

Capstone Project

**Information Warfare in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: The Dynamics of Weaponized
Narratives**

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Introduction

In the last three decades, people in the South Caucasus have been experiencing an ever-escalating war over a 4400 sq. m. area called Nagorno-Karabakh, or Artsakh, in its historical name (Hewsen & Salvatico, 2001). Like any modern-day territorial dispute, it has involved information warfare and weaponized narratives hovering on the media to win in the psychological battleground.

The conflict's historical background can be traced back to the early 1900s, involving multiple military engagements since then. It emerged on the grounds of cultural-religious differences between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and the successive rule of different empires with varied administrative divisions on each occasion in the South Caucasus (Fraser et al., 1990). The first major clashes between the parties occurred in 1905, in Baku, allegedly provoked by the Russian tsarist administration (Fraser et al., 1990), within its perpetual policy of maintaining a hegemony by provoking frozen conflicts in the region (Ohanyan, 2018). After the Russian Empire's collapse, Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent, having "overlapping territorial claims" (Zakaryan, 2021) over the regions of Karabakh, Zangezur (now Syunik), Nakhchivan, and northeast of the present Republic of Armenia. Populated predominantly by Armenians, Karabakh declared independence from Azerbaijan and fought for it. Supported by the Ottoman Empire on Azerbaijan's side, the war lasted nearly 2 years, and ended with the Sovietization of the two countries in 1920. The Soviet administration resolved the conflict through two treaties signed with Kemalist Turkey, leaving the regions of Karabakh (Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast) and Nakhchivan (Nakhchivan Autonomous Oblast) in the Azerbaijan SSR (Zakaryan, 2021).

Virtually, the Soviet regime did not resolve but temporarily froze the conflict between the two nations until the subsequent escalation in 1991. During the Soviet period, Azerbaijani authorities carried out a discriminatory policy toward the region, causing a consistent violation of the rights of Karabakh Armenians (Geukjian, 2016).

In the late 1980s, as the USSR began to crumble, Armenians launched what they called a “national-liberation movement,” or the Karabakh movement, to withdraw from Azerbaijan’s territory and join the Armenian SSR. In turn, massacres against Armenians in other cities of Azerbaijan were held by the Azerbaijani authorities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Artsakh, 2023). In 1991, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh (NKAO) declared independence, a right granted to nations under international law. Nonetheless, both Soviet Union officials and the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan rejected the referendum (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Artsakh, 2023).

The clashes in the region escalated to a full-fledged war of nearly 3 years once the two countries received independence (Blakemore, 2023). It ended with full Armenian control over the NKAO and surrounding areas, thus linking Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Over 30,000 deaths occurred, and thousands of people from two countries were displaced (Blakemore, 2023)

The sides did not sign a peace treaty, but a relative ceasefire prevailed for around 25 years, with periodic low-intensity escalations and casualties across the border. Since then, neither Armenia nor the international community has recognized the independence of the Republic of Artsakh so as not to destabilize the region further. However, negotiations have been ongoing since 1992, when the OSCE Minsk Group was formed to mediate a peaceful settlement.

Nevertheless, an exhaustive and durable solution has yet to be found. Renewed escalations began in 2020 and included a 44-day war in the fall (BBC, 2023). The escalation

reshaped the geopolitical map in the region, with Azerbaijani forces taking over the bulk of the self-declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The conflict ended with a ceasefire brokered by Russia in November 2020, when Russian peacekeepers were deployed to the area. The latest flare-up erupted in October 2023, following a nine-month siege of what remained of the territory of the self-declared Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan overcame Nagorno-Karabakh in 24 hours of fighting and ethnically cleansed the entire region of Armenians (BBC, 2023). In the past three years, Azerbaijan has also slowly seized almost 200 sq. km. of the sovereign territory of Armenia, yet it is presumed that the Azerbaijani forces will further expand (Tatikyan, 2023).

Even so, the two countries have had a significant barrier to achieving a peaceful settlement due to the conflicting geopolitical interests in the area, the systematic displacement of Armenians, and the longstanding hostility between them (Al Jazeera, 2023).

As a modern-day conflict in an age of information and an interconnected digital world, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been marked by a significant information warfare component. The latter, in this context, refers to the use of various forms of media and communication to shape public opinion and influence the perceptions of both domestic and international audiences. This has included the use of traditional media, as well as its newer forms, such as social media and online news outlets.

The importance of this topic to the media and communications field lies in the fact that it highlights the growing role of information in shaping political and military outcomes. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, both Armenia and Azerbaijan have used information warfare tactics to shape the narrative and gain the upper hand. This has involved the use of propaganda, disinformation, and other forms of manipulation to control public opinion and shape the international community's perception of the conflict. Furthermore, the study of information

warfare in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can also provide valuable insights into how technology and media can be used to influence political outcomes on a global scale. By looking at the national narratives underneath the information war in the Artsakh conflict, we can answer the questions about the general motivations of the different actors involved.

This study is crucial for understanding the evolving nature of media and communication in the modern world and how these tools are being used to shape peacebuilding processes. It also provides an opportunity to apprehend the role of national narratives in shaping the information war. The urgency and fatality of this issue are the primary reasons for this project. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a 30-year-old complex and constantly evolving disaster for the region, which withholds regional development and frequently grows into a humanitarian crisis in recent years.

Studying this narrow aspect of media and communications in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will pave the way for further studies and result in creating solutions for establishing peace in the South Caucasus. Unfortunately, the currently available literature on the topic does not discover weaponized narratives of the parties involved and their proportionality in each side, the underlying motivations and strategy, and how they try to influence people's perception of conflict and the opponent.

Literature Review

This literature review aims to provide an overview of information warfare and weaponized narratives, focusing on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (NKC) and drawing on eight academic sources. These are journal articles, white papers, reports, and a thesis paper. The methodologies used are solely qualitative, including discourse analysis, content analysis, narrative analysis, and media framing analysis. The review is organized into three main themes: 1) weaponized narratives in modern warfare, 2) their increasing threat to democratic institutions, and 3) the media's role in information warfare.

I. Weaponized Narratives in Modern Warfare

Weaponized narrative is a term introduced by Braden Allenby in 2017 (Peterson, 2018). The term refers to the manipulation of information and media in order to influence public opinion and shape political outcomes (Allenby, 2017). The overwhelming and sustained bombardment of negative narratives directed at a specific population presents a challenge for the recipients to fully comprehend and critically evaluate the information being presented to them (Arizona State University, 2022). This can lead to cognitive disorientation and confusion, mainly if the targeted individuals are unaware of the attacks. Furthermore, this tactic presents ample opportunities for manipulating the targeted population's emotions, thereby weakening their ability to resist or make decisions (Arizona State University, 2022). The studies presented below share this idea and complement each other, shedding light on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute as well.

“Powerful Narratives: Weaponized Harmony and the Soft Power Tools of China's Rise to Global Primacy” is a technical report on the importance of soft power in China's efforts to attain

global influence (Brown et al., 2021). The report explores how China is leveraging a narrative that promotes its vision of a harmonious world and seeks to shape global perceptions of its actions and intentions. To understand China's soft power strategy and narrative, the authors produced a content analysis of Chinese government documents, speeches, and media reports. They conducted qualitative interviews with allied experts and used critical discourse analysis to see how these narratives are constructed and deployed. The report suggests that these narratives can be used as a weapon to deploy disinformation and propaganda in cyber warfare settings and points to China as an example of a government that uses censorship, propaganda, and disinformation to control the narrative both in China and abroad (Brown et al., 2021).

Calvin Peterson Jr. outlines ideas in the thesis "*Weaponized Narrative: Exploring New Vocabulary for the Cognitive Domain Fight*" that underscore the powerful nature of weaponized narrative, at least to an extent, in persuading people, organizations, and the masses (Peterson, 2018). The author investigated this concept of the weaponized narrative, the language of those narratives, and their implications using content, discourse, and narrative analyses of various texts like books, articles, documents, and reports.

The author also uses multiple examples from different countries and cultures to illustrate his point. His analysis is based on historical and contemporary cases, using interviews to triangulate his findings. Peterson explores the concept of weaponized narrative and its potential use in psychological operations and cognitive warfare. According to Peterson, a weaponized narrative can be used to manipulate public perceptions and attitudes to achieve specific political, social, or military objectives (2018).

Jonathan Herrmann introduces this concept in his white paper "*Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace*," which addresses the need for disinformation and propaganda in warfare

(Herrmann, 2017). It employs literature review, expert interviews, and case studies to unpack the concept of weaponized narrative and its implications for shaping public perception and decision-making. The author also employs critical discourse analysis in how the media frames weaponized narratives and how it reflects the current political and social context. The use of narrative as a form of weaponry has changed recently, with information warfare specifically in mind, Herrmann argues. The paper argues that the ability to control the narrative, or how information is perceived and understood, has become a crucial aspect of power and influence in today's world. The notion of weaponized narrative, as conceptualized by Herrmann (2017), also serves as another critical factor that challenges traditional paradigms of warfare and security, requiring new strategies and tactics to address its repercussions.

The “*White Paper on Weaponized Narrative*” by Brad Allenby (2017), published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, explores the use of narrative as a weapon in modern warfare and politics. To contemplate what the ‘weaponized narrative’ entails the author reviewed literature, conducted interviews with experts, and explored case studies. It is an exhaustive exploration of this idea, where it comes from, what it looks like, and what it means. Published in October 2018, the paper takes on a critical analytical approach and explores the various facets of weaponized narrative within the world, spanning disciplines such as politics, media, and national security. The study also provides research and policy recommendations that could help mitigate the threats posed by weaponized narratives. It argues that weaponized narrative, or the use of disinformation, propaganda, and other forms of manipulated information, is among the greatest threats of the 21st century, and can be used to achieve a broad spectrum of strategic objectives (Allenby, 2017).

Narrowing down to the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the report “*Media and Disinformation in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and their Role in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding*” highlights the significant role of media and disinformation in fueling the conflict and creating a negative narrative that can make it difficult to achieve peace (ERMES et al., 2021). It reports on an exploratory seminar held by the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, European Resources for Mediation Support, and the European External Action Service's mediation support team. The objective of the meeting was to gather context and media experts to examine the communications landscape related to the 2020 Artsakh War and evaluate its potential effect on the prospects for a peace process. The report summarizes the discussions and presentations by independent experts during the seminar based on observations and notes taken, but not a specific research methodology. The report states that disinformation is used to undermine peacebuilding efforts in NKC by spreading misinformation and creating mistrust between conflicting parties (ERMES et al., 2021).

II. Threat to Democracy

Several sources describe how weaponized narratives are a growing threat to democratic institutions, societal cohesion, and public trust. The damage both to the trust in democratic institutions and values and the division waged by weaponized narratives has been the focus of analyses by Allenby (2017), Herrmann (2017), and Brown et al. (2021). Atanesyan (2020), however, draws attention to the weaponization of narratives in war journalism and the fact that they can be used not just against democracy.

Braden Allenby (2017), in his article “*The Age of Weaponized Narrative, or, Where Have You Gone, Walter Cronkite?*” states that the phenomenon of weaponized narratives is becoming

increasingly prevalent in today's society. The author uses content analysis to look at different dimensions of weaponizing narrative. In the context of democracy, Allenby highlights that the weaponization of narrative in the age of digital media has a significant impact on the spread of information and the public's trust in news sources (Allenby, 2017).

Furthermore, they can be used to exacerbate pre-existing social cleavages (Brown et al., 2021), according to the threatcasting report “*Powerful Narratives: Weaponized Harmony and the Soft Power Tools of China's Rise to Global Primacy.*” This is particularly relevant when looking at, for example, China and the ramifications of their “harmony” narrative for both the international order as well as the rights and freedom of individuals and nations. They highlight the risks associated with China's soft power efforts, including the erosion of democratic values (Brown et al., 2021).

For example, Jonathan Herrmann (2017) discusses how weaponized narratives can lead to the breakdown of trust in institutions and the creation of societal divisions. However, “*Media Framing on Armed Conflicts: Limits of Peace Journalism on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*” (Arthur Atanesyan, 2020) asserts that war journalism stands by the national strategies of the states that enter into armed conflicts, either democratic or authoritarian ones. Thus, the research suggests that narrative weaponization can be directed not just against democracy but against any state with a conflict of interest. Atanesyan adopted a content analysis approach to study the media coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by Azerbaijani, Armenian, and international outlets. The analysis also relies on interviews with journalists. Atanesyan examines the frames used in the media coverage and how they correspond to the peace journalism approach. He applies critical discourse analysis to investigate how media frames the message of the conflict

and how it reflects the broader political and social environment of the countries involved. The study covers a period from the outbreak of the conflict in 2016 to 2018.

III. Media in Information Warfare

Nearly all examined studies in this review discuss how news outlets and social media play in information warfare. All authors agree that social media and traditional news outlets play a role in spreading misinformation and disinformation, shaping public opinion, and promoting violence. Allenby (2017) and Herrmann (2017) focus on the rise of social media and the decline of traditional news outlets as a cause for spreading misinformation, whereas Atanesyan (2020) focuses on the specific impact of mass media promoting violence. As for the Artsakh dispute, the two reports emphasize the media's critical role in shaping the public's perceptions of the conflict, behaviors, and escalating conflicts. In addition, Ruben Elamiryan (2016) examines the specific use of Twitter and how different actors used it to shape public opinion.

In the journal article, Allenby (2017) claims that the rise of social media and the decline of traditional news outlets has led to the spread of misinformation and "fake news." Herrmann (2017) agrees, highlighting the use of technology, precisely social media and the internet, to manipulate public opinion and spread disinformation. The EU report *"Media and Disinformation..."* reaffirms these positions for the case of Artsakh, emphasizing the critical role media plays in shaping the public's perception of the conflict (ERMES et al., 2021). Atanesyan (2020) adds that the mass media tends to promote violence through the dissemination of violent content, such as images of fighting and bloodshed. This can profoundly affect viewers, influencing their behavior and shaping their understanding of violence as an acceptable means of resolving conflicts. It can lead to the normalization of violent behavior in society due to the widespread exposure to such content. War journalism, as a reflection of the interactions between

conflicting parties and a part of the state's information policies, aligns with official security strategies and attempts to increase perceptions of insecurity (Atanesyan, 2020).

The report “*Four Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Discriminatory Discourse Analysis of the Media in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey*” (Arslan et al., 2017) continues Atanesyan's argument, analyzing numerous media articles in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey during the 2016 Four-Day War. The report examines media coverage through discourse analysis. The media outlets selected for examination were chosen based on various criteria, such as circulation numbers, media ownership, political positions, and ideologies. The analysis includes questions such as whether news items are signed by reporters if background information about the history of the conflict is provided, who the primary sources of information are, the most commonly used words, the discourse used in describing casualties, and how the lives of civilians are described during the clashes. The authors aimed to understand how the media, in general, produces discriminatory discourse in times of conflict and war and to what extent they contribute to the peace discourse. According to the “*Four Day War...*” the media, as a primary source of information, holds significant power to shape societal perceptions and behaviors through its traditional and digital platforms. It can escalate conflicts and fuel hostility between societies by perpetuating discriminatory and war-promoting discourse (Arslan et al., 2017).

In addition, Ruben Elamiryan (2016) explains the abovementioned with the example of Twitter. The article “*The Factor of Twitter in the Information War Around Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*” analyzes the role of Twitter in the information war surrounding the Four-Day War. During the April 2016 hostilities, Elamiryan applied content and critical discourse analyses on tweets about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The second step involved analyzing the language they used to describe the conflict, the actors involved and the general tone of the tweets. He also

employed interviews with experts. He conducted the study using a sample of the tweets collected between January 2016 and September 2023 from public Twitter accounts broadcasting specific keywords and hashtags related to the conflict. Elamiryan also analyzes how tweets, both by governments, media outlets and individual users, were heralded and disseminated to create a favorable public opinion about the conflict. The article concluded that Twitter was a valuable tool in the information war, noting that both pro-Armenian and pro-Azerbaijani accounts utilized it as a means of pushing their narratives and undermining the narratives of the other (Elamiryan, 2016).

Conclusion

The 21st century is the beginning of the age of information and the world's accessibility, just as for the rise of hybrid wars and the use of weaponized narratives in them. Information warfare's role is to legitimize the given countries' struggles, to reach the consensus that every action it takes is legitimate. The new generation of warfare is dominated by psychological and information warfare, which aims to demoralize populations and eventually break their will to resist.

There are very few yet short studies on this topic, especially regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, because the latter is out of the sight of international academia. Furthermore, the Artsakh conflict is "mostly in the minds" (de Waal, 2014, as cited in Arslan et al., 2017), shaped by national narratives that depict the opposing party in a negative light, which are often found to be inaccurate. The studies discussed in this paper help build up to this argument and observe this 30-year territorial dispute from a different perspective.

The presented literature is the beginning of the studies in this newly emerging field. It highlights the importance of understanding the complexity and fast-paced evolution of

weaponized narrative and its adaptability to different contexts and cultures. Nevertheless, the counter-measurements discussed in the literature are primarily vague and not thoroughly studied. Moreover, a more comprehensive range of research must be conducted to fully understand the motivations and strategy behind the narratives. Although the literature suggests further study on the psychological and cognitive factors that underlie the effectiveness of weaponized narratives, no study mentions how information warfare and weaponized narratives can influence the military actions or negotiations. However dangerous these narratives are as weapons, they can never be stopped unless the age of information ends. Therefore, more study has to be done to help build new resilience in the context of national security and peace.

Statement of Central Research Questions

This research seeks to investigate the national weaponized narratives that Armenia and Azerbaijan adopt as part of their information warfare strategy in the pursuit of understanding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Accordingly, the primary research question deals with the specific weaponized narratives used by Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh context.

The follow-up research question attempts to explore the motivations and impact of these narratives. It aims to find out the why behind every narrative, hoping to evolve the processes of those driving the narrative - its creators and disseminators.

1. What are the weaponized narratives employed by Armenia and Azerbaijan in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?
2. What is the motivation behind every narrative?

The abovementioned questions build a comprehensive framework for the analysis of the complex dynamics of national narratives and the role of information warfare in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Methodology

To explore the national weaponized narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, gathering a diverse dataset, in particular official statements from both parties involved in the conflict, disseminated to support specific state-imposed narratives was necessary. The English versions of the Armenian and Azerbaijani content were collected and examined.

Because information warfare is a relatively new phenomenon, and it has gained momentum in recent years in this particular conflict, the studied materials were taken from the last twenty years. The choice of the time period is also determined by appointment to the office of the current Azerbaijan leader to ensure that the examined contents are interrelated within the strategy under the same government and relative to the same strategy in the case of Armenia.

Three addresses made by each country leader in different contexts and times were analyzed to capture the comprehensive image of how they construct their narratives. Qualitative data analysis was conducted to uncover underlying narratives and their motives. As a research method, rhetorical analysis allowed to understand the weaponised narratives used in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

More specifically, rhetorical analysis focusing on each text's context, purpose, intended audience, messages, language and tone. This provided insights into how particular weaponized narratives were formed and sustained, revealing neither the motivations of those wielding them nor the desired consequences. In addition, it enabled the investigation of persuasive techniques, rhetorical devices and structures, and emotional appeals across the texts, identifying distortions of facts and manipulation, which exposed the techniques of weaponized narratives and how those narratives are meant to influence audiences. Ultimately, they were compared and

contrasted to identify patterns, discrepancies, and commonalities in the information warfare strategies.

Limitations

This research project has several limitations, including the loss of meaning in analysis material due to translation, the author's predisposition to the topic, and insufficient materials analyzed to reveal the complete picture of the weaponized narrative.

Firstly, some linguistic value may have been overlooked as the texts are collected in English translations and not analyzed in their original language due to the author's inability to understand Azerbaijani.

Even though this work is intended to be as objective as possible, the researcher's inherent predisposition towards the subject matter presents a potential source of bias, particularly given her Armenian background and prolonged exposure to Armenian narratives, alongside personal experiences amidst the conflict.

Last but not least, as the materials suitable for analysis are messages communicated to the public over two decades, it was impossible to collect and analyze every one of them within the adequate length of an undergraduate research project in order to discover the holistic image of weaponized narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Besides, the need to analyze materials in English limited the choice because of the scarcity of resources translated into English on the web. Consequently, the inability to thoroughly analyze most of the relevant data within this study necessitates a call for further research into this topic.

Analysis

I. Azerbaijani Narratives

Aliyev, 2012

The first message for examination is the “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the opening of a residential building for disabled veterans of the Karabakh war and martyr families in Sumgayit,” delivered on December 24, 2012 (Aliyev, 2012).

To unveil the historical context of the speech, it is essential to trace the trajectory of border clashes between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, which escalated notably from 2008 onwards. In March 2008, Ilham Aliyev announced that Azerbaijan was ready to resolve the conflict and take back Nagorno-Karabakh by force, attacking Nagorno-Karabakh the day after (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2012). He reclaimed his willingness to rely on military force and admitted to preparing and buying military equipment the day Azerbaijan first attacked Nagorno-Karabakh in 2008 (BBC News, 2008). Prior to this speech, since 2008, Azerbaijan’s attacks had resulted in at least 123 casualties on both sides. These clashes set the stage for subsequent escalations, including more large-scale confrontations in 2016 and 2020, further exacerbating regional tensions.

The speech by Ilham Aliyev served the following goals:

1. Express care about Azerbaijani citizens, show that his government has adopted policies that contribute to the welfare of the citizens, prosperity, and empowerment of the state,
2. Demonstrate appreciation and praise to the first Nagorno-Karabakh war veterans and their families,
3. Position Azerbaijan as a strong and developing country,

4. Position Azerbaijan as a victim in the conflict with a just cause and rightful owners of the land,
5. Position Armenia as a brutal aggressor,
6. Offer hope that Azerbaijan will reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh, justifying the means of force,
7. Show Armenia its determination and unwavering commitment to reclaiming Nagorno-Karabakh by all means necessary.

The speech is directed at the veterans of the Nagorno-Karabakh war and their families and the general Azerbaijani public. As it is a tragic topic for the audience, the latter has a highly emotional predisposition. However, some of the messages were directed at Armenian authorities, such as presenting Azerbaijan's military and economic power, the international community's favor of Azerbaijan's claims, and its determination to reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh by all means.

The fundamental messages portrayed in the speech are the following:

1. War veterans are heroes deserving of recognition and support,
2. Azerbaijan has the "best social policy" among the former Soviet Union countries,
3. Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the central issue facing the nation,
4. Azerbaijan is the rightful owner of Nagorno-Karabakh,
5. The conflict is a matter of historical justice and international law,
6. Armenia is an occupier and perpetrator of atrocities, violating international law and perpetuating a "far-fetched criminal regime" in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Aliyev incorporated all main persuasion techniques in the speech, addressing different topics, such as ethos, pathos, and logos. Aliyev establishes his credibility and authority as the President, positioning himself as a trustworthy and knowledgeable figure addressing the nation.

This way he aims at strengthening the argumentation of his initiatives and proposal with respect to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Aliyev keeps addressing the emotions of the public, and uses nostalgia, sympathy, and patriotism throughout the speech. He hails disabled veterans and the families of people killed in the war as heroes for their sacrifices. By tapping into these emotions, Aliyev aims to foster empathy and solidarity among the audience, considering the emotional predisposition.

He stresses Azerbaijan's historical connections to Nagorno-Karabakh and frames the conflict as a fight to recover ancestral territory. He tries to use these feelings to win public support and mobilize national unity for re-occupation and struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh so many times. Besides, Aliyev incites hatred and hatred to the Armenians, calling them "the fictitious Armenian state", "the occupier state", "Armenian atrocities", "Khojali genocide" [committed by Armenians to Azerbaijanis during the 90's war], "far-fetched criminal regime" functioning illegitimately in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Last but not least, the Azerbaijani president uses logic and evidence as the basis of his reasoning and beliefs. He makes historical and legal arguments to legitimize Azerbaijan's territorial claims to Nagorno-Karabakh, citing historical precedents and international law. Through an appeals to logic and reason, Aliyev tries to confirm to the listener that Azerbaijan's stance in light of the conflict is both valid and legitimate.

Although he keeps the language formal throughout the speech, Aliyev maintains an assertive tone especially when he talks about Azerbaijan territorial claims, their military capabilities, Armenian occupation, international actors' apprehension, and his approach on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. He expresses confidence in Azerbaijan's ability to resolve the

conflict in its favor and emphasizes his government's commitment to winning back Nagorno-Karabakh.

As a vivid tactic of weaponized narrative, Aliyev uses misinformation and manipulation of historical facts, or, in other words, historical revisionism. In his speech, he mentions “a historical document: in 1918, one of the first decisions of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was the transfer of Erivan to Armenia as its capital.” It is unclear about which transfer decision the Azerbaijani leader discusses.

Armenians have been living in the current territory of the Republic of Armenia since the nation's formation. The last time they were independent before 1918 was during the kingdom of Bagratid Armenia in the 11th century AD, when Turkic people (ancestors of Azerbaijani people) had not migrated to the region, and it was never part of Caucasian Albania either; the descendants of which Azerbaijanis claims to be. Subsequently, the South Caucasus was under the control of several empires, the last of which was the Russian Empire. Until 1918, none of the ethnic groups in the Caucasus Viceroyalty of the Russian Empire were independent, leaving it unclear which Azerbaijani-owned lands Aliyev points out. In fact, there were randomly distributed administrative divisions named after the largest cities in those territories - Baku, Kars, Tiflis, Erivan, and other governorates. Armenians were the second nation by number after Russians in the Caucasus Viceroyalty in 1917 (Office of the Caucasian Viceroy, 2023), mostly living in the Erivan Governorate. Erivan Governorate (in the Russian Empire), Erivan Khanate (in the Persian Empire), or Erivan (modern-day Yerevan), whichever Aliyev mentions, were never part of any Azerbaijani state.

The borders of Caucasian Albania have shifted throughout its existence from the 2nd century BC to the 8th century AD. At some point in history, the Artsakh province was part of

Caucasian Albania, and in some instances, Albania was part of Armenia. Even if Azerbaijanis consider themselves descendants of Caucasian Albanians (despite their Turkic descent), Artsakh was not historically Albanian. Of course, during the Serjuk, Mongol, Iranian, and Russian invasions of the region, the demographics and administrative divisions underwent some changes. Nevertheless, Armenians made up the majority of the population in Nagorno-Karabakh. Whereas, being of mixed origin and carrying Turkish, Persian, and Caucasian cultures, “Azerbaijani national identity emerged in post-Persian Russian-ruled East Caucasia at the end of the 19th century and was finally forged during the early Soviet period” (Gasimov, 2022). Even if “Azerbaijani people have lived and worked in Nagorno-Karabakh for centuries,” as Aliyev mentions, this does not make it accurate that the land is native Azerbaijani land. The logical inference and reasoning are distorted in this statement.

Armenians ruled over Artsakh until the mid-18th century, preceding the Afsharid dynasty of Iran. Artsakh then was part of the Elizavetpol Governorate (1822-1918) during Russian rule, so was Syunik (Zangezur), and Nakhijevan (Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic) was part of the Erivan Governorate. The divisions were not made based on the ethnic majority principle. However, due to Soviet administrative divisions, both Nakhijevan and Artsakh fell under Azerbaijani rule despite the resistance from the population of Artsakh. Thus, historically, Artsakh never belonged to Azerbaijanis, except for the 70 years in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan.

The rhetorical analysis of the given speech unveiled the existence of certain weaponized narratives in the Azerbaijani agenda back in 2012. One of the narratives is the depiction of Azerbaijan as the victim in the conflict - Azerbaijan’s rights have been violated, historically and legally. Using tactics such as manipulation of facts, revisionist interpretation of historical events,

appeal to emotion and national identity, and exploiting the emotional predisposition of the audience, Azerbaijan's leader weaves a victim's narrative.

Another weaponized narrative is the dehumanization of Armenia. Aliyev depicts Armenia as the aggressor and employs rhetoric that demonizes Armenia, thoroughly delegitimizing Armenia's stance. By using specific language to provoke anger and hate toward Armenia, he is portraying it as an occupier and perpetrator of atrocities. He accuses Armenia of violating international law and perpetuating a "far-fetched criminal regime" in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The series of narratives in the given speech ends with nationalistic rhetoric. It is characterized by assertions of superiority over Armenia, most expressed in phrases such as "fictitious state" when referring to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, or the idea that Azerbaijan has granted Armenia the lands of the present Armenian sovereign territory.

Putting all the above-mentioned together, Ilham Aliyev's speech employs rhetorical strategies and weaponized narratives aimed at shaping Azerbaijani public perception of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, reinforcing Azerbaijani national identity, and justifying territorial claims through historical revisionism and demonization of the enemy. These weaponized narratives serve to mobilize public support, legitimize Azerbaijan's stance and further military actions, and delegitimize Armenian claims to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Aliyev, 2018

Continuing to study the messages of the Azerbaijani government in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the next is the “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the 6th Congress of New Azerbaijan Party” from February 8, 2018 (Aliyev, 2018).

The backdrop of this address is the 2016 “Four-day War” between Azerbaijan and Armenia. After years of openly declaring intentions to use military force to retake Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan launched an offensive along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh on April 2, 2016. It was the largest escalation since the ceasefire of 1994. It was instead “an attempt to break through or test the Armenian lines of defense, although not to actually retake Karabakh from Armenian hands,” as the OSW Center for Eastern Studies states (Jarosiewicz & Falkowski, 2018). Leaving dozens dead on both sides, the situation had calmed under a ceasefire mediated by Russia on April 5. Azerbaijan therefore took possession of 800-2000 hectares of land through the southeastern part of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2016).

The intentions behind the speech do not differ much from the previous speech, mainly directed at:

1. Denoting and reaffirming the achievements and good-natured intentions of the New Azerbaijan Party (the current ruling party of Azerbaijan),
2. Showing the vision and directions for the future of Azerbaijan,
3. Creating a good image of Azerbaijan in the minds of its citizens as a rapidly developing, robust, secure, and prosperous country,

4. Reasserting his tough stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and expressing further intentions on the issue, delegitimizing Armenia's position and diminishing its image.

Again, the message is addressed to the domestic audience, particularly the ruling party members, the young generation, whom he addresses several times in his speech, and the general public. The audience is elevated following the 2016 events. However, "economic difficulties associated with the decline of oil prices have raised social frustration and sparked spontaneous protests by the population" in 2016 and the following years (Jarosiewicz & Falkowski, 2018).

Below are the main messages derived from the speech:

1. New Azerbaijan Party is a successful political party in Azerbaijan, the architect of independence that genuinely cares for its people and development,
2. Azerbaijan is an economically, politically, financially, and militarily strong and stable country under Aliyev's leadership, with a promising future and a respected position in global affairs, in contrast with regions plagued by conflict and instability,
3. The only remaining problem for Azerbaijan is Nagorno-Karabakh, which Azerbaijan must reclaim by all means because it belongs to Azerbaijan, historically and legally,
4. Armenia is an aggressor and, compared to Azerbaijan, has much weaker positions,
5. Azerbaijan is pushing and will continue to push Armenia until its demands are satisfied, resolving the conflict based on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity principles.

Azerbaijani leader employs several rhetorical techniques to make the address persuasive - ethos, pathos, and logos are persistent in his speech. First, he establishes his credibility and authority by mentioning his achievements as a leader. He invokes the legacy of his father and former President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, and his commitment to its continuation to bolster his credentials as a leader.

Throughout the speech, Aliyev consistently appeals to the emotions of his audience, mainly through patriotic rhetoric and references to Azerbaijan's history. He seeks to "liberate" lost territory and restore national pride. Furthermore, he references the reclaimed territory in 2016, calling it a "glorious and historic victory on the battlefield." By using rhetoric such as "After our lands are liberated from occupation, we will restore all the cities and villages destroyed by Armenian vandals," Aliyev creates animosity and enmity of Armenians, thus justifying his position on the conflict. He highlights the suffering of internally displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh and depicts Azerbaijan as a besieged nation surrounded by hostiles. He presents logical arguments to justify his claims and his policy prescriptions.

The President of Azerbaijan makes logical arguments to support his assertions and policy proposals. For example, he presents economic data and statistics demonstrating Azerbaijan's progress and development under his leadership. He appeals to law and international actors' favorable stance on the conflict, referencing resolutions and support from entities like the UN and principles of sovereignty to legitimize Azerbaijan's stance on territorial integrity and conflict resolution. However, his speech lacks evidence for the democracy policy, diversity, and freedoms in Azerbaijan, as international reports state otherwise. Nearly 95% of the country is Muslim Azerbaijanis, according to the 2019 census (The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2019), yet he mentions the "multiculturalism" of the country. "All freedoms are and will be guaranteed," while the freedom score of Azerbaijan is 7 out of 100 in 2024 (Freedom House, 2024). Another false statement is that "there has never been and never will be any confrontation and misunderstanding on national or religious grounds in Azerbaijan." At the same time, Azerbaijanis have destroyed Armenian heritage, khachkars, and churches in Nakhchivan and, later on, reclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh (Monument Watch, 2022).

In addition, Aliyev employs antithesis to contrast Azerbaijan's achievements and progress with the challenges faced by other countries. By juxtaposing Azerbaijan's stability and prosperity with regions in conflict and instability, he highlights the significance of his government's policies. Moreover, he compares and contrasts Azerbaijan's economic and political situations with Armenia, raising Azerbaijan in the eyes of the audience and creating a bad image of Armenia, which indicates nationalistic rhetoric.

Similar to the previous speech, the Azerbaijani leader maintained an assertive tone; however, this time, using more aggressive and inflammatory language. He uses phrases like "aggressive separatism" and "far-fetched entity" when describing Nagorno-Karabakh. He describes Armenia's authorities as "the criminal, corrupt and bloodthirsty regime" and Armenia - a declining country. He admits that Azerbaijan is "keeping and will continue to keep them in isolation until our lands are liberated from occupation."

Last, he presents the national vision with the provocative sentence: "Erivan is our historical land, and we, the Azerbaijanis, must return to these historic lands. This is our political and strategic goal, and we must gradually approach it." The latter statement Azerbaijani leader makes multiple times, and, in contrast to the previous speech, he adds "Zangezur and Goycha" (Syunik region and Lake Sevan) to the list of historical Azerbaijani lands that need to be returned. As shown in the analysis of the previous speech, this claim, too, contains disinformation and manipulation of historical facts. While he boldly defends the right of territorial integrity, he claims the sovereign territories of Armenia, contradicting his own stance.

To wrap up, Aliyev's speech advances similar weaponized narratives to the preceding case. He is painting Armenia as the antagonist and Azerbaijan as the victim, thereby justifying Azerbaijan's military actions and positioning himself as a defender of national sovereignty.

Aliyev revises historical narratives to legitimize Azerbaijan's territorial claims. He emphasizes the historical lands outside Nagorno-Karabakh, in the sovereign territory of Armenia, such as the Erivan Khanate, Zangezur, and Goycha, insisting on Azerbaijan's historical right to these regions. This narrative serves to mobilize nationalist sentiment and gain support for Azerbaijan's territorial ambitions.

Another weaponized narrative is the nationalist rhetoric. Aliyev appeals to Azerbaijan's cultural and historical identity, emphasizing the importance of national pride and sovereignty. This narrative fosters a sense of collective purpose and solidarity, reinforcing support for Aliyev's leadership and further actions on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Aliyev, 2022

The last example of Azerbaijani rhetoric is the Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the meeting with a group of intellectuals from Western Azerbaijan, given on December 24, 2022 (Aliyev, 2022).

Before this address, in September 2022, Azerbaijan had struck Armenia proper, occupying around 140 square kilometers of the sovereign Armenia (Avetisyan & Aghayev, 2022). The official statement of Azerbaijan mentioned that Armenia provoked the attack; however, in this speech, Aliyev admitted that he had to do it to ensure Azerbaijan against future revanchism, in other words, to create a buffer between the two countries. In 2022, just 12 days before the President's address, Azerbaijanis blocked the Lachin corridor - the only road connecting Artsakh to the world, leaving Artsakh blockaded for months (Aghayev, 2023). Aliyev claimed that activists blocking the road initiated the protests independently; however, in his speech, he referred to the blocking as "our legitimate right and demand." He views it partially in

the context of Western Azerbaijan, classifying the illegal presence of Azerbaijani troops in the territory of Armenia as “fair.”

The speech serves the following goals:

1. Reinforce the idea of “Western Azerbaijan” among the Azerbaijani public, mainly those whose ancestors lived in Armenia prior to the independence of both countries, to justify invading Armenia earlier and gain support,
2. Give momentum to a new agenda in society and Azerbaijani propaganda in the world, according to which Azerbaijanis should return to their ancestral lands in Armenia proper to garner sympathy and support from the international community for Azerbaijan’s territorial claims and policies,
3. Undermine Armenia’s presence in the region,
4. Reinforce the government’s narrative of national resilience and determination in the face of historical injustices.

Aliyev speaks to the “Western Azerbaijan Community” and those who have once lived in Armenia. They are the families of those who were forced to flee their homes in Armenia during the first Nagorno-Karabakh war, especially after the Baku and Sumgayit pogroms, as the situation was tense between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Armenians of Azerbaijan were leaving their homes, too (Shahmuratian & Bonner, 1990). Azerbaijanis might have longed for their homes and wanted to return.

Once again, the Azerbaijani leader presents the same messages with slightly modified phrasings:

1. Aliyev emphasizes Azerbaijan's historical connection to "Western Azerbaijan," framing it as a core part of Azerbaijani identity. He refers to the Armenian sovereign territory as Azerbaijani.
2. He demonizes Armenia, refers to the destruction of Azerbaijani heritage by Armenia, and asserts Azerbaijan's right to return to its lands.
3. He presents Armenia as a weak country, in contrast to the strong Azerbaijan.
4. He portrays Azerbaijan as a victim of historical injustices, including deportations, ethnic cleansing, and territorial losses. Despite these challenges, he attempts to evoke Azerbaijan's resilience and determination to reclaim its lands.

Calls for organized actions to change the perception of history, victimizing Azerbaijan and demonizing Armenia at the international level. He highlights the development of a "Concept of Return" for Western Azerbaijanis and the establishment of an international agenda for raising awareness of Azerbaijan's historical claims and Armenia's "atrocities."

All of the rhetorical appeals were present in Aliyev's speech. First, he appeals to his audience's trust by referencing historical events and expressing a deep understanding of Azerbaijan's past (ethos).

However, pathos is the primary persuasion technique in this speech, more than in the case of the two previous speeches. He emphasizes the historical injustices suffered by Azerbaijanis, portraying them as victims deserving of sympathy and support. Statements like "No one can influence us," or "Our villages are being destroyed. We can't tolerate that," and many others contain pathos.

At some points, Aliyev employs an appeal to fear by highlighting the potential threats posed by Armenia and its supporters. He warns of the dangers of revanchist forces in Armenia and the need for Azerbaijan to secure its borders and protect its interests.

Aliyev brings up historical documents, maps, and events to substantiate Azerbaijan's claims to Western Azerbaijan (logos). However, he does not clarify any further and does not present weighty arguments to support his claims. All of his arguments are either consisting of misinformation or manipulation of facts. Additionally, Aliyev appeals to authoritative sources, such as international conventions and historical documents, to strengthen his arguments and lend credibility to his territorial claims. He references legal principles and diplomatic norms to justify his demands.

As for the language used in the speech, the President of Azerbaijan uses formal but rather aggressive and inflammatory language when referring to Armenians, thereby provoking anger and hate, as previously.

By referring to Armenia as Western Azerbaijan - a term circulating in the Azerbaijani discourse only starting the last decade - and saying that "Armenia was never present in this region before," he attempts to delegitimize Armenia's presence in the region. However, the latter statement is true about Azerbaijanis, which Aliyev does not mention. Before 1918, neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia did not have sovereignty. Technically, Armenia was not present in the region as an internationally recognized sovereign entity.

Aliyev claims the territory of a sovereign state by using the phrase "our lands" persistently while denying intentions to invade and says they are going to return to Armenia "peacefully." Nevertheless, the overall discourse is not peaceful, even after eliminating the main issue between the countries and satisfactory results for Azerbaijan.

There have been numerous instances of manipulation of historical facts. While speaking about Azerbaijanis who left Armenia starting in 1989, he refers to them as deported and ethnically cleansed. However, he does not mention that more Armenians were living in Azerbaijan who also fled their homes after the infamous pogroms against Armenians. Sensing the threat of an upcoming war and the growing tension between the two nations, Azerbaijanis voluntarily left Armenia, as earlier Azerbaijanis started an anti-Armenian campaign in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, Aliyev accuses Armenians of killing and torturing fleeing Azerbaijanis. In fact, Azerbaijanis left “largely without bloodshed” (Sunny, 1999).

Another significant accusation is that Armenians destroyed Azerbaijani heritage throughout Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Firstly, there was no Azerbaijani heritage in Armenia; only Persian and Turkish heritage was present from the times of the Ottoman and Iranian Empires. The mosques and other historical sites were mostly destroyed in Armenia as a result of wars or Imperial Russian and Soviet plans for city transformation. Nonetheless, the Azerbaijani mosques that were ruined because of war were repaired and reconstructed in recent years by Karabakh Armenians (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2010). Thus, these are manipulations used by the President of Azerbaijan to dehumanize Armenia and prevent a peaceful disposition toward Armenians.

It is also noteworthy that Azerbaijan’s leader mirrors common narratives about Azerbaijan that exist in Armenian reality. For example, the fact that Armenians were killed and tortured from 1988-1990 during Baku and Sumgayit programs is mirrored as Azerbaijanis being subjected to the same attitude by Armenians (however, it did not happen). The same is true for the fact that Azerbaijanis were destroying Armenian heritage in Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh, or “Azerbaijanophobia” as opposed to “Armenophobia.” Aliyev also calls Armenia a

dictatorship, as Armenians do in regard to Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, the freedom scores of both countries show the objective image - 7/100 for Azerbaijan and 55/100 for Armenia (Freedom House, 2022).

Overall, Ilham Aliyev's speech delivered in December 2022 poses the same narratives in the frames of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Aliyev reiterates the injustice to Azerbaijanis perpetrated by Armenians and by the Soviet state in history. Azerbaijan, he said, is a "victim of occupation," and Azerbaijanis have borne the burden of Armenian "atrocities," both physical and cultural. By portraying Azerbaijan as the ill-treated one, he legitimizes current aggressions, and claims the moral high ground for Azerbaijan in its struggle against Armenia.

In contrast, Aliyev portrays Armenia as the aggressor, occupier, and perpetrator of crimes against Azerbaijan. By demonizing Armenia, he hopes to obtain sympathy for Azerbaijan's cause and delegitimize Armenia's moves on the international front and, in general, its presence in the region.

He seeks to unite Azerbaijanis under the banner of nationalism and historical identity by appealing to the cultural heritage of the Azeris. He also presents Armenia as an instrument of outside forces and a relatively weaker state than Azerbaijan. Aliyev wants to rally nationalistic emotions and prompt a call to return Azerbaijanis to their "native lands."

Aliyev claims that its legal and territorial claims over Western Azerbaijan coincide with international law—and the historical justice principle of it, arguing that the matter is of a historical justice and an international law. His use of the term "Western Azerbaijan" only helps to drive an even deeper wedge between the two countries.

In summary, Aliyev is using these secondary weaponized narratives to control the perception of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, which aims to reinforce Azerbaijan's stand in this conflict, and garner support for Azerbaijan's territorial claims and policies.

II. Armenian Narratives

Kocharyan, 2004

The first Armenian discourse concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the narratives around it is the 2004 speech by the second President of Armenia and the first President of Nagorno-Karabakh, Robert Kocharyan, at the Parliamentary Assembly Of The Council Of Europe (Kocharyan, 2004).

To understand and study Kocharyan's speech at PACE in full depth, it is necessary to refer to some of the events that preceded the speech. In 2003 and 2004, mass protests took place against rigged 2003 presidential elections, where the opposition demanded the resignation of the functioning President Robert Kocharyan. The government took harsh measures to disperse the peaceful protesters, which caused concern among the international community. The protection of human rights and democratic freedoms in the country was at a low level (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Armenia was going toward authoritarianism (Petrosyan, 2010).

In the negotiations between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, mediators introduced four plans in 1997, 1998, and 2001. The first two viewed Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan but with autonomous governance. The third, the "Common State" plan, introduced a confederative solution, where Karabakh and Azerbaijan would act as equal entities within a confederation of Azerbaijan. The last plan, the Key West proposal, gave Nagorno-Karabakh a sovereign status in exchange for an unobstructed passage in the territory of Armenia for

Azerbaijan, connecting it to Nakhchivan and Turkey. For Armenia, the autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh within the state of Azerbaijan was unacceptable. For Azerbaijan, the equal status of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan as a sovereign state was equally unacceptable (Harutyunyan, 2021).

With this speech, Kocharyan aimed to:

1. Persuade the Council of Europe that Armenia is improving the level of democracy,
2. Show that he is working toward developing Armenia, and his government has taken the path of reforms toward a better Armenia, both politically and economically,
3. Justify his actions on human rights violations and democratic shortcomings within Armenia,
4. State Armenia's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, based on the principles of peace and cooperation, seeking to garner support and understanding on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenia's integration into European institutions,
5. Explain Armenia's stance on regional issues, such as relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, as a responsible actor seeking peace and stability in the region, aiming to reshape international perceptions of Armenia and Kocharyan's government.

The primary audience for this speech was the Council of Europe and its member states, including Azerbaijan and Turkey. The latter did not have any democratic relations with Armenia due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and genocide accusations. Azerbaijan had been demanding the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Nagorno-Karabakh and the return of the occupied territories, showing no progress in negotiations with Armenia at all (Harutyunyan, 2021).

On the other hand, the Council expressed disappointment in Armenia's progress and carrying out post-accession obligations, especially regarding the government repression against opposition supporters in April 2004 (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

The principal ideas conveyed in this speech encompass the following:

1. Armenia has taken a path toward democracy and growth, emphasizing Armenia's commitment to fulfilling its obligations as a member of the Council of Europe and its efforts to improve the lives of its citizens,
2. Kocharyan's policies are contributing to building a democracy,
3. Criticizing opposition for organizing a revolution, calling them "political extremists," in response to the Council of Europe's concerns,
4. Nagorno-Karabakh is a legitimate independent state which belongs to Karabakh Armenians, and they fought for their right to self-determination,
5. Azerbaijan is an aggressor and misuses the right of territorial integrity, as it has no place in this context,
6. Armenia has a constructive approach to the issue and believes in peaceful resolution, cooperation, and regional stability, while Azerbaijan does not,
7. Armenia is willing to engage in regional dialogue and cooperation,
8. Turkey and Azerbaijan keep Armenia under the blockade, isolating the country from regional international projects.

Kocharyan starts his speech by establishing credibility in front of the Council of Europe. He presents facts about his government style and leadership, recites his policies toward building a democracy and economic stability, presents the achievements, and acknowledges the areas of further development.

Afterwards, he criticizes the opposition for the uprising, stating that they had no valid reasons. He calls them “political extremists” and “populists,” once again stating his accomplishments and progress due to his competent leadership. He also seeks to gain the trust of his audience by reaffirming Armenia’s adherence to international obligations and its pursuit of peaceful solutions to conflicts.

To indicate positive change, Armenia’s leader supports his arguments with numbers and statistics regarding the economic situation and lists the steps that have been taken to put Armenia on the path of development despite international reports saying otherwise.

Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, President Kocharyan uses several appeals to reasoning. He provides historical context to justify Armenia’s position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, referencing the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent states, including the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, thereby asserting the legitimacy of Nagorno-Karabakh’s claims to self-determination. The latter is also presented to support Nagorno Karabakh’s quest for independence, as stated in international law.

He also argues that Nagorno Karabakh has never been a part of independent Azerbaijan from a legal standpoint. He refers to the formation of both the Azerbaijani Republic and the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh at the collapse of the Soviet Union as having similar legal grounds, thereby implying that Nagorno Karabakh’s territorial integrity is distinct from that of Azerbaijan. By doing so, he denies one of the main narratives promoted by Azerbaijan. However, he does not provide sufficient logical reasoning for this argument. He distorts historical facts - Nagorno-Karabakh existed in the Soviet Azerbaijan Republic as an autonomous region - part of Azerbaijan during Soviet times.

The Armenian President presents a narrative of aggression by Azerbaijani authorities during the 1992-94 war, accusing them of attempting ethnic cleansing and annexation of Nagorno Karabakh territory. By framing Azerbaijan as the aggressor, he justifies Armenia's intervention and support for Nagorno Karabakh's independence.

Pathos makes up the lowest proportion of Kocharyan's speech. He only uses this technique a handful of times when he portrays the conflict as a struggle for survival and self-preservation by the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, arguing that their fight for independence is rooted in their right to live safely and determine their future. He tries to justify the assertiveness of the Armenian side regarding preserving the independent status of Nagorno-Karabakh by stating that "an entire generation grew up there that can think of no other status for the country."

Along with the distortion of facts mentioned earlier, the President of Armenia also uses manipulation in his speech. Kocharyan presents a selective historical narrative that portrays Armenia as the victim and Azerbaijan as the aggressor in the conflict. Although he emphasizes aggression and ethnic cleansing by Azerbaijani authorities, he fails to mention key events and context in the historical background, including the original conflict over the territory and the role of Armenian forces in the region.

Kocharyan makes excuses for Armenia's participation in the conflict and Armenia's support for Nagorno-Karabakh's independence while avoiding recognition of the fact that Armenian military forces occupied a significant part of Azerbaijani territory beyond the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh itself. He is also mistaken about the mediation process.

Although he asserts that Armenia has agreed to the previous two proposals, he conveniently omits Armenia's rejection or reluctance to implement certain proposals (Harutyunyan, 2021). The first two plans of the resolution pushed by Azerbaijan were not

accepted by Armenia, which rejected the principle of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan due to the lack of trust and security guarantees for Nagorno-Karabakh.

Within his narrative, Kocharyan ignores its own role in delaying the resolution while presenting Armenia as more cooperative and peace-seeking.

The President speaks in a formal, professional, and diplomatic register when addressing the international community. His tone is mostly subdued and assured, as he balances a need to communicate gravitas and authority. When the conversation turns to controversial issues, like the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, his words swing to be more emotional and impassioned, especially when listing Armenia's grievances or explaining its actions. Overall, his tone is calm and diplomatic.

A rhetorical analysis of Kocharyan's speech reveals the use of two of the most visible weaponized narratives. The first spreads the narrative of Armenia as the righteous defender of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, who are victims of this conflict. The approach of painting the rivalry in the context of the survival and the right to self-determination of the Armenian people, countering the aggression by the Azerbaijanis, serves to strengthen the victimization narrative. It's this narrative that is used to justify Nagorno-Karabakh's independence and to legitimize Armenia's military intervention and support of it. He resorts to manipulation to try to delegitimize Azerbaijan's territorial claims, distorts historical facts, and aims to discredit the Azerbaijani narrative of territorial integrity. He presents Armenia as peace-seeking, constructive and cooperative, yet expects the opposite for Azerbaijan.

Another narrative is the Azerbaijani aggression against Armenians. Kocharyan blames them for ethnic cleansing and annexation of Nagorno Karabakh territory in the 1990s. He presents Armenia as standing up for its people against existential dangers. Additionally,

Kocharyan ensures the audience that Turkey and Azerbaijan keep Armenia under blockade and that Azerbaijan tries to resolve the conflict with its growing economic influence thanks to “oil money.” Again, this narrative attempts to undermine Azerbaijan’s position in the conflict resolution.

In conclusion, the narratives mentioned above support one another to shape perceptions and mobilize support for Armenia’s stance on the conflict, intervention, and remaining troops in the occupied territory around Nagorno-Karabakh and delegitimize Azerbaijan’s actions, narratives, and claims.

Sargsyan, 2012

The second analysis material is Serzh Sargsyan’s Congratulatory Address on the Independence Day of Nagorno-Karabakh, made on September 3, 2012 (Sargsyan, 2012).

The third President of Armenia made this address after Ilham Aliyev had pardoned and glorified an Azerbaijani axe murderer who had killed an Armenian soldier (Amnesty International USA, 2012). In 2004, Ramil Safarov, an Azerbaijani officer who attended a NATO Partnership for Peace course in Budapest, hacked another Armenian participant to death while he was asleep at night (BBC News, 2012). While Safarov admitted his crime and served eight years in a Hungarian prison, he was transferred to Azerbaijan to serve the rest of his sentence. Instead, he was promoted and awarded by the Azerbaijani authorities, suggesting that the murder was “a state-sponsored hate crime,” as stated by Amnesty International (2012).

The purpose of Sargsyan’s statement is as follows:

1. To commemorate the Independence Day of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, as he acknowledges Artsakh citizens’ resilience, sacrifices, and achievements in establishing and maintaining their independence,

2. To assert Nagorno Karabakh's independence and legitimacy as a sovereign state,
3. To justify Armenia's support for Nagorno Karabakh's independence as a response to perceived threats and injustices,
4. To assure Armenians of their military strength and resilience against another war,
5. To condemn Azerbaijan for leaving the murderer of an Armenian soldier unpunished,
6. To mobilize support for Nagorno Karabakh's independence and solidarity with the Armenian cause, framing it as a symbol of Armenian pride and resilience.

The addressees of these messages are Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. The primary audience is citizens of Armenia, but also Azerbaijani authorities, as he refers to them multiple times in the text.

The recurrent border clashes since 2008, Aliyev's aggressive rhetoric, deadlocked negotiations, and recent glorification of an anti-Armenian hate crime had created a threat of a possible war and raised tensions in Armenian society. At least 31 Armenian soldiers had been killed at the Nagorno-Karabakh-Azerbaijan line of contact as a result of Azerbaijani shootings (International Crisis Group, 2011). Thus, the public sentiments were tense regarding the conflict.

As for the secondary audience, the Azerbaijani authorities, they had been propagating hate toward Armenians and gradually preparing the Azerbaijani society for a large-scale war, as seen in the analysis of Aliyev's 2012 speech.

Through his address, the President conveys the following messages to the audiences as mentioned above:

1. Nagorno-Karabakh is the ancestral land of Armenians, subjected to Azerbaijani aggression in the 1990s,

2. Nagorno Karabakh is an accomplished independent state, recovering from the devastation of the war and showcasing its determination and strength,
3. Azerbaijani authorities attempted ethnic cleansing in the 1990s, and this threat continues, particularly in light of recent events,
4. Armenians are stronger and more resilient than Azerbaijan, prepared to defend their land and people if necessary. He reassures that any new attempts at aggression will fail just as previous ones did,
5. The release of an Azerbaijani officer who murdered an Armenian is a “morbid episode,” an example of Azerbaijan’s hostility and moral corruption,
6. No one with a sane mind will think that Armenians can co-exist peacefully next to Azerbaijanis because they would be exposed to hatred and ethnically motivated violence, as they have been in the case of the killed Armenian soldier in Budapest,
7. It is “a disgrace” for international justice, mainly European countries, for not reacting appropriately,
8. Nagorno-Karabakh’s independence is a matter of national dignity and pride.

Regarding rhetorical appeals, most of Sargsyan’s addresses are based on pathos; however, there are also instances of logos and ethos.

By condemning Azerbaijan’s actions, particularly the release and glorification of Ramil Safarov, he appeals to a sense of justice and moral righteousness, enhancing his ethical appeal.

He attempts to justify the decision of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to seek independence, presenting a logical argument based on historical events, such as Azerbaijani aggression and attempts at ethnic cleansing. Additionally, Sargsyan portrays Safarov’s crime as

proof of “what was in store for the people of Artsakh,” thereby legitimizing the secession of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan.

In the case of pathos, Sargsyan builds his appeals around the victimhood of the Artsakh people and the aggression of the Azerbaijani side. He describes the devastation caused by the war and the subsequent efforts of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to rebuild their lives. “You have been healing the wounds inflicted by the war unleashed by the short-sighted authorities of Azerbaijan,” he addresses the Artsakh people. This emotional appeal shows his empathy and support for their cause.

The President instills a sense of threat by recounting past and ongoing aggressions while fostering defiance and resilience. This dual emotional appeal seeks to gather his audience around a common cause and prepare them for potential future conflicts. He uses phrases like “Armenians must not be underestimated,” “We are not afraid of murderers,” and “We know how to send them [invaders] right where they belong - to the cesspit of history.”

Lastly, Sargsyan taps into national pride by celebrating the accomplishments and dignity of the Armenian people, fostering a sense of unity and collective identity. In particular, he states that Nagorno-Karabakh is the “embodiment of Armenian dignity” or that its Independence Day is a “great day” and “glorious holiday.”

The address is in the formal genre, but the language is quite emotional and evocative for the formal settings, evident in phrases such as “villages and towns devastated by the deadly bombs.”

Sargsyan also uses defiant, assertive, and inflammatory language, with an accusatory and critical tone, reflecting a solid stance against perceived threats. Offensive language like

“maniacs, sadists and murderers,” or “invaders and brigands” is used to describe Azerbaijanis, intended to evoke anger and a sense of injustice.

Statements like “if we have to, we will fight and win” or “they [Azerbaijani authorities] have been warned” underscore a message of resilience and readiness to defend their territory.

Sargsyan uses the combination of these kinds of language and tone to promote the narrative of victimhood, legitimize secession, evoke a sense of justice and pride, and prepare the audience for ongoing and future challenges.

Moreover, some elements in his statement can be seen as distortions of historical facts and manipulations, reinforcing his messages. Firstly, Sargsyan frames the conflict in terms of Armenian victimhood and Azerbaijani aggression. As in the case of Kocharyan’s address, the narrative omits the complexities and mutual hostilities. By simplifying history to one-sided aggression, he strengthens the justification for Nagorno-Karabakh’s independence and Armenia’s support.

Another instance is the claim that Azerbaijan’s goal was to “wipe the Armenians out from the territory of Artsakh.” While ethnic violence and displacement actually occurred, this statement frames the conflict in absolute terms that do not fully capture the multifaceted nature of the conflict, including actions by both sides.

The President of Armenia highlights Ramil Safarov’s release, using it to paint Azerbaijan as morally corrupt and inherently hostile. He uses this incident to justify the continued separation between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. The emotional impact of this example is strong, but it simplifies broader geopolitical and legal contexts.

Furthermore, by focusing on specific incidents and using them to generalize Azerbaijani intentions and behaviors, Sargsyan creates an image of Azerbaijan as an enduring threat. This tactic encourages fear and hatred toward Azerbaijanis as a whole.

As for depicting Nagorno-Karabakh positively, Sargsyan asserts that Nagorno-Karabakh is a “democratic and developing” state. This statement minimizes the challenges and limitations, including issues related to international recognition, economic hardships, and political stability. This positive portrayal supports the legitimacy of Nagorno-Karabakh’s claim to independence.

Ultimately, the weaponized narratives and their motives in Serzh Sargyan’s address resemble the ones discussed in the previous analysis. Sargsyan portrays the people of Nagorno-Karabakh as victims of aggression and persecution by Azerbaijan. This victimhood narrative serves to legitimize Nagorno Karabakh’s independence while demonizing Azerbaijan as the aggressor.

The opponent’s demonization aims to mobilize support for Nagorno Karabakh’s cause and justify Armenia’s readiness to fight against perceived threats while also not compromising the status of independence during negotiations.

In addition, his defiant rhetoric serves to assert Armenians’ military strength and resilience and depict Azerbaijan as inferior while warning them of the consequences of their actions. In the same context of nationalistic rhetoric, he frames Nagorno Karabakh’s independence as a symbol of Armenian pride and resilience, making it unnegotiable and uncompromisable for Armenians.

Through strategic framing and rhetorical devices, Sargsyan seeks to shape perceptions and evoke emotions so that they widen the gap between the two nations and mentally prepare Armenians for the possible war.

Pashinyan, 2019

The last significant statement from the Armenian side necessary to analyze is Nikol Pashinyan's speech at the opening of the 7th Pan-Armenian Summer Games in Stepanakert, Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, on August 5, 2019 (Pashinyan, 2019).

Prior to this address, there had been significant changes in Armenia's internal political life. A revolution took place in the spring of 2018, bringing Nikol Pashinyan to power, who restarted the negotiations from his "own point" (Pashinyan, 2019). These changes started a renewed effort to seek compromise from both sides and seemed promising in reaching a peaceful resolution (International Crisis Group, 2019). Due to the renewed talks and agreements between the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Azerbaijan, the tension in the border significantly decreased in 2018 and 2019, with 23 recorded casualties in two years (Armenpress, 2019).

However, with this address, Pashinyan toughened his rhetoric, which got a harsh response from the President of Azerbaijan in October 2019. To the scandalous statement of Pashinyan, "Artsakh is Armenia, and that's it," Aliyev responded, "Karabakh is Azerbaijan, and exclamation mark!" (Aliyev, 2019). This renewed negotiation tensions between the two countries, destabilizing the region.

Pashinyan's address had the following goals:

1. Reaffirm Armenian claims of Nagorno-Karabakh and its sovereignty by stating "Artsakh is Armenia," thereby challenging Azerbaijani claims,
2. Reinforce the legitimacy of the Armenian position in the conflict by commemorating the fight for Nagorno-Karabakh and its "liberation" and strengthening the narrative that their sacrifices were for a just and enduring cause,

3. Portray the Nagorno-Karabakh war and its results as a turning point and awakening for Armenians, presenting the revolution as a continuation of the process,
4. Reaffirm the essence of the 2018 revolution, defend democratic values, and position Armenia as a morally superior and ethical actor in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, thereby garnering international sympathy,
5. Call for all-national consolidation around the revolutionary values, national unity, and development of Armenia and Artsakh, mobilizing support in the face of ongoing challenges and threats related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,
6. Call for unity to maintain a high level of engagement and backing for the Armenian cause in Nagorno-Karabakh,
7. Present the objectives of future development, including military development, to consolidate political support and portray his leadership as essential to the future of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

Among the audience of Pashinyan's speech are the authorities and citizens of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian investors, and diaspora Armenians overall. The audience had a positive predisposition toward Pashinyan's address, full of hope for a better future and a favorable resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict following the aforementioned political events.

There are several critical messages incorporated in the Prime Minister's speech:

1. Artsakh's liberation was a turning point for Armenians,
2. The revolution united Armenians around the Armenian agenda,
3. Armenians from Armenia, Artsakh, and the Diaspora should unite around one common goal - developing Armenia and Artsakh,

4. Armenians worldwide must realize their potential and work for the future of Armenia, for the collective national interests, which suggests the idea of pan-Armenianism,
 5. Artsakh is an integral part of Armenia and a symbol of national reawakening and liberation,
 6. Armenia and Artsakh are the homeland of all Armenian people in the world,
 7. There is a need for continued investments and repatriation to foster economic development and military strength, which is crucial for the defense and stability of Nagorno-Karabakh,
 8. Pashinyan's government will negotiate to fix the outcomes of the war, meaning to recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh,
 9. Any solution to the conflict must be approved by the people of both Armenia and Artsakh,
 10. Peaceful resolution is fundamentally important for Pashinyan's government; however, increasing the military force of Armenia and Artsakh to ensure their security is a priority.
- Pashinyan's address predominantly includes persuasion techniques of ethos and pathos, with a few instances of logical arguments and reasoning.

By reminding the audience of the “non-violent, velvet, popular” revolution he led, its underlying motivations to unite Armenians, and its commitment to democratic values, Pashinyan positions himself as a morally sound and ethical leader.

He also aligns himself with the legacy of freedom fighters, enhancing his credibility as a defender of Armenian interests. Moreover, he attempts to raise his credibility by presenting key objectives and milestones for Armenia's development.

The Prime Minister's references to the historical context of the Artsakh conflict and the sacrifices made by Armenians provide a logical framework for his assertions of sovereignty and the need to continue to support Nagorno-Karabakh independence. Another logical argument he makes is referring to international law when stating that Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh have fought for their right to "self-determination and security."

Pathos is relatively consistent in Pashinyan's speech. He attempts to evoke a sense of pride, patriotism, and loss with his statements. By honoring the memory of "martyrs with selfless dedication" and evoking these emotions, he aims to keep the spirit of resistance and commitment to the Armenian claims alive.

Moreover, by calling for unity among Armenians worldwide, he appeals to a national identity and collective purpose meant to strengthen the determination and support for Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia's leader creates a sense of urgency and danger by emphasizing the need for economic and military strength to defend Nagorno-Karabakh, attempting to arouse action and support.

Pashinyan also tries to lift the spirit of Armenians and depict Armenians as powerful and resilient by stating that "Armenians can manage the impossible" or that "the Armenian nation is back, and we must win." These statements are aimed at preparing Armenians for the upcoming escalations and inspire a continued commitment to the independent status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The language with which Pashinyan addresses Armenians is formal yet evocative. He keeps a balance in his choice of words between an official political discourse and an emotional connection with the Armenian public. His speech is rich in emotional and patriotic language, invoking a sense of pride, excitement, and duty among Armenians, as in the following sentence -

“being Armenian should be interesting; being Armenian should be attractive; being Armenian should be promising.” In this regard, he also refers to the audience as “proud citizens of the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh.”

In contrast, his tone becomes assertive when discussing the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and the need for national defense and solidarity. At times, it also reflects urgency, displaying the immediate challenges and the need for prompt action. Commands such as “We must be united” convey the latter.

Certain attempts at manipulation can be detected in some of Pashinyan’s messages. Firstly, he draws attention to the bravery and sacrifices of Armenian soldiers to inspire patriotism and solidarity. However, he skips the discussions about the broader geopolitical context, such as secession from Azerbaijan.

Moreover, framing their sacrifices as the foundation upon which current and future positions and aspirations are built weaponizes the notion of sacrifice, implying that any deviation from the struggle for Artsakh’s sovereignty would dishonor these sacrifices.

The same is implied by portraying Artsakh’s aspirations for independence as a matter of national dignity and from the perspective of preserving the national identity. Pashinyan tries to create inseparable associations, making Artsakh identical to Armenia in the minds of Armenians.

Lastly, by invoking the slogan “Reunification” from 1988, the Prime Minister positions Armenians’ control over Nagorno-Karabakh as a continuation of historical justice and self-determination efforts, which undermines Azerbaijani claims and narratives.

To sum up, the rhetorical analysis of Nikol Pashinyan’s speech brought to light slightly different narratives from the ones of the previous Armenian leaders.

Pashinyan's weaponized narratives revolve around the claims that Artsakh is inseparable from Armenia, identical to Armenia, and its independence is a matter of national dignity and identity - unnegotiable and uncompromisable. In addition, stating that Nagorno-Karabakh has been liberated for the sake of its security and historical justice implies Karabakh's victimhood and Azerbaijan's violent attitude.

These narratives serve to invoke determination in demanding Nagorno-Karabakh's recognition as an independent state, legitimize and mobilize unconditional support of Armenia's control over Nagorno-Karabakh, and eventually prepare for physically defending Nagorno-Karabakh's sovereign status.

Conclusion

The analysis of the weaponized narratives employed by Armenia and Azerbaijan from 2004 to 2022 reveals distinct but overlapping narratives designed to mobilize domestic and international support, legitimize territorial claims, and delegitimize the opponent.

Azerbaijani state-imposed narratives are coherent and consistent in all three speeches. Themes of territorial integrity and historical justice prevail in the Azerbaijani narratives. Ilham Aliyev stresses that Nagorno-Karabakh is historically and legally part of Azerbaijan. This narrative counters Armenian claims of independence and frames Armenia as an occupier.

Similar to the Armenian strategy, Azerbaijan portrays itself as the victim of Armenian aggression and ethnic cleansing. It tries to justify Azerbaijani plans of attack and aims to rally both domestic and international support for their efforts to reclaim the territory. Azerbaijan promotes its narratives with significantly more assertive and aggressive wording, especially when attempting to demonize Armenia and Armenians, by using inflammatory words to provoke anger and hate.

Azerbaijan also highlights its economic development and military capabilities, often attributing its growing influence to oil revenues. The narrative of positioning Azerbaijan as a powerful and capable actor attempts to inspire confidence among Azerbaijani citizens that attacking will end in victory, unlike in the 1990s.

Both parties engage in historical revisionism, but Aliyev mainly focuses on delegitimizing Armenian historical narratives by emphasizing the legality and historical continuity of Azerbaijani claims over Nagorno-Karabakh.

In contrast, Armenian narratives predominantly frame the conflict in terms of historical victimhood and existential defense. Armenian leaders Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan depict Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh as victims of Azerbaijani aggression and ethnic cleansing. Moreover, by highlighting Azerbaijani actions, such as the glorification of Ramil Safarov, a murderer of an Armenian soldier in sleep, Armenia depicts Azerbaijan as morally corrupt and inherently hostile. This portrayal justifies Armenia's claims to Artsakh's independence and the need for Armenia's military support.

The assertion of Nagorno-Karabakh's independence is a recurring theme. Armenian leaders present Nagorno-Karabakh as a developing and democratic state deserving of international recognition despite complexities in international law and negotiations.

Nikol Pashinyan, on the other hand, takes these narratives to the next level by claiming that "Artsakh is Armenia." More intensely than the previous leaders, he connects the status of independence with national pride and resilience, framing the conflict as a continuation of historical national struggles and sacrifices. The goal is to unify the Armenian people and prepare them for potential future conflicts. Nonetheless, Armenian narratives should be viewed from the

perspective of defending Nagorno-Karabakh's sovereignty and maintaining Armenia's control of it.

In terms of similarities, both countries use these narratives to rally their audiences, strengthen unity, and justify ongoing or future military actions. Additionally, both seek to gain international support and recognition for their respective positions by portraying themselves as rightful and moral actors while depicting the other as illegitimate and aggressive.

However, there are significant differences, too. First of all, Armenia's primary narrative revolves around the independence and self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh, whereas Azerbaijan focuses on the territorial integrity and unity of the region with Azerbaijan.

Armenia tends to depict Azerbaijan as an aggressor and morally corrupt, often using specific incidents like the Safarov case to underline this point. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, frames Armenia as an occupier and a violator of international law.

Finally, Azerbaijan leverages its economic development as part of its narrative strategy, which is less prominent in the Armenian narrative and instead focuses on historical and moral claims.

The weaponized narratives explored in this analysis not only reflect the deep-seated grievances and aspirations of both sides but also shape the political and social dynamics that drive the conflict forward. Eventually, they are meant to break the spirit and will to fight in the opponent's mentality.

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