

Vahram Ter-Matevosyan¹

*Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor
College of Humanities and Social Sciences,
American University of Armenia*

Hovhannes Nikoghosyan²

*PhD, Adjunct Lecturer
College of Humanities and Social sciences,
American University of Armenia*

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION DURING THE 2020 WAR: SETTING THE STAGE FOR DEFEAT

DOI 10.46991/jos.2024.26.2.185

The present paper looks into the Armenian side of the 2020 war in the pursuit to elucidate the non-military factors that led to the devastating defeat of the Republics of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. Based on the available public records (public statements, media publications), as well as non-structured interviews with select high-ranking officials, the article aims to improve expert-level understanding of the wartime management that led to the Armenian defeat. This paper also attempts to launch a discussion on wartime behaviour of the political elite in Armenia.

Keywords: 2020 war; military defeat; crisis management; information warfare; Armenia, Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh

Introduction

The full-scale war Azerbaijan unleashed against Artsakh and Armenia on September 27, 2020, has drastically changed Armenia's political landscape. The ramifications of the war were felt across the board as they came to test

¹ E-mail: termatevosyan@aua.am ORCID 0000-0002-2212-0391.

² E-mail: hnikoghosyan@aua.am ORCID 0000-0001-5397-582X.

the resilience, fragility and adaptability of Armenia's leadership, public institutions and society. Already shattered in the wake of the political turmoil and recurring crises between April and December of 2018 - with complete reset in government due to the abrupt change of power that brought in an inexperienced cadre of new elite - the government of Armenia would fail to manage and respond to the Azerbaijani aggression, *inter alia*, due to also grave mistakes during the COVID-19 pandemic before the war.

Hitherto, several years after the war, the English-language analyses mainly focused on the root causes of the 2020 war and its regional and transregional implications paying little to no attention to the domestic politics of the fateful six weeks of the war. Although the wartime behaviour of Pashinyan's government was scrutinized within the domestic political context, only a few academic papers have tried to look into domestic political patterns that led to the war outcomes. The present paper looks into the Armenian side of the 2020 war in the pursuit to elucidate the non-military factors that led to the devastating defeat of the Republics of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. Based on the available public records (public statements, media publications), as well as non-structured interviews with select high-ranking officials, the article aims to improve expert-level understanding of the wartime management that led to the Armenian defeat. This paper also attempts to launch a discussion on the wartime behaviour of the political elite in Armenia.

The discussion proceeds in the following three main passages: it begins by briefly presenting, in broad strokes, the pre-war political landscape to develop some contextual understanding, followed by analysis of the efforts of the Armenian political leadership in domestic affairs during the war, and, lastly, wraps up with the endgame of the war.

“Democratic Invincibility” aspirations of the post-2018 regime

The discussion of Armenian government actions and decisions in the course of the war shall depart from briefly outlining the foreign and security policy approaches adopted by the new, revolutionary government following

the peaceful transition of power in April-May, 2018. Since day one of the success of the “Velvet, non-violent, people's revolution” on May 8, 2018, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his team, as well as an army of supporters among the expert community,³ have begun propelling the narrative that the democratic nature of the new government would inevitably become the primary shield towards aggressive revanchism by Azerbaijan.⁴ This has been reiterated for public use, for international audiences, as well as instruction to the Armenian corps diplomatique on numerous occasions up to 2020 and even beyond.⁵

There are possibly three relevant aspects to set the stage. First, the representatives of the deposed elite, since summer 2018, have repeatedly questioned the foreign and security policy credentials of the new Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan. Driven by the pursuit of distancing himself from the old elite, Pashinyan has made numerous populist statements - mostly for internal use - which however resonated beyond the borders of Armenia. That has created a false promise on an international scale that the new, popular regime can use its legitimacy for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.⁶ On numerous occasions there have been direct statements about aspirations to bring a certain new thinking to the international fora about the conflict.⁷

Second, the dynamics in the peace process under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship entered a deadlock by early 2018. While the often-quoted statement by Serzh Sargsyan at the Armenian parliament about

³ Grigoryan S. *The Armenian Velvet Revolution*. Yerevan, 2018; *Armenia's Velvet Revolution: Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World*. 2020. (eds) Laurence Broers and Anna Ohanyan. London. I.B. Tauris, 2018.

⁴ Tamrazyan H., Papyan A. 2018. *Pashinyan. Azerbaijan's aggression is not only against Armenia, but also against democracy in the region*. Radio Liberty. July 12. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29358788.html> (Accessed 15.06.2023)

⁵ Statement by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during the "Diplomat's Day" reception. March 7, 2019 <https://168.am/2019/03/07/1091962.html> (Accessed 15.06.2023)

⁶ Interview of Armenia's Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan to BBC HardTalk's Stephen Sackur, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djTGRiBCRkw>. (Accessed 15.06.2023)

⁷ Statement by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan during the "Diplomat's Day" reception. March 7, 2019 <https://168.am/2019/03/07/1091962.html> (Accessed 15.06.2023)

the deadlock was about, arguably, Armenian and mediators' being on the same wavelength, the new approach adopted by Nikol Pashinyan - with the blessing of his Security Council in Summer 2018⁸ - to reject the tabled proposals of the mediators and try to postpone any tangible commitments for as long as possible - eventually produced deadlock around the negotiation table. Fingers were pointed against Armenia - first time in decades. Russian updated proposals, tabled in Moscow in April 2019,⁹ were neglected, and that was a blow to Russian ambitions in particular, and lacking tangible proposals by other mediators - to the Minsk Group format as such. Lastly, the pandemic situation has had adverse effects on the overall situation too, severing regular diplomatic engagement, as well as the field missions under the aegis of the OSCE CiO Personal Representative Andrzej Kasprzyk. Between 2018 and 2020, trading accusations of "selling out" Nagorno Karabakh by the popular and populist government have become the main political show in town - between the representatives of the deposed elite and the new Government. Previously inexperienced in foreign or security policy making, or in any other area of state affairs, the new regime would seize any opportunity to claim strong credentials in national security affairs, mostly producing unforced errors in this path.

In summer 2020, the Armenian military started reporting on higher risks of escalation. At least on three occasions, namely on July 4, July 10 and August 21, Onik Gasparyan, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, urged the Prime Minister and members of the Security Council to proactively work towards preventing the new war and reported about the inability of the armed forces to sustain long-term fighting. He also informed the government that the armed forces needed 8 billion USD to solve the

⁸ Nikoghosyan H., Ter-Matevosyan V., From 'Revolution to War: Deciphering Armenia's Populist Foreign Policy-Making Process, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 23 (2), 2022, pp. 207–227.

⁹ Buniatian H. 2020. Lavrov: The principles of step-by-step resolution lie as the basis of discussions between Mnatsakanyan and Mamedyarov. Rus.azatutyun.am/a/30568279.html. April 21, (Accessed 15.06.2023)

problems of technological modernization.¹⁰ Arguably, Gasparyan also encouraged the political leadership to mend ties with the Kremlin and update lines of communication on institutional levels.¹¹ However, possibly driven by the pursuit to cement his foreign and security policy credentials, PM Pashinyan had blown out of proportion a tactical gain along the international border in Tavush region in July 12-14, 2020. More than seven dozen servicemen were decorated with medals, and one officer was awarded the highest state honour - “National Hero” - for their role in the July clashes, only a month before Azerbaijani full-scale invasion in Nagorno Karabakh. On the Azerbaijani side, President Ilham Aliyev sacked the long-time Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov, and replaced him with a 'yes-man' among his technocratic elite. Aliyev has also, on a few occasions since July, shut the door for any future negotiations blaming Armenia's leadership for “disrupting the negotiation process”.¹² In July, the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmen released a few statements, which, in effect, declared there was no ongoing peace process as such and urged the parties “to prepare for serious substantive negotiations to find a comprehensive solution to the conflict.”¹³ The same statement also reaffirmed the principles and elements presented to the parties on March 9, 2019, and emphasized the need for OSCE monitors to “return to the region as soon as possible.”¹⁴ In parallel to that and in the midst of the pandemic the government never ceased to

¹⁰ “Weal Air Defense System, intelligence, insufficient UAVs. What did the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces report to the Prime Minister.” 2023.

<https://armeniasputnik.am/20230628/tujl-hop-hetakhuzutjun-anbavarar-ats-ner-inch-e-zekucel-gsh-nakhkin-pety-varchapetin-61882095.html>. 28 June. (Accessed 15.08.2023)

¹¹ Bavakanach'ap' jank'er ch'gortsadrvets'in paterazmy Hayastani ev Arts'akhi hamar arravel barenpast paymannerov..., July 3, 2023. RFE/RL Armenian Service, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32487309.html> (Accessed 15.06.2023)

A few then-high level officials with knowledge of Security Council discussions elaborated on the content in expert interviews with authors.

¹² “Aliyev announced that negotiations over the Karabakh conflict are actually suspended. Jnjel, 2020. TASS< <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/9502113>. September 19. (Accessed 19.06.2023)

¹³ Press Statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group and Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office. 2020. Moscow/Paris/Washington, DC, <https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/458068> (Accessed 15.06.2023)

¹⁴ Ibid.

believe that those purported democratic credentials would act as deterrents for large-scale aggression against Armenia. The leader of the majority in the parliament even excluded any possibility of Turkey's involvement in the conflict because "it will be perceived in the context of the Genocide."¹⁵ In this vein, the Turkish Foreign Minister's statement on August 10, that Armenia shall "come to its senses" must have annulled the belief in Armenian Government corridors that Turkey will stay idle in case of a new war,¹⁶ but it did not.

Armenia's public institutions and society approached the conflict in a state of deep polarization. In line with his populist rhetoric, Pashinyan's policy choices sowed discord and discontent among society, especially between leaders of public opinion, parts of the Yerevan-based intelligentsia as well as between Artsakh's political-military leadership and Armenia's political leadership. Even though Arayik Harutunyan was elected Artsakh's president in the midst of the pandemic enjoying support from Pashinyan's political entourage, by September he also realised that negotiations were doomed and war seemed imminent.¹⁷

Prior to September 2020, Pashinyan also made a series of changes in the military leadership which, in essence, have created management and organisational problems within the military units and in the system.¹⁸ Most of the changes have been of political nature. In June 2020, Artak Davtyan, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, was sacked for throwing a wedding party for his son in the midst of pandemic.¹⁹ Experts and practitioners have

¹⁵ "Turkey will not join Azerbaijan in unleashing large-scale aggression against Armenia – Armenian MP". 2020. Armenpress. <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1023126>. July 27. (Accessed 14.09.2023)

¹⁶ Ter-Matevosyan V., Deadlocked in History and Geopolitics: Revisiting Armenia–Turkey Relations. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 30 (3), 2021, pp. 155–169.

¹⁷ "People, let's prepare for war, instead of discussing the topic of negotiations". 2020. Armenian Time. <https://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/194847>. September 2. (Accessed 15.06.2023)

¹⁸ Discussed this with two experts and provided more details.

¹⁹ "Artak Davtyan was sacked from his position as the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Onik Gasparyan replaced him." 2020. Armenian Times. <https://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/189737>. June 8. (Accessed 18.06.2023)

periodically raised questions about the lack of modernization in Armenia's armed forces and the importance of reforms in the chief of staff which remained stuck in the Soviet-era tactics and strategies.²⁰

As the fateful September approached domestic political variables in Armenia and Azerbaijan were heading in opposite directions. Even though July skirmishes in the Tavush region resulted in Armenia's tactical gains, Armenia's public opinion, including the new political elite, remained inherently ignorant of the looming war. Those warnings about possible war - had been either silenced, or ridiculed in the context of domestic political discourse by reference to the 'democratic invincibility' of the new popular government.²¹ Whereas, the July flare-up resulted in radicalising public opinion in Azerbaijan when the hawkish public pressured on political elites into war.

“War is here”: Failures of crisis management

Terrorist attacks or foreign aggressions are shocking events, that serve as extreme tests of the resilience, capabilities and adaptability of the governments, public institutions, and communities to absorb and react to them. The literature on crisis management offers different models of the government's response. In 2005, Arjen Boin *et al* identified 5 key tasks that emerge in times of crisis: sensemaking, decision-making and coordination, meaning-making (crisis-communication), ending, and learning.²² In 2013, Eric Stern, one of the co-authors, has added another challenge of crisis

²⁰ Amirkhanyan Zh., A Failure to Innovate: The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameter*, 2022, pp. 119-134; Cheterian V., Technological determinism or strategic advantage? Comparing two Karabakh Wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 47 (2) 2024., pp. 214-237.

²¹ A more detailed discussion on the 'democratic invincibility' can be found at: Nikoghosyan & Ter-Matevosyan, Post-Revolution and War, Armenia Must Find a Geopolitical Balance, Carnegie Endowment, March 9, 2021. <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2021/03/post-revolution-and-war-armenia-must-find-a-geopolitical-balance?lang=en> (Accessed 15.06.2023)

²² Boin A., Hart P., Stern E. and Sungelius B., *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

leadership: preparing.²³ Applying this framework of analysis reveals that the Armenian government neither adequately addressed nor embraced in a timely manner the mentioned tasks of crisis management.

The Armenians woke up in the morning of September 27 with headlines about large-scale military attacks by Azerbaijan across the entire Line of Contact in Nagorno Karabakh. At the beginning of the war, despite deep societal polarizations, Pashinyan secured quick and wide political and popular support because Azerbaijan's invasion in Artsakh left no room for interpretations. The well-observed tendency of the public to rally around the flag and political leadership can be attributed to the manifestations of modern nationalism: national myths of omniscience and omnipotence of the nation and the congruence of one's national morality with a supranational.²⁴ This pattern was also widely observable in Armenia as hours after the news broke out people poured to the streets and in front of the Military Enlistment offices to volunteer for war.

On September 27, the statements from all corners of the political spectrum were about seeking national unity and rallying the nation around the flag. The Prime Minister spoke both at the special session in the National Assembly, and addressed the nation.²⁵ Nagorno Karabakh President Arayik Harutyunyan did the same. In retrospect, Pashinyan's remarks at the National Assembly where he argued what's now famous "whatever happens - we won't consider ourselves defeated", alongside his speculations about the unacceptable "political price" of stopping the war, both sounded as if seeking broader legitimacy for any future decisions. Part of the parliamentary opposition has been rather optimistic in prospects for military victory and called upon the Prime Minister "to order the troops to advance and resolve the issue once and for all" and recognize Artsakh's

²³ Stern E., Preparing: The Sixth Task of Crisis Leadership. *Journal of Leadership Studies.*, 7 (3), 2013, pp. 51-56.

²⁴ Levy J., Domestic Politics and War, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History.* 18 (4); The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars, 1988, pp. 653-673.

²⁵ "The enemy should realize that all Armenians are today standing by Artsakh" - Prime Minister's message to the nation. 2020. <https://www.primeminister.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2020/09/27/Nikol-Pashinyan-message/> (Accessed 15.06.2023)

independence.²⁶ Enthusiasm was still present during the next few days and weeks, then it declined as the war became prolonged and costly. It also declined because of the reports coming from Artsakh about lack of organization in the frontline, read, and the military's inability to stabilize the positions and halt Azerbaijan's advance.

Several policy choices during the initial stages of the war led to dramatic outcomes. War requires crisis decision-making skills on the level of all state institutions and the political leader, which in Armenia did not get beyond mere rhetoric. The beginning of the full-scale war was a huge blow to the Government's much-acclaimed narrative about the 'invincibility' of the democratic regime, arguably protected by the international community, against an authoritarian adversary. To the dismay and surprise of many in Armenia, no tangible international effort was offered by the U.S. (probably the tenure of Donald Trump in the White House being a limitation), France or the European Union. This in many ways manifested the collapse of the 'democratic invincibility' narrative.

Whether the beginning of the full-scale war has been a surprise for the Government remains unclear. The Prime Minister, the military and ruling political establishments have made contradictory statements to that end over the past four years. A closer look into the early four days of the war - namely from September 27 to October 1 - is vital since the early decisions (whether made formally or not) by the Government affected the entire dynamics of the armed conflict. The nature of these statements, retrospectively, shows the lack of coordination and profoundly groundless optimism on the part of those who had to manage the war effort.

On September 30, while the Nagorno Karabakh President was making statements that "the war will end with Azerbaijan's defeat or non-victory at best", the Chief of General Staff of Armenian armed forces, supported by the Minister of Defense, urged the political leadership "to employ all available means" to stop the war in 2-3 days due to the incompatibility of

²⁶ "Marukyan. With this war we should resolve the issue once and for all", 2020. Aysor.am. September 27. <https://a1plus.am/hy/article/380051> (Accessed 15.06.2023)

resources with the adversary.²⁷ The next day, October 1, was marked by unprecedented penetration of four Azerbaijani UAVs closer to capital Yerevan, intercepted by air defence systems.²⁸ Pashinyan's address to the nation on October 5, where he called upon the recently discharged draftees to re-join the military service with "their own helmets and uniforms", has been in stark contravention of the call of the military leadership to end the war.²⁹ After the war it was revealed that on October 6-7, the entire Southern flank of the Artsakh-Azerbaijan Line of Contact was wide-open (16km) for the advancement of Azerbaijani forces. According to Tiran Khachatryan, the Deputy Chief of General Staff - decorated with the highest "National Hero" award by the Prime Minister during the war and then discharged afterwards - the negative outcome of the war could be expected as of October 10 (which coincides with the fall of the city of Hadrout in Nagorno Karabakh).

Looking retrospectively at the developments of the initial days of the war, it can be concluded that there had been one key political choice made (whether formally or not) by the Prime Minister that affected the whole war effort. That is - instead of utilising the Security Council as a main forum for policy formulation, coordination and implementation, whether with or without more experienced representatives of the political elite, PM Pashinyan opted to use it as a 'briefing room' - quite often with the participation of non-statutory members, such as the President, National Assembly Speaker, etc. - to seek greater legitimacy for his choices. During the six weeks of war, the Council convened five times, the last one being on October 19. Throughout the war there was no effort - without regard to its efficiency - to mobilise resources, whether economic, diplomatic or

²⁷ Davit Tonoyan, then-Minister of Defence, confirmed the reports about the urge by the Chief of General Staff to stop the war "in 2-3 days".

<https://panarmenian.net/arm/news/300124> (Accessed 05.07.2023)

²⁸ Note: The Prime Minister's choice to use Twitter for announcing that "three enemy drones had been downed and the search for the fourth one is underway" on October 1 indicated a broader decision by the Armenian leader to stay on top of information streams, no matter what, instead of leading the war effort.

²⁹ "Pashinyan. A call of duty to our soldiers discharged last year." 2020. A1Plus. <https://a1plus.am/hy/article/381206>. October 5. (Accessed 09.06.2023)

Diasporan. Many prominent actors were on their own, disconnected from the rest. For example, President Armen Sarkissian, who was believed to have business and other connections in the Gulf region, was a player on his own,³⁰ disconnected from the rest of the Government. Due to political, technical and medical obstacles, the former presidents of the country could not travel to Moscow to solicit support. Similar situation with the Diasporan organisations, and with the Armenian Apostolic Church - they organised some efforts, but due to disconnect with the Government - these were limited to satisfying the humanitarian needs only. According to various interviewees, PM Pashinyan chose to form his own 'ExComm' of Security Council for policy formulation with more trusted political allies, like DPMs Avinyan and Grigoryan, MPs Ruben Rubinyan and Lilit Makunts, SC Secretary Armen Grigoryan – who had the trust of Pashinyan, but not any relevant experience in crisis management or working with foreign partners. The MOD Davit Tonoyan and MFA Zohrab Mnatsakanian have become the main players, aside from PM Pashinyan, to deal with the foreign interlocutors. Meantime, the MOD has arguably kept the Foreign Ministry in a certain information vacuum about the developments on the battlefield³¹ and that has adversely affected the quality of diplomatic engagements at lower levels.

A web of processes and decisions made in the initial four weeks of the war by the Armenian political leaderships reveals a set of patterns along with lack of coordination, mismanagement, miscommunication, etc. By the beginning of the war, PM Pashinyan has either succeeded in subordinating various relevant segments of the bureaucratic machinery, or has learned to work with the top-tier of his political appointees and largely suppress disagreements with either his leadership style or policies.

³⁰ Armen Sarkissian has addressed the leaders of several Arab nations. 2020. Radio Liberty. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30866170.html>. 30 September. (Accessed 15.10.2023)

³¹ Interviews with two former high-level MFA officials in Yerevan, May 2021 and February 2022.

Wartime propaganda efforts

Throughout the six weeks of war, with the use of all types of ammunition the parties accumulated in the preceding decades, the hostilities were limited mostly to the territory of Nagorno Karabakh Republic. Although the Armenian villages along the borderline were shelled several times, a few civilians were killed, the understanding among the general public about the scale of hostilities and situation on the ground had remained limited. There were several reasons behind that, the most important being the war-time propaganda employed by the state institutions and their affiliated structures. Prior to the war, the government and its leader had only one crisis management experience, namely the COVID-19 pandemic in February-September 2020. The latter has offered one main lesson: mass media - which has grown more combative compared with 2018-19 period - can be effectively silenced by various propaganda mechanisms, lawsuits, and public shaming. The next lesson was the heavy use of social media platforms to reach out not only to the public but also government officials and offices about their expected behaviour and modus operandi. In sum, the above choice about utilisation of the Security Council can best be rationalised by how the wartime propaganda was played out - mostly groundless and with great disconnect from realities on the ground.

The Armenian Government declared Martial Law and General Mobilization on September 27, 2020. The martial law remained in force until March 24, 2021. Along with several restrictions on people's rights and freedoms, Decree No. 1586-N was enforced to set considerable limitations on the media. This decision obliged the media representatives and platforms to disseminate war-related information only with a reference to official information from state bodies, fully reflecting the official information without edition³². On October 8th, new media restrictions were introduced with amendments to the Martial Law Decree. According to these amendments, any publication criticizing, devaluing, or questioning the effectiveness of

³² Decree No. 1586-N of the Republic of Armenia on Declaration of Martial Law in the Republic of Armenia. 2020. <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docID=146652>. (Accessed 16.11.2023)

meeting with the officials inside. The police forces gathered in front of the building were soon outnumbered as the number of demonstrators rapidly increased. The police soon withdrew letting the angry mob enter the building in a frantic search for any official who could provide answers to mounting questions. Going from one room to another, the people, feeling frustrated and fooled, started to demolish furniture, destroy official documents while posting everything online and livestreaming. While the people were raging the government building another group of angry protesters marched towards the Parliament building and PM residency with more radical demands. The people in the parliament were making chaotic statements requesting Pashinyan to resign for signing a ceasefire behind people's backs.

The angry mob also found and heavily assaulted the Speaker of the National Assembly, who was subsequently hospitalized with life-threatening injuries. Pashinyan quickly made a broadcast on social media, reportedly intoxicated and in a bunker of the Ministry of Defence, attributing Armenia's defeat to the alleged theft of the army's resources by the pre-2018 administrations. President Armen Sarkissian also made a statement confirming that he had learned of the terms of the ceasefire only from the media.

The situation in the country remained tense as Pashinyan published videos online urging his supporters 'to prepare for revenge' against 'corrupt rogue oligarchs who stole soldiers' bread [and] weapons'.³⁸ Several days later, his rhetoric intensified as he attempted to incite violence against his critics by telling those supporters returning from the frontline: "I am waiting for you in Yerevan. To finally solve the problems of those who are barking under the walls."³⁹

³⁸ "Nikol Pashinyan. There was simply no possibility to decide something else in the current situation". 2020. Aravot. <https://www.aravot.am/2020/11/10/1150460/>. November 10. (Accessed 18.06.2023)

³⁹ "Pashinyan is waiting for the soldiers from the frontline to finally solve the problems of those who bark under the walls". 2020. Radio Liberty. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30952078.html>. November 16. (Accessed 15.06.2023)

In the night of November 10 and on the next few days there was everything but clarity on the Armenian street. No official numbers of casualties, POWs or even refugees were being released. The government, it might be felt, stopped operating and was 'restarting'. Tens of thousands from Nagorno Karabakh fled to Armenia. This was the second major shock about the recent conflict in Karabakh that the Armenian population was not ready to comprehend.

A further disconcerting revelation emerged on November 17 when Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that as early as 18–19 October 2020, he had convinced Azerbaijani President Aliyev to agree on ceasefire terms that would have left Shoushi intact and under the continued sovereignty of the Republic of Arstakh, but Pashinyan had disagreed with the terms offered, although they could have saved many lives and preserved Armenian control over the key city.⁴⁰ It subsequently became clear that Pashinyan had not shared the details of Putin's proposal with other members of the Security Council. In the same interview, Putin also defended Pashinyan calling the statements that Pashinyan was a traitor "as baseless."⁴¹

In response to these revelations and the looming political crisis, beginning in mid-November various opposition groups held uncoordinated rallies in the streets of Yerevan demanding that Pashinyan resign, accusing him of treachery and of hiding the truth from the public. Several cabinet members, including the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, of Defence, were replaced, and several mid-ranking officials from the executive branch resigned. In the National Assembly, only a handful of members of parliament left the ruling party, while the majority stayed loyal to the Prime Minister who retained a legislative majority. The new political elite, born in 2018, demonstrated profound adaptability to drastically changing circumstances and in the next few years would also master living in low-

⁴⁰ "Putin told why it was not possible to stop the fighting in Karabakh in October". 2020. Ria Novosti. <https://ria.ru/20201117/karabakh-1585078134.html?in=t>. November 17. (Accessed 15.06.2023)

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

popularity mode. This adaptability merits more analysis to improve expert-level understanding beyond the official election result data.

Conclusions

The 2020 war has changed Armenia's domestic political landscape and social discourse. The fateful six weeks became a resilience test for Armenia's state and military institutions. The new elite has subordinated the entire government apparatus to new rules of the(ir) game, and profoundly succeeded in doing so by August 2020. In wartime, the government relied on censorship and restrictions, that had serious ramifications on the quality of behaviour of state institutions and societal interpretations of the war and its outcome. It has, however, solved the key challenge: remaining in power after a crushing defeat that ended a significant part of the new national mythology rooted in the 1992-94 war victory. This adaptability to changing circumstances merits further discussion and analysis, since merely relying on electoral results as expressing 'popular will' or 'will of the people' is good only for political manifestations, not academia.

ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՂՈՐԴԱԿՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ 2020 ԹՎԱԿԱՆԻ ՊԱՏԵՐԱԶՄԻ ԸՆԹԱՑՔՈՒՄ. ՊԱՐՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՆԱԽԱՊԱՏՐԱՍՈՒՄԸ

Վահրամ Տեր-Մաթևոսյան⁴² Հովհաննես Նիկողոսյան⁴³

Սույն հոդվածը քննարկում է 2020 թվականի պատերազմի հայկական կողմը՝ ձգբելով պարզել ոչ ռազմական գործոնները, որոնք հանգեցրին Հայաստանի և Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի Հանրապետությունների պարտությանը: Հիմք ընդունելով առկա հրապարակային նյութերը (հրապարակային հայդարարություններ, լրադաստիճանների հրապարակումներ), ինչպես նաև բարձրասդիճան պաշտոնյաների հետ ոչ կառուցվածքային հարցազրույցները՝ հոդվածը

⁴² Վահրամ Տեր-Մաթևոսյանը Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարանի հոմանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի պրոֆեսոր է, պ.դ.դ., էլ. փոստ՝ termatevosyan@aua.am, ORCID 0000-0002-2212-0391:

⁴³ Հովհաննես Նիկողոսյանը Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարանի հոմանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս է, թ.դ.թ., էլ. փոստ՝ hnikoghosyan@aua.am ORCID 0000-0001-5397-582X:

նպարակ ունի բարելավելու փորձագիրական մակարդակով պարկերացում-ները պարերազմի ժամանակաշրջանի կառավարման մասին, որը հանգեցրեց Հայաստանի պարզությանը: Այս հոդվածում փորձ է արդում նաև քննարկում ծավալել Հայաստանում քաղաքական վերնախավի պարերազմական պահվածքի վերաբերյալ:

Բանալի բառեր՝ 2020 թ. պարերազմ; ուզմական պարզություն; ճգնաժամային կառավարում; բեղեկարգվական պարերազմ; Հայաստան, Ադրբեյջան, Լեռնային Ղարաբաղ

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ КОММУНИКАЦИЯ ВО ВРЕМЯ ВОЙНЫ 2020 Г.: ПОДГОТОВКА К ПОРАЖЕНИЮ

Ваграм Тер-Матевосян⁴⁴, Ованнес Никогосян⁴⁵

В настоящей статье рассматривается армянская сторона войны 2020 г. с целью выяснить невоенные факторы, которые привели к поражению Республики Армения и Нагорного Карабаха. На основе доступных публичных материалов (публичных заявлений, публикаций в СМИ), а также неструктурированных интервью с избранными высокопоставленными чиновниками, статья призвана улучшить на экспертном уровне понимание управления во время войны, которое привело к поражению Армении. Данная статья также пытается начать дискуссию о поведении политической элиты Армении во время войны.

Ключевые слова: Война 2020 г.; военное поражение; управление кризисом; информационная война; Армения, Азербайджан, Нагорный Карабах

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. A few then-high level officials with knowledge of Security Council discussions elaborated on the content in expert interviews with authors.

⁴⁴ Ваграм Тер-Матевосян - профессор факультета гуманитарных и общественных наук Американского университета Армении, д. ист.н., эл. почта termatevosyan@aua.am, ORCID 0000-0002-2212-0391.

⁴⁵ Оганес Никогосян - преподаватель факультета гуманитарных и общественных наук Американского университета Армении, к.п.н., эл. почта: hnikoghosyan@aua.am, ORCID 0000-0001-5397-582X.

2. A more detailed discussion on the 'democratic invincibility' can be found at:
3. Aliyev announced that negotiations over the Karabakh conflict are actually suspended. 2020. TASS< <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/9502113>. September 19. (Accessed 19.06.2023)
4. Amirkhanyan Zh., A Failure to Innovate: The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameter*, 2022, pp. 119-134; Cheterian V., Technological determinism or strategic advantage? Comparing two Karabakh Wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 47 (2) 2024., pp. 214-237.
5. Armen Sarkissian has addressed the leaders of several Arab nations. 2020. Radio Liberty. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30866170.html>. 30 September. (Accessed 15.10.2023)
6. Artak Davtyan was sacked from his position as the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Onik Gasparyan replaced him." 2020. Armenian Times. <https://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/189737>. June 8. (Accessed 18.06.2023)
7. Azerbaijan wants capitulation of Artsakh, not settlement of the conflict". 2020. Armenpress. <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1032826>. October 26. (Accessed 21.06.2023)
8. Bavakanach'ap' jank'er ch'gortsadrrets'in paterazmy Hayastani ev Arts'akhi hamar arravel barenpast paymannerov..., July 3, 2023. RFE/RL Armenian Service, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32487309.html> (Accessed 15.06.2023)
9. Boin A., Hart P., Stern E. and Sungelius B., *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
10. Davit Tonoyan, then-Minister of Defence, confirmed the reports about the urge by the Chief of General Staff to stop the war "in 2-3 days". <https://panarmenian.net/arm/news/300124> (Accessed 05.07.2023)
11. Decree No. 1586-N of the Republic of Armenia on Declaration of Martial Law in the Republic of Armenia. 2020. <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docID=146652>. (Accessed 16.11.2023)
12. Discussed this with two experts and provided more details.
13. Grigoryan S. *The Armenian Velvet Revolution*. Yerevan, Edith Print, 2018; *Armenia's Velvet Revolution: Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World*. 2020. (eds) Laurence Broers and Anna Ohanyan. London. I.B. Tauris, 2018.
14. Harutyunyan K., The Karabakh War, Media, Propaganda, and Immorality. *Civilnet*. December 16, 2020 ,<https://www.civilnet.am/en/news/474655/the-karabakh-war-media-propaganda-and-immorality/> (Accessed 15.06.2023)