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Department of International Relations

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**Ondřej Kopečný**

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**Warfare and Institutional Communication on Social Media in  
2020 Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict**

Master's thesis



By: Ondřej Kopečný

Study program: International Relations

Supervisor: Mgr et. Mgr Jan Ludvík, Ph.D.

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### **Declaration of Authorship**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.

2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.

I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Conflict Reignited

The reignition of war in Nagorno Karabakh on 27 September 2020 came as a surprise mainly due to its scale. The frozen conflict, which was established since 5 May 1994 in borders delineated by provisional ceasefire formalized by the Bishkek Protocol, (Kofman 2020) erupted into full-scale war between Azerbaijan and self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh after over 24 years of low intensity violent frictions between the two parties.

Nevertheless, the roots of the conflict over a region, that is de jure integral part of Azerbaijan, but de facto controlled by Republic of Artsakh has deep roots. Nagorno Karabakh until this day hold prominent position in both Armenian and Azeri national historiographies and is central to both countries' modern identities. (Geukjian 2012, Cornell 1999)

The 2020 war, which officially terminated on 10 November by ceasefire agreement, redrew the borders of this conflict. Republic of Artsakh, supported by Armenia had to leave districts it occupied outside of Nagorno Karabakh district, which formed a buffer zone around the unrecognized state supported by Armenia, and brought about a Russian peacekeeping mission to the area. ([RIA Novosti 2020](#))

Analysts concur, that conflict was accompanied by massive social media propaganda and disinformation campaigns by both sides, suggesting coordination of internet activists, as well as surge in fake accounts supporting mainly Azerbaijani point of view. ([BBC 2020](#)) At the same time, we could see concerted efforts by state agencies of both belligerents to be attempting to influence the narrative, especially in the digital realms. Probably most visible were media activities by Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense, which produced numerous high-quality videos, mainly showing Azeri military successes through elimination of Artsakh Armenian fighters. At the same time, this narrative-altering effort was not limited to one agency. (Mirovalev 2020)

Due to limitations on foreign journalists access to the areas of fighting, it was fairly difficult for media to establish an unaltered and unbiased image of the wars course. (Kofman 2020) This would only exacerbate the reliance of foreign newspaper on social media content and narrating by official institutions. A substantive part in presenting the conflict to international

audience on the official level was taken on by Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministries of Defense (MOD) of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

## **1.2 Research Aims**

The thesis aims to explore, describe and compare communication via Facebook posts by MFAs and MODs of Armenia and Azerbaijan in relation to Nagorno Karabakh conflict in form of two case comparative study. It attempts to identify the key narratives and online communication practices, which the MFAs used in a period prior to the war and after the war's beginning, since MFAs are seen as a vehicle of outwards communication of a narrative for purposes of this thesis. At the same time it attempts to establish which researched of the communication channels seem to have larger impact in comparative perspective based on a data set acquired via Crowdtangle, an application for content data mining for and by Facebook.

Since perception of one's history is a focal point, through which he sees the present, this historical experience reflects on the way one engages in public discourse. This thesis therefore first aims at exploring the roots of Nagorno Karabakh conflict which is necessary to identify possible key narratives both parties use to justify their position and actions. Upon the historiographic analysis, it proceeds to analyze communication of MFA of Armenia and MFA of Azerbaijan on Facebook itself.

MFAs are seen as a centerpiece to Public Digital Diplomacy (Tuch 1990) efforts coordination of any state, I will therefore conceptualize the researched communication on Facebook in this context. (Manor 2019) At the same time, MFAs tend to be crucial in framing the conflict, creating positive outlook for the audience by making sense of the chaotic reality by often invoking the past. (Manor, Criley 2018) I will provide both quantitative, and qualitative overview of both parties' communication, which I will further analyze and compare with each other, trying to trace the historical narratives previously researched. To do this, the thesis sets a timeframe of 100 days – 50 days before the start of war and 50 after its beginning, to be able to compare respective parties' Facebook activity prior and during the war.

I will therefore explore, how can Facebook of MFAs and MODs might prove to be a useful tool for narrative creation and control, morale boost and public engagement during wartime, in relation to the practice of public diplomacy. I see immersion in institutional wartime communication on social media as a crucial and as often overlooked topic, given the

prominence of hybrid actuation as part of modern warfare, especially in times, when more people rely on social media as their main information source.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.2 A Comparative Case Study

According to Juliet Kaarbo (1999), the term case and other terms linked to the idea of case analysis are not properly defined in social science, despite their frequent usage. Case can be a single instance or data point, an individual survey respondent, or the event of presidential election. It can be also a unique phenomenon bound to time or geographic reality. The word “case” can have multiple meanings, which are determined by contextual implication connected to the respective empirical investigation. (Kaarbo 1999: 372)

Case study method has multiplicity of understanding. It can be defined as *“an in-depth multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon.”* (Orum 1991: 2) In contrast to Lijphart, case study was a single case that is closely associated to the comparative method, as in opposition to experimental and statistical method. (Lijphart 1971). The method of comparative study, on the other hand, has quite clear delineation. Comparative study is definable as *“the systematic comparison of two or more data points”*. (Kaarbo 1999: 372) Comparative case study, in effect, is the *“systemic comparison of two or more data points “cases” obtained through use of the case study method.”* (Kaarbo 1999: 372)

In cases studies, cases can be handled for variety of purposes. It is possible to employ theory as a mean explore cases, or on the opposite cases can be used to develop a new theory. It is also not uncommon to use cases to explore and refine existing theories. Cases. (Kaarbo 1999: 373-375, Baxter 2008)

Case study often uses multiple techniques to gather information, such as interviews, surveys or content analysis. It is however not necessary to use multiple sources or gather more types of evidence to conduct a case study. Case studies take form of a qualitative excursion with narrative characteristics, as well as they can be strictly quantitative and analytical. Important characteristic is, that the studied subject is examined within its natural context, while the

researcher should not directly manipulate neither the phenomenon, nor the context. (Kaarbo 1999: 373, Baxter 2008: 545)

At this point it is clear, that case study method is a relatively open discipline, with virtually zero specific requirements, as opposed to quantitative methods or grounded theories. Case studies however demand the more careful handling of choices, such as the one of cases themselves, data collection and research design, to be able to produce a contributive study. (Meyer 2001: 329)

## **2.2 Method, Research Design and Research Questions**

For purposes of this thesis, I have selected a method of a descriptive two-case study with several comparative elements. A descriptive case study, sometimes called atheoretical (Lijphart 1971) is a method, in which the analyst attempts to provide a holistic picture of the selected phenomena. According to Kaarbo (1999: 373), such method requires few points of reference, which can be interpreted as a theory, however the study does not concern itself with the theory primarily. The case is meant to be researched for its own sake, or rather for better understanding of the subject matter.

Nevertheless, in order to explain the recurring narratives, which would fuel the war, as well as to understand the casus belli, a historical review providing context, as well as legal analysis of the conflict, had to be conducted.

To approach the subject in a manner, that would allow me to make a comparison, I have chosen a timeframe of 100 days, between 8 August 2020 and 16 November 2020. This timeline was selected in reference to beginning of hostilities in Nagorno Karabakh on 27 September 2020 – the period therefore covers two sub-periods of 50 days before and 50 days after beginning of the war.

For the examined period, I have created a data set consisting of all Facebook posts of MFAs and MODs of Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the first instance, I have created two datasets – one individual for the MFAs, and then one extracted via Crowdtangle, which had to be cleaned and ordered and which includes a range of data unrelated directly to my research, which might however come handy to future researches. In total, 542 Facebook posts are taken into account for MFAs, out of which 381 directly relate to the conflict by mention in the post's text. Since



this thesis focuses on use of public diplomacy during wartime, I had to examine the whole of posts individually, and extract those, which were related to the war by directly mentioning the conflict in the post. Furthermore, I have created a content review of Facebook posts related to war, which I deemed as significant for researching the narratives used by MFAs of both belligerents, and to subject them to comparative qualitative analysis. In order to be able to assess the Facebook communication by MODs and MFAs in comparative perspective on a large scale, I worked with a data set of total of 1436 posts in the examined period.

This would allow me to answer the following research questions, which I find crucial to highlight both mechanisms of state communication towards the audience and their motivation, as well to establish clearer image of possible qualitative differences across the institutions and in between the institutional communications. Answers to these will not only bring about better understanding of what makes success on social media platforms, but can also serve as lessons learned for anyone, who might want to engage in online institutional communication on social media, as well as in communications towards audiences invested in the complicated relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan:

**RQ1: How does the FB communication of AZE and ARM MFAs and MODs compare in the examined period between the countries, but also in within the countries?**

While it was already established, that MFAs can be crucial in framing the conflict (Manor, Criley 2018) by spreading the narrative via content, it is also important to look out for the mass scale of communication. It is not enough to reveal the goal the institution aims to achieve by identifying the theme of communication on qualitative term, we also need to pay attention to more general properties of communication on social media. That is to measure how successful an institution can be in disseminating the message, whatever the message might be, by generating views, reads and interactions. Looking up from the content, I will therefore investigate the issue of the efficiency of the vehicle of communication itself, how it differs between the countries, but also how the two examined institutions compare in within the respective states.

**RQ2: How did commencement of war reflect on use of Facebook in case of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, as in comparison to pre-war period?**

Accordingly, the thesis analyzes the differences between pre-war and in-war posting by the examined subjects in qualitative manner. Nonetheless, to thoroughly examine the possible discrepancies, a quantitative element is introduced, which provides a comprehensive overview of posting-sum over the 100 days period. This approach allows for further comparison of communication strategy, as it appears to differ in between the pre-war and in-war sub-periods.

**RQ3: How did the conflict-related communication on Facebook differ between Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs content-wise?**

By examining the empirical evidence accumulated and formulated throughout the content extracted from selected Facebook posts, it will be possible to establish a wholesome picture of each of the cases. These are subsequently put into comparative perspective, in order to highlight differences and similarities in approaches and contents of communication by both ministries.

**RQ4: What are the causes of Nagorno Karabakh conflict, and how do they reflect on the narratives disseminated by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia?**

By mapping the evolution of Nagorno Karabakh conflict and its legal aspects, the thesis attempts to uncover its roots, their relation to identity and symbolism. Furthermore, a review of the conflict causes in the light of contents extracted from Facebook posts by both ministries allows for tracing and identification of their reflection in contemporary narratives.

For the purpose of this thesis, I associate the narrative-controlling efforts of the two MFAs with the process of conducting public digital diplomacy. Since public diplomacy is an effort to influence public opinion in favor in favor of the respective state, aiming to enhance chances to achieve a desirable policy outcome (Nye 2008, Gilboa 2008) and a governments process of communication with foreign publics to ensure understanding of state's positions and ideas (Tuch 1990), I deem this association as appropriate, since this is the purpose of MFA communication (Manor 2019).

## 3. Theory and Literature Review

### 3.1 Research Literature Review

Even though there has been a surge in research on social media, the field was not able to overcome certain difficulties. For instance, social media, such as Facebook, are considered a problematic source of data, as they provide advanced privacy settings to users, making data mining on mass scale inapplicable. This significantly limits the amount of research on Facebook, as in comparison to Twitter and other more open social media. (Samanthula 2014: 6, Kardes 2014)

Other authors, such as Lanagan, Anokhin and Velcin (2014) highlight the benefits of quantitative real-time information processing, while acknowledging method's limitations when it comes to analyzing social media content – quantifying methods naturally provide less in-depth analysis, than the ones focusing few cases in qualitative manner.

A portion of research focuses on predictive capabilities connected to social media. Even though the focus primarily lies upon individual user behavior, it is easy to imagine wider application. These could be based on the notion, that all behavior on social media is either social or viral, and that individual behavior spills over to broader networked communities, both local and global. (Ngonmang 2014, Fortunato 2010) Indeed Tayebi (2016) claims, that social network analysis can contribute to predictive policing efforts. It is thus reasonable to assume, that data obtained from mining social media can be applicable to this scheme.

Braithwaite (2011) then argues, that even though very few studies have been published on qualitative research of social media, any analysis of the realm should include a human interference if it is to be reliable. Purely machine-run analysis often lacks nuance and sensitivity needed to produce valuable conclusions for social science. The lack of literature on qualitative research of social media is also emphasized by Snelson (2016). She recognizes the value of qualitative content analysis of social media, but also points out certain limitations: qualitative research is necessarily limited in scope of research, as it focuses on a limited time scale and usually only on one medium. In her literature review, Snelson (2016) asserts, that qualitative research and mixed methods research is on the rise, and it focuses more and more on Facebook. Methods used are most frequently surveys and interviews, followed by

qualitative content analysis. Qualitative research however does not nearly match the scale of quantitative research of social media.

Currently it has been well established in literature, that governments are fervent users of social media platforms, and this trend is not likely to regress. (Alam 2016) When it comes to the subject matter of institutional communication on social media during wartime, many authors (Manor and Criley 2018, Singer and Brooking 2018, Mayfield 2011) recognize the power of public institutions to contribute to framing the conflict and shaping the narrative on government actions, and as such can contribute to achieving policy objectives during the conflict. (Manor and Criley 2018: 370) According to Sultana Alam (2016), there are however qualitative differences when institutions are handling their public social media accounts. These differences may stem from the lack of expertise on social media, manifesting specifically in lack of content, not knowing the audience, handling the content type wrongly or lack of effort to create interaction. The ability to captivate the audience is then possible to interpret as failure in outreach efforts, as opposed to generating interactions, suggesting the centrality of outward-engaging language, visual contents such as videos and photos and general incentives to sharing. (Alam 2016: 106)

Given all the literature research, there are still many blank spots, which this thesis attempts to fill. Practically none of the literature consulted concerns with comparative perspective of FB communication of ministries across states, which are in open war with one another, less with comparing wartime communication efforts on social media by ministries within one state. The 2020 conflict, as terrible as it was, is also a unique opportunity to indulge into communication schemes and hybrid influencing of the two rivals, bound together by battlefield still reeking of gunpowder.

## **3.2 Theoretical Review**

### **3.2.1 Social Media**

While traditionally media, such as television, newspaper or radio generated one-way relation of information flow, social media are specific with forming dialectic and multidimensional communication environment. (Ingenhoff 2018: 3664) Creating relationships on social media has generated the attention from numerous public relations scholars (Wang 2020, Kaplan 2010, Saffer 2013) Social media can help both private and public organizations to cultivate

relationships with their target audiences. (Wang 2020: 2) According to some researchers, adoption of social media as a communication channel in practice outruns theoretical understanding of how the technology can affect both organizational processes and desired outcomes of communication. (Treem 2012: 144)

One definition conceptualizes social media as *“a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content”* (Kaplan, Haenlein 2010: 62). Social media can then serve as either a source of power, or a mean for influencing power relations by signaling through use of information. Actors can use social media communication to signal possession of knowledge, disseminate discourses, attract attention to issues and other actions, which can in effect influence individual and organizational decision making. (Treem 2012:175)

Authors engaged in critical theory sometimes argue, that due to their exposed, visibility-oriented character, which facilitates both text and image to the reader, social media are a discursive space, where individuals and organizations can present their viewpoints with intent of influence their audience. In this view, it is a space, where ideologies are being disseminated, and where actors with enough resources and power can marginalize their opponents, to maintain existing power structures. (Alvesson 1999) Other authors would on the other hand argue, that it is this visibility, along with decentralization and informal nature of participation in discursive engagements, social media encourage open exchange of information and make it difficult for any actor to assert dominance over the discourse. (Kosonen 2009)

While private organizations use social media in more dialogic way, state organizations are sometimes more constrained. This can be attributed to lack of communication strategy, but also to expectations for official communication by both organization’s insiders, who prefer to create a sense of impermeability, and audience members, who see responsivity as undignified. This discrepancy relates directly to the problem of social media governance. Governance provides organizations with framework for communication. For its establishment, number of requirements come forth: security, privacy, legal, ethical, and regulatory compliance requirements. Proper communication management through governance contributes to formulating culturally and socially sensitive forms of engagement. In most government organizations, hierarchy, centralization and restrictive management are present, traits, that are an abomination to successful social media communication. (Macnamara 2012: 15) In

contrast, acceptance of the new reality of communication on personnel level can lead to organizational changes within institutions. These institutions, such as Ministries of Foreign Affairs can then replace formerly rigid communication cultures for ones, which are more prone to risk and learning. (Manor 2019: 33)

Considering state issued communication, another blurred line stems from differences with cultural perceptions of what is ethical, socially responsible and culturally sensitive across different states, and even single organizations within one state, but also specific time. While in some cultures and times it might be considered desirable in terms of communication for organization representatives to call for killing of opponents and holy war, in others these calls would be deemed irresponsible. It is thus important to take into consideration the reflective role of communication management, prevalent in European scholarly context. This role aims at reflecting changing standards and values in the society, in order to maintain the communication up to date and legitimate. (Macnamara 2012: 6) According to Verhoeven, Zeffass and Tench (2011), *“preserving societal legitimacy of an organization is the primary task of communication management.”*

When it comes to practical consideration of social media, they also possess a useful trait of editability. Social media managers can invest a lot energy and time in writing, editing, and chiseling the content of their communicative act, before it is published. At the same time, social media, such as Facebook, allow for easy correction of shared information after it has been posted. Of course, the longer time passes from the moment of publishing, more likely it is, that the audience will either notice the error, causing possible damage to organizations reputation, or share the incorrect information further, damaging the narrative the post was trying to reinforce. (Treem 2012: 159) Nevertheless, this low synchronicity aligned to social media can be contributive towards the primary goal of conveying message, as it might help to make the message comprehensive and well structured. (Dennis 2008: 592-594)

### 3.2.2 Public Diplomacy

According to some authors, public relations and public diplomacy are a very similar fields, which are currently merging, thus calling for conceptual and theoretical convergence of the fields. (Gilboa 2008: 65) Marketing scholars then tend to see public diplomacy as a branch of state marketing or nation branding. From their perspective, public diplomacy only involves

communication policy of the specific government, while nation branding deals with overall perception and presentation of a nation. (Ingenhoff 2018: 3665) On the other hand, public diplomacy practice includes more than simple promotion of government policies – it also involves transference of state values and ideas, notwithstanding the process of relationship building and building of long-term understanding. Due to its complexity, public diplomacy should be according to some authors *“seen in the context of the changing architecture of international relations in an increasingly interdependent and interconnected world.”* (Ang, Isar, Mar 2015: 371).

From the International Relation perspective of Joseph Nye (2008), public diplomacy is a mean of strengthening states soft power. Soft power then relates to ability to influence preferences of other actors. (Nye 2008: 95) According to him, the soft power of a state *“rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).”* (Nye 2008: 96) Nye further traces the emerging of public diplomacy as a practice to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, conflating it with cultural propaganda. Interconnectedness of the global political arena then demands emphasis on soft power, which can contribute to more subtle and elegant achieving of goals, than hard power. According to Gilboa (2008), *“favorable image and reputation around the world, achieved through attraction and persuasion, have become more important than territory, access, and raw materials, traditionally acquired through military and economic measures.”* (Gilboa 2008: 56)

Public diplomacy is currently a key instrument to win minds by promotion of positive image of a nation, its attractiveness and in effect can enhance chances of reaching desired results. (Nye 2008: 101) It does not take solely the form of persuasion through communication, also action can be an important instrument to better country’s image. Nye references example of Norway, which cultivates it’s positive image through financial support of variety of projects abroad. On the other hand, even unlimited resources cannot secure garnering public support for arrogant, self-serving policies. (Nye 2008: 102).

To better understand the concept of public diplomacy, we can borrow a definition of Hans Tuch (1990: 3), who sees it as *“a government’s process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies.”* To put it in a practical dimension, Frederick

(1993: 229) describes public diplomacy as a set of *“activities, directed abroad in the fields of information, education, and culture, whose objective is to influence a foreign government, by influencing its citizens.”* (Frederick 1993: 229) In the information environment of social media, however, we can also assume more broad view of public diplomacy, which not only influences the foreign public, but can also serve as a mean of communication with other state actors and institutions, but also domestic audience. We can also assume, that due to dialogical nature of social media the actor can utilize public diplomacy to create further organic engagement.

Modern public diplomacy is closely intertwined with new communication schemes, which were introduced through social media. We can therefore talk in this sense about digital diplomacy, as a sub-section of public diplomacy, which is performed online. (Ingenhoff 2018: 3665) For state agencies, platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram are a vital instrument for delivering messages and narratives to target audiences, giving them also a useful tool to analyze public feedback to the information shared. The feedback can be measured by various metrics, such as by measuring organic engagement in form of responses to posts, counting reactions (likes, hearts etc.), or even qualitatively examining sentiment of debates. Social media give institutions an opportunity not only to disseminate information, but also to alter the messages in the future to positively engage the public. (Ingenhoff 2018: 3665) Therefore, since the way target audiences form their image of a country is directly influenced by content of government’s communication through different channels, social media is a valuable contribution to performance of public diplomacy. The ability to create positive perceptions is nonetheless bound to the ground upon which the content is based: state’s actions in the international environment, historical narratives or cultural significance. (Kanaeva 2011) Furthermore, social media make for easy activity monitoring and surveillance, since the information, albeit not always readily accessible, is stored and aggregated by the providers. (Treem 2012: 177)

### **3.2.3 Practice of Digital Diplomacy**

Ministries of Foreign Affairs are in most cases at the center of public diplomacy orchestration. MFAs are widely seen as social institutions, which need to respond to expectations of members of digital society, in other words engaged social media users. Users of online social media are accustomed to immediate communication over constant information flow. They communicate in real time and irrespective of territorial boundaries. MFAs therefore need to



adapt to users' expectations to learn about events without any delay. Ministries therefore take on the role of a narrator or commentator, who help users to make sense of events as they unfold. On the organizational level, MFAs were required to meet these demands by forming new departments, hiring new professionals, and introducing new working guidelines, which would allow them to fully use new technologies to their benefit. (Manor 2019: 33) Needless to say, some countries managed the transformation better, than others.

Even though importance of social media to state institutions can be demonstrated by their presence on various platforms, often a comprehensive social media policy is lacking. Developing a framework, which would address topical and ethical concerns should be the first step, in order to secure efficient and responsible use of social media as a communication instrument. Due to relative novelty of social media, many governments lack formal documents, or even guides their employees could draw from. (Auer 2013: 8) Approach of many state institutions worldwide to social media use can be with a grain of salt described as organic, leading at times to inconsistencies in communication or a downright failure.

To address possible strategies of communication in terms of practice and research, authors, such as Pammet emphasize vitality of transmedia engagement to public diplomacy. Having an underlying objective, diplomatic efforts often draw upon numerous communicative practices. Campaigns might involve top-level multilateral diplomacy, summit organizing, cultural events, endorsement by celebrities and influencers, educational programs, foreign tours, or content sharing or engagement on various social media. For practitioners, it is important to engage all the possible channels to achieve the objective. For researchers, it is essential to identify this objective and uncover the web of intertwined actions performed by a number of actors, spread over multiple channels and audiences. (Pammet 2016: 2049)

### **3.2.4 Possible Frameworks for Analysis**

Even though application of communication theory to political science and international relations issues is commonplace, their introduction to the research of public diplomacy is severely lacking. (Gilboa 2008: 65) One of these models is Entman's cascading activation, which attempts to synthesize approaches to policy, media and public opinion. Entman suggests, that political actors, such as the political representation, media and interest groups are all attempting to influence the shape of frames, or in other words set agenda, that is effectively imposed on the public through media. These actors are detrimental to shaping of

public opinion. He offers comprehensive modeling of how this fight over frames is happening, determining success of various communication strategies and processes, which lead to this success. Essentially, Entman provides a framework for identification of conditions, which allow media to affect content of public diplomacy. (Entman 2004)

Another important work was conducted by Yun (2006), who researched applicability of the communication Excellence study to the field of public diplomacy. Yun introduces a model for measurement of Excellence in communication, adding ground principles: “involvement of PR in strategic management, integration of specialized PR functions, internal and external symmetrical communication, and departmental knowledge.” (Yun 2006) He further proved functionality of the model by examining practices of foreign embassies in the U. S.

A comprehensive approach to comparative research on public diplomacy was introduced already in 1979 by Alexander George, labeled “structured focused comparison,” which defines three main tenets of public diplomacy: time, range, and focus. (Gilboa 2008: 72) Gilboa further developed a framework, which focuses on the time distinctive time dimensions of public diplomacy: immediate, intermediate and long, as he summarized in the following table.

**A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS**

Range	Immediate	Intermediate	Long
Time	Hours/days	Weeks/months	Years
Purpose	Reactive	Proactive	Relationship
Media/public opinion	News management	Strategic communication	Building favorable conditions
Government	Closely linked	Partially linked	Remotely linked
Public diplomacy (PD) instrument	Advocacy; international broadcasting; cyber PD	International public relations; corporate diplomacy; Diaspora PD	Cultural diplomacy; exchanges; branding

Source: Gilboa 2008: 72.

Each of the proposed time levels is matched with a set of characteristics, like time, purpose, communication in relation to public, its link to government and exemplification of public diplomacy instruments.

The immediate level expects reaction to an event withing the shortest time possible. It can be perceived as a damage control attempt, or an exploit of a diplomatic opportunity. Such action is most often led by senior government officials. Public diplomacy instruments would include advocacy, international broadcasting, and cyber public diplomacy. The involved officials could use media of rapid response: controlled TV and broadcast or internet sites and social media. (Gilboa 2008: 72)

At the intermediate level, more proactive planning and policy implementation is involved. It expects involvement of techniques of strategic communication. The action would be typically led by governmental and nongovernmental agencies over periods lasting between a few weeks and a few months. The instruments used would be interpersonal relationships, corporate diplomacy, or diaspora public diplomacy. (Gilboa 2008: 72)

The long-term level can be conflated with traditional public diplomacy, and its main purpose is to raise supportive attitude from global publics through building of trust and conditions for amicable relations with states and nonstate actors. The most efficient action would be led by NGOs, since they do not need to respond to political cycles. Instruments of public diplomacy would involve cultural diplomacy, international exchanges, and branding. (Gilboa 2008: 73)

In this thesis' analysis, I will attempt to apply the framework introduced by Gilboa to provide fitting characterization and classification of digital communication by Azerbaijani and Armenian Ministries of Foreign Affairs in relation to Nagorno Karabakh War of 2020.

While this section successfully addressed the theoretical knowledge of social media, and their role in public diplomacy, it failed to reconcile the theory with subject matter of this thesis, which aims at exploring role of digital diplomacy in times war. There is a clear lack of research conducted at this point. The literature consulted in this chapter perceives public diplomacy as an effort of peaceful character, both implicitly and explicitly. I, on the other hand believe, that public diplomacy can be utilized to garner support for war, demoralize the enemy and for other war-related purposes, something I will explore further in this work. This however leaves relatively wide space for interpretation, as well as for future original research.

## 4. The Origins of The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict

It would be intellectually dishonest to be trying to explain the underlying causes of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict without exploring its historical roots, since the sticking points of today often reproduce grievances present for many generations. These grievances are extrapolated by narratives, which refer to understanding of region's ancestry going as deep as to the centuries Before Christ. (Geukjian 2012: 1-2) The distinctive apprehension of ethnic histories and origins of Armenian and Azerbaijani nations respectively constitute the core of social consciousness for both groups and are the essence of the still ongoing conflict in the region. (Geukjian 2012: 36) This chapter therefore provides historical overview of core events and processes, which translate to the conduction of the conflict, as well as its portrayal by Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020.

### 4.1 Ethnic Origins – The Ground for Contemporary Narratives?

The multiplicity of sovereign claims, as well as conflicted history of Nagorno-Karabakh region reflects in the name itself. While “*Nagorno*” can be translated as “*mountainous*” from Russian, Karabakh is most likely a composite of Turkish and Persian words. According to Cornell (1999: 3) “*Kara*” is translatable as “*black*” from Turkish language. The ending “*bakh*” is a russification of the word “*bag*”, which is a bastardization of Persian “*baō*” for garden, or “*vine*” in Turkish. We can see that just the region's most widely used name brings together three different languages, Russian, Persian and Turkish – for three great powers, which have controlled and shaped the region and fates of its peoples. (Cornell 1999: 3, Geukjian 2012: 37-38) Furthermore, the disputed area has distinctive names in languages of the main warring parties of today. Armenians call it Artsakh. For Azerbaijanis it is Yuqarı, but also Dağlıq Qarabag. (Cornell 1999, Geukjian 2012)

#### 4.1.1 Armenian Account of Ethnic History of Nagorno Karabakh

Armenian historians claim Karabakh to be part of Armenian kingdoms since as early as 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. However according to Greek historians, as well as Armenian chroniclers, the area, which constitutes modern day Azerbaijan, was demographically divided one third to the west populated by Armenians, and two thirds to the east populated mainly by Caucasian Albanians, from whom Azeris claim their ancestral heirloom. These records are talking about

the state of the region in 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., when Christianity was already a commonplace. (Cornell 1999:4)

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, a major event in form of Arab invasion and settlement unfolded. This proved to be important for the regions future due to Islamization of the Albanian population, as it allowed for easier blending of the indigenous and Turkic peoples, who already practiced Islam at the time of their arrival. At the same time those of the locals, who did not wish to accept Islam aligned closer to Armenian-Christian identity. (Cornell 1999: 4-5) The importance of this shift in the region for Armenian identity can be read in records by Movses Dashkurantsi, Albanian-Armenian historian, who in 10<sup>th</sup> century wrote about importance of ties of “Western Albania”, today’s Nagorno Karabakh, with Armenia. He stressed out the importance of shared history, as well as the need for primacy of Albanian Church, a branch of Armenian Church. Important motive is also independence of either the Albanian Church, or the region. (Walker 1991: 7). The process of religious differentiation thus necessarily formed a solid base for future identity forming, misunderstandings, mistrust and in effect for grievances.

Eastern Albania, on the other hand, does not get much mention in Armenian historiography of the time. It most likely ceased to exist due to Arab and Turkic invasions, and forming of several Muslim emirates, such as the emirates of Ganja, Shivran or Derbend. Swietochowski 1985: 1-4)

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century Karabakh was conquered by Persian Safavid Empire, becoming a piece in its administrative system along with other parts of Caucasus. Along with Tabriz, Chukhur-Saada and Shirvan, Karabakh was part of Persian Armenia. The territory was ruled by Armenian lords of princely descent, or Meliks, who managed to preserve local autonomy over foreign invaders, also due to secluded mountainous character of the region. The accounts of autonomy of Karabakh inside of Persian Empire, while being under ethnic Armenian rule put emphasis on unique individuality and Armenian character of Karabakh throughout Armenian historiography. This ancient continuity is a key to understanding Armenian position towards Karabakh, and is also part of the argument, which seeks to belittle historical Azerbaijani importance in the area. Furthermore, Armenian position does not accept the link between indigenous Caucasian Albanians and current Azeri population, questioning the whole sense of Caucasian Albanian ancestry of Azeri people. (Geukjian 2012: 32)

Based on the previous accounts of foreign invasions, Armenian historians, and in effect Armenian society, interpret their shared ethno-historical experience on exactly that ground: as continuous episodes of invasions and subjugations by foreign powers, who attempt to subdue, or even erase millennia long history of the peaceful, non-expansive nation. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, this perception manifests in attempts of Armenian elites, who repeatedly appeal to Russian and European Christians rulers to free the ancestral Christian lands of Muslim invasion. Karabkh was then presented as the battleground for the identity of the region. (Geukjian 2012: 32)

While the arrangement of Karabakh autonomy within Persian Empire lasted until mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, internal strife essentially destroyed the ruling Armenian elite, which led the region out of Armenian orbit, allowing for formation of semi-independent dynastic Khanate of Karabakh, ruled by a Turkic Muslim family, which would stay in power until the Russian conquest of the region. (Cornell 1999: 5)

#### 4.1.2 Azerbaijani Account of Ethnic History of Nagorno Karabakh

While it is not clear, when exactly did the Turkic tribes arrived from Central Asia to Caucasus region and Asia Minor, records show that by 11<sup>th</sup> century the region of Karabakh and today's Azerbaijan already had significant Turkic population, which already blended to a large extent with Caucasian Albanians. These Turkic people most likely arrived along with Seljuk tribes invading Byzantine Empire. Azeri historians, however, claim strong presence of Turkic element in the region since 7<sup>th</sup> century, an assertion, which is deemed controversial by some researchers. (Swietochowski 1985: 1-4, Cornell 1999: 4)

The agreement stands, that Islamization of the Caucasian Albania begun in early 7<sup>th</sup> century and was the result of most of the territory becoming part of Islamic Caliphate. Islamic dominance consequently led to waning of Christianity in the region, especially in the eastern part. Turkification of Albanians is then seen as a centuries long process, which started in 7<sup>th</sup> century and peaked in 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century, when Oguz Turks invaded the land. Blending of Turkic tribes with Albanians and Iranian people then gave birth to Azerbaijani ethnic group over centuries, coined with adoption of Turkish language and Shi'ite Islam in 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, due to Persian influence and adoption of the forementioned minority branch of Islam contributed to defining of Azerbaijanis as a nation. (Geukjian 2012: 28-29) Nevertheless,

a common, perhaps orientalist denomination for the people living in the region of today's Azerbaijan was Caucasian Tatars, or so they were called by Russians up until 1918. This would signify, that the concept of Azerbaijani nationhood is a product of 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual efforts. (Geukjian 2012: 31-32)

Azerbaijani historians, such as Geyushev, Mamedov or Neymatov, then often consider Caucasian Albanians as direct ancestors of modern-day Azerbaijanis. Regions of Nagorno Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Zangezur are in this sense seen as inherently ancestral Albanian, thus fully Azerbaijani. National historiography of Azerbaijan then tries to portray Armenian character of the territories as a myth, and signs of Armenian presence as unbelonging and foreign. (Geukjian 2012: 33)

There is a common conception, that the first mentions of Karabakh are from 9<sup>th</sup> century B. C., when the region was part of Uratian kingdoms, later to be conquered by Medians and subsequently by Persians. In the times of emergence of Armenian kingdoms in 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Karabakh was supposed to be dominated by the latter against the will of both Albanian nobility and population. In this view, Armenians forcefully assimilated the indigenous Albanian population – therefore inhabitants of Karabakh were never Armenians, rather Armenianized Albanians. (Swietochowski 1985: 1-4)

The Azerbaijani researchers further claim that the territory of Daghylyg Garabagh was always an indivisible part of Azerbaijani states formation, even after the downfall of Caucasian Albania in 8<sup>th</sup> century A. D and Arabic and Turkic invasions, which they do not see as a discontinuity of statehood in the region, but rather its natural extension. (Cornell 1999: 3)

When Armenians found their constitutive myth in territorially defined bloodline, Azerbaijani historians attempted for the similar approach. They attempt to define Azeri national identity as stemming from pre-modern, territorially bound ethnic groups, which were living in an area of modern-day Azerbaijan, including Nagorno Karabakh. (Swietochowski 1985: 1-4) There is an apparent interplay with Karabakh region, which Azerbaijan claims to be an indispensable contribution to its nationhood. The focality of this region manifests with mythological importance of the town of Shushi, which Azeri historians, and in effect society, perceives as a symbol of ethno-historical continuity of Azerbaijanis, as well as a historical cultural center. (Geukjian 2012: 34-35)

The centrality of territoriality, and thus extrapolated symbolism of Nagorno Karabakh, as portrayed by both historians and politicians over past century and a half, directly translates into Azerbaijani sense of national identity, along with the narrative of local ancestry of Azeris. To bring this sentiment closer to the reader, a quote by Azerbaijani author Rufat Novrozov: *“Territory was all we had left ... They could not change our territory without our agreement. So, a fight over territory became a fight for our worth, our dignity as a people, as a nation.”* (Dudwick in Suny 1996: 437)

#### 4.1.3 Ethnicity in Transcaucasia in late Russian Empire

The waning of Persian influence in late 18<sup>th</sup> century gave way to further Ottoman, but mainly Russian presence in the region. Upon annexation of Nagorno Karabakh by Russia in 1805, majority of population was Armenian. (Levon 1994: 78-80) Up until that point, territory of today’s Armenia was essentially a battlefield, over which Ottomans were fighting with Persian Shahs, split into several semi-independent Khanates. Russian advance was welcomed by the Armenians, who saw it as a chance to reconstitute an independent Armenian state, protected by Russia from Muslims, which would comprise of Yerevan, Ganja, Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh Khanates. Armenian efforts were however terminated with peace treaty of Gulistan in 1813, which led to partitioning of Eastern Armenia and western parts of today’s Azerbaijan, including Karabakh, between the two powers.

By signing the treaty of Turkmenchai in 1828, Persia effectively ceded Khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan to Russia. The new administration aimed at suppression of possible territorial-national contentions and intentionally introduced new administrative divisions of the new controlled regions, which insensitively merged local communities of Azerbaijanis and Armenians under local government bodies. The Russian colonial planners contended that by forming ethnically mixed administrative bodies, local nationalisms and separatisms would be eliminated. The Russian therefore introduced a new province of Elizavetpol, which would connect Armenian-inhabited Karabakh with areas of today’s Azerbaijan dominated by Azerbaijanis. This step helped to bring Karabakh closer to Azerbaijan in both sense of transportation infrastructure, economy, as well as it contributed to forming Azerbaijani nationalist and emotional sentiment to Karabakh. (Geukjian 2012: 40-41) The attempt would nonetheless prove to fuel ethnic confrontations between the two communities throughout the rest of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Under Russian governance, there were some apparent demographic shifts in the region. Armenians were encouraged to move into the controlled territories, effectively shifting the demographics in favor of Armenians in previously Muslim dominated Khanates, such as Yerevan, which only reached Armenian minority by 1870's. The demographic transformations, along with economic inequalities would constitute a major factor in ethnic tensions, which would eventually lead to conflicts. Historians (e.g. Geukjian, Cornell) report apparent tensions between Muslim landlord and Armenian peasants, as well as under-represented Muslims in municipalities, education and judiciary and Armenian bourgeoisie, which was also widely reinforced by support of Russian administration. (Geukjian 2012: 43)

Along with previously narratives referring to ancestry and ethnicity, as part of nationalist identity building throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century, these differences based on distribution of resources and representations lead ethnic tensions and subsequent violence between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in 1905-1906. The accumulation of grievances erupted in 1905 by clashes in Baku, where Azerbaijanis, set off by murder of a Muslim, burnt down Armenian parts of the city. The violence soon spilled over to Yerevan, Ganja and Karabakh, causing thousands of deaths. These events lead to emergence of radical groups calling for ethnic homogeneity in the affected regions, both Azeri and Armenian. According to Audrey Altstadt (1994: 106), *“the atrocities which took place in 1905- 06 laid one of the foundations of a national consciousness of both communities that were more closely bound up with religious identity.”*

## **4.2 History in World War I. and under the Soviet Union**

The eruption of First World War and subsequent military campaigns of the two adversaries, the Russian and the Ottoman Empire, caused a massive identity upsurge in the region. The genocide of Armenians in 1915 by Ottoman armies left 1,5 million Armenians dead, after being subjected to inhumane treatment, deportations, death marches, cold-arm executions and other atrocities. While Turkey denies the events of 1915 to be a genocide, for Armenians the genocide constitutes an essential part of their modern-day identity, but also strategic culture. The events can explain the importance of a corridor between Nakhichevan and Karabakh to Armenia – without it, Armenia would face encirclement by Azerbaijan and Turkey, while losing the access to Persia. (Cornell 1999: 6)

The relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, who claimed Turkic descent, therefore furtherly deteriorated. Revolution in Russia in 1917 and subsequent decay of central authority gave leeway to Turkish advance and establishment of Azerbaijani state on foundation of Elizavetpol province in early 1918. Upon massacring 30 000 Armenians in Baku and ousting the newly formed Baku Soviet, Turks propelled the nationalist Musavat Party to power. Musavat leaders proclaimed Azerbaijani Democratic Republic in May 1918. Karabakh then became a subject of border dispute between the newly formed republic and Armenia, which also declared an independent republic. In the summer of 1918, Armenians of Karabakh took advantage of political instability in Azerbaijan, forming a congress with capital in Shushi. The attempt for self-determination was ended by Turkish armies in August 1918. Armenians of Karabakh were forced to submit to Azerbaijani rule, being promised humane treatment. Upon defeat of Central Powers, Turkish forces withdrew from the region, being replaced by British expedition. The British denied Armenian calls for merging Karabakh with Armenia, and reaffirmed a position, that Karabakh is a territory under Azerbaijan's authority. Nevertheless, the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh comprised of some 170 000 people, or 95 % of all inhabitants. (Geukjian 2012: 55-59)

The following year of 1919 were marked by attempts of both Armenia and Azerbaijan to gain control over as much territory the parties claimed on ethno-territorial basis before the Paris Peace Conference, accompanied with widespread violence by both armies and non-state actors. With British withdrawal from the region, the Azerbaijani republic asserted provisional control of the region, which was later reaffirmed by a treaty signed by both Armenia and Azerbaijan on 22 august 1919, submitting Karabakh to Azerbaijan. The treaty was supposed to provide just administrative representation of Armenians in the region, which equaled dominance. It also meant to secure cultural and educational rights of Armenians, as well as provisions for self-defense: the population was allowed to keep arms, and movements of Azerbaijani armies in the region would be subjected to permission by the Armenian-dominated council. The treaty was, however, violated on many occasions. Azerbaijan was building up its military position in Karabakh, Armenian villages were not rebuilt as agreed and no financial assistance to Armenian cultural life was given by Baku. (Geukjian 2012: 43)

Cession of Karabakh to Azerbaijan was not widely accepted by Armenian public, and nationalist parties in Armenian republic often called for unification of the two. The nationalist

support followed by failed negotiations on further incorporation of Karabakh into Azerbaijan, resulted in Armenian uprising in the region. The Azeri government attempted to prevent escalation of violence between the two ethnicities by military force. The suppression of revolt was successful, but at cost of widespread destruction and atrocities, to which Azerbaijani forces also contributed. In Shusha, the Armenian half of the city came to complete ruin, while Armenian accounts claim, that this was due to Azerbaijani army joining local inhabitants in perpetrating the violence. (Hovanisian 1996: 150-152)

The response of Azerbaijani officials and public to the revolt was condemnation: it was considered an attack on Azeri statehood. Both government officials and newspaper called for forceful reaction and even holy war against Armenians. Reaction of Armenian republic was on the other hand supportive of the rebels, portraying it as a proper response to broken promises by Azerbaijan. (Geukjian 2012: 61)

Violence, which lasted through early 1920, left heavy marks on possibility for reconciliation – combination of ethnic mythos, history of violence and newly added accounts of war crimes became a common standpoint in relations between Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples. Even though peace agreement was reached on 18 April 1920, the mounted animosity reached a point of inability to reconcile without assigning blame.

The conflict would be determined by invasion of Bolshevik 11<sup>th</sup> army in May 1920, which forced the nationalist parties of Azerbaijan and Armenia to concede their demands and find a new way to live together under the Soviet rule. On 12 May Red Army reached Shushi, claiming to end the ethnic war in the region, assuring military presence until peaceful solution is reached. (Geukjian 2012: 62) Throughout 1920, both Azerbaijani and Armenian politicians were trying to convince Soviet leadership of their rightful claim of the region. The sovietization of the region lead to establishing of Azerbaijani and Armenian Soviet Socialist Republics by the end of 1920, while conflict over Nagorno Karabakh would transfer strictly into political realm for the following decades. (Cornell 1999: 3)

Upon several years of negotiations and position-switching, the Kavburo, Soviet bureau for Caucasia, assigned Nagorno Karabakh to Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan without further debate, despite the protests of Armenian Communist Party. It was however established as Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast in 1923, as a way of keeping the region's autonomy on

Azerbaijan SSR. The Soviets assumed, that incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into Azerbaijan would contribute to peace between the two ethnicities, while allowing for vast regional autonomy would diminish separatist attempts of Karabakh Armenians. The decision of 5 July 1923 would be the last legal document to be accepted on the status of Nagorno Karabakh by the Soviet government. On July 7 1923, the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan SSR adopted a bill on officially establishing NKAO as part of Soviet Azerbaijan, ruled by local Soviets with administrative center in Stepankert. Official language of NKAO would be Armenian, therefore business, education and legislation would be conducted in Armenian language. (Geukjian 2012: 79-81)

This newly founded status is considered by historians (Geukjian, Hovansian, Cornell) an important contribution to realization of religious and ethnic freedoms in the region, and a major step towards ethnic reconciliation. The Armenians however contested the decision of not awarding Karabakh to Armenian SSR, arguing the 1915 genocide and deprivation of Armenian ethnic rights by Azerbaijan SSR. Therefore, despite limiting national tensions under Soviet rule, Armenians regularly protested the status of Nagorno Karabakh, only to be repeatedly refused by the central government. (Hovansian 1996: 137-143)

Upon death of Stalin in 1953 and relative decline of Russification policies, tendencies to re-establish ethnic and cultural policies reemerged in Soviet political discourse. In 1961, however, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress decided to keep on with the scheme of unified Soviet nation as a condition for successful communist development. The policy embraced the notion of bringing the nations of the USSR together, rejecting nationalist deviations, and would last throughout the Brezhnev era. (Cornell 1999: 9-11)

The attempts for homogenization of societies in Transcaucasia lead on the other hand to discrimination of minorities in the Soviet republics, and lead to occasional unrest, such as in 1963, when 18 people died in violent ethnic clashes in Nagorno Karabakh. (Cornell 1999: 11) At the same time, the slow process of Russification in Armenia and especially Azerbaijan contributed to preservation of linguistic and cultural identities, and as such to preservation of dormant conflict. The rise in nationalism was then extrapolated since 1980's, and furthermore during Perestroika, which allowed more space for dissent, and in effect ethno-linguistic resistance towards homogenization policies. (Geukjian 2012: 98-112)

To summarize the experience of ethnic nationalism under Soviet rule, let me quote Zbigniew Brzezinski (in Suny 1991: 353), who wrote, that *“communism in fact intensified popular nationalist passion. It produced a political culture imbued with intolerance, self-righteousness, rejection of social compromise and a massive inclination toward self-glorifying oversimplification. On the level of belief, dogmatic Communism thus fused with and even reinforced intolerant nationalism. On the level of practice, it further reinforced the populist inclination toward nationalistic chauvinism. Nationalism was already nurtured, rather than diluted, in the Communist experience.”*

### **4.3 The First Nagorno Karabakh War**

In wake of Gorbachev’s reforms, which led to decrease in centralization, Armenians in Karabakh have seen an opportunity to pursue national self-determination and began to organize. In 1987 and 1988, three delegations lobbied in Moscow to transfer Nagorno Karabakh to Armenia, arguing the necessity to protect Armenian population in the region. (Geukjian 2012: 130) They argued, that since the beginning of Azerbaijan SSR’s rule over the region, Armenian population decreased significantly due to Azeri nationalist policies. Indeed, while census in 1939 revealed, that 91 % of population in Karabakh are Armenians, in 1970s the number was around 80 %. (Cornell 1999: 11-14)

On the opposite side, Azerbaijani intellectuals (Aliyarov, Vahabadzé) responded to these demands by dismissal, claiming the region to be a historic Azerbaijani territory, and its people descendant of ancient Albanians and Turks. (Geukjian 2012: 132)

Furthermore, in 1987 the conflict began to reemerge, along with mobilization of nationalist movements all over USSR. Violent clashes between Armenians and Azeris first took place in Chardakhlu village outside Nagorno Karabakh borders, and immediately spilled to Nagorno Karabakh and respectively to Armenia in form of protests. The year 1988 then saw a full reignition of the ethnic violence. (Mooradin, Druckman 1999, Babayev, Schoch, Spanger 2020) Armenians began to chase Azeris from Armenia proper, and the first wave of refugees arrived to Baku by the end of January 1988. The calls for unification of Nagorno Karabakh were coined with a 110:17 vote on 12 February 1988 by NKAO Soviet, appealing to Supreme Soviets of USSR, Azerbaijan and Armenia to transfer Nagorno Karabakh to Armenia, and subsequent 20 February decision of NKAO Soviet of unification with Armenia. Mass demonstrations were

held in Yerevan, supported publicly by Armenian intellectual nationalist elites, and especially historians, who would recall the mythos of Karabakh's significance to Armenian identity. (Geukjian 2012: 180)

Mass protests in Yerevan, petitions of Armenian diaspora and proclamations of Nagorno Karabakh and Armenian officials pushed Azerbaijanis to take a strong stance as a society, protesting themselves what they saw as attack on their homeland's territorial integrity and their people's cultural identity. On 21 February Azerbaijan refused the NKAO Soviet's decision, ruling out any territorial changes on TV, sparking attacks of Karabakh Azeris on their fellow Armenian citizens. (Geukjian 2012: 183) Moscow's attempts for mediation all were in vain, failing to douse the resurgent ethno-nationalism. The March 23 decision of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to reject demands of Nagorno Karabakh proved to be futile at this point. (Mooradin, Druckman 1999)

On June 15, the Armenian Supreme Soviet voted for unification with Nagorno Karabakh, a decision to be refused by Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet June 17. In summer 1988, Supreme Soviet of the USSR reaffirmed Azerbaijani territorial integrity. On November 17, mass protests erupted in Baku, and spilled over to other Azerbaijani cities, to be followed by November 26 anti-Armenian pogroms in Ganja and Baku. At the same time, Azeris were subjected to ethnic cleansing in Armenia. High estimates talk about 180 000 Armenians expelled from Azerbaijan, and 160 000 Azeris had to leave Armenia by the end of November 1988. Both sides thus engaged in a spiral of violence, fueled mainly on civilian-civilian level, further mounting inter-group grievances. (Cornell 1999, Geukjian 2012: 188-192)

These events took place as perestroika was picking up pace in form of political reforms, which touched upon the question of representation. At the same time Moscow attempted to settle the dispute by weight of its central authority, placing Nagorno Karabakh under its direct military control in January 1989, effectively taking control of the region off the Azerbaijan SSR, while leaving it de-iure under Azerbaijan's control. By November 1989, facing the democratic revolutions all over Eastern Bloc, Moscow returned Nagorno Karabakh under Azerbaijani control, urging Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet to solve the issue in constitutional manner. Gorbachev even urged Azerbaijan to grant Nagorno Karabakh a real autonomous status, a wish, that did not come to realization. (Geukjian 2012: 186)

As the demands on Karabakh unification with Armenia strengthened, Azerbaijani nationalist movement took a stance to refute these claims, organizing a rail blockade of Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia. The blockade shattered the Armenian narrative, that Nagorno Karabakh is economically dependent on Armenia – absence of supply from Azerbaijan indeed demonstrated the economical integration of the region with Azerbaijan. (Geukjian 2012: 172-174)

Early 1990 then brought about full-scale militarization of the conflict, with use of heavy weaponry and involvement of Azerbaijani militias in ethnic cleansing of Armenian villages. Even though Moscow attempted to stop the violence by intervening in Azerbaijan, attempting to prevent the nationalist Azerbaijani Popular Front from seizing power from the Communist Party. Nevertheless, the Soviet central authority already started to disintegrate, which became apparent after adoption of Declaration of State Sovereignty of the RSFSR in June 1990. (Cornell 1999: 32-35)

During this time, numerous paramilitary formations were building up numbers on both sides, as did the willingness to solve the conflict the violent way by both governments. Clashes between militias were a constant in Nagorno Karabakh for most 1990 and 1991. In April 1991, the Soviet troops and Azerbaijani OMON launched an offensive to assert Azerbaijani control over Nagorno Karabakh, accompanied by deportations of Armenians, in order to replace them with Azeri refugees from the region. The operation led to increase in security dilemma between Armenians and Azeris in the region. By June 1991 the casualties rose up to 816. (Cornell 1999: 36)

On December 10<sup>th</sup> Armenians in Karabakh held an independence referendum, which they finalized after dissolution of the USSR in February 1992 by declaring an independent Republic of Artsakh. The republic was not internationally recognized by any state, including Armenia, which tried to avoid criticism of the international community. The unilateral action served as a trigger to interstate war, which effectively led to displacement of over a million people from Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan. (Geukjian 2012: 180).

The declaration of independence resulted in Azerbaijan's full-scale attack on the region, which was not successful. Armenian army with support of a Russian Army regiment, on the other hand, launched a successful counter-offensive, which captured the town of Khojaly, as well as

villages of Malybeili, Karadagly and Agdaban, leaving the settlements evicted. (Cornell 1999: 31, Geukjian 2012: 190-192).

Azerbaijan's military operations in summer of 1992 targeted Martakert and Shaumyan district in Nagorno Karabakh and were successful. Later in 1992, Azerbaijan captured the town of Shushi. This offensive forced 40 000 Armenians to leave their homes. The scale of destruction left by the fighting, along with morale-boosting proclamations by Azerbaijan's government to seize not only Karabakh, but also southern Armenia, created a reminiscence of 1915 genocide in Armenians. They were convinced, that complete elimination by either expulsion or killing of Armenians was the final goal of Azeri campaign, contributing to the narrative of existential struggle. (Geukjian 2012: 192)

At this point it is important to discuss the Turkish non-involvement in the conflict, which stands out in contrast to Turkey's position in 2020. In 1990's, the Turkish position towards the conflict did not reflect the public opinion, due to fear of compromising its position in NATO, as well as in EU ascension talks. The internal debate became intense when Armenia attacked Nakhichevan in May 1992, upon which Turkish president Demirel pledged aid to the region. He was discouraged of any steps by Russian diplomacy, which warned him of starting a regional war. (Geukjian 2012: 194)

An offensive by Karabakh Armenian military in April 1993 reversed most of Azerbaijan's territorial gains of the previous year. At the same time, Azerbaijan was suffering of internal turmoil, stemming from ill-preparedness for the war and mounting losses. The crisis propelled Heidar Aliyev to power.

By the end of summer 1993, Karabakh Armenians held control of several important regions outside Karabakh: Agdam, Fizuli and Jeyhulayil. These successes followed by seizing control over Zangilan region bordering Iran. (Cornell 1999: 41) These places would become engrained in Azerbaijan's national memory as symbols of humiliation, which needs to be righted, along with the defeat in the war itself, as we are going to see later in this work. It is also important to note, that most of these advances by Karabakh Armenian forces were a clear defiance of UNSC resolution 822 passed on 30 April, as well as of resolution 853 secured by Turkish diplomatic efforts. The UNSC 853 would condemn named territorial gains by Artsakh Republic and demand withdrawal of its forces. Two more resolutions were passed by UNSC in 1993, 874



and 884, reaffirming the previous two and acknowledging Nagorno Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. (Cornell 1999: 41, Geukjian 2012: 199, Krüger 2010)

The Nagorno Karabakh war concluded with signing of the Bishkek Protocol, a provisional ceasefire agreement, which would effectively freeze the conflict in its borders of May 5, 1994. The war enabled Artsakh to militarily control seven districts along the Nagorno Karabakh border, forming a buffer zone around the region, controlling 16 % of Azerbaijan's territory. At the end of the conflict, there were 750 000 internally displaced Azeris in Azerbaijan, along with 200 000 Azeris expelled from Armenia. On the other side, 300 000 Armenians were forced to leave Azerbaijan. (Babayev 2020: 21) The conflict also contributed to feeling national humiliation in Azerbaijan, especially in relation to occupied places of symbolic value to the nation.

#### **4.4 Post-war escalations**

Up until the conflict in 2020, which led to final breaking of the Bishkek Protocol, two main accounts of deadly clashes between Armenians and Azeri forces in Karabakh were reported. In 2008, the clashes close to Marakert left several dead, and led to adoption of UNGA resolution 62/243, which demanded withdrawal of Armenian forces from Karabakh. In 2016, major fights between the two parties erupted, leaving between 250-500 dead, both military and civilians (U.S. State Dpt. 2016), enabling Azerbaijan to recapture a small portion of the occupied territory – between 8 to 20 km<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, since 1994 over 7000 ceasefire breaches have been reported by both Armenia and Azerbaijan. ([Azerbaijan MOD 2016](#), [PanArmenian 2016](#)). In both cases the parties were blaming one another of reigniting the conflict.

More recently, in July 2020 skirmishes occurred outside Nagorno Karabakh. Four days of artillery fire exchange and drone strikes on Azerbaijan-Armenia borders caused at least 17 military and one civilian deaths. The fighting took place mainly along strategic communication and infrastructure lines, including gas and oil pipelines, as well as railway connecting Baku with Tbilisi. (Jones 2020, Jaffe-Hoffman 2020, BBC News 2020) Both parties lay blame on each other for the clashes.

## 4.5 Nagorno Karabakh Conflict Through the Prism of International Law

If we are to understand a large portion of argumentation by Armenia and Azerbaijan alike regarding the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, it is necessary to establish an overview of legality of Artsakh secessionism as well as of Armenian military involvement in the region and support of Artsakh in Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Both parties are widely using legal arguments to justify their positions and actions. In this section, I will explore whether these claims are justifiable from the standpoint of international law.

### The Territorial Status of Nagorno-Karabakh and Involvement of Armenia in Artsakh

From legal standpoint, territorial affiliation of Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan is not lessened by the past events relating to national identity of the region, which the two parties often argue. Ethnic developments of the region throughout history also play no substantive role from view of international law. According to Krüger (2012: 90), the principle of *uti possidetis* is crucial to this position, but even if the Soviet decision to award Nagorno Karabakh to the Azerbaijan SSR, as a predecessor of Azerbaijan Republic is taken into account, the only principle under international law, which could possibly be in favor of Artsakh independence, would be the one of the right to secession.

While international law recognizes both internal and external right to self-determination, right to secession is considered to be the most prominent external right to self-determination. This right is however in direct conflict with the claim to state integrity. Therefore, it can only be applied in exceptional circumstances, which, according to Krüger (2012: 91) are not matching the case of Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Krüger's analysis further affirms, that the practice of non-recognition of Artsakh by international community is correct from the international law standpoint.

In his review Krüger (2012) examines potential violations of human rights and political discrimination as a reason for secession. Prevailing opinion in international jurisprudence however rejects this possibility. Krüger furthermore asserts, that even if it was a possibility, in case of Karabakh there were no massive and systemic human rights violations, and that the ensuing violence, leading to such violations was a result of Armenian secessionism, which resulted in mass exodus of Azeris from Armenia and Artsakh, only to be followed by expulsions

on both sides. It is also not possible to clearly evaluate claims of discrimination, which Armenians argue, and Azerbaijan rejects, as these were endemic to the system and time, and were not a limited to Armenia and Azerbaijan only. Armenians, who were living under vast autonomy of NKAO were also not legally excluded from political participation in Azerbaijan, specifically due to the autonomous status, which allowed for cultural realizations of Armenians in the regions. This ground for secessionism is therefore also proved to be invalid. As such, the view of international community, which reaffirms territorial integrity of Azerbaijan with Karabakh as its integral part is valid. (Krüger 2010: 90-92)

Another part of the legal analysis concludes that Armenia's military, political and financial support of Artsakh violates international law on grounds of prohibition of intervention. This however gives no ground for attack on Nagorno Karabakh by Azerbaijan, especially given the ceasefire of Bishkek Protocol, Krüger (2012: 112) claims. At the same time, Krüger (2012: 113) writes: *"Even if it is assumed that Armenia has deep political and military influence on Karabakh, it remains unclear as to whether it exerts an overall or an effective control of certain conducts or operations of the Karabakh government or of parts of the Karabakh Army."*

#### **4.6 Summary of Conflict Causes**

We can see that nationality and ethnicity play a vital role in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. To summarize the main causes for the current conflict, the region has immense symbolic and historical value for both parties. For Armenians, Nagorno Karabakh is a symbol of ancestral statehood, which survived over thousand of years of Muslim oppression, and it is unacceptable to simply give it away to Muslim Azerbaijanis. There is also a strong reminiscence of Armenian Genocide and history of ethnic cleansing, contributing to portrayal of the conflict as fight for bare existence of Armenians in Karabakh. For Azerbaijanis, the region is also centerpiece of national identity, which they define through territorial prism. The territory in dispute constitutes a symbol historical continuity of Azerbaijani and Armenian peoples in the region alike, while both parties perceive it as exclusively theirs. This symbolic value has been extrapolated by national historiographies of both parties both in years of early nationalisms of late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as during the late Soviet era, when newly rising nationalism served as a way of self-definition in contrast to Russifying existence within the USSR.

Beyond the symbolic value, mutual history of ethnic cleansing since 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed to mounting grievances and effectively to deep distrust between the populations on micro level. This distrust resulted in “pre-emptive” secession of Armenian populated Artsakh from Azerbaijan in early 1990s, while the fear of Azerification and loss of identity played a vital role. Another important factor lies in awarding of Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan in 1921 as a monument to Soviet ignorance of ethnic realities, or downward attempts to paralyze possible attempts to secede from USSR by Caucasian republics.

The 2020 war is then a direct continuation of the 1991-1994 conflict, which allowed Artsakh with support of Armenia to occupy 14 % of Azerbaijan’s territory, causing ethnic cleansing of both Armenians and Azeris, as well as a feeling of deep national humiliation in Azerbaijanis, both of which Azeri offensive of 2020 aimed to right. Continuous military presence of Artsakh forces in occupied regions led to numerous international protests by Azerbaijan, as well as to adoption of several UNSC resolutions (notably UNSCR 853, 874 and 884), which confirm Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity.

## **5. The 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War and Facebook communication of Armenian and Azerbaijani MFAs and MODs**

### **5.1 Overview of 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War**

The 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War erupted on 27 September by Azerbaijani offensive along the contact line established by the Bishkek Protocol in 1994, effectively leading to dissolution of the agreement. (Kofman 2020) On the day Armenia and Artsakh declared total mobilization, while Azerbaijan declared partial mobilization. In the following days, Azerbaijani units broke Artsakh and Armenian lines of defense in the South-eastern and Northern occupied regions. The warfare was significant due to use of modern military technology by Azerbaijan, such as drones, used both for reconnaissance and strikes.

The warring parties agreed on three ceasefires on 10 October, 17 October, and 26 October, which were all broken within hours of coming into effect. On 9 October Azerbaijan captured Jabrayl and on 17 October Füzuli. On October 22 Azerbaijan announced liberating the whole of border with Iran by capturing Agbend. On 8 November Azerbaijan’s army captured Shusha.

(MOD Azerbaijan 2020) Essentially, it seems that Azerbaijan disregarded any ceasefire until its military objective has been reached, that was to capture of Shusha, the second largest settlement in Karabakh, while using the fog of war to blame Armenia for breaching the truces.

After the fall of Shusha, a ceasefire agreement was signed by Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President of Russia Vladimir Putin, which would end the hostilities from 10 November, allow for exchange of POWs, ensure withdrawal of Armenian troops from occupied territories and introduce a Russian peacekeeping force for a 5-year period. (Kremlin 2020) In late November and December ceasefire has been broken on several occasions, the ceasefire is still in effect nonetheless. (The Guardian 2020)

In terms of civilian casualties, 65 Armenians were killed according to Armenian Authorities, while Azerbaijan reported 100 civilian deaths. Both parties attributed these deaths mainly to deliberate shelling of civilian areas. (Kavkaz Uzel 2020, Azernews 2020) Furthermore, tens of thousands of civilians have been displaced, numbers differing based on whether reported by Armenia or Azerbaijan. (International Rescue Committee 2020) Throughout the conflict, human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported on war crimes, including torture and beheadings of POWs, based mainly on social media evidence posted by soldiers involved and reports by Armenian human rights defenders. (Roth 2020) Moreover, there are records of use of prohibited ammunitions by both Armenians and Azerbaijanis, including white phosphorus. (Transparency International 2020)

It has also been established that Azerbaijan has been supported by Turkey from the onset of war, which can be exemplified by numerous public declarations by both Turkey and Azerbaijan. Scale of this support is however disputed, ranging from claims of material support and recruitment of foreign fighters to direct military involvement. (Kofman 2020, Gall 2020, Carley 2020). There have been numerous claims of involvement of Syrian fighters, who were allegedly hired by Ankara to guard infrastructure, or even to fight at the frontline. (Mirovalev 2020) Furthermore, sources cite involvement of Pakistani and Afghani fighters on Azerbaijan's side and Armenian diaspora volunteers, Iraqi Yazidis and Kurds on behalf of Artsakh. (Pugliese 2020)

Most importantly, the conflict was accompanied by a massive information warfare, which included both online activists of the two belligerent sides and official communication

channels of both belligerents. The mobilized activists were organizing themselves in groups as 100 thousand large, targeting online discussions on social media in attempts to dominate the narrative. (Mirovalev 2020). At the same time, there has been a wide involvement of influencers supporting either side, including Kim Kardashian, who donated 1 million USD to Armenia Fund. (MSN 2020) During the research, I have encountered a cartoon image of Kanye West's wife where she collects money for Armenia, highlighting her pleasant visage, while behind her tremendous buttocks she conceals a ballistic missile. The image has been widely shared by Azerbaijanis on Facebook. I have also stumbled upon numerous occasions of organic activity by both nations' diasporas online, which aimed at convincing the public of rightfulness of one party's position. An interesting illustration of a public influence operation were PROTEXTs, or sponsored articles, which Azerbaijani Community in the Czech Republic published via ČTK, the public service Czech News Agency. (ČTK 2020) The Azerbaijani Community in the Czech Republic is an interest group, which promotes and organizes Azeri cultural activities in the Czech Republic. It claims not to be in any way linked to the government of Azerbaijan. With the Nagorno Karabakh war re-ignition, its focus shifted towards spreading information about the conflict, but also Azeri state propaganda. In effort to influence the public opinion of consumers of Czech media, the interest group contracted the PP Partners PR agency.

Moreover, International Cyber Policy Center registered attempts to dominate the cyberspace via fake accounts. The researchers have identified *"589 Facebook accounts, 7,906 Pages and 447 accounts on Instagram that were involved in co-ordinated inauthentic behaviour."* (Giles 2020)

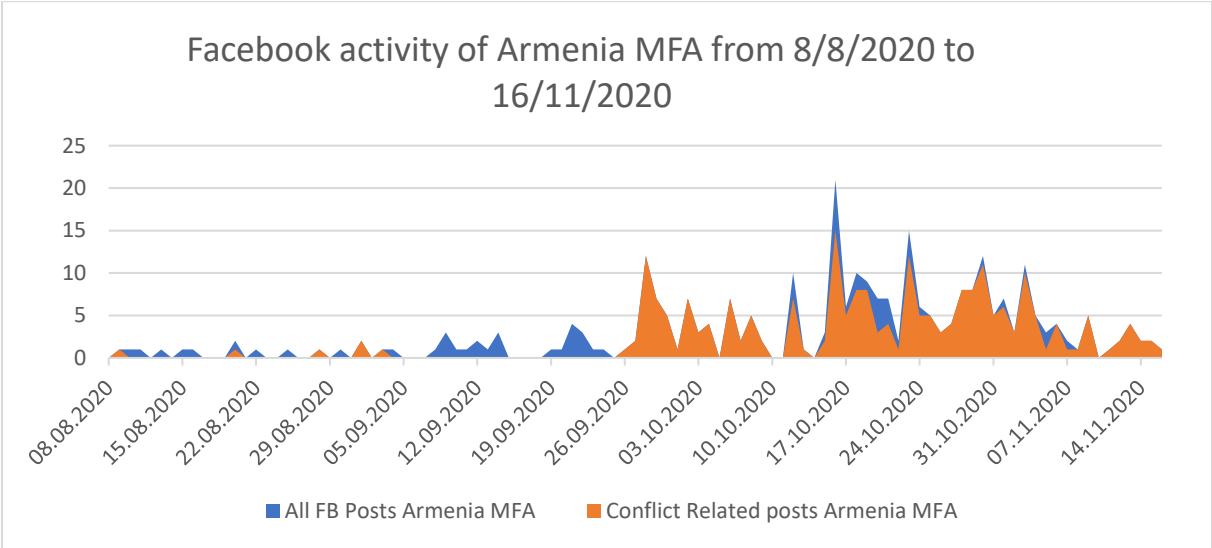
Apart from rather organic cyber activist involvement, over the course of the war much information spread was based on efforts of official state organizations to control narrative. (Giles 2020, Mirovalev 2020) Due to limited journalist access to the region, official statements and interpretation of events were often the only information source apart from social media user content. Therefore, the following section will provide an analysis of this narrative-controlling efforts by MFA of Azerbaijan and MFA of Armenia.

# 5.2 Facebook Activity of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ministries of Foreign Affairs

## 5.2.1 Facebook Activity of Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

### 5.2.1 a) Facebook Activity of Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Summary

In total Armenian MFA posted 292 times throughout the examined period of 8 August till 16 November, out of which 227 (77,7 %) posts were directly mentioning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Before the commencement of hostilities, the overall activity was low – in the first 50 days of the period selected, Armenian MFA posted 42 times, with only 7 (16,6 %) posts concerning the conflict.



After the beginning of war on 27 September, however, we can notice a significant surge in Facebook use by the ministry, with the conflict being essentially the only content of posts in the first weeks. Throughout the in-war period, until 16 November, the MFA of Armenia posted 252 times, out of which 220 (87 %) times its posts related to the conflict.

The following section summarizes chronologically content of Facebook posts by Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the examined period. The posts selected are the ones related to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, and are divided into two groups, one of pre-war conflict related posts, the other conflict related posts after commencement of hostilities on 27 September.

Posts content of Armenia MFA conflict-related posts before war commencement:

- **9 August:** a) Armenia sends humanitarian relief to Lebanon „from People of Artsakh“
- **20 August:** a) Recalls UNSC resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) in relation to Armenian National Action Plan and involvement of women in Nagorno Karabakh conflict, as an exemplification of hardships of people living in conflict zones
- **28 August:** a) Publishes speech, in which Pashinyan praised heroes of July 2020 victory against Azerbaijan, awarded them with medals. Claimed, that there is no military solution for Karabakh, and that Azerbaijan has to adopt constructive approach.
- **1 September:** a) Publishes interview of MFA for Interfax, claiming Azerbaijan to be mounting hatred, calling for peaceful process without one-sided concessions in Artsakh and involvement of Artsakh in negotiations.
- **3 September:** a) Publishes interview, claiming Armenia is looking for military personnel Exchange options, blaming Azerbaijan for lack of respect for human rights. (3 september)
- **26 September:** a) Posts remarks by permanent mission representative to UN Mher Margaryan on video – there he criticizes Azerbaijan's demagogical narratives, inability to positively contribute to deliberations and inflammatory propaganda rhetoric in Landlocked countries group

Posts content of Azerbaijan MFA conflict-related posts after war commencement on 27 September:

- **27 September:** a) Posts release by PM Pashinyan, claiming Armenia will guarantee security of Artsakh Republic, keep the borders of homeland intact, calls for International community to prevent Turkey from interference in conflict. b) Posts interview to Aljazeera with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mnatsakanyan, claiming Azerbaijan aggression with support of Turkey.
- **28 September:** a) Calls for investigative mechanisms and Azerbaijan acceptance of ceasefire régime. FM claims Artsakh armed forces determined to defend their homeland with support of Armenian forces. b) MFA Posts employ international narratives of condemnation of breaching of ceasefire, blames Azerbaijan for rejecting OSCE Minsk Group investigation mechanisms for ceasefire. Claims on 25 September Azerbaijan rejected Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office to monitor the line of contact. Recalls genocidal behavior of Turkey and labels Azerbaijan-Turkey alliance as genocidal. c) Claims 1,4 million USD have been collected to support war effort worldwide, calls for more donations. d) Reposts multiple interviews with Armenian Ambassadors, calling for support by Armenian communities abroad.
- **29 September:** a) Ambassador Nersesyan claims this is premeditated, well prepared aggression. b) Denies accusation of shelling of civilian areas of Azerbaijan.
- **30 September:** a) Claims of Turkish F-16s based in Ganja airport violating Armenian airspace, downing Armenian SU-25. b) Papikyan, Armenian Ambassador to the OSCE Minsk Group concurs with groups co-chairs that there's no alternative to peace talks.
- **1 October:** a) Reports on injury of 2 French journalists from Le Monde by Azerbaijani shelling in Martuni.
- **2 October:** a) Reports on artillery attack on village of Gegharkunik inside Armenia, as well as a missile attack on Mets Masrik settlement, killing a civilian and wounding two other. Says that while OSCE calls for cessation of hostilities, Azerbaijan escalates. b) Reports attacks on civilian facilities in Stepankert, including deliberate targeting of State Emergency Service of Artsakh, using cluster munitions. Includes photographs. c)



MFA Spokesperson Anna Naghdalyans claim, that Azerbaijan is turning into Turkish Proxy state, aiming to strengthen Turkey's role in South Caucasus.

- **3 October:** a) Claims Azerbaijan resorted to long-range missile attacks on civilian infrastructure, threatening to cause environmental disaster.
- **6 October:** a) MFA recalls statement of FM of the OSCE Minsk Group, condemning targeting of civilian population and infrastructure in Nagorno Karabakh, reiterates the need for an immediate cessation of hostilities and calls for peaceful solution. b) Claims of breaches of international humanitarian law by targeting civilian population and infrastructure, reminds of Turkey's support. c) Cites report of Armenian Human Rights Defender, which claims 19 civilian deaths, 80 injured, missile strikes against residential areas. d) Denies attack on Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline as Azerbaijani lie via MFA Spokesperson.
- **8 October:** a) Posts Pashinyan's Interview to Euronews, where he calls on the International community to recognize independence of Nagorno Karabakh. b) Claims shelling of Ghazanchetsots church in Shushi took place, posts images, in result 2 foreign journalists were injured. c) Posts infographics containing data on civilian casualties and attacks on infrastructure and private property.
- **9 October:** a) Informs on meeting between FMs of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia in Moscow.
- **12 October:** a) Posts transcript of interview of MFA Mnatsakanyan to Al-Jazeera, where he denies responsibility of Armenia for missile attacks on Ganja, claims Azerbaijan violates ceasefire. Claims necessity to protect Artsakh from ethnic cleansing, as Azerbaijan conducted in 1992. Calls for verification mechanisms of ceasefire on ground. b) Posts joint press conference of Mnatsakanyan and Lavrov, where Armenian MFA claims holding on to Minsk OSCE Format, denounces calls for Turkey to play more active role in peace process – Turkey actively militarily supports Azerbaijan.
- **13 October:** a) Posts interview of Mnatsakanyan for BBC, where he claims support for Artsakh independence and commitment to its safety.
- **16 October:** a) Posts a proclamation by Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg, which condemned Turkish military support to Azerbaijan, as well as breaking of 1994 ceasefire agreement by Azerbaijan. Furthermore, posts about condemnations of Turkish-Azerbaijan aggression by Spanish MEPs. b) Reports on call of Mnatsakanyan and UN's Guterres, claiming Azerbaijan breaking ceasefire. c) Posts a number of interviews with Armenian Ambassadors in foreign, explaining Armenian position. (CZ, BG, GB) d) Reposts a tweet, which claims French foreign minister shuns Turkey as being the only one, who doesn't respect calls for ceasefire. e) Publishes several posts on joint events regarding the recognition of Armenian genocide along with Greek representatives. f) Posts images of damage caused by Azeri shelling of civilian objects. g) Reports on flights of Azeri UAV over disputed territories.
- **17 October:** a) Posts numerous Ambassador interviews in foreign newspaper. (i.e. ITA, UA) b) Reports on Ambassador Papykian's information to OSCE, which blames Turkey for obstructing peace by being involved in Baku's decision making process. It also reports on involvement of foreign "terrorist" fighters, making a stance, that Armenia is fighting international terrorism. c) Calls upon USA to halt military assistance to Azerbaijan and pressure Turkey to stop its interference. d) Informs on reaching agreement on humanitarian truce starting 18 October.

- **18 October:** a) Reports on violation of ceasefire by Azerbaijan. b) Reports on rejection of withdrawal of wounded soldiers from the battlefield by Baku.
- **19 October:** a) Posts further claims and condemnations of Azerbaijan violating the ceasefire. b) Condemns beheading of Armenian soldiers by Azeris, reposts Human rights defender of Artsakh post, which contains visuals of beheaded soldier, blurred. c) Reposts statements of Armenian Ambassadors (i. e. Italy, USA)
- **20 October:** a) Posts several interviews with MFA. b) Posts interviews with Ambassadors of Armenia.
- **21 October:** a) Reports on meeting between FMA Mnatsakanyan and FMA of Russia Lavrov, appreciating Russian role in ceasefire arrangement and claims Azerbaijan violates ceasefire. b) Claims genocidal tendencies of Azeri-Turkish offensive, violations of international law.
- **22 October:** a) Reports strikes on Shushi cathedral. b) Posts statement of Catalanian parliament, calling for end of hostilities in Nagorno Karabakh.
- **23 October:** a) Reports on meeting of FMA Mnatsakanyan with US Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Phillip Reeker, pointing out agreement on necessity of implementation of ceasefire plan. b) Reports on meeting of Mnatsakanyan with Pompeo, highlighting Azeri aggression with support of Turkey, violations of ceasefire and agreeing on implementation of ceasing hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, as well as the continuation of the peace process within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs. c) Publishes the statement of H. E. Mher Margaryan at the UN, blaming Azerbaijan of violation of Human rights, money laundering and breach of humanitarian law.
- **24 October:** a) Publishes a declaration by Adam Schiff at House of Representatives of U.S. Congress, calling for recognition of independent Artsakh. b) Reports on OSCE Minsk Group meeting, where all co-chairs called for implementation of agreements on the cessation of hostilities. c) Claims intensive missile attacks on Stepankert by Azerbaijani-Turkish armed forces.
- **25 October:** a) Informs of new ceasefire starting on 26 October. b) Reports on the MFA trip to the U.S., garnering support from Armenian Diaspora.
- **26 October:** a) Dismisses Azeri claims of violating ceasefire. b) Reports dead civilians in Azerbaijani missile attack at Avetaranots village. c) Publishes transcript of Pashinyan interview for Indian newspaper.
- **27 October:** a) Denounces missile attack claims by Azerbaijan as a lie, blames Baku for continuous violations of ceasefire.
- **28 October:** a) Claims, that Azerbaijan bombed Stepankert and Shushi, attacking civilian infrastructure. Posts pictures of damage on houses. b) Condemns attacks on Armenians in France. c) Claims Azerbaijan targets medical facilities, killing captives.
- **29 October:** a) Reports Azerbaijan shelling civilian settlements at Martakert, Shushi and Stepankert with SMERCH missiles. b) Further claims attacks on peaceful settlements using missiles, artillery, UAV for past 3 days, claims Azerbaijan pursues genocidal intent.
- **30 October:** a) Reports on violation of Geneva conventions by Azerbaijan, deliberate attacks on civilians and beheadings. b) Posts video-confession of Middle Eastern fighter captured by Armenian forces. c) Reports on commencement and finalization of meeting between Azerbaijan and Armenian MFA in Geneva. d) Posts video evidence of

use of cluster and phosphorus munition by Azerbaijan via Artsakh Human rights defender.

- **31 October:** a) Reports on results of meeting of Azerbaijan and Armenian MFA in Geneva, reiterating the continuation of peace process within the Minsk Group framework. b) Reports on letter Pashinyan sent to Putin, asking for immediate consultation to define type and scale of assistance Russian Federation can provide Armenia to ensure its security. c) Reports on shelling of residential areas of Stepankert, few hours after OSCE Minsk Group statement, shares video and photo evidence.
- **1 November:** a) Posts another video evidence of Syrian mercenary involvement. b) Reposted statement of Pope Francis, reminding of fighting in Nagorno Karabakh. c) Condemns Azerbaijani employment of terrorist, refusal to observe humanitarian truce, use of prohibited weapons and attacks on civilian population.
- **2 November:** a) Reposts claim of Azerbaijani artillery fire killing a civilian. b) Claims forest fires caused by Azeri phosphorus munitions. c) Condemns acts of vandalism on General Consulate of Armenia in Lyon and desecration of Armenian monuments in France.
- **3 November:** a) Posts visuals of a rocket used against civilian areas, claims it is a weapon of mass destruction. b) Condemns terror attack in Vienna, links it to fights in Karabakh – terrorists are sponsored by Turkey and Azerbaijan. c) Claims shelling of Shushi and Stepankert, posts photo-evidence. d) Posts a number of Ambassador interviews for foreign media, proof of recognition of Artsakh from council of Lombardia.
- **4 November:** a) Posts images of shelling of Shusha. b) Posts remarks by Mnatsakanyan at Council of Europe, calling for action against Turkey destabilizing the region and the Middle East, for establishing unhindered access to observers to conflict area. c) Posts infographics by Artsakh Ombudsmann on damage to civilian population.
- **6 November:** a) Summarizes discussion of Armenian OSCE Ambassador Papikyan, who claims Azerbaijan used prohibited weapons, war-crimes against civilians. This was exacerbated by government-supported anti-Armenian sentiment, which manifests in hatespeech on social media. Blames Turkey for being involved militarily and supplying Jihadists to Azerbaijan. Accentuates, that Turkey should no place in regulation process. b) Reports about release of ad-hoc report by Armenian Ombudsmann on use of chemical ammunition, environmental terrorism 1) the used ammunition has nature of mass destruction; 2) ammunitions contain chemical elements; 3) are used towards forests, causing mass fires and long-term severe damage to environment; 4) according to expert assessments, the fire, caused by this type of weapon is not stopped even with the extinguishing materials or water; 5) the forests where these ammunitions were used, are located close to the civilian communities; 6) according to the fact-finding activities, civilians, who were probably damaged from the use of the ammunition, are hiding from attacks of Azerbaijani military forces in those forests; 7) the use of this ammunition against civilian objects is prohibited by the international law and may entail to war crime.
- **8 November:** a) Informs of release of a report on inhumane treatment of POWs and mutilation of bodies of Armenian servicemen by Azerbaijani forces.
- **9 November:** a) Cites report by Armenian Human Rights defender, which claims ethnic cleansing, war crimes and stirring of hate against Armenians by Azerbaijan. b)

Condemns downing of Russian Mi-24 by Azerbaijan, claims this incident happened far from conflict zone, on Armenian territory.

- **November 11:** a) Cites UN Working Group Report on use of mercenaries, which concluded possible involvement of Syrian fighters on Azerbaijani side, linking these mercenaries to war crimes in Syria. b) Claims of violation of children rights with infographics and images. Claims at least 50 civilian deaths and deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, including schools.
- **November 13:** a) Posts claims of violations of rights of ethnic Armenians, discrimination, anti-Armenian racial propaganda, and ethnic cleansing by Azerbaijan.
- **November 14:** a) Shares statement of World Church Council, calling for protection of religious sites in Nagorno Karabakh by UNESCO, implicitly condemning actions by Turkey.
- **November 15:** a) MFA condemns acts of vandalism against a Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Church in Shushi, claiming further atrocities against civilian population of Artsakh, attempts to destroy cultural heritage.
- **November 16:** a) Posts an interview piece, where Pashinyan claims abandonment of city of Shusha not part of peace process.

### 5.2.1 b) Analytical Overview of Armenia MFA Facebook Activity

From the graph above we can see, that prior to war commencement, Armenian MFA was using Facebook continuously, but with very low frequency. In the 50 days, Armenian MFA only produced 42 posts, leaving often 3 or more days without any posted content. This reflects also on posting about the conflict. It is not possible to identify an underlying strategy regarding conflict-related content. At the same time the MFA praises soldiers fighting in summer 2020 skirmishes and call on Azerbaijan to proceed with peaceful solution of the conflict. Only on the eve of the conflict on 26 September, Armenian MFA reactively addresses claims by Azerbaijan.

Since beginning of the war on 27 September, virtually all FB posts start to only concern the conflict, growing in numbers at a high pace. Later on in time it is still vast majority (87 % overall) of posts, which relate to the conflict. This would seem natural due to an institutional role of MFAs to narrate world events, here extrapolated by Armenia being in center of those events. (Manor 2019)

From the very onset of war, Armenian MFA incorporates the Turkish threat into its narrative. This manifests in pointing out Turkish aid to Azerbaijani aggression, later-on with associating the alliance with genocidal intent, reminiscing of the 1915 Genocide. Concerns of human rights violations are a repeatedly used motive. The MFA on multiple points claims deliberate

targeting of civilians, engaging in portrayal of Artsakh republic as a victim of inhumane aggression. To strengthen this narrative, the MFA cites reports by Artsakh Defender of Human Rights, which gather evidence on civilian suffering in the conflict.

A strong point is also made around involvement of Muslim fighters from Syria, which allows the MFA to associate Azerbaijan and Turkey with support of international terrorism and create an image, in which Armenians in Artsakh fight Islamic terror, and thus serve as a shield for other countries. It further fuels this image of battle of civilization against barbarianism of Azerbaijani invaders by stressing out the alleged killings and beheadings of Armenian prisoners of war, as well as by highlighting damage made by the fighting to Christian monuments in Nagorno Karabakh.

Another dominant narrative concerns with Azerbaijan's breach of ceasefire agreement of 1994 and not respecting the multilateral institutions. Repeatedly Armenia calls on Azerbaijan to respect the Bishkek protocol status quo, not mentioning that it means de facto occupation of districts surrounding Nagorno Karabakh. On multiple occasions Armenia tries to create an image of vast international support, by trying to involve foreign dignitaries in the communication process, even though it is only repeating points made by Armenian diplomats during the talks, who all condemn Azerbaijan's aggression and point out Azeri crimes against humanity.

Concerning International law, the MFA cites primarily crimes against humanity and use of prohibited ammunition by Azerbaijan. At the same time it however makes case for Artsakh secessionism, challenging international community to recognize Artsakh as independent republic, against the current practice of the community.

It is also hard to omit the obscure practice of interview posting. Rather than publishing a statement of a politician based on an interview, Armenian MFA would post either full-text interview, or a long section of the interview. (Appendix 3) A recurring theme is also posting of support by third parties, in order to reinforce Armenian position of Artsakh being a subject of unfair aggression. Mostly, these endorsements are by minor actors, such as Parliamentary Committee of Catalonia (22 October) or a Council of Lombardia (3 November). Apart from that, there is a large body of interviews with Armenian Ambassadors, given to foreign media in their respective countries of residence. This practice seems to me a mirroring of confusion

on the organizational level. The MFA seems unable to decide, who to address by its posts. Even though the Ambassadors are naturally taking Armenian stance, it is difficult to fathom these interviews would be targeting foreign audience. At the same time, these interviews are often posted as a link to websites of news servers of countries respective Ambassadors reside in, in these countries' languages. It is thus hard to fathom they would be targeting domestic Armenian audience either. Which leads me to a conclusion, that this is a further demonstration of Armenia's lack of communication strategy for social media – and that Armenian MFA conflates successful managing of audiences on social media with overall (read any form of) activity.

That said, during research of the content of Armenian MFA posts, I noticed an interesting approach to multi-linguistic posting. While mostly I would see posts in Armenian with Russian and English translations, certain posts were also translated to other languages, such as Spanish, Turkish, Georgian, Polish, German, Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Romanian, or Lithuanian. These translations were absolutely inconsistent – content of those posts did not relate to the countries, whose localization Armenian MFA published. As an example, we can use a post from 18 October, in which the MFA shunned Azerbaijan for rejecting a petition of Red Cross. Among Russian, English and other translations, there was also Persian for no apparent reason, as if Red Cross even operated in Iran. Another example, also from 18 October provides Lithuanian translation for a post, where the MFA criticizes Azerbaijan for violating a ceasefire agreed upon at OSCE Minsk Group. This would be justifiable, if we would assume Lithuania a member of the group. Yet, this is the only instance, when Lithuanian translation is provided, out of numerous posts mentioning the Minsk Group. Such approach seems extremely incoherent, and one must ask, whether these translations were made based on which polyglot was having a shift at that very moment.

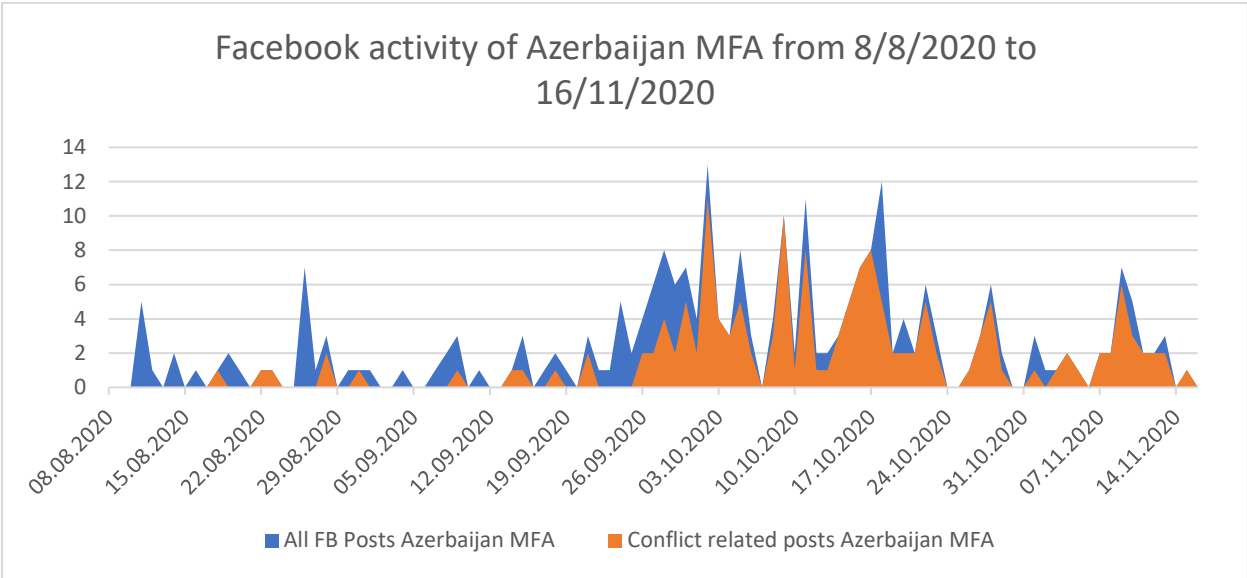
Overall, both the graphical and content analysis of Armenian MFA Facebook activity reveal a number of inconsistencies and the probable ad hoc character of posting, which could be associated with the immediate, or reactive way of conducting digital public diplomacy. (Gilboa 2008) These signs can be interpreted as lack of adaptation towards social media environment, and to lack of communication strategy.

## 5.2.2 Facebook Activity of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs

### 5.2.2 a) Facebook Activity of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Summary

The following section will provide description and analysis of data collected concerning Azerbaijan MFA activity on Facebook throughout the 100day period from 8 August until 16 November, while the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War beginning is marked on 27 September.

In total, throughout the examined period Azerbaijan MFA published 250 posts. Out of these 154 (61,6 %) were concerning the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. During the pre-war period between 8 August and 27 September, Azerbaijan MFA published 61 posts, out of which 14 (23 %) were regarding the war. In these posts we can see certain periodicity, as the graph bellow shows, with posts being published bi-weekly or more frequently.



We can clearly notice a massive surge in Facebook post activity since the beginning of the war on 27 September. From this day, Azerbaijan MFA published 189 posts, out of which 140 (74 %) were addressing the conflict situation by direct mention. To provide more context, the following section presents an aggregate of war-related posts content, separated into pre-war and post-war period, ordered by date.

Posts content of Azerbaijan MFA conflict-related posts before war commencement:

- **18 August:** a) Post criticizes illegal activity of Armenia in Karabakh with regard to illegal settlement building.
- **22 August:** a) Posts text of UNSC resolution, which acknowledges Nagorno Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan, calls for withdrawal of Armenian forces.

- **23 August:** a) Reminds of Armenian Occupation of regions of Jabrail and Fuzuli regions, using hashtag [#StopArmenianAggression](#) b) Posts text of UNSC resolution, which acknowledges Nagorno Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan, calls for withdrawal of Armenian forces.
- **28 August:** a) Reminds of Armenian massacres of civilians from First Nagorno-Karabakh War. b) Claims Armenian hostilities and provocation in Karabakh region, blaming Armenia for fueling tensions.
- **29 August:** a) Claims Armenian hostilities and provocation in Karabakh region, blaming Armenia for fueling tensions.
- **31 August:** a) Reminds of Armenian occupation of Gubaldy region, using hashtag [#StopArmenianAggression](#)
- **14 September:** a) Claims Armenians use tragic event of Beirut Explosion to resettle Lebanese Armenians to Nagorno Karabakh to pursue policy of illegal settlements.
- **15 September:** a) Blames Armenia of environmental terrorism and deprivation of Karabakh inhabitants of water.
- **18 September:** a) Posts text of UNSC resolution, which acknowledges Nagorno Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan, calls for withdrawal of Armenian forces.
- **21 September:** a) Claims Armenian hostilities and provocation in Karabakh region, blaming Armenia for fueling tensions.
- **26 September:** a) Claims Armenian hostilities and provocation in Karabakh region, blaming Armenia for fueling tensions. b) Calls for action by International community against Armenian occupation.

Posts content of Azerbaijan MFA conflict-related posts after war commencement on 27 September:

- **27 September:** a) Claims Armenian hostilities and provocation in Karabakh region, blaming Armenia for fueling tensions.
- **28 September:** a) Start publishing videos of AZ military successes in an counterattack against Armenian aggression. b) Blames Armenia of breaching Geneva conventions, of terrorism and breaching international humanitarian law.
- **29 September:** a) Reposts Turkey's message support of Azerbaijan via livestream of MFA of Turkey. b) Blames Armenia for using European Court as tool for its political games.
- **30 September:** a) Publishes statement of at OSCE Perm delegation and necessity of mediated settlement. b) Informs on successes of counteroffensive, claims respect of humanitarian law and regard for civilian lives, posts images of destruction of civilian facilities and homes. Uses [#StopArmenianAggression](#), [#StopWarCrimes](#). c) Praises Turkish brotherly support.
- **1 October:** a) Refuses claims of use of Syrian militias by Azerbaijan. b) Blames Armenia of endangering foreign journalists by allowing them in combat areas.
- **2 October:** a) Reminds of other occupied regions to be liberated from Armenian occupation. b) Posts infographics on civilian casualties caused by Armenian aggression. c) Claims Armenia purposely targets civilians. d) Claims Armenia not interested in resolving conflict at Minsk Group. e) Further praises of support for Azerbaijan by Turkey.



- **3 October:** a) Urges journalists not to visit occupied territories. b) Claim Armenian diaspora organizations are guilty of organizing terrorist activities against Azerbaijan and its civilians.
- **4 October:** a) Azerbaijan claim cooperation with OSCE Minsk group and reports on calls with French, Russian, USA co-chair – informs of civilian casualties and declares Armenian withdrawal from occupied territories as condition for peace.
- **5 October:** a) Posts infographics on civilian casualties caused by Armenian aggression. b) Reports on bilateral calls between MFA and foreign counterparts, interjects in structured accusations, such as: „[#Armenia's blatant #violation of international #humanitarianlaw](#) & deliberate shelling of Azerbaijani civilians far from the line of contact was brought to the attention.“ (with USA) or „*The latest tensions in the region, especially Armenia’s deliberate shelling the Azerbaijani civilians and civilian objects were discussed.*“ (with Finland)
- **6 October:** a) Posts about support by Afghanistan.
- **8 October:** a) Comments on Heiko Maas call for ceasefire by saying it would only preserve occupational status quo.
- **9 October:** a) Denies Armenian claim targeting religious places as false accusation. b) Claims Armenia smuggles arms under the guise of humanitarian aid.
- **10 October:** a) Announces Russia-Armenia-Azerbaijan deal on starting of ceasefire talks.
- **11 October:** a) Claims Armenian missile attack on Ganja far beyond frontline, reporting civilian deaths, including photographs. b) Further exposing crimes against civilians, use of hashtags [#stoparmenianterrorism](#), [#karabakhisazerbaijan](#), [#ganjastrong](#)
- **12 October:** a) Post stipulating Armenian aggression against children, calling upon Red Cross, Human Rights Watch or UNICEF to intervene.
- **14 October:** a) Posts image from aerial strike destroying Armenian vehicles, claiming them to be missile launchers ready to attack Ganja.
- **15 October:** a) Claims Armenia violates humanitarian ceasefire by shelling civilians.
- **16 October:** a) Claims Armenia targets children and educational facilities, causes suffering of hundreds of thousands of children.
- **17 October:** a) Further claims of cruel attacks on civilians in Ganjga, reports civilian casualties, crimes against humanity. b) Announces humanitarian truce. c) Posts celebration of Azerbaijan Independence Day, claim Jabrayl liberated.
- **18 October:** a) Posts celebration of Azerbaijan Independence Day, claim Fuzuli liberated. b) Reaffirms of commitment to protect civilians despite ceasefire and claims Armenians violate the truce.
- **20 October:** a) Reports on state visit of Speaker of Turkish National Assembly to Ganja, posts images of laying flowers for the victims of missile strikes.
- **22 October:** a) Claims continued attacks on civilians areas far from conflict zone. b) Posts images of Israeli help to victims of shelling and Israeli ambassador laying flowers.
- **23 October:** a) Posts article by [Washington Times](#) claiming territorial integrity only way to peace as a prelude to Mike Pompeo meeting.
- **26 October:** a) Claims third violation of ceasefire by Armenia.
- **27 October:** a) Condemns violation of children rights and ignoring of international conventions by Armenia. b) Claims another “bloody attack” took place, Armenia not interested in political solution.

- **28 October:** a) Reports Armenia deliberately killing civilians at Barda, calls it a genocide, crime against humanity and war-crime.
- **3 November:** a) Posts statistics of crimes against civilians committed by Armenia since 27 September
- **5 November:** a) Claims violation of International law by Armenia.
- **7 November:** a) Reports on Armenia violating humanitarian ceasefire, targeting civilian population and Azerbaijani diplomats, uses [#WarCrimes](#). b) Condemns attacks of radical Armenian forces against Azeri diplomats and communities in foreign countries.
- **8 November:** a) Posts about glorious army of Azerbaijan liberation of Shusha. b) Celebrates anniversary of Azerbaijan flag with patriotic call for flying it over liberated territories.
- **9 November:** a) Posts images of distribution of humanitarian aid to civilians, who suffered of “Armenian rape“ of Azerbaijan. b) Acknowledges shooting down Russian Mi-24, offers Russia compensation, apologizes for the act.
- **10 November:** a) Posts declaration of ceasefire with conditions and Russian peacekeeping mission.
- **11 November:** a) Criticizes France for Minsk Group statement on cessation of hostilities as biased, highlights the narrative of territorial integrity and illegality of Armenian occupation.
- **12 November:** a) Welcomes establishment Russian-Turkish Center for Control over ceasefire. b) Criticizes Canadian Foreign Minister’s statement on cessation of hostilities, asking why Canada did not condemn occupation of Karabakh.

### 5.2.2 b) Analytical Overview of Azerbaijan MFA Facebook Activity

Prior to the conflict, Azerbaijan MFA has been posting on Facebook with moderate frequency and high consistency. Only in the first three days of the examined period there were no posts published, but further on at most 2 days were left without content. Over the period of 50 days, 61 posts were published, out of which 14 directly addressed the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh. There has been a weekly to bi-weekly periodicity in posting about the conflict. Before the war beginning on 27 September, the MFA would post reminders of Armenians occupying regions Azerbaijan would liberate in future. Prior to war the MFA posts UNSC Resolutions, which deem this occupation illegal and which affirm Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity. Furthermore, on multiple occasions the MFA claims Armenian provocations and hostilities, as well as environmental and anti-civilian terror. Both the periodicity and careful selection of content would suggest that MFA of Azerbaijan posted as a part of broader communication strategy, which would provide the audience with justification for Azerbaijan’s assault on Nagorno Karabakh. The posts provide audience with moral and legal reasons for the attack, as well as they position Azerbaijan as a victim, who is using war as last resort to protect civilians.

From September 27 and commencement of full-scale war, there is an apparent growth in activity, even though not all posts explicitly mention the conflict. The proportion would however rise from 1 October, reaching 74 % overall.

The recurring theme in this period is the one of Armenian hostilities, from which Azerbaijan has to defend itself. While blaming Armenians for sparking the conflict, the MFA boasts military advancements on the offensive. There is an evident scheming, use of fog of war and a discrepancy obvious to an observer between MFA's proclamations and action on the battlefield, which is related to another of narratives built.

On multiple occasions the MFA blames Armenians for breaching one of several truces negotiated, only to soon announce liberation of another region – this leads to an assumption, that the military activity by Azerbaijan had to be resumed during the truce. Indeed, accounts of military successes are frequent, containing also well edited videos and photographs of aerial strikes against Armenian military vehicles.

A repeating motive is Armenian targeting of civilians, the most often reproduced one. The MFA blames Armenians for shelling civilian areas far from the frontline often specifically targeting children and education facilities. Armenians are further blamed for crimes against humanity and labeled as terrorists, on one occasion called genocidal. This spin contributes to depicting Armenians as the inhumane aggressors, against whom the military operation is justified, as well as portrayal of Azerbaijan as the real.

Among posts, some of which did not explicitly concern the conflict, the ones pursuing the narrative of Turkic brotherhood between Turkey and Azerbaijan stand out. The idea is promoted as “one nation-two states”, while Turkish and only Turkish political representatives are being dubbed “brothers” in these posts. Positioning Turkey as a supporter of Azeri cause can serve as an attempt to boost morale of domestic audience, as well as of Muslim audiences abroad by pursuing an image of not only Turkic, but also Islamic unity.

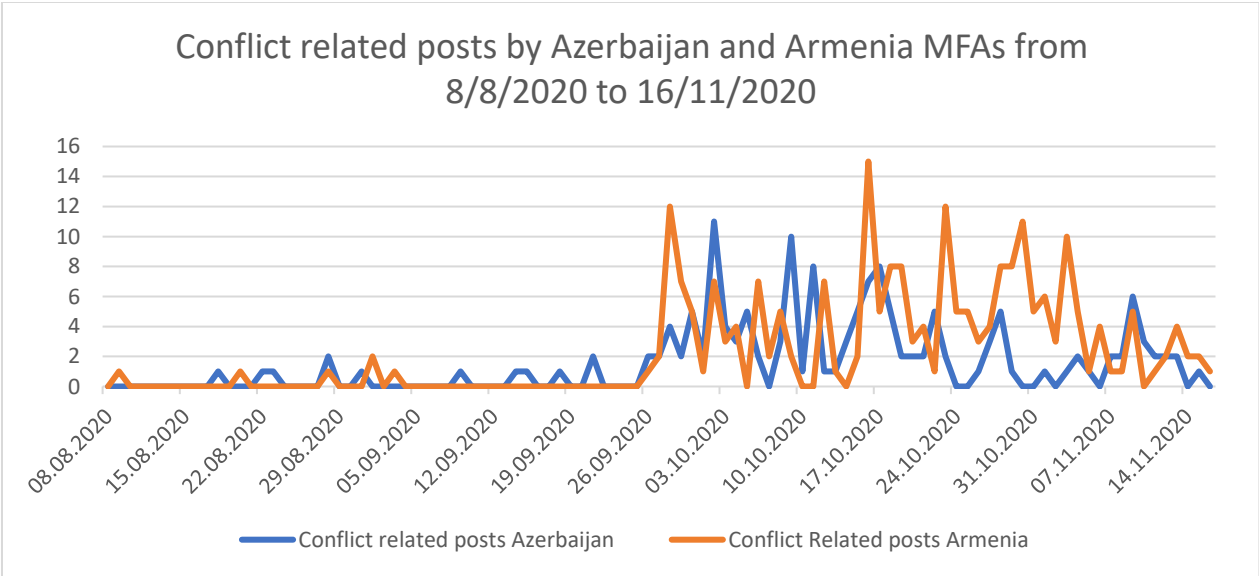
At the same time, the MFA engages in criticism of foreign diplomats' statements, arguing international law and the UNSC resolutions as a justification for military action, since these resolutions clearly state Artsakh occupation of surrounding regions illegal and Nagorno Karabakh under Azerbaijan's sovereignty under International law.

From the stylistic perspective, Azerbaijan MFA posts are rather well structured and organized. Since the beginning of war, the MFA posts in English apart from Azerbaijani, and on 5 October Russian is added to the mix. No other languages are being used.

In sum, the Facebook activity of Azerbaijan MFA is consistent and up until the conflict it is possible to identify a central strategy, which would manifest in preparing ground for the assault on Artsakh. It could be associated with an intermediate level of public digital diplomacy, since it seems to be premeditated, proactive and aiming to build and control the narrative rather than to only mitigate damage. (Gilboa 2008) Upon reaching the war period, the communication did not cease to be structured and comprehensive, even though it naturally reacts to the event as they unfold. It is reasonable to assume, that the MFA was following a plan for strategic communication.

### 5.3 Comparison of Facebook Communication of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ministries of Foreign Affairs in relation to 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War

From the previous section we can abstract, that Facebook has been grasped as a channel to control the narrative about the war by both parties, which manifests by rise in Facebook posts since the beginning of war on 27 September. The following graph compares the total number of conflict related posts throughout the whole 100 day period.



In total, Azerbaijan published 154 posts relating to the conflict, while Armenia posted about the conflict 227 times. This would make it seem, that Armenia out-posted Azerbaijan by large.

However, Azerbaijan's activity was spread more evenly throughout the whole period. Specifically, before the war commencement, Azerbaijan MFA posted 14 times about the conflict, as compared to Armenia MFA's 7 posts. The frenetic rise in posting by Armenia from 27 September on seems like an attempt to make up for the previous inactivity, which translated in lack of control over the narrative.

Before the war, Armenian posts were not following a clear strategy in relation to the conflict. In contrast, Azerbaijan used the space to build up an image of Armenian provocations and mistreatment of civilians in Nagorno Karabakh, shedding positive light on potential offensive, which would be morally justifiable and solely a reaction to Armenian hostilities. Furthermore, Azerbaijan used its posts to prepare ground for the offensive on legal basis as well, by citing UNSC resolutions, which support Azerbaijani territorial integrity and condemn occupation of territories by Artsakh Armenians. We can thus identify a level of premeditation on Azerbaijan MFA's part and lack thereof by Armenia.

An important topic in both party's posting was Turkey. Armenia portrays Turkey as a villain, who controls Azerbaijan to pursue its genocidal tendencies, referencing the 1915 Genocide. In contrast Azerbaijan depicts Turkey as a brotherly nation and a staunch supporter of the just cause of liberating occupied territories.

Both parties engaged in blaming the other for crimes against humanity, war crimes and attacks on civilian population, in order to strengthen the narrative of victimhood. Armenian MFA further linked Azerbaijan to international terrorism and use of terror methods. Similarly, Azerbaijan MFA called Armenian activity a terrorist one. Both parties also indict each other of breaching ceasefires on multiple occasions, contributing to fog of war – moral relativity,

While Armenia called upon international support and was trying to manifest an image of international support, Azerbaijan countered this attempt by engaging in critical dialogue with foreign dignitaries and diplomats.

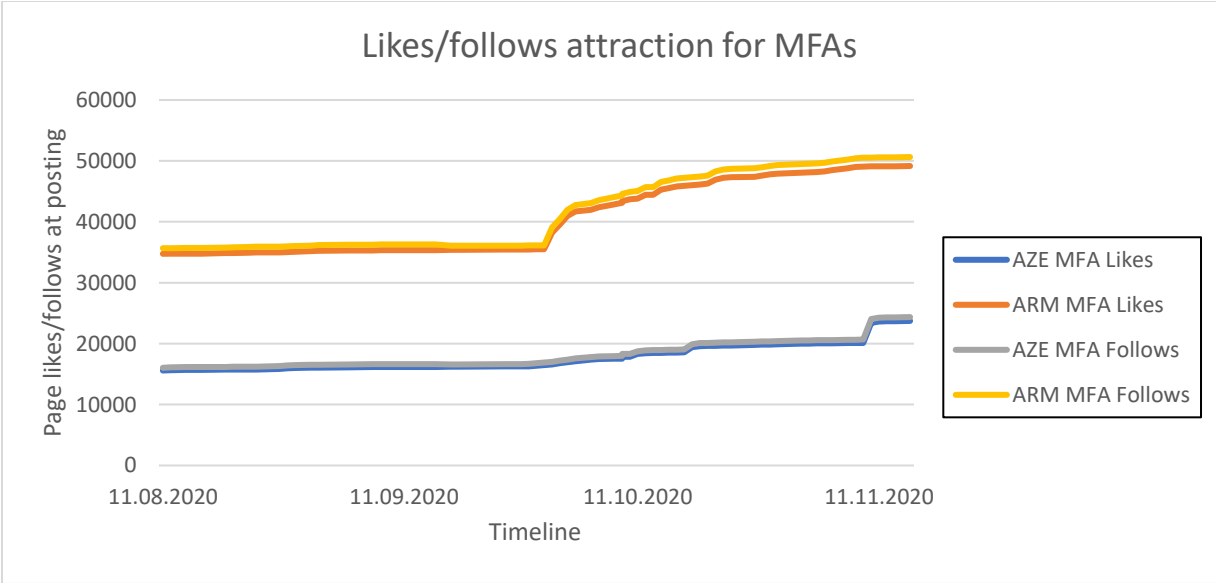
Since the offset of the conflict, both MFAs were using their post content to boost morale of their citizens – Armenia often citing successfully repelling enemy attacks, Azerbaijan claiming advances in occupied territory.

From the International law debate, Armenia pursues the narrative of Artsakh right to secede from oppressive Azerbaijan, even calling for Artsakh's international recognition. At the same

time Armenian MFA presents Azeri breach of the 1994 ceasefire as a violation of international law. Azerbaijani MFA then argues the generally accepted position by international community, which affirms Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and condemns occupation of its territories by Armenians.

When it comes to stylistic properties of posts, the ones by Azerbaijan MFA are better structured and ordered than the ones of Armenian MFA. They follow a clear communication strategy and structure, while Armenian posts give an impression of being ad-hoc reactions to events both on field of battle and in diplomatic community. This discrepancy also manifested in handling of linguistic content of parties’ respective publications on Facebook – where Azerbaijan follows a clear method, Armenia presents itself with utmost incoherency.

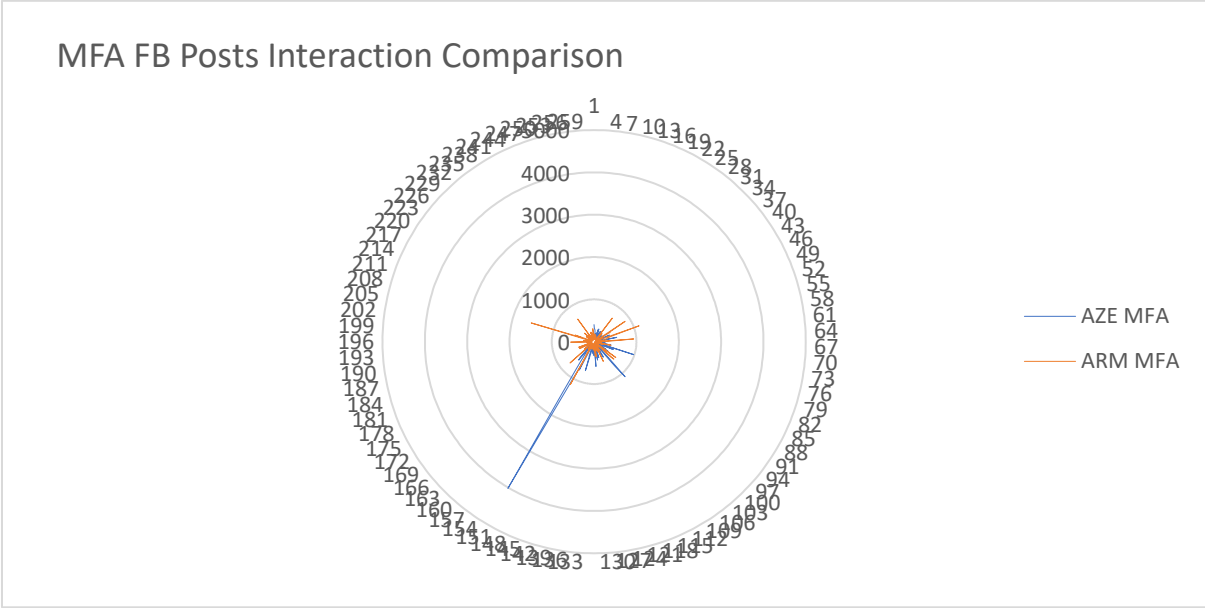
Another point to consider is what any social media manager would aim for when creating and posting content on social media – that is the growth of audience, which can be associated with likes and follows of their page on Facebook.



The chart above shows the numbers of likes and follows the examined FB pages exhibited throughout the 100 day period in question. Armenian MFA had a starting position, which could be in general terms considered easier, since it had more than double the audience in the beginning (34751 Likes/35674 Follows)of the watch period than its Azeri counterpart (15590 Likes/16044 Follows). At the end of the period, Armenian MFA gathered 49371 Likes/50853 Follows, while Azeri MFA had 23733 Likes/24361 Follows. We can notice the raise in audience of both accounts since the war start, while the rise is steeper in Armenian case. Several

explanations are at hand – much of content of online activity of MFA of Armenia focused on external outreach – calls for assistance as well as public outreach activities by Armenian Embassies abroad were employed, as well as the mobilization of diaspora. The significant diaspora itself could be the reason for rise in following as well – there are over 4 million ethnic Armenians living in diaspora, so the interest over happenings in their homeland might have went up, reflecting on the number of follows. Azeri diaspora, in contrast, is significantly slower (1 million people), therefore the rise in following would be lower accordingly. These interpretations, however, cannot be verified without access to FB data on users.

By the end of the conflict, Armenian MFA audience went up by some 15000 followers, Azeri MFA by 8000. The growth, therefore, is comparable, given the original numbers the accounts were starting with. The following chart, however, highlights some of the forementioned discrepancies in efficiency of communication by both MFA. As we can see, the Armenian MFA posted on FB significantly more times, than Azerbaijan MFA did. However, the amount of generated interactions favors Azerbaijani admins – 46385 interactions were generated by Azeris, while Armenian posts generated 44774 interactions. While this seem to be a fairly similar number, lets not forget the double the liking/following audience the Armenians might have boasted throughout the examined period. Even this preliminary observation points out to a problem in effective communication management the Armenian MFA might be facing.

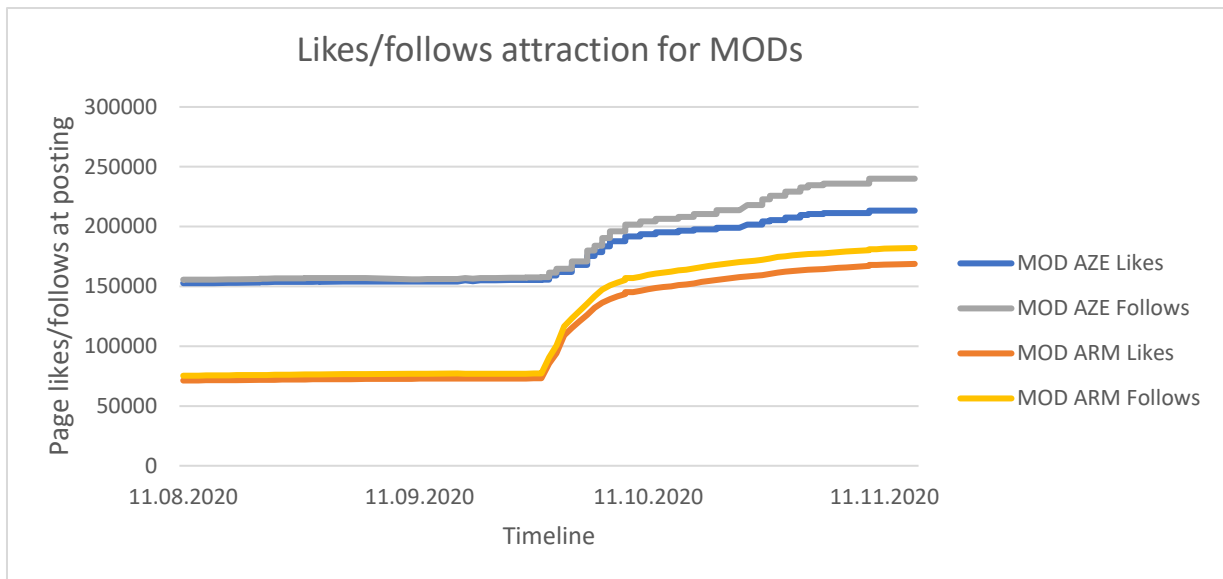


## **5.4 Comparison of Facebook Communication of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ministries of Defense in relation to 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War**

For reasons explained earlier, I did not venture into qualitative evaluation of FB communication content of the MODs, rather focusing on the quantitative level of evaluation and comparison. To delimitate this portion of dataset, the Azerbaijani MOD generated total 653 posts in the period examined, while Armenian MOD posted 369 times. When it comes to audience to the pages, Armenian MOD had 71283 Likes/75304 Follows, and it was the Azerbaijan MOD who boasted 152700 Likes/ 155464 Follows at the beginning of the period. At the end of it, Armenian MOD has seen the rise to 168764 Likes/182051 Follows, while its counterpart 233263 Likes/274295 Follows.

The chart below shows a steep rise in audience for both parties at the first days of war commencement, as it was the case for Armenia MFA. Significant then is the growth in difference between Likes and Follows levels for both pages, which would signify the rising level of attractive content the pages are publishing – a thorough look into the Crowdtangle dataset reveals, that much of the content since the beginning of the war is of viewer-attractive kind – native videos. By examining a portion of the most successful (or overperforming) posts, we can establish, that such content includes almost exclusively videos of military operations, where guns are shot, drone missiles fired, military technique included. Simply put – such content attracts not only audience somehow invested in the conflict, but also hobby viewers of military snuff content, which especially Azerbaijan provided plenty of.

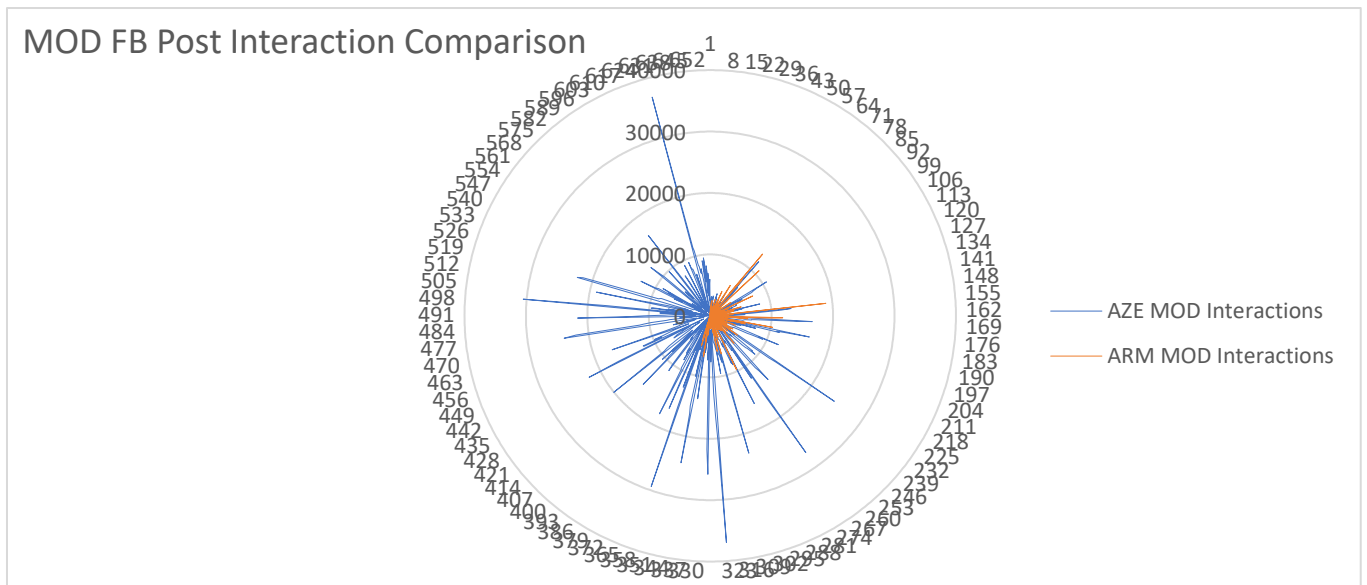




Important to note is the audience growth of both pages – Armenia MOD, starting in a worse of position, gained over 50 %, while Azerbaijan MOD grew little over 30 %. The explanation could be similar to the one stipulated in the MFA related section.

Upon analyzing the data on user engagement for both MODs, quite striking image lays supportive of the content-quality argument. The 369 ARM MOD posts at peak of 168764 Likes/182051 generated 635442 interactions. In contrast, the 653 posts at 233263 Likes/274295 Follows by AZE MOD generated 3392690 interactions.

The following chart on MOD FB Interactions not only displays the difference between amount of posts, it very clearly points to the posts potential organic reach, and therefore successfulness of FB communication efforts by the respective MODs. Even though the ARM MOD fares better in comparison to the ARM MFA in terms of interactions, we can see the AZE MOD overperforming with numerous high-interaction posts (relative to our data context).



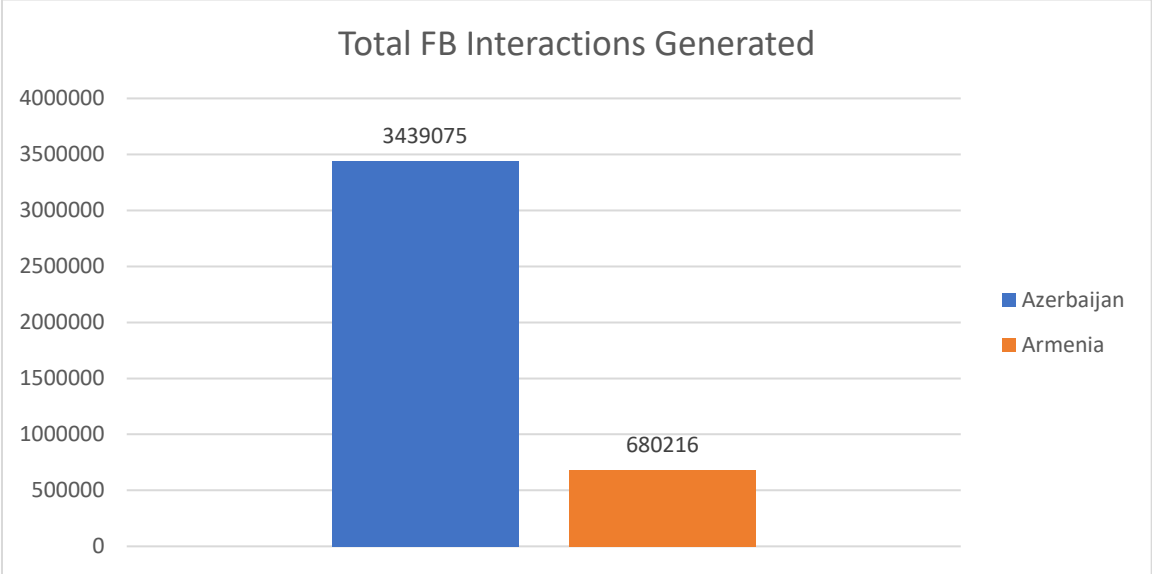
Even though an observer might point out to possibility of exponential growth of interactions given the audience number/post amount combo, a comparison with the MFA case controverts the idea. Again, it is important to point out to the issue of content and correct management of the audience by noting the structure of the most successful posts – out of the 50 posts with the highest interactions of all the posts (both MFAs and MODs), 42 are native videos. In fact, for Azerbaijan, these videos generated 55,2 % of all interactions (1899016 out of 3439075)

### 5.5 Interpretation of Findings and Resolution of Research Questions

The data prove, that Facebook as a tool of digital public diplomacy can be used in multiple way. The online activity in form of posts can be used proactively, periodically and consistently, as in case of Azerbaijan MFA, or incoherently and reactively as Armenian MFA demonstrated. Discrepancy between these two approaches can be possibly attributed to existence or non-existence of a clear communication strategy, which employees of the ministries could consult. At the same time, we should not under-estimate the role of resources – oil rich state with higher population like Azerbaijan should naturally have more capacities to create a functional digital diplomacy unit, first of all due to bigger pool of human resources, second due to ability to financially attract professionals, who would otherwise work in private sector. The importance of correctly assessing the audience, as well as focus on what the audience of the respective page wants to see seems to be crucial to manage any information campaign successfully, a public one notwithstanding. So **how does the FB communication of AZE and**

**ARM MFAs and MODs compare in the examined period between the countries, but also in within the countries?**

If we would compare the total interactions generated by the FB pages in questions, especially given the basic data provided above, the difference is so vast it deserves a contemplation on the cause. As I wrote before, professionalism in communication is definitely one of the key factors. But without downplaying the efforts of Azeri communication experts, it might be also easier to involve the audience (and sell the narrative) when it is whipped up by the well-known intoxicating mixture of nationalism, violence and victory when juxtaposed with the decade-built recital of betrayal, anger, humiliation, the repeated rite of righteous retaliation. I might add to the benefit of the Azeris, that all the forementioned results were achieved without boosting any of the posts by advertising.



In total, Azeri FB activities generated 3439075 interactions in the examined period. Armenians only garnered 680216 interactions in the same period, 5 times less. Since we established that mere basic data setting in terms of following and frequency of posting is not a valid explanation, it is necessary to look for the reasons for such vast difference elsewhere. Answering the question „where“ would require a study on its own.

A hint might lie in the comparison of the generated interactions between MFAs and MODs of respective countries. For Azerbaijan, MOD generated a total of 98.65123616 % total country page interactions, while its follower base constituted just 88.9 % of peak audience of both AZE ministries. In case of Armenia, its MOD accounted for a total of 93.417679 % country

interactions generated, while accounting to only 71 % of follower base for the two ARM ministries in question. This means, that the MODs, irrespective of the country, were better fit to produce a positive outcome in form of user post interactions. Yet again, I deem it to be the result of calibrated content, attractive to the audience, and as such MODs are also a better vehicle for reaching the audience with direct and subliminal messaging. The question is, whether it would be the content type change, or the change of content itself, which could elevate MFAs as institutions to a higher level of achieving comm goals. Such goals would naturally differ in peacetime and in wartime.

As stipulated before, the Facebook as a medium has proven to be a viable resource for communicating narratives and framing in wartime. This leads us back to the **RQ2: How did commencement of war reflect on use of Facebook in case of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, as in comparison to pre-war period?**

In the pre-war period, Azerbaijani MFA utilized Facebook periodically, using it to build up a narrative, which would justify the offensive in Nagorno Karabakh from both moral standpoint and the view of International law. It would systematically point out alleged Armenian hostilities in the region, as well as mistreatment of civilians by Armenians in the region. At the same time, by publishing UNSC resolutions, which would reaffirm Azeri position in the conflict, the narrative of war justified by International law would be strengthened. The use of Facebook in pre-war period would be proactive and following a clear strategy. Armenian MFA in contrast lacked such level of orchestration. During the 50day pre-war period, Azerbaijan posted 61 times, out of which 14 posts were conflict related. Armenia posted 42 times, only 7 posts relating to the conflict.

Upon commencement of hostilities on 27 September we would see a dramatic surge in Facebook posting by both MFAs. Out of 542 total posts published by both parties in total, 441 were published in the latter 50day period, which covers posts since beginning of war. Azerbaijan posted 189 times, with 140 posts relating to the conflict, Armenia posted 252 times with 220 posts related to conflict. The posts would become more reactive – rather the narrative creation there were attempts for narrative control. The substantial rise in proportion of war-related posts by both sides could be attributed to need to narrate the conflict in favorable light, effectively not ceasing the discourse arena to the enemy.

### **RQ3: How did the conflict-related communication on Facebook differ between Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs?**

A contextually deep difference was noticeable in pre-war conflict-related communication by both ministries. Armenian MFA was posting about the conflict 7 times in the period, without clear purpose, only once it was denying Azeri claims. Azerbaijan MFA used the period to build up a narrative with its 14 posts, that a military action against Nagorno Karabakh would be justified on terms of protection of civilians, response to provocations as well as International law. At the same time, in order to establish whether it was a serious build-up with effects into the social sphere, aiming at the change of opinion in favor of the war we would need to examine substantially longer period prior to the war and include more state controlled/related means of communication than only one ministry.

In the period post commencement of hostilities, Azerbaijan posted 140 times about the conflict, while Armenia did so 220 times. Armenia therefore ramped up its Facebook activity more than Azerbaijan, which stands in stark contrast to its previous inactivity.

A grave difference lied in approach presented perspectives of international law to the conflict. Armenian MFA called upon 1994 Bishkek protocols and status quo, claiming breach of ceasefire by Azerbaijan is violation of International law. Furthermore, Armenian MFA would promote right for secession of Artsakh. Azerbaijan was in contrast referencing UNSC resolutions affirmative of its territorial integrity and condemning Armenian occupation.

Both warring parties would reflect on Turkish involvement in the conflict. Armenia portrayed Turkey as a villain, who puppeteers Azerbaijan in order to finalize the 1915 Armenian Genocide. In contrast Azerbaijan depicted Turkey as a brotherly Turkic nation and a righteous supporter of the just cause of liberating occupied territories.

Taking style of posts into consideration, Azerbaijani posts were more organized, seemingly following clear guidelines when it comes to number of characters and structure. Armenian posts on the other hand gave impression of being ad hoc created and disorganized, based on newest developments on the field and in diplomatic community, hence the large proportion of shared interviews and long posts. Handling of translations of posts would also differ significantly – where Azerbaijan MFA would only provide direct translation to Russian and English, Armenia would inconsistently post translations to major languages, but also to

languages like Lithuanian or Chinese. This was done with posts, which had no relation to Lithuania or China.

There was a difference in approach to the international community as well. While Armenian posts were building up relationships with other, mainly Western nations in order to garner support and legitimacy, Azerbaijan on several occasions critically engaged with statements of foreign dignitaries.

**RQ4: What are the causes of Nagorno Karabakh conflict, and how do they reflect on the narratives disseminated by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia?**

The historiographic research established, that grievance based on nationality and ethnicity served as a long-term catalyst in a conflict, which dates back centuries. Due to efforts by national historiographies of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the region holds an immense symbolic and historical values for both peoples, For Armenian it is a symbol of ancestral statehood and a self-defining element in contrast to experience of oppression by Muslims. In Armenian historical narrative, there is a strong reminiscence of 1915 Genocide and ethnic cleansing, used to portrayal of conflict as a struggle for bare existence of Armenians in Karabakh. To Azerbaijanis, Nagorno Karabakh is central to their national identity defined through territorial dimension of nationhood. The region is a symbol of both peoples historical continuity in the region, central to their national identities and as such exclusively inseparable from their peoples. The ethnic nationalism would also serve as a mean of self-preservation during the USSR period.

Furthermore, the history of ethnic cleansing is a contributor to mutual grievances and distrust of between the nations on individual level. This distrust would manifest in a “pre-emptive” attempt for secession of the Armenian dominated region and formation of unrecognized Republic of Artsakh in Nagorno Karabakh in 1990s. Another reason is awarding of Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan by USSR, seen as a historical injustice by Armenians.

The 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War is on a factual level of the First Nagorno Karabakh War of 1991-1994, which allowed the secessionist Artsakh supported by Armenia to occupy 14 % of Azerbaijan’s territory, resulting in ethnic cleansing of both Armenians and Azeris, and a sense

of deep national humiliation in Azerbaijanis, both of which Azeri offensive of 2020 aimed to right.

Finally, when it comes to permeating historical narratives as summarized previously in the chapter “Conflict Overview”, one identifiable element relates to the use of 1915 Armenian Genocide as a demonizing instrument by Armenian MFA and a tool for pressuring the audience through reminiscence of past atrocities. The second one relates to the idea of Muslim oppression and cultural genocide of Armenians, positioning Armenia as barrier between civilized world and Muslim invasion, embodied in employment of Syrian fighters to the battlefield. On the other hand, Azerbaijan MFA communication relates mostly to righting the injustice of 1991-1994 war and reclaiming its rightful territory, citing UNSC resolutions.

## **6. Conclusion and Possibility for Future Research**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

The thesis stems from a premise, that Facebook can serve as a useful and indeed used tool for narrative creation and control, especially in war situations, when the battlefield is covered by fog of war and independent journalists have limited access to informational resources. Social media can also be used to directly engage with both domestic and foreign audience, boost population morale and justify the conflict to the audience. The latter complex has been demonstrated in both analyzed content, as well as graphically, when we witnessed surge of Facebook activity and audience interactions by both MFAs and MODs from the onset of war on 27 September. Furthermore, it is now clear, that Facebook as an instrument of digital public diplomacy can serve as an instrument to prepare narrative ground for a military invasion, helps create fog of war and to exacerbate the victim game/blame-game, as the analysis of Azerbaijan MFA’s pre-war communication showed. In 21<sup>st</sup> century, social media are undeniably an inseparable part of creating states image, disseminating ideas and conducting hybrid warfare. The state controlled social media accounts are part of this complex too.

It can however be used in multiplicity of ways, and it has been established, that there is a qualitative difference between communication of the two MFAs with regard to structure of posts and implementation of communication strategies. Resources used in this thesis however do not have the capacity to evaluate successfulness of communication efforts by either of the

parties per se. Even though I was able to provide thorough description, I have not pursued further such evaluation, which I commented on in context of post engagement and reach, since in order to measure successfulness, I would have to engage with in-depth study of effects of said engagement and reach on public opinion by consulting sociological data, measure effect of named narratives on combat readiness or at least examine public media in order to evaluate acceptance of messages conveyed by FB efforts of MFAs and MODs in question. Overall, the MFAs have a comparatively tougher job reaching the audience with their agenda-related content even in wartime. MODs, on the other hand, can post content, that is attractive to the viewer – such as exclusive combat footage from the battlefield, which is pleasant (for many) to watch and has potential to over-reach beyond the strictly invested community.

Nevertheless, the thesis' conclusions could serve as a take-away point for anyone, who is interested in institutional communication and digital public diplomacy, as it explores and presents examples in form of real cases, compares them and demonstrates crucial differences two institution on the same organizational level can have when it comes to communication narratives through social media platforms. As such, it contributes to bettering an understanding of FB as a communication phenomenon in realm of the institutional. Moreover, the thesis helps to understand the possibility of qualitative growth through recognizing what is demanded on part of the audience.

Furthermore, the thesis provides an important overview of causes of Nagorno Karabakh conflict, which can be useful to understand the reasons, why Armenians and Azerbaijanis are willing to kill each other over this piece of mountainous land. It is an interesting excursion in souls of two nations, which are whipped up by fierce ethno-nationalism, and also a probe to historical processes that make people who never met hate each other.

## **6.2 Possibilities for future research**

As noted earlier in the thesis, the research on communication of state institutions during wartime is insufficient. A very contributive would be to conduct research similar to the one in the analytical part of this work, but with access to more data, which are nevertheless a subject of privacy protection, or are a trade secret of social media providers. The usefulness of previously established research would be vastly extended, if we could use a scheme for evaluating efficiency and successfulness of social media publication of institutions in



questions, which of course do not have to be limited to MFAs and MODs. Even for needs of this thesis, a verification model could be made to measure effectiveness of social media messaging by tracing the disseminated narratives and positions across social media user base in comments, sociological surveys on public opinion or media content analysis.

At the same time, future research might focus on defining boundaries between state issued propaganda and public diplomacy, as throughout the thesis it was demonstrated, that the two are closely intertwined and in effect serve the same purpose.

Another prospective research can lie in conflict predictive potential of social media. Even though behavior predictive models are already well established for social media, (Ngonmang 2014, Tayebi 2016) there is an opportunity to steer the research towards predicting conflict through monitoring and evaluation of content of institutional social media. This thesis documented that there has been a level of orchestration in Azerbaijan MFA's communication, which was to prepare the ground for future offensive. By focusing on the content prior to the conflict, it might be possible to reach higher level of preparedness for conflicts to come, contributing to their prevention or damage mitigation. Yet another question comes to mind, and that is what makes a war-related social media post successful, and how is this related to the socio-cultural context the message is targeted at? Are there any universal traits we all share? Are all the military-related visuals on social media only sought after by males 25+? Is Kim Kardashian truly more influential than the whole of Armenia's diplomatic corps? How can a warring state counter foreign hybrid influence and spreading disinformation on social media, especially when disseminated by verified channels?

As every research I ever had the pleasure to conduct, this one erected more questions than it answered.

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## 8. List of Appendices

Appendix 1: DATASET + working excel sheets