WAR AND INFORMATION WARFARE:
ANALYSIS ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR

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Abstract. One of the means leading to victory in war is skillfully using the power of information. One of the most successful actions that led Azerbaijan to victory in the second Karabakh War was skillfully countering Armenia's disinformation activities. Unlike previous times, during this war, the Azerbaijani leadership, fully aware of the great importance of modern weaponry, military technology, and combat readiness, was better prepared to counter the strong Armenian lobby's attempts to steer international opinion toward Armenia's objectives, gain military-political support from states interested in prolonging the conflict, isolate Azerbaijan, and increase political-diplomatic pressure on its leadership to avert a potential defeat. That is why Armenia's attempts to spread disinformation, which it has been using for many years, did not give the desired result this time. All this justifies the relevance of the article and increases interest in a close study of the struggle of the two states in this area.

In the article, the disinformation spread by the Armenian state with the support of its patrons and the Armenian lobby and the activities carried out by the Azerbaijani state to prevent this process were studied with the help of methods of political science such as analogy, comparative analysis, system analysis. To achieve the set objective, statements by government officials on the topic, newspapers and journals from various countries, electronic resources, and scientific works were extensively used, and a fact-based analysis was conducted.

The main scientific novelty of the research lies in the analysis of the activities of two states conducting information warfare against each other, based on specific examples. The main scientific result of the article is that the mentioned state, contrary to expectations, was separated from the information war by defeat. This shows that Azerbaijan was also prepared for information warfare.

Key words: Second Karabakh War, information warfare, spreading disinformation, international community, political interests.

Introduction. One of the tools leading to victory in war is the skillful use of the power of information. In the 20th century, in addition to newspapers and magazines, mass media such as radio and television emerged, and by the end of the century, the internet appeared, playing a significant role in the rapid dissemination of information to any part of the world. The rapid development of the internet and its transformation of the world into a "global village" has led to the emergence of new mass media such as "social networks" and "virtual spaces", which the warring parties have begun to utilize extensively. The importance of information in our age is an indisputable fact, and it is among the important factors for the effective use of the power of information not only in war, but also in all spheres of human activity, to achieve a successful result. Among the foreign policy tools of the states, the mass media is in the spotlight as the most effective tool along with diplomacy and armed forces. And in wartime, states that manage to skillfully use this tool acquire a greater psychological advantage over their enemy, and also become the side closer to victory, pulling the international community to their side and increasing foreign support.

During the second Karabakh War, when the Republic of Azerbaijan liberated Karabakh and seven adjacent regions under the actual occupation of Armenia for about thirty years, skillfully using mass media, prevented attempts to win the world community over with disinformation spread by the enemy, and made great efforts for public opinion to get the right information. In this article, the information

struggle of the two states and the means used by them and the consequences of this struggle are extensively studied with concrete facts.

Disinformation activities of Armenia during the war. In the second Karabakh War, which began on September 27, 2020 and lasted until November 10, 2020, the Armenian army, after several days of resistance, began to rapidly approach the day when it would face defeat. The Armenian army, shrouded in the myth of invincibility and having relied on Russian support for 30 years, was forced to surrender in the face of the Azerbaijani army, which attacked with new-generation weapons and military strategies in a brief period of just 44 days. Clearly seeing that defeat was fast approaching, Armenia had two main means of preventing it. One of them was to fire powerful missiles and artillery at cities far from the war zone, and especially the civilian population, and the second was to use the power of Armenian lobbying organizations to launch an information warfare and spread disinformation, increasing international pressure on Azerbaijan and achieving a ceasefire. (Altunalan, 2022, pp. 156–157) The military-political leadership of Armenia, which committed a number of crimes that would be recognized as war crimes in the first instance, issued orders that led to the deaths of hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians and the destruction of residential areas. In this regard, the Azerbaijani side has utilized all available resources to ensure that these truths are conveyed to the international community.

On the other hand, Starting from the first days of the war, the Armenian side started an information warfare in order to eliminate such myths as the "invincible Armenian army" and the "impenetrable Ohanyan wall" and turn international pressure in favor of preventing the attacks of the Azerbaijani army, which successively suffered heavy defeats, and hoped for misinformation. In those days, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, regularly called capitals such as Moscow, Paris, Washington, Tehran, and requested the support of these countries to put pressure on the official Baku to stop the rapidly advancing Azerbaijani army. Armenia's attempts to exert pressure on Azerbaijan through diplomatic channels continued consistently throughout the war in almost all countries, including African states. It has been observed that Armenia continued its diplomatic efforts to escape the rapidly approaching defeat in almost all organizations, including the UN, the European Union, the CIS, and the Eurasian Cooperation Organization.

In order to gain the attention and support of Christian states and communities, the Armenian authorities and the mass media, despite the fact that the cause of the war, the conflict and the problem had nothing to do with religious differences, began to spread disinformation, putting the religious factor at the forefront. The image of Armenians as a victim of aggression was created by the media supporting Armenians during the reporting period. The counteroffensives launched by Azerbaijan to liberate its occupied territories have been portrayed as unilateral attacks by Muslim Turks against Christian Armenians. In such black propaganda and information, the aim was to create the image of "angelic and oppressed Christian Armenian" and "tyrannical, demonic Muslim Turk" in the international community. Describing the war that began as a war on religious grounds, they demanded that Christian states and people support the Armenians. The Italian newspaper La Stampa, one day after the start of the Second Karabakh War, published an article titled "Military advisors, mercenaries, and weapons: Erdogan and Putin's proxy exchange", stating that "Türkiye is assisting Baku with drones and soldiers, while Moscow is sending air defense systems and weapons to the Armenians... The scenario is similar to what is happening in Syria and Libya, but here attacks along the entire front line are risky for both sides." (Consiglieri, mercenari e armi: la nuova guerra per procura combattuta da Erdogan e Putin)

The pro-Armenian French newspaper "Le Monde", in its October 16 issue, published an article titled "Nagorno-Karabakh: Turkey stokes the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia," stating that "The control of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region intensified the previous day when Yerevan announced that a Turkish F-16 fighter jet shot down an Armenian "Su-25" aircraft in Armenian airspace". (FOG – Ces Arméniens qui veulent mourir debout) The two above-mentioned examples

are aimed at showing Azerbaijan, the rightful side of the war and wanting to liberate its lands from Armenian occupation, in the eyes of the world community as an aggressor and an attacker against the civilian population. To prevent such news and accurately inform the international community about the situation on the front, official Baku has mobilized all its resources. For this purpose, official Baku has repeatedly organized meetings in a live, question-and-answer format with the participation of all well-known media organizations of the world, and the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev himself has answered the questions many times in such meetings.

The American Wall Street Journal, in a report published on October 5, 2020, included the statement, "A victory in the Caucasus would be a personal victory for Erdogan. His support for ethnic Turks in Azerbaijan, who are mostly Shia, against Christian Armenians will further boost his popularity among religious and nationalist Turks..." (Mead, 2020)

As can be seen in the above examples, in Armenia's information warfare, its most reliable weapons have undoubtedly been the Armenian communities spread almost worldwide and the media organizations influenced by the lobby groups they have established. In powerful countries around the world, including the USA, France, Russia, and Canada, Armenians who own various media outlets, political factions, and NGOs have utilized their resources to send financial and material aid to Armenia. Additionally, they have sought to obtain political-diplomatic support by employing lobbying activities that have become customary in their respective countries. To achieve this, they have made use of nearly all traditional and new mass media outlets. Even the footage of several attacks on the cities of Ganja, Tartar and Barda, where hundreds of civilians were killed as a result of their attacks, was described as an attack by the Azerbaijani army on the Armenian civilian population and showed their ugly faces one more time.

Activities carried out by Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani side has demonstrated great attention and vigilance to prevent another attempt by the Armenians to deceive the international community by mobilizing their domestic and foreign resources. Acting very carefully on the front, the Azerbaijani army, as far as possible, tried not to endanger the security of the civilian Armenian population. Because the military-political leadership of Azerbaijan understood perfectly well that every wrong action that could lead to the death of the Armenian civilian population would strengthen the hand of official Yerevan and take advantage of this to take a step forward in the information warfare, so that international support would turn in favour of the Armenians. In addition, despite the fact that the Armenian army was the first to start the war, Armenia occupied 30 percent of the Azerbaijani territory for 20 years, one million Azerbaijanis became refugees, and Azerbaijan was the only one to make a compromise on the peaceful settlement of the conflict, the political and military leadership of Azerbaijan, led by the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Ilham Aliyev, has made significant efforts to accurately inform the international community about several issues. These include Armenia's unwillingness to vacate the occupied territories, the presence of foreign mercenaries among the Armenian ranks during the war, the use of child soldiers, and the Armenian army`s attacks on the civilian Azerbaijani population with powerful ballistic missiles and artillery, causing extensive destruction. Their aim has been to counter Armenia`s attempts to disseminate disinformation. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev held almost daily live meetings with local and foreign media outlets, sometimes lasting 4–5 hours, answering their questions with all sincerity, declared to the world the truth of Karabakh, the right position of Azerbaijan in the war, Armenia`s occupation, the Armenian army committed a war crime by attacking with heavy weapons against civilian Azerbaijanis. The same struggle was given by other Azerbaijani officials, the country's military leadership and diplomatic representations. It is precisely the result of this information warfare that the global community has obtained accurate information about the ballistic missile attacks and heavy artillery assaults by Armenian armed forces on cities like Ganja, Tartar, Beylagan, Barda, and Mingachevir while the war was ongoing, and has recognized Azerbaijan's just position. These attacks were met with concern by the European Union (Azerbaijan: Statement by the Spokesperson on the strikes on the city of Ganja) and UN Secretary-General

António Guterres (Both sides obliged to 'spare and protect civilians' over Nagorno-Karabakh fighting declares UN's Guterres), who condemned the targeting of the civilian population. (Rehimov, 2020)

The Azerbaijani army has gained an unparalleled advantage in psychological warfare by disseminating strike and destruction footage obtained from drones and kamikaze drones to boost the morale of its population while simultaneously undermining the enemy's psychological state. These posts, which contributed to gaining psychological superiority, also cast doubt on the credibility of the statements and information disseminated by Armenia, leading to a shift in psychological advantage to the Azerbaijani side in the war.

On the other hand, the increased instances of mass desertion in the Armenian army and the fact that children are being used as combatants for military purposes have further undermined the image of the Armenian side in the eyes of the international community. So, on October 25, 2020, a video clip appeared on the internet, in which a civilian-born Armenian boy helped the Armenian military in firing artillery rounds against the positions of the Azerbaijani army. Azerbaijan rightly accused Armenia of using children for military purposes in the war. (Armenia uses child soldiers in occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, commits war crimes: Azerbaijan) One day later, the ombudsman of the separatist regime in Karabakh claimed that the child featured in the video was there not for military purposes, but to help his father. Although this footage can be seen as a move aimed primarily at shaping domestic public opinion, the use of children for this purpose has faced sharp criticism from the international community. (About some speculated photos of children)

On October 28, when the war continued, the Armenian Armed Forces launched a large-scale attack on the Azerbaijani city of Barda using rockets and artillery devices. In this attack on the city of Barda, which was not located in the combat zone, the target once again was the civilian population. This attack resulted in the death of 21 civilians, including one Red Cross volunteer, and caused various injuries to over 70 individuals. (Gall, 2020) Amnesty International confirmed that the Armenian army used banned bombs and Smerch rockets. The organization's regional director, Marie Struthers, stated that the use of such weapons against civilians was "cruel and irresponsible", leading to "numerous deaths and injuries among the population". The Azerbaijani leadership and the country's chief human rights ombudsman described this attack as an "act of terror against the civilian population". (Armenia continues to commit war crimes, terrorist acts – Azerbaijani ombudsman) The use of cluster munitions was also confirmed by The New York Times. (Gall, 2020) Armenia, however, denied responsibility for this war crime and placed the blame on the separatist regime in Karabakh. (Staff, 2020) The separatist regime accepted responsibility, claiming that their objective was to target military bases. (Artsakh denies use of cluster munition in Azerbaijan's Barda direction)

On October 30, Human Rights Watch (HRW) announced that Armenian and Karabakh separatist forces had used cluster munitions and called for an immediate halt to the use of this weapon. (Armenia: Cluster Munitions Kill Civilians in Azerbaijan)

Another issue that both states involved in the war sought to leverage in their information warfare was the presence of foreign mercenaries. The arguments put forward on this issue could really give a great impetus to the weakening of the position of the opposing side under the world community and strong states. However, in this matter as well, the Azerbaijani state, using all its resources, succeeded in properly informing the international community. On September 28, a day after the war began, the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan released information presenting evidence that Armenian forces included mercenaries of Armenian descent from several Middle Eastern countries, notably Syria and France. (Dargahli, 2020) On the same day, the Ministry of Defense of Türkiye issued a statement demanding that Armenia hand over mercenaries and terrorists to Türkiye. (Erdoğan urges Armenia to 'end occupation in Upper Karabakh') Two days later, Azerbaijani officials demanded a fair response from the international community regarding Armenia's use of terrorist forces. (Hajiyev, 2020) On September 30, 2020, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also released

information confirming that Syrian fighters of Armenian descent were sent to Armenia to fight in the Karabakh war. (Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. First Syrian fighter of Ankara-backed factions killed in Azerbaijan) One day later, the Azerbaijani state, through various official government agencies, announced evidence showing that Armenian-origin terrorists and other mercenaries had come to Armenia from Middle Eastern countries–particularly Syria and Lebanon – as well as several other states, including Greece and the United Arab Emirates, to fight against Azerbaijan. (Azerbaijani MFA: Foreign terrorist and mercenaries being used by Armenia against Azerbaijan) The Greek City Times news agency also noted that approximately 500 to 800 Armenian-descended Greek citizens and some Greeks voluntarily came to Karabakh to join the Armenian side. (Former non-commissioned officer: I`m going to Artsakh with 500–800 Greeks to crush the Turks)

The Azerbaijani state regularly brought all these facts to the attention of the world community, both through official news agencies and the internet, in order to see the world, and tried to expose the true face of Armenians. The Azerbaijani military-political leadership, along with its diplomatic resources, diaspora organizations, and media outlets, successfully countered the enemy's attempts to spread disinformation throughout the war, bringing the real situation on the front lines to the attention of the world. For instance, just one day after the start of the war, In its statement, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense noted that based on intelligence gathered on the first day of military operations, the Armenian army had suffered significant losses. It reported the destruction of 22 tanks and other armored vehicles, 15 "OSA" surface-to-air missile systems, 18 drones, and 8 artillery pieces, as well as more than 550 personnel casualties, including both dead and wounded. During the first 4 days of the war, Azerbaijan announced the destruction of approximately 200 tanks and armored vehicles, 228 cannons and artillery systems, 30 air defense systems, 5 ammunition bases, 110 military trucks and 1 S-300 rocket system. (Erbay, 2020) The rapid movement of the Azerbaijani army in the subsequent days of the war and the liberation of the occupied lands shows that the information provided by the Azerbaijani side on the course of the war reflects the truth.

Conclusions. All this shows that from the first day of the war, both sides used information tools to spread disinformation, as well as to attract international public opinion and the support of foreign states to their side in order to gain psychological superiority over the enemy.

This article, which examines Armenia's activities in spreading disinformation, concludes that the aforementioned state, contrary to its expectations, emerged defeated from the information war, indicating that Azerbaijan was well-prepared for the information warfare. Another conclusion of the article is that the Azerbaijani state had been preparing for this war for many years, thoroughly studying the enemy's military-political and military-strategic capabilities, while also effectively organizing its efforts to balance the enemy's information and disinformation capabilities.

As a result, the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War provides numerous data and insights regarding the changing nature of warfare, serving as a significant case that illustrates the important effects and implications of military techniques and technologies not only on the battlefield and tactical level but also in diplomatic and geopolitical layers.

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