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Realist and Constructivist Interpretations and Representations of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War: As an Event and as a Process

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to analyze communications from the presidential and security council websites on the interpretations and representations of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War to understand how people, places, and events were interpreted and represented in terms of realism and constructivism in the geopolitics of the conflict to global audiences. Critical discourse analysis is used as a methodology for highlighting and making sense of texts in terms of the intangible elements of power relations, reputation and brand of the actors, relative balance of ethics and morality of the belligerents, value judgements, and predictions of the war's outcome. There is a clear tendency to engage in what Sun Tsu and von Clausewitz characterize as the politics of war using brand and reputation management to global audiences of a good and virtuous self-image versus a projected ruthless opponent lacking virtue. This is an exploratory paper with an indicative result, and several apparent trends emerge. One observation suggests that the actor that is militarily weaker tends to communicate more often to shape the political variables that influence the conduct of war. The role of constructivist rhetoric is being used to justify and legitimize realist-oriented policy and practice in war.

Keywords: realism; constructivism; geopolitics; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

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1. Introduction

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War broke out on the 27 September and lasted until the 10 November 2020, marking the renewed open conflict of an unresolved crisis that had been heating and cooling since 1988, even before the Soviet Union dissolved (Amirkhanyan, 2022). The correlation of forces and the balance of power shifted over time away from Armenia's favor to Azerbaijan's favor. Political will and geopolitics were also important factors in the decision to go to war during the coronavirus pandemic. There has been discernible growth in geopolitical positioning, competition, and conflict in the Southern Caucasus as the trends and processes of 21st century international relations have evolved (Sadiyev Saleh et al., 2021). Geopolitics is an interpretive theoretical means of understanding actors' actions, but it is also a representative means of communication between foreign policy and politics (Flint, 2017, p. 36) to engineer audience perceptions and consent for geopolitical events (Simons, 2023). This is driven by what was characterized by Sun Tsu and von Clausewitz as being the politics of war, driven by the competitive communication of ideas and emotions.

As geopolitical competition and conflict increase and accelerate in 21st century international relations, the role of politics, information, and communication has become increasingly important in defining events and processes (Simons & Chifu, 2017; Chifu & Simons, 2023). By taking the real-time communications of the presidential and security councils of Armenia and Azerbaijan during the period of fighting, which are subjected to critical discourse analysis, it is possible to decipher and reveal the qualitative nature of the politics of the non-kinetic war that supported the kinetic war of both sides in terms of seeking legitimacy for self and to de-legitimize the other. It is the intention of this paper to contribute to a greater understanding of the role played by communication to external audiences by political actors among the main belligerents during an asymmetric conventional armed conflict. In terms of political communication by belligerents to a general global audience during a period of armed conflict, how important are representations using constructivist and realist approaches? Is this affected by the asymmetry of hard power projection? The results of this exploratory single case study are, of course, indicative in nature and are intended to spur further research along the lines of this work. This article is limited to focusing on the quality of the official messages being communicated by the main belligerents; there is no intention to pay attention to international audience perception, which is another article in its own right.

This paper begins with a section on understanding and explaining the theoretical and practical implications of realism and constructivism in geopolitics. Then, the methodology of the work is explained and justified, along with the dataset that was collected and collated. In the following section, a brief section on the background of the 2020 war is provided and contextualized via a selection of the academic literature. Finally, the results from analyzing and interpreting the texts from official Armenian and Azerbaijani sources (performed by the authors) reveal answers to the questions posed in this introduction. The research focus of this article is not on examining and analyzing absolutely equivalent state institutions that are able to determine and influence government policy, but rather relatively equivalent state institution communications to a global audience in the war for hearts and minds rooted in the political elements of modern state–state warfare.

2. Materials and Methods

The realism/constructivism dual approach and search for motivations allows us to compare alternative rationales and campaigns (Gurpinar, 2020; Özkan, 2008), built up by the parties to obtain support for the individual position and narrative, to shape the perceptions of key players in a combination of facts, legal and political arguments, and induced perceptions (Simons & Chifu, 2017). Context analysis also offers a step-by-step factual and theoretical discovery of the elements that support each decision at each step. Therefore, we look at all the events that defined the Second Karabakh War to see the realist component and constructivist rationale that prompted the nature of real-time political communication during the war found in the interpretations and representations of political/politicized speech that comprised the different national storytelling of the one and the same event in the information warfare struggle to engineer global public perception.

Narratives and frames project and represent the world around us and the events that take place; they potentially define perceptions and opinions and assist in engineering audience consent. This is an essential fact to understand in a world of competition and conflict, where the definer is proactive in setting the agenda and the defined is forced into a stance as a passive object of events. For the purposes of this article, narrative and story can be regarded as synonyms, where stories are a means of depicting reality and revealing the cause of events. Rather than concerning the communication of facts, the story's focus is on the conveyance of meaning (Brophy, 2009, pp. ix, 36; Franklin et al., 2011,

pp. 157–159). Frames support the qualitative way in which the story is told to the audience, which deliberately selects (and omits) information to construct the message in the desired manner for an intended effect. Entman (1993, p. 52) proposed that a frame intends to "select some aspects of a perceived reality to make them more salient, thus promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation". Narratives and frames shape the information domain and influence the cognitive domain of the audience.

The means to decode and make sense of the meaning and purpose of text, together with revealing hidden power asymmetries and hierarchies, can be found in critical discourse analysis (CDA). The overall aim of CDA is to link linguistic analysis to social analysis under the general rule that language use builds on the (re)production of social life and plays a role in producing and reproducing inequalities. It has become politically engaged in research on social practices and social relationships, particularly the relationships of disenfranchisement, disempowerment, dominance, discrimination, and/or prejudice. CDA draws the link between text and its social conditions, power relations, and ideologies (van Dijk, 1988, 1997; Fairclough, 1995). This provides the basis for analyzing the texts to be collected from official Armenian and Azerbaijani sources that were published as official publicly available information during the war. To ensure reliability, a background to the 2020 war is provided to capture the historical, political, and military nuances and context so as to avoid oversimplification. It is also important to understand and recognize the temporal nature of discourse, as texts are not static but evolve over time and circumstance, hence the decision to limit the texts collected to the period of fighting in the war.

Materials were collected and collated from the 27 September until the 10 November 2020, marking the active phase of the kinetic war during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. All the collected texts were in the English language and were selected based on the communication of aspects of the war, based on the content relevance of the headline and the content of each communication. The CDA process was structured and organized to manually detect and evaluate texts that detailed and expressed the relationships of disenfranchisement, disempowerment, dominance, discrimination, and/or prejudice. The following websites were combed for news releases in English, because the intention of this language is to address international rather than domestic audiences: (1) Armenian President (https://www.president.am/en/, accessed on 27 May 2024), (2) Armenian Prime Minister (https://www.primeminister.am/, accessed on 27 May 2024), (3) Armenian Security Council (https://seco.am/?lang=en, accessed on 27 May 2024), (4) Azerbaijan President (https://president.az/en, accessed on 27 May 2024), (5) Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry (https://www.mfa.gov.az/, accessed on 27 May 2024), and (6) Azerbaijan Security Council (https://scar.gov.az/?/en/, accessed on 27 May 2024). These political institutions were selected on the basis of (1) they are the most likely places for finding texts on the war that are communicated to international audiences, (2) the Armenian prime minister and Azerbaijan president are the respective heads of state of the main belligerents, (3) the security councils of the respective countries' defense policy directions and the territorial integrity, (4) Azerbaijan foreign ministry selection is on the basis of its mandate to communicate policy and intent of the country to international audiences, and given the need for further texts on the war given the imbalance of texts collected from Armenia and Azerbaijan.

A total of 29 texts were collected, which are broken down in Table 1 below. The website of the Azerbaijan foreign ministry was selected, as a website for the Azerbaijan prime minister could not be found, further motivation being that the foreign ministry has a mandate to communicate to foreign audiences. The collected data were subjected to qualitative analysis and interpretation. Research that involves a qualitative approach

concerns the verbal (including text) description of real-life situations; this possesses several advantages. These advantages include the following: giving context to the described phenomena, interpreting meanings or processes, making use of theoretically based concepts, and seeking to create an understanding (Silverman, 2020, p. 6). This is carried out with the aid of words that are used to generate meanings, which are derived from the dataset generated through the selected topic and time period of the above-mentioned websites.

Table 1. Breakdown of sample according to source.

Source	Number of Texts	Total
Armenia President	3	29
Armenia Prime Minister	7	
Armenia Security Council	10	
Azerbaijan President	3	
Azerbaijan Foreign Minister/Ministry	4	
Azerbaijan Security Council	2	

It is understood by the authors that the selected key political figures and institutions selected for Azerbaijan and Armenia are rather different in terms of the qualitative nature of each national system and the level of power and influence of those entities. For example, the Armenian president possesses far less power and influence than his Azerbaijani counterpart; the Armenian prime minister is closer in terms of the absolute nature of power and influence in the political office. However, it is not the absolute comparison that is being made but rather a relative one of approximately equivalent titles, as the emphasis is not on the ability of the individual or the group to exert power and influence on the policymaking and practical aspects of managing the event. Rather, the emphasis is on how the selected political institutions in the respective countries communicate their interpretations and representations of people, places, events, trends, and processes associated with the kinetic phase of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. To emphasize, the aim is to understand the different approaches by opposing relatively equivalent political institutions of the belligerent nations and their attempt to define the perceptions of the war (to be an active subject) and to avoid being defined (as a passive object). It does not concern an attempt to understand the institutions that possess the formal powers and responsibilities to direct and determine policy in an armed conflict, because information operations run in parallel and in support of the military operations.

Please see an overview of the sample, which is broken down into sources and number of texts, in Table 1 below.

3. Results

3.1. Realism and Constructivism in Geopolitics

At the very heart of realism is the claim that the core of state behavior is found in the concept of interest, which is defined in terms of power. The natural state of international relations is a dangerous and insecure environment that drives the main consideration of the state as pursuing self-interest. This places an emphasis on the role and application of military might (Smith et al., 2008, p. 396). This is associated with Bismark's foreign policy of realpolitik, which concentrates solely on the pursuit of national interest (Dunne et al., 2007, p. 339; Roselle et al., 2020, p. 17). Realism is a traditional theory in international relations (IR) and constructivism is a more modern theory intended to better explain and interpret the results of more recent trends and processes.

Constructivism, on the other hand, focuses on social reconstruction. It emerged during the Cold War as a critique of the more traditional IR theories (and the inability to predict or initially explain the end of the Cold War). There is an emphasis on the social dimensions

of IR and the possibility of change, which emerge from historically and culturally specific circumstances. Thus, there is a difference across contexts, and there is no single objective reality. This means that norms, rules, and language are important in the construction of context for the possibility of change. Actors are influenced and constricted by the process of interacting with others, with distinctive patterns and processes of distinct political, cultural, and historical realities. IR is seen as a social construction rather than being independent of existing human meaning and action by interacting in a meaningful world (Buzan et al., 1998; Fierke, 2007, pp. 166–184; Checkel, 2008, pp. 71–82; Roselle et al., 2020, p. 18). In the context of IR, the theoretical tools of constructivism and realism can be subjected to further conceptual analysis via geopolitics.

Flint (2017, p. 16) defines geopolitics as "the struggle over the control of geographical entities with an international and global dimension, and the use of such geographical entities for political advantage". This concerns political regulation, management, and exercise of power and the influence of actors in IR. However, geopolitics is both a practice and a representation through language that involves the decisions and actions of actors, along with the way that action is justified and explained in political statements (Flint, 2017, p. 36). Geopolitics provides a useful means of understanding the reasons and mechanisms of events, trends, and processes in IR, especially those involving the notion of a crisis as an extraordinary event, such as armed conflict. As a means of regulating power relations and interactions, geopolitics can make sense of an evolving and changing world, which is currently experienced in 21st century IR, where actors need to be aware of the transformation and need to adapt to emerging threats and opportunities (Klieman, 2015; Short, 2022, pp. 335–344).

3.2. Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Background

Nagorno-Karabakh is the original name of the region in Azerbaijan SSR that fell, beginning from 1988 to 1994, to an inter-ethnic war between Armenia and Azerbaijan from the times when they were "union" republics inside the USSR. However, it has evolved to include the influence of foreign countries, the diaspora, and the emotional politics of victimhood and redressing historic grievances/injustices (Özkan, 2008; Abbaszadeh et al., 2022; Amirkhanyan, 2022, p. 119). At some point, geopolitical rationales clashed with the identity and strong links of blood lines (Volkan, 1997), and informational warfare involved the strengths of perceptions, beliefs, and legitimacy of alternative actors and narratives. Before the 2020 war, the formation of myth and conflict narratives in both sides became increasingly entrenched in identity politics and the belief in their own military victory, which set the stage for an eventual transition from a non-kinetic war to a kinetic war (Gamaghelyan & Rumyantsev, 2021). What we can see is the maturation of the process of evolution, where identities and shaping perceptions play a very important role (Chifu & Simons, 2023). The underlying (geo)political environment of not war and peace was unlikely to be permanent, as the status quo rested on realist interpretation and evaluations. If one side considered that they had a sufficiently hard power advantage over their foe and the political will to defeat the other, war would begin.

Often, the literature in a realist paradigm tends to ignore or overlook the constructivist approach to the conflict, especially the factors related to socially constructed identity, a mixture of ethnically defined identity and socially constructed identity, and the perception conundrum and rival narrative debate (Hovakimyan, 2017). The interwar period, between 1994 and 2020, was internationally and widely considered long enough that the Armenian side could have considered its bets and established that the balance was changing in its enemy's favor (Schiffers & Kaufmann, 2023) and that legitimacy belonged more to Baku in the eyes of the international community. Moreover, when it had the upper hand, Armenia

could have better negotiated a way out with important advantages (at least autonomy) in Karabakh. However, as time passed, the Armenia diaspora pressed and internal formal Karabakh veterans and Karabakh generals pressed and blocked any "betrayal" and the Armenians lost everything (Amirkhanyan, 2022). This perception is hard to challenge at the international level and contends with the nationalistic sphere and ethnic communalities of Armenians in the region with the kin state.

Azerbaijan has better adapted to the environment of 21st century policies and succeeded in combining its own resources' surge, geopolitically important position, and knowledge of the narrative and perception games to obtain and maintain an increased sense of legitimacy and support or, at least, a lack of resistance at the international level with its own capability increasing since 2006 (Cavanaugh, 2017). This happened when Armenia stalled in the same disputable framework of victimization and fight for international genocide recognition-related efforts (Companjen, 2010), with a local population and leadership subject to continuous constraints from the diaspora, and a lack of a sense of pragmatic opportunity that could have put it in a better position when it had the upper hand and the possibility to prove itself generous, but also effective in securing some more balanced aims. Pragmatic constructivism (Wittgenstein, 1953; Nørreklit, 2020) is our designation for the new Azerbaijani foreign policy.

In 2016, there was a conflict in April when a four-day war proved to the Azerbaijani authorities that small territorial gains for tactically improving positions could be made using force and with impunity. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and his military planners learned that territory can be liberated by force without incurring any significant political costs (Cavanaugh, 2017). Moreover, this episode of the clash occurring at the mutual border but outside Nagorno-Karabakh showed that escalation and war could begin at any moment in time through a random act or miscalculation (Cavanaugh, 2017).

3.3. Informational Geopolitics During the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

A total of 29 text samples were collected from the Azerbaijani and Armenian websites that were related to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, when physical fighting took place. Even though the absolute number of texts communicated by the respectful presidents was equivalent, the Armenian authorities communicated a total of 20 texts in English and the Azerbaijani authorities communicated a total of 9 texts. The disparity in communication activity and focus may reflect the asymmetry in kinetic war capabilities and capacities, as Armenia was noticeably weaker and may have attempted to even the playing field in the non-kinetic aspects of the war. These texts will now be interpreted using CDA to reveal the realist and constructivist geopolitical representations that are communicated to global audiences (based on the assumption that English serves as the lingua franca). The first texts to be analyzed and interpreted are those from the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, which are followed by the texts from the Armenian and Azerbaijani security councils.

3.4. Presidents' Texts

There were six texts in this category that were evenly distributed between the Armenian president and the Azerbaijani president. Texts were selected from the oldest to enable any tracking of change in their emphasis and tone, which reflected the evolving (mis)fortunes on the physical battlefield. The first communication given by Armenian President Armen Sarkissian occurred on the first day of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (27 September)[1]. His message was clear to the audience from the very title of his speech, and unity in the purpose and action of the Armenian people (in Armenia and the diaspora abroad) was required if there was a chance of victory against the Azerbaijani military forces. This was a call to arms on kinetic and non-kinetic battlefields. The symbolism of the

protection of God was invoked in the text, which was also an intended signifier of the virtue and righteousness of the Armenian people and their cause. In the text, binary opposing realities were projected to denote asymmetries in the tangible and intangible balance of power, where a united, morally virtuous, and militarily weaker than an evil, immoral, and aggressive Azerbaijan. Values and norms at risk in this military contest were outlined: "A new military aggression by Azerbaijan is a war against the entire Armenian nation. This war is launched against the right of the people of Artsakh to live free, with dignity, to have a peaceful life and future". Azerbaijan was depicted as ignoring international law and norms, which was his basis for a plea to the global audience to intervene in Armenia. "We hope that the international community will take urgent steps to stop the war unleashed by Azerbaijan. It is essential to stop the loss of human lives and prevent further destabilization of the fragile situation in the region". Thus, all the virtuous traits assigned to Armenia were mirrored as represented opposites in terms of Azerbaijan's traits that lacked virtue.

The second text of the Armenian president appeared on the 4 October[2]. This was a message and call to prime and mobilize the global community to Armenia's cause in a kinetic war that was going very badly for them. This was obvious in the title of the text: *Our powerful and strong Diaspora is a genuine army, who supports the Homeland and the courageous Armenian Army. President Armen Sarkissian's message to the Diaspora*. He declared that Azerbaijan and Turkey were waging an immoral war of aggression against brave, resilient, and determined Armenian people. The Armenian diaspora was referred to as an army that engages in the cultivation of global public opinion and raising funds for the Armenian war effort. This signaled Armenia's weaknesses in terms of the state's lack of hard power capability and capacity to wage an effective kinetic war. "Today, you are Armenia's and Artsakh's ambassadors abroad. With all possible means—rallies, demands, petitions, and statements—you do everything to bring the truth and the voice of Artsakh to the international community and especially to your home governments about the inhuman essence of the war unleashed by Azerbaijan with the full support of Turkey". Armenia's myth making[3] example of historical memory and national trauma from the events of 1915 associated with their national narrative of the Armenian genocide by the Ottoman Empire was brought to the fore in the message to further reinforce the imperatives of the need for a sense of Armenian unity and sense of purpose and to emphasize the scale of "evil" that was faced in 2020. "This is the same Turkey, which perpetrated ethnic cleansings and Genocide against the Armenians 105 years ago in the Ottoman Empire". This was the basis of an urge to not only reinforce the narrative that Armenia would win the war but also the warning frame that it may happen again if they did not prevail. This constructs a very specific historical, cultural, and identity environment to contextualize the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

In the third and final message from the Armenian president during the period of the kinetic war, the text that was published on the 6 November[4] once more focused on the power of the Armenian people as their greatest weapons. By this stage, it was clear that Armenia was going to suffer a decisive military defeat during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The tone of this message was almost akin to a eulogy, thanks to the bravery and sacrifices of the civilians and military personnel, the constant need for unity, and vigilance against common threats (the human enemy and the virus enemy). Referring to the situation as a continuation of a "patriotic war" that began 30 years ago, the price of victory or defeat was emphasized in emotional and absolute constructivist terms. "For us victory in this war means defending our home, our culture, our values, and our faith, it means doing everything to prevent a second genocide". Words that featured in the text were sacrifice, duty, patriotism, homeland, heroism, selfless, freedom, dignity, culture, values, faith, unity, and other positive words for the description of self. Azerbaijan and

Turkey were associated with an unleashed war, international terrorism, destruction, death, and genocide. Highly emotive words constructed a binary opposing image of aggressor and victim, wrong and right, bad and good, where emphasis was placed on the use of pathos.

The first speech by President Aliyev of Azerbaijan to the security council was also on the 27 September 2020[5]. The speech began with both realist and constructivist aspects, outlining the threat faced by Azerbaijan. "As you know, early this morning, Armenian armed forces committed yet another military provocation against Azerbaijan. We have losses because of this provocation, both among the civilian population and servicemen. It again shows that Armenia's policy of aggression against Azerbaijan continues, and this policy shows the fascist essence of Armenia to the whole world". Azerbaijan was depicted as needing to react to a premeditated military action undertaken by Armenia, which drew Azeri's blood. In addition to the tangible military threat, the intangible ideological threat faced by Azerbaijan was also presented. This contemporary (in addition to the historical) context served as the basis for the legitimacy of Azerbaijan's coming operational military choices and decisions. Greater attention to detail was applied to the historical context, in which the story of Azerbaijan as the victim and Armenia as the aggressor prevailed. "Because such atrocities against the civilian population can only be attributed to fascist states, and this is not the first time—the events in Tovuz and others. Armenian savages committed the Khojaly genocide against the civilian population". There was bountiful evidence of a binary opposing constructivist approach to storytelling, which cast Azerbaijani liberation versus Armenian occupation, defense versus offence, truth versus propaganda, and justice versus injustice (historical and contemporary). There was also an aspect of dehumanizing the opponent. "Armenian savages committed the Khojaly genocide against the civilian population". There were various contextual references (as with the Armenian side) to the historical aspects and origins of the conflict, that is, the conflict did not start on the 27 September 2020 but rather some 30 years earlier. In common with the Armenian counterpart, references were made to the intangible strengths of the human spirit as an enabler of an ultimate military victory for the people, mentions of bravery, unity of purpose and desire, belief in political and military leadership, dignity, and a sense of righteousness. The war was presented as defensive with limited military objectives (to what is seen as historically speaking Azeri lands and not someone else's). The qualities of power, purpose, intent, and national character were featured in this speech.

In the second text published by the President of Azerbaijan on the 30 September 2020[6], the theme focused on the issues of sacrifice, human cost, care, gratitude, and empathy. The text began with a religious reference: "May Allah grant you healing". The cost of sacrifice in the war was acknowledged, as was a pledge to ensure the care of those casualties of the fighting and a return to "normality" after the kinetic war was concluded. This was a hint of the expected results of the war, given Azerbaijani's superiority in kinetic warfare capability and capacity over the Armenians. There was also an acknowledgement of a historical grievance resolved owing to the sacrifice made by Azeri military personnel. "We are fighting for a fair cause, and I am sure that in this conflict we will achieve what we want. Justice will be served and Azerbaijan will restore its territorial integrity. Our compatriots who have been living as IDPs for many years will also return to their native lands". Hence, the frame of historical injustice that was on the verge of being righted was a consistent central theme. The legitimacy and righteousness of the Azerbaijani cause were articulated from a mixture of legal and emotional standpoints. "We are right from the point of view of history, from the point of view of international law, from the point of view of justice". The Armenian opponent was constructed as a dangerous, shrewd, cunning, ruthless, reckless, and cynical actor of numerous vices, with none of the numerous virtues possessed by Azerbaijan. Strong bonds with the Turkish people, culture, and politics were

also emphasized. "Most letters from abroad are from brotherly Turkey. In these letters, our Turkish brothers expressed their desire to fight with us for this just cause. I would like to express my appreciation to them. However, I want to reiterate that there is no need for this. Azerbaijan's army is strong and well-equipped". Although expressed in constructivist terms, there was pragmatic realist concern embedded in this text. If the correlation of forces arrayed against Armenia were perceived as being too disproportionate, then global opinion, sympathy, and maybe action (political, diplomatic, and possibly even military) could be primed and mobilized against Azerbaijan. The text created a story of a humble, resolute, caring, and empathetic leader during a time of war.

On the 25 October 2020[7], the third and final texts of the Azerbaijani president were published. The mood and tone of the text focused on anticipating an Azerbaijani military victory in the war and began to discuss the postwar political consequences and repercussions for Azerbaijan and Armenia. "The occupied lands and ruins are witness to Armenian vandalism. The Armenian state is responsible for these crimes and will be held accountable for them". In realist terms, it was the victor that set the political terms and conditions, imposing its will upon a defeated opponent in the act of maximizing self-interest as an act and display of power. Attention was paid to the restitution and reconstruction of the formerly occupied territories, which consolidated the theme of the expected military victory and what political priorities were to follow. Armenia was escribed as an untrustworthy actor that did not abide by political agreements (such as ceasefires) or diplomatic pressure (such as the 1993 UN Security Council resolution). This shaped the politics and goals of Azerbaijan in attempting to resolve the 30-year conflict through decisive military and political means. "We have one condition: the countries that are so concerned about Armenia, patronize them and create conditions for the Armenians to occupy our lands for about 30 years should put pressure on Armenia". The fear of Azerbaijan was the potential of Armenia to "freeze" the conflict for more decades based on operationalizing an unconditional ceasefire through effective diplomatic and political means. The text expressed President Aliyev's personal beliefs and convictions. "I am confident that Azerbaijan will restore its territorial integrity. We are fighting our own lands. Justice is on our side, international law on our side, and historical justice on our side. We must restore our territorial integrity, expel occupiers from our lands, and ensure the sovereignty of our country. I am confident that we can achieve this goal. But this, of course, requires great responsibility, courage, and discipline from every official". This represented the belief in a military victory, and that they were on the right side of history, but included the call not to lose focus, to be unified, organized, and to work hard for the final victory.

The texts of the president of Azerbaijan tended to be longer and more detailed than those of the Armenian president. There was a clearly present undertone of realist interpretive thinking in terms of maximizing self-interest and security concerns in the unstable and hazardous environment generated by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Issues such as the physical survival of people and the state were articulated by both sides. However, there were also clearly evident representative constructivist projections of the self and the other within the highly specific historical, cultural, political, and military aspects of Armenia and Azerbaijan, which centered on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. The texts of both presidents focused on justifying and legitimizing their political and military course of action within the frame of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Azerbaijan was better adapted to the political and military environment and circumstances of the conflict; hence, the focus was on asserting and legitimizing their moral right to act without any interference from other external actors. On the other hand, Armenia faced a much better equipped and trained military force. To stave off an absolute military (and then political) defeat, they needed to summon and operationalize intangible resources for effects in the information

and cognitive realms to counteract the asymmetries in the physical realm. The political focus of these efforts was to boost the intangibles of the Armenian people (belief in the political and military leadership, and possessing the will to fight), engage in obstructive diplomacy that could impose restrictions on Azerbaijan's operational military choices, and prime and mobilize global public opinion by urging sympathy and action for the Armenian cause.

3.5. Armenian Prime Minister

On the very first day of the war, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan delivered three public statements (of the five in total), which were communicated from the official website. In the first speech by Pashinyan, the outbreak of the war was announced to the Armenian public. His speech emphasized that Armenia was attacked by Azerbaijan, leaving civilian casualties (in contrast with Azerbaijan's emphasis that they were attacked by Armenia), highlighting the resolve of the Armenian people to overcome adversity. "The Artsakh Republic has been under attacks unleashed by Azerbaijan's armed forces since early morning. Civilian population, the capital city of Stepanakert and civil infrastructures are being targeted in Artsakh. There are casualties and injuries, including among the civilian population. Using heavy weapons, artillery and infantry, the enemy attacked the Defence Army's positions in all directions. The Defence Army is standing firm on its positions and honourably fulfils its task of defending Artsakh by taking actions called for by the current situation"[8]. Armenia was pictured as the victim and the underdog in the conflict, implying moral and ethical righteousness in face of an overwhelming military attack. A very stark and threatening image of the enemy was presented in his speech, which highlighted a massive value and normative divide between the two countries and their people. "Ilham Aliyev's dictatorial regime has resumed the hostilities. It is a war imposed on the Armenian people. It is a war against our independence, freedom and dignity. The Armenian people were prepared for the possibility of a war, because we realized that Armenophobia, enmity and hatred with which the Azerbaijani dictatorship used to feed its people for many decades could not lead to any result other than war. The dictatorship of Azerbaijan has become a hostage of its own anti-Armenian policy and is now trying to justify its propaganda-fostered pledge to resolve the Karabakh conflict through military means"[9]. Pashinyan provided a problem definition of the conflict and a casual interpretation why the war occurred, which was presented as being an inevitability based upon the political and social trajectory of Azerbaijan. The asymmetry in tangible military power working against Armenia was acknowledged but was projected as being offset by the intangible resolve of the Armenian people. "We are united as always. We are united just as we used to be in the crucial moments of our history when the enemy threatened our existence, our identity and our national values. Azerbaijan's dictatorial regime should understand that they cannot bring the Armenian people to knees". Physical force and was contrasted with psychological power and willpower, where the long history of Armenian culture and identity was detailed as the source of their intangible power and will to resist. An attempt was made to the wider international audience through invoking the possibility of risk and threat, not only to Armenia but raising the possibility of a possible cascading effect that could trigger a wider regional conflict and instability. "The outbreak of a large-scale war in the South Caucasus, which we can witness now, could have unpredictable consequences. It could go beyond the borders of our region, reaching a much larger scale and threatening international security and stability. I call on the international community to use all the leverages of influence it has to prevent any possible interference on the part of Turkey, which will definitely destabilize the situation in the region"[10]. This may be a reflection of the consideration, if sympathy and empathizing with the "righteous

underdog" was not enough, of the possibility of a wider security threat that may prime and mobilize international audiences to action on Armenia's behalf.

In an address to the National Assembly, Pashinyan repeatedly made mention of the willpower of the Armenian people to fight, and that there was no choice other than to win the war for the country. "This is a decisive moment, we must stand firmly with Artsakh today, we must stand firmly with our Armed Forces today, we must demonstrate that we have enough will and determination to defend our right to life, and I want to emphasize that the will and determination are the most important here. The will and determination are the most important here, all Armenians must unite to defend Artsakh. All Armenians must unite to defend our history, our homeland, our identity, our future and our present. And we will win. We must win, and for that, there is only one prerogative, that we promise ourselves that we will not retreat a single millimetre from defending our history, our people, our Artsakh, our future, our past, our identity, our values"[11]. A righteous and existential struggle was pictured and presented, along with the need for unity among Armenians (in the country and abroad) and what was at stake for the country and its people. "This is a decisive moment, we must stand firmly with Artsakh today, we must stand firmly with our Armed Forces today, we must demonstrate that we have enough will and determination to defend our right to life, and I want to emphasize that the will and determination are the most important here. The will and determination are the most important here, all Armenians must unite to defend Artsakh. All Armenians must unite to defend our history, our homeland, our identity, our future and our present. And we will win. We must win, and for that, there is only one prerogative, that we promise ourselves that we will not retreat a single millimetre from defending our history, our people, our Artsakh, our future, our past, our identity, our values"[12]. The willpower and positive representation of Armenians was contrasted against the negative traits of Azerbaijan and its people as a form of bestowing moral ascendency.

In a speech that marked one week since the conflict began, Pashinyan detailed the scale and intensity of the armed conflict between the belligerents on the battlefield. There were numerous references to the necessity to win and the likelihood of Armenia prevailing over Azerbaijan. "We are facing a fateful chapter in our history. The objective the Azerbaijani-Turkish bandits pursue is not to resolve a military or a military-political task. They are not here to deal with Karabakh or the Karabakh issue. They have not come with the objective of capturing territories, villages, cities. Their key target is the Armenian nation. Their objective is to carry on with their genocidal policy. And they have set themselves the task of bringing to completion the Armenian Genocide. But I wish to state now that the Armenian, the citizen of the Republic of Armenia, the citizen of the Republic of Artsakh is not an eternal traveller on the road to Der Zor (a Syrian desert, where thousands of Armenians lost their lives during the Genocide. Translator's note). Today, more than ever, we are bound to our identity and our homeland through an unwavering conviction to protect our rights"[13]. This was an emotional call to arms and to resolve what was being defended, along with the image of victimhood in a historical and contemporary context where the past was brought to the presence, a frame that was more easily achieved with the military involvement of Turkey on the side of Azerbaijan. Another speech was given that marked the 18th day of the war. Mention was not only made of the efforts of Armenians in Armenia but also the Armenian diaspora and relations with the leaders of key countries such as France and Russia, and moral and legal blame was assigned to the terrorist war unleashed by Turkey and Azerbaijan against Artsakh. A sense of historical relativity was constructed to convey to the audience a possible wider problem from past experience. "At this stage, however, we recorded a strange circumstance: A number of countries, capable of taking strategic deterrence measures, failed to properly assess the threat. They continued to view

the issue in the context of the Karabakh conflict, considering that the "territories for peace" formula could save the situation. This unacceptable formula is similar to the 1938 Munich Agreement, when the European powers allegedly surrendered Czechoslovakia to Germany for the sake of peace. We all know what happened next. Now the question is whether the world will allow the emergence of a new Hitler in Asia Minor"[14]. This was an urgent call for the need for intervention on Armenia's behalf for the projected fear of possible cascading security risk and hazard consequences, which was framed within a moralistic evaluation. The need for unity in the face of adversity was stressed, as was the tangible help in the present day and the intangible help from the historical past. "But at this crucial moment we will not back down, because this is a crucial war for our people. In this situation, the Armenian people have only one thing to do: unite, mobilize all the potential we have, halt the enemy with a decisive blow and achieve a final victory, that is, the final settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the recognition of the right of the Nagorno-Karabakh people to self-determination. The souls, spirit and strength of our other great martyrs and heroes, King Artashes, Tigran the Great, Ashot Yerkat, Aram Manukyan, Hovhannes Baghramyan, Monte Melkonyan, Vazgen Sargsyan, are with us today. Today, the Armenians are united more than ever. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians are providing financial, economic, media-borne and political support to Armenia and Artsakh"[15]. The war was clearly not going well for Armenia, and the emphasis was gradually shifting to a message that made greater use of intangible resources (informationally and cognitively based).

The final address to the nation by Pashinyan, before the end of the kinetic phase of the war, came on the 27 October and it represented a number of continuities from the previous addresses, such as the asymmetric kinetic capability nature of the war, the call for courage and perseverance, demonizing Azerbaijan and Turkey as the polar opposite "other", and, even though there was still mention of a final victory, there was also an increasing air of desperation. "To do so, we need an exceptional nationwide consolidation and discipline. During martial law, especially in combat conditions, everyone has to follow the logic of executing orders unconditionally and without discussion; those who fail to do so, or question our will to fulfil orders will be severely punished, held accountable and, most importantly, publicly blamed. Nothing should serve an excuse for them, because the Homeland and the nation's fate is at stake now; we cannot allow the loss of Artsakh or the eviction of Armenians"[16]. There was a final emphasis on an existential war being a collective threat to the whole of the Armenian people, their culture, identity, and way of life by two historical enemies that were the basis of a collective historical trauma. The past was every bit as relevant and, in some cases, even more relevant than the present day. Armenia and Armenians were framed as being the victims, in the past and in the present. Similarly, Turkey and Azerbaijan were narrated as the perpetrator historically and contemporarily. Pashinyan pointed out the sense of disenfranchisement and disempowerment created by this war that accumulated with traumatic historical experiences, and the possible consequences from the threat of losing identity and culture through the coercive dominance of Azerbaijan and Turkey by military means. He also pointed out that this was far from solely being an Armenian problem but was potentially a more regional issue in the event of the instability spreading. There were some notable similarities and differences with the communications from the foreign ministry of Azerbaijan.

3.6. Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry Texts

The initial Azerbaijan foreign ministry press release on the resumption of the armed conflict was carefully framed by aspects of adherence to law and norms and the role of "objective" observers and emphasized the human and material losses that had been accrued at that stage. Blame was given, based on historical and contemporary factors in addition to

the farming of victim and perpetrator. "We reiterate that Armenia's leadership bears full responsibility for the results of the counter-offensive measures to be taken by the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan in order to ensure the security of its civilians and residential areas deep inside the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan"[17]. The narrative for the contextual setting gave legal arguments (ethos) and moral/ethical judgements (pathos) to persuade the audience as to who was the perpetrator and who was the victim. "In the framework of its new aggression against the Republic of Azerbaijan the armed forces of Armenia are deliberately targeting the civilian population and infrastructure of Azerbaijan in violation of fundamental norms and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as Armenia's relevant international obligations"[18]. Thereby, these statements attempted to define the problem of the war, provide a casual interpretation, offer a moral evaluation of the belligerents, and present a treatment recommendation (namely Armenia's adherence to international and humanitarian law, and the unconditional withdrawal from the territory). An attempt to lobby international organizations with the arguments given above was evident. "This evidence collected with the participation of local and international experts, including the foreign journalists on the ground, will be presented to the relevant international organizations"[19]. The use of what were categorized as being subject experts and eyewitnesses suggested a leading role for the legal arguments that may be suggested as a potentially more "objective" approach in political communication and in influencing the dynamics of the operational choices and aspects of prosecuting the kinetic military operations.

At a Council of Europe meeting, Azerbaijan continued the line of legalistic argumentation to identify the victim and perpetrator of the war, together with the accompanying moralistic evaluations and judgements. "While joining the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan and Armenia undertook a joint commitment on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which resulted in illegal occupation of about 20 percent of the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan and forced displacement of around one million Azerbaijani citizens. Over the last 28 years, the mediation efforts under the OSCE Minsk Group did not yield any tangible result, due to the policy of aggression and occupation of successive governments in Armenia"[20]. There was the attempt to ensure the engineering of public perception that the 2020 war was a continuation of the past, inclusive of the accompanying interpretations and representations of the actors and events.

The final work (published in *The Washington Times*) to be analyzed in this category tended to be an outlier given the heavy dependence on the use of emotional argumentation. "Since the 1988–94 war that resulted in illegal occupation of 20% of Azerbaijan, my country has negotiated for nearly 30 years for its peaceful return. It is disappointing that the international community has adopted an attitude close to appeasement of the occupier by failing to enforce the rule of international law". Once more, the role of historical experience and memory of the tensions were at the forefront of the focus of the communication logic. In addition to the moral and ethical righteousness that was emphasized, there was also a supporting role of political and diplomatic righteousness. "From the United States to Russia, even Armenia itself—every country recognizes the legality of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, and Nagorno-Karabakh's indissoluble place within it. Moreover, Azerbaijan has repeatedly stated its commitment to grant Nagorno-Karabakh the highest possible autonomy once and when peace is achieved"[21]. The suffering of the citizens of Azerbaijan and the aggression of the Armenian government and authorities were the frame for the binary opposite characterization of the "good" and the "bad" sides of this conflict. Focus was on the enfranchisement and empowerment for Azerbaijan and its citizens, and a sense of justice by the resolution of historical wrongs.

3.7. Security Council Texts

In the category of texts from the respective security councils, there were a total of 12 examples. However, the distribution was highly disproportionate given that 10 of the texts were derived from the Armenian security council and only 2 texts from the Azerbaijani security council were collected from the time of the kinetic war component of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Several of the Armenian texts were related to high-level phone conversations between the Armenian secretary of the security council and different important high-ranking foreign officials. The first text was published on the 29 September 2020[22], and involved a phone conversation between the Armenian secretary of the security council and the secretary of the Russian security council. The text was short and included almost entirely what was stated by the Armenian secretary of the security council, which consisted mostly of assigning blame to Azerbaijan and Turkey for aggression and regional security destabilization while praising the Armenian forces for their defensive efforts. The Russian counterpart merely expressed concerns about the development of events and stressed the need for peaceful resolution to end the conflict. There was scant evidence of constructivism in the text but rather a heavy emphasis on realism, which was not surprising given the role of the participants and the nature of the communication.

A second publication of the text also occurred on the 29 September 2020[23], another phone conversation initiated by the Armenian secretary of the security council with its counterparts in Belarus and Tajikistan. "The Secretary of the Security Council discussed Azerbaijan's role in instigating the war since September 27, as well as its attempts to transfer the conflict into the territory of the Republic of Armenia and targeting the peaceful population. The Secretary also emphasized Turkey's destabilizing role and its negative impact on regional security at large". A moral evaluation was made, which pointed at the relationships of disenfranchisement and disempowerment of Armenia and among Armenians. The text was almost identical to the first from a phone conversation with the secretary of the Russian security council. This suggested the possibility of a looming military defeat by Armenia, even though there was a stress on the remarkable efforts by the Armenian forces who had the situation under control (for the time being), which required a significant change in the correlation of opposing forces that would come from securing the direct entry of the Russian-led Collective Treaty Security Organization (CTSO) to militarily assist, which respectfully declined. The third text publication was on the 30th of September 2020[24]. It was an extremely brief publicity article on the Armenian secretary of the security council visiting wounded soldiers in a military hospital and an exchange of "pleasantries". A fourth text also appeared on the 30 September 2020,[25] which involved the coverage of a phone conversation between the Armenian secretary of the security council and its counterparts from the CTSO countries of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Some constructivism was displayed by the Armenian side, which stated that "the Secretary also mentioned that in this situation, the Artsakh Defence Army and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia are the sole guarantors of regional stability and security". This seemed to have been in reaction to the trajectory of his previous conversations. Otherwise, the text and trajectory of the interactions were almost identical in argumentation and outcomes.

A renewed attempt was made by the Russian security council secretary on the 26 October 2020[26], where the process and outcome were like the first encounter in September. The next text appeared on the 28 October[27], where a physical meeting took place with the French ambassador to Armenia. Given the large Armenian diaspora in France, which may have influenced the choice, it was an attempt to persuade the French to diplomatically intervene in the conflict, given the relative success of French intervention in the 2008 Georgian–Russian War. An emotional plea was made for the French envoy. "The Secretary called the Ambassador's attention to Azerbaijan's gross violation of the three humanitarian

ceasefires reached by the persistent efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries. The Secretary highlighted Turkey's growing negative involvement in regional security and stability, evident in its provision of military technical assistance to Azerbaijan, the recruitment and transfer of mercenary terrorists to the conflict zone and calls for a military solution to the conflict". However, the results of the meeting were not conclusive or in Armenia's favor. A similar meeting and argumentation occurred on the 30 October 2020[28] with a British diplomat based in Armenia. By this stage, the war was going very badly, and this seemed to be an act of desperation to try to create a political/diplomatic stalemate, as there was no realistic chance of achieving a stalemate let alone a victory on the battlefield given the CTSO's reluctance to become directly involved in Armenia's side. The role and experience of historical experience and memory was important for Armenia in drawing lessons and associations of the past into the present to influence the social and political relations at the national and international level. It was crucial in helping to define the problematic nature of the conflict, to offer a casual interpretation, offer a moral evaluation, and to perhaps recommend a remedy. The constructivist approach was used by Armenian officials in political and diplomatic management and responses to the war, which was a means of accumulating sympathy with the hope of being able to make tangible operational use of intangible emotions and feelings. This was meant to be the source of engineering a sense of legitimacy in Armenia's cause and plight, which was made more critical for Armenia given its relative lack of military capability and capacity. Constructivism was intended to accumulate the objectives of realpolitik with the objectives of balancing power and self-interest rooted in realism.

The first Azerbaijani text was dated the first day of the war on the 27 September 2020[29], when President Aliyev chaired the security council meeting. This text appeared on the website of the president of Azerbaijan and is documented in the above subsection. However, the intervention of key Azerbaijani officials, namely the minister of defense, described the trigger for war. "I report that a few minutes before 6 o'clock the Armenian armed forces subjected villages of Fuzuli, Jebrail, Terter and Aghdam regions to artillery fire. There is destruction, and there are wounded and dead among the population. The frontline of military units also came under fire". In this context, Azerbaijan reacted to the Armenian military action and, therefore, was not the aggressor. What was also apparent in this text was the initial success of what was referred to as the Azerbaijani army's counteroffensive against the Armenian forces. The initial military actions were overwhelmingly favored by Azerbaijan. The Armenian frontline was reported to have been broken. Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov stated the military situation "as you noted, the most modern weapons are used, and we do not see particularly strong resistance from the enemy. The enemy completely retreats". Military dominance of military operations in the Nagorno-Karabakh area was absolute. The next and last text from the Azerbaijani security council was from 9 November 2020[30]. It was a list of 298 results of different Azerbaijani military actions from 27 September to 9 November in terms of the dates when territory and settlements were taken from the Armenian forces. This was a tangible illustration of the extent of Azerbaijan's military success, which was also politically symbolic in terms of the political pledges made by the government. The focus of the Azerbaijani security council was twofold: First, to establish the aggressor and victim as a means of establishing moral ascendency and political legitimacy for their cause in the war. Second, it summarized the positive military results and political achievements of the war effort. Thus, a mutually supporting interaction between constructivism and realism was established and maintained. In this manner, the problem of the war was defined as being Armenia's fault, owing to them being the aggressor and having a lack of adherence to international and humanitarian law. The casual interpretation was given as Armenian aggression and militaristic expansion,

historically and contemporarily. As such, the logic followed that Azerbaijan held the moral high ground as the victim. The recommendation to resolving the problem was given as the military (and political) defeat of Armenia by Azerbaijan. In terms of social and political practices and relationships, it concerned the righting of historical injustices that converted disenfranchisement and disempowerment into the enfranchisement and empowerment of Azerbaijan and its people. The righting of those wrongs by legal, moral, and military means reversed the earlier dominance and discrimination that was experienced.

4. Discussion

A military defeat on a physical battlefield can soon be translated into a political defeat for the presiding government, with a corresponding loss in the country's political and military leadership. Armenia was by far the weaker military power of the belligerents of the war, which prompted the country to try and innovate by engaging in non-kinetic warfare to obstruct and restrict the operational military choices at the disposal of Azerbaijan. This was perhaps seen as a potential way to offset their military power disadvantage by engaging in politics that could restrict their opponents by altering the political variables that regulated the bounds of the kinetic war. Emotional logic (constructivist) was attempted using intangible elements (informational and cognitive) to offset the rational logic (realist) of more powerful tangible elements (physical). This is not to say that constructivism lacks reason and rationality; emotions are used to generate an emotionally based commitment to the constructed culture and identity of the "self" and to oppose that of the "other". Given its military superiority over Armenia, Azerbaijan's potential worry was not directed at mobilizing global audiences to their cause but rather that they did not mobilize their support for Armenia and remained neutral and/or passive. Of course, the sense of righteousness and legitimacy of the self-cause (and an antithetical for the opponent) was necessary to be established by both actors to enable the fulfilment of their overall strategy in winning or, at the very least, not decisively losing the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Having made this point, it is necessary to introduce some nuance, as Azerbaijan did make use of emotional constructivism to legitimatize and justify their military campaign, such as the historical loss of people and territory to Armenia and the large-scale internal displacement of its citizens. This was the basis for engineering the audience's perception of justification and legitimacy of the favored operational military aspects that were rooted in the hard and cynical world of power and influence of realism. Azerbaijan also made references to reasoned rational aspects of constructivism, which was achieved through attempts to invoke the rule of law to add a further layer of justification and legitimacy through a more pragmatically oriented appeal.

5. Conclusions

Before moving to answering the research questions, it needs to be reiterated that this present article is an exploratory study that provides an indicative result in the single case findings. A research question was posed: how important are representations using constructivist and realist approaches and is this affected by the asymmetry of hard power projection? An initial observation is that these elements of constructivism and realism are not mutually exclusive but rather act as a force multiplier within the context of the politics of armed conflict. There is a complicated interaction and relationship between realism and constructivism, but it is discernible and distinct, being related to the politics of war. War as an extension of politics by other means necessitates the shaping of the cognitive domain via the information domain to influence and persuade the formation of perception and opinions and to engineer consensus among audiences. The accumulation of political capital

is a means to gain legitimacy for one's own actions and to simultaneously delegitimize the opponent's actions.

The rational and worldly logic of realism is complemented and assisted by the emotionally cognitive logic of constructivism. However, from a realist perspective, the timing for priming and mobilizing global audiences could not be worse. The prevalent and palpable global cognitive environment of fear due to the coronavirus pandemic meant that countries around the world were heavily engaged in the realpolitik of maximizing self-interest and security in the unstable and insecure world caused by the effects (physical and psychological) of the virus. Self-interest trumped a problem that was somewhere else; some sympathy was possible rather than mass mobilization of global support. However, this hypothesis must be tested and verified through further scientific testing.

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