Black Garden," 41; Welt and Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia*, 7, 8; Amirkhanyan, "Failure to Innovate", 129-130; Brenda Shaffer, "The Trigger for War: Energy in the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan War," in *The Karabakh Gambit: Responsibility for the Future*, ed. Turan Gafarlı, and Michael Arnold (Istanbul: TRT World Research Centre 2021), 100-113.
- ²⁹ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 319-326.
- ³⁰ Shusha contains major monasteries and churches, one of them the cradle of the Armenian script. It was formerly the capital of the Azerbaijani realm under Turkish and Persian suzerainty in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. International Crisis Group, *Improving Prospects for Peace after the Nagorno-Karabakh War*, Crisis Group Europe Briefing No. 91 Baku/Yerevan/Tbilisi/Moscow/Brussels, December 22, 2020, 9, 10, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-conflict/b91-improving-prospects-peace-after-nagorno-karabakh-war>, consulted June 16, 2022; Thomas de Waal in: "War in the Caucasus: Europe/Heavy Metal", *The Economist*, October 10, 2020, 31-32, 31; Miloslav Terzic, "Critical Review of the Protection of Aircraft Defense Forces during the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* (Published online 12 January 2022): 3, 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2021.2025286>.
- ³¹ Terzic, "Critical Review", 2-6.
- ³² Amirkhanyan, "Failure to Innovate," 124; Terzic, "Critical Review", 2-6; Gustav Gressel, "Military Lessons from Nagorno-Karabakh: Reason for Europe to Worry," European Council on Foreign Relations, November 24, 2020, <https://ecfr.eu/article/military-lessons-from-nagorno-karabakh-reason-for-europe-to-worry/>, consulted June 16, 2022.
- ³³ Ibid.; Rubin, *A Milestone*, 1-16; Terzic, "Critical Review," 1-15; Amirkhanyan, "Failure to Innovate," 119-134; Joël Postma, "Drones over Nagorno-Karabakh. a glimpse at the future of war?" *Atlantisch Perspectief* 45, no. 2 (2021): 15-20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48638213>.
- ³⁴ Thomas De Waal in: "War in the Caucasus," *The Economist*, 32. However, De Waal does ignore the design and execution of Armenian preemptive strikes with more limited targets, such as the attack on the Tovuz power plant in July 2020; Shaffer, "Trigger", 100-113.
- ³⁵ Rubin, *A Milestone*, 8, 9. Postma, "Drones."
- ³⁶ The Israeli drones could fly independently with Artificial Intelligence, although during this campaign they were remotely controlled; Rubin. *A Milestone*, 1-16; Gressel, "Military Lessons"; Terzic, "Critical Review," 10.
- ³⁷ Rubin, *A Milestone*, 9, 10, 12-15. Terzic, "Critical Review," 7.
- ³⁸ Rubin, *A Milestone*, 12.
- ³⁹ Gressel, "Military Lessons." Terzic, "Critical Review," 1-15.

- ⁴⁰ Gressel, "Military Lessons."
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Rubin, *A Milestone*, 10, 11.
- ⁴³ Welt and Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia*, 8-11.
- ⁴⁴ It provided them with an overwatch position to conduct further operations in the city itself. Welt and Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia*, 8-11; Gressel, "Military Lessons"; Michael Kofman, "Armenia-Azerbaijan War: Military Dimensions of the Conflict," *Russia Matters*, October 2, 2020. <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/armenia-azerbaijan-war-military-dimensions-conflict>, consulted June 16, 2022.
- ⁴⁵ Welt and Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia*, 13.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 13-15.
- ⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, *Improving Prospects*, 3-6.
- ⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, *Improving Prospects*, 6-8; "War in the Caucasus," *The Economist*, 32; Postma, "Drones," 17.
- ⁴⁹ Arshaluys Barseghyan, Lusine Grigoryan, Anna Pambukchyan, Artur Papyan and Elen Aghekyan, "Disinformation and Misinformation in Armenia. Confronting the Power of False Narratives," Freedom House, June 2021, 18-20, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Disinformation-in-Armenia_En-v3.pdf, consulted June 16, 2022; Welt and Bowen, *Azerbaijan and Armenia*, 16.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 6. For the initial reaction of the UN and the EU, see: International Crisis Group, *Improving Prospects*, 13-16.
- ⁵¹ Galip Dalay, *Turkish-Russian Relations in Light of Recent Conflicts. Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh*, SWP Research Paper 5/2021, 19 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik – SWP – Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2021RP05>; Daria Ischachenko, *Turkey-Russia Partnership in the War over Nagorno-Karabakh: Militarised Peacebuilding with Implications for Conflict Transformation*. SWP Comment No. 53/2020, 1-4, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2020C53>.
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