

WAR CRIMES AND THE GENOCIDAL POLICY OF AZERBAIJAN DURING THE SECOND ARTSAKH WAR AND THE INTERNATIONAL REACTION

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Abstract

During the second Karabagh war were registered many war crimes committed by Azerbaijan, which primarily were directed against the civilian population of Artsakh. Azerbaijan carried out ethnic cleansing during the war and continues its policy of cultural genocide after the war. However, no international organization takes practical steps to preserve the Armenian cultural heritage, instead, Azerbaijan continues to destroy and falsify Armenian monuments.

Keywords: Second Artsakh war, genocidal policy, international reaction

Introduction

Azerbaijan began the eviction of Armenians from Artsakh after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The violence against Armenians was begun in 1988, with the pogroms of Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku. Then in 1990 the Azerbaijani government started the eviction of Armenians from the Shahumyan region, in particular, the fighting took place in the villages of Getashen and Martunashen. The Azerbaijani aggression turned into a large-scale war in spring of 1991. In response to this aggression, a referendum was held in Artsakh and on September 2, 1991 was declared the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

The first Artsakh War (1991-1994) was ended with the victory of the Armenian side and by the mediation of Russia was signed a ceasefire on May 12, 1994 in Bishkek. A negotiation process had started within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group. During the negotiations were presented options for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. We are convinced that Azerbaijan has always sought to seize whole Artsakh and, in fact, he had prepared for a war during the negotiation process. About this testifies the four-day military escalation of 2016, which didn't turn into a large-scale war, but it demonstrated the position of Azerbaijan to solve this conflict by forceful means.

War Crimes and the Genocidal Policy of Azerbaijan

On September 27, 2020 Azerbaijan launched a large-scale war against the Artsakh Republic, which lasted a mere 44 days. The Azerbaijani armed forces, their Turkish allies and the pro-Turkish Syrian and other mercenaries carried out numerous war crimes during the Second Artsakh War. In this paper we will mention the following

crimes: indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, the use of cluster munitions and incendiary ammunition, crimes against prisoners of war (POW) and captured civilians.

From the first day of the war Azerbaijan began bombing civilian areas and infrastructures. Such acts are war crimes according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Geneva Conventions. Article 8² (b), (i), (ii), (iv) of the Rome Statute describes the following as war crimes: «intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities», «intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives» and «intentionally launching an attack in the knowledge that such attack will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment which would be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated»¹. Articles 51 («Protection of the civilian population»)² and 52 («General protection of civilian objects»)³ Protocol I to the Geneva Convention also protect civilian lives and civilian objects.

Azerbaijan had violated all the above-mentioned points, about which numerous facts have been presented by the governments and officials of the Republic of Artsakh and the Republic of Armenia and also by foreign journalists and mass media. At first, numerous settlements in Artsakh, including the capital city Stepanakert, were subjects to indiscriminate shelling and bombing by Azerbaijani forces. Many residential buildings and houses were destroyed as a result of these bombings.⁴ By the end of the war, around 50 civilians were killed and 148 were wounded on the Armenian side.

Azerbaijan deliberately targeted civilian infrastructures throughout the territory of Artsakh, such as the Shushi Cultural Centre, major electrical power substations, Stepanakert's electricity company headquarters and even cultural monuments and churches, particularly St. Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi, twice. Azerbaijan even targeted schools and kindergartens: as of November 2, 61 schools (around 28% of all schools) and 10 kindergartens were damaged.

Azerbaijan also targeted medical facilities - the military and civilian hospitals. Here we again quote the relevant articles of the Geneva Convention. So, article 19 of the First Geneva Convention protects «Fixed establishments and mobile medical units of the Medical Service» and is mentioned «may in no circumstances be attacked».⁵ Article

¹ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Published by the International Criminal Court, 2011, p. 5, <https://bit.ly/3gKsr3P> (15.03.2021)

² Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977, <https://bit.ly/3iU9k8z> (10.03.2021).

³ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977, <https://bit.ly/3xv8YcM> (10.03.2021).

⁴ On the Azerbaijani Atrocities against the Artsakh Population in September-October, 2020, Stepanakert, 2020, p. 19-26, <https://bit.ly/35AHerd> (15.01.2021).

⁵ Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field. Geneva, 12 August 1949. <https://bit.ly/2TMJU2c> (10.03.2021).

18 of the Fourth Geneva Convention mentions «Civilian hospitals organized to give care to the wounded and sick, the infirm and maternity cases, may in no circumstances be the object of attack, but shall at all times be respected and protected by the Parties to the conflict».⁶ Two facts should be mentioned in this regard. On October 14, the military hospital of Martakert was shelled and the Armenian side reported that there were civilians too. On October 28, the maternity hospital of Stepanakert was hit with air strikes, some days later on November 3 the same facility was hit again with a Smerch missile.

Journalists were also attacked by the Azerbaijani forces. The rights of journalists are enshrined in Article 79 of Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions according which journalists engaged in professional work in war zones «shall be considered as civilians» and «shall be protected as such under the Conventions and this Protocol, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians».⁷ So, on October 1 French and Armenian journalists were injured in Martuni. The next day a minibus with 10 journalists travelling to the city of Martakert was shelled. On October 8 two Russian journalists and their guide were injured by the second bombing of St. Ghazanchetsots Cathedral of Shushi.

One of the war crimes is the use of incendiary weapons and cluster munitions. The use of these weapons is prohibited by international conventions and their use against the civilian population is inadmissible. The use of incendiary weapons is prohibited under the Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons, which is Protocol III to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.⁸ The Armed Forces of Artsakh, Ombudsmen of Armenia and Artsakh published a number of videos and materials, which prove the fact of the use of incendiary ammunition by Azerbaijan. On October 30, Armenia's Government Ombudsman Arman Tatoyan released a video of what appeared to show white phosphorus dropping on forests in Artsakh.⁹ On November 6, the Human Rights Defenders of Artsakh and Armenia released joint special report on the use of incendiary weapons of mass destruction against civilian objects in Artsakh.¹⁰ They also published photos of severely injured civilians.¹¹ Independent studies have shown that white phosphorus has been used in

⁶ Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949. <https://bit.ly/3gEwZIX> (10.03.2021).

⁷ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977. <https://bit.ly/3xBbMVB> (10.03.2021).

⁸ The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons, (Protocol III), <https://bit.ly/3qbpdsQ> (11.03.2021).

⁹ Tatoyan A., Human Rights Defender of Armenia, Azerbaijan uses Phosphorus munitions, <https://bit.ly/3wTgoXz> (31.10.2020).

¹⁰ On the Use of Incendiary Ammunition of Mass Destruction (Incendiary Weapon) Against Civilian Objects of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, the Human Rights Defender of Armenia and the Human Rights Defender of Artsakh, Yerevan, Stepanakert, November 2020, p. 4-38, <https://bit.ly/3xCUsji> (10.01.2021).

¹¹ Նույն տեղում, էջ 15-16:

Artsakh. On December 5, Armenian's Government Ombudsman Arman Tatoyan published additional photos of soldiers injured from incendiary ammunition.¹²

Now about the cluster munitions, the use of which is a war crime. During the Second Artsakh War the use of cluster munitions by Azerbaijan has also been documented. The production, storage, transfer and use of this weapon is banned by the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, which has not been signed by Azerbaijan and Armenia.¹³ According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), cluster munitions have «widespread indiscriminate effect and long-lasting danger to civilians». Human Rights Watch identified the remnants of Israeli-produced LAR-160 series cluster munitions rockets and unexploded M095 dual-purpose submunition in Stepanakert and Hadrut. Each rocket carries 104 submunitions and each submunition is equipped with a self-destruct mechanism. Human Rights Watch identified the Israeli-produced M095 dual-purpose submunition in each location. When this submunition detonates on impact, it produces lethal pre-formed metal fragments and a jet of molten metal intended to destroy vehicles and materials. Human Rights watch observed hundreds of the distinctive impacts of M095 submunitions as well as remnants of the pink-colored nylon stabilization ribbons in three neighborhoods in Stepanakert. In a special visit on October 13, Human Rights Watch found the remnants of a LAR-160 series rocket less than 100 meters from the location the video of the attack was taken. Human Rights Watch observed damage to power lines, children's playgrounds, vehicles, production enterprises, houses, the main post office, and the Karabakh Telecom building.

During and after the Second Artsakh War, Azerbaijan executed a number of crimes against prisoners of war and captive civilians. The Third Geneva Convention prohibits mistreatment and execution of POWs, making them war crimes.¹⁴ The first crimes were committed by Azerbaijani Armed Forces in Hadrut. On October 11, the Artsakh Government Ombudsman's office said that Azerbaijani side has killed at least four civilians in Hadrut – handicapped Misha Movsisyan, his mother Anahit Movsisyan, Nver Grigoryan and Artyom Mirzoyan. Pargev Soghyan (aged 75) was killed in Martuni and a woman (aged 65) was wounded in Shosh village. On October 15, two videos emerged on social media showing Azerbaijani soldiers, possibly from special forces units, capturing two Armenian men in camouflage, one of whom evidently an old man, and then executing them. The execution took place at a town park sometime between October 9 and 15 in Hadrut. Although Azerbaijani authorities claimed the videos were fake, but the BBC confirmed their authenticity.¹⁵ Later the two men in the videos were identified by Artsakh Government Ombudsman Artak Beglaryan, who told the BBC that

¹² Tatoyan A., Human Rights Defender of Armenia, Azerbaijan uses Phosphorus munitions, <https://bit.ly/3gMWmXx> (05.12.2020).

¹³ Convention on Cluster Munitions, 2008, <https://bit.ly/3vCu9rX> (12.15.2020).

¹⁴ Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 12 August 1949, <https://bit.ly/3vH48b9> (15.01.2021).

¹⁵ Atanesian G. & Strick B., Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: 'Execution' video prompts war crime probe, BBC News, 24 October 2020.

the men were locals - Benik Hakobyan (73) and Yuri Adamyan (25). Beglaryan said that Hakobyan wasn't a soldier, he was a civilian from Hadrut and Yuri Adamyan was likely a serviceman from a neighboring village.

Beheadings of both soldiers and civilians is one of the crimes committed by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces. The beheadings took place during the war and after the ceasefire. Azerbaijani soldiers posted videos of beheading on social networks and even sent them to relatives of Armenian soldiers. Similar materials were published by the Ombudsmen of Artsakh Government Armenia.

The Azerbaijani armed forces also carried out executions. On October 30 a video emerged showing the bodies of at least 19 Armenian servicemen, some handcuffed and several unclothed and some of the soldiers had sacks on their heads. Open source investigator Benjamin Strick geographically located the video to Kovsakan (Zangelan), which was recently captured by Azerbaijani forces.¹⁶

Azerbaijan continued to publish videos about war crimes after the ceasefire. Armenian POWs and captives were humiliated, tortured, mutilated, killed and beheaded in those videos. On November 19, a video emerged on social media showing a group of Azerbaijani soldiers forcefully dragging an elderly Armenian man and kicking him from behind. Artak Beglaryan wrote that he has been identified as Jonik Tevosyan (80) a resident of Shushi who could not leave the town as it fell under Azerbaijani control.¹⁷ It is obvious that the Azerbaijani soldiers treated him inhumanely. Several videos have been posted online showing Armenian POWs or civilians beheaded and mutilated.¹⁸ One such video shows a severed head of an Armenian man on a slaughtered pig. Another video shows an Armenian soldier saying «Karabakh is Azerbaijan», then Azerbaijani soldiers showing the severed head of the same soldier impaled on a wooden stake. In another video Azerbaijani soldiers cut off both ears of an old man on the floor of his home. On December 8, another video appeared in which an Azerbaijani soldier beheaded an Armenian old man, who in Azerbaijani language begs not to behead him. That soldier was awarded for beheading an Armenian old man. All these videos testify to the danger of ethnic cleansing by Azerbaijan. The possibility of ethnic cleansing increases due to the high level of anti-Armenian sentiments in that country.

On December 2, Human Rights Watch released a detailed report on the treatment of Armenian POWs in Azerbaijan, who are subjected to physical abuse and humiliation.¹⁹ HRW contacted relatives of some POWs to identify and verify the videos. Military analyst Ryan O'Farrell, who follows the conflict, argues that these war crimes are «widespread, consistent and systematic» and are «tolerated or even encouraged by commanders». He stated that «It's impossible to not assume that the Azerbaijani state

¹⁶ Strick B., Geolocation of footage which shows bodies, some handcuffed, others unclothed, in Zəngilan, <https://bit.ly/3iR9ptI> (28.10.2020).

¹⁷ Beglaryan A., the Human Rights Defender of Artsakh, <https://bit.ly/3wFPMsB> (19.11.2020).

¹⁸ Azerbaijan's war crimes in Nagorno-Karabakh, <https://bit.ly/3cT9yIj> (03.12.2020).

¹⁹ Azerbaijan: Armenian Prisoners of War Badly Mistreated: Investigate, Prosecute Violations; Ensure Protection of All Military Detainees, <https://bit.ly/3zFf3W0> (02.12.2020).

has given its tacit approval to these war crimes. These aren't accidental cases. This is systematic».²⁰

It should be noted that Azerbaijan has begun to destroy and exterminate the traces of Armenian cultural heritage in the territories occupied by his. This is a cultural genocide committed by Azerbaijan in Artsakh. Azerbaijan did the same in Nakhichevan, especially by destroying *khachkars*, which are Armenian cultural masterpieces, in previous decades.²¹ Azerbaijan continues to destroy first of all Armenian churches during and after the war. This is evidenced by a number of facts. Thus, after the occupation of Shushi Azerbaijani soldiers destroyed St. Hovhannes Mkrtych Church, popularly known as «Kanach Zham». It is noteworthy that the church was destroyed months after the war.²² Another fact of cultural genocide is the total destruction of the Armenian Church in Mekhakavan (Jabrail), again after the war.²³ The Azerbaijani soldiers (The Turkish flag is also clearly visible on their uniform) cynically insult and vandalize the St. Yeghishe Armenian Church in Mataghis. In the video, one of the soldiers says: «This belongs to the Armenians, everything here belongs to the Armenians, and we tore it».²⁴

In parallel with the physical destruction of the cultural monuments of Artsakh, which are currently under its control, Azerbaijan at the highest level has resorted to a deplorable practice of falsifying historical facts and alienating religious and cultural values of the Armenian people, in particular presenting the Armenian cultural heritage as being the so-called «Albanian». This is a state policy and sponsored by the president of that country Ilham Aliyev. The latter has made numerous statements of this nature. During his visit to the occupied Artsakh Aliyev misrepresents the nature of Armenian church of the 17th century in the village of Tsakuri of the Hadrut region claiming it to be «Albanian» and labeling the Armenian inscriptions on its walls as «fake», thus preparing grounds for yet another act of vandalism. It is noteworthy that in the published video the above-mentioned church has already been vandalized, as the religious symbols were removed.²⁵

²⁰ Natiqizi U., Kucera J., Evidence of widespread atrocities emerges following Karabakh war: The Azerbaijani government has promised to prosecute any war crimes, but many are skeptical of its sincerity, Eurasianet, Dec 2, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3vzOloY> (09.12.2020).

²¹ The number of monuments destroyed by Azerbaijan was more than 89 medieval churches, 5840 khachkars and 22000 tombstones. This policy of Azerbaijan didn't receive a harsh assessment from international organizations.

²² Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Armenia regarding the consistent violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by Azerbaijan in the occupied territories of the Republic of Artsakh, 18 March, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3cTP8jA> (20.03.2021).

²³ Nagorno-Karabakh: The mystery of the missing church, BBC News, 25.03.2021, <https://bbc.in/2S93epY> (25.03.2021).

²⁴ Tatoyan A., Human Rights Defender of Armenia, This is the St. Yeghishe Armenian Church in Mataghis, Artsakh (built in the 19th century), <https://bit.ly/3wl5gfM> (27.03.2021).

²⁵ Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Armenia regarding the consistent violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by Azerbaijan in the occupied territories of the Republic of Artsakh, 18 March, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3cTP8jA> (20.03.2021).

Azerbaijan has adopted the policy of destruction, misappropriation and distortion of the Armenian cultural heritage, which Turkey has done against the Armenians in their historical homeland at the beginning of the XX century.

International Reaction to the Azerbaijani Aggression against the Republic of Artsakh

There are a number of international organizations and protocols for the protection of human rights in the XXI century. And what was the international reaction about the violation of human rights and war crimes against Armenian population in Artsakh? It should be noted that the international reaction to Azerbaijan's aggression against Artsakh and its war crimes was not active, it was even indifferent. The UN, which is called to protect peace and security, almost did not respond to these events. Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights talked about war crimes only once: on November 2, when she mentioned that the central market of Stepanakert was hit and that 47 civilians in Artsakh and Armenia had been killed.²⁶ The Armenian side repeatedly raised the issue of pro-Turkish Syrian mercenaries during and even after the war. The fact that Azerbaijan brought Syrian mercenaries to the region did not receive proper response from international organizations and especially in the USA. It was not until November 11, a day after the armistice was signed, when the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a statement on Syrian mercenaries deployed in Azerbaijan and called for their withdrawal.²⁷ The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights has addressed the conflict only once.

France pursued a more active policy during the Second Artsakh War. Ara Aivazyan, foreign Minister of RA made a clear statement on the activities of the French leadership during the joint press conference with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian on December 8, 2020. Aivazyan mentioned: «...On behalf of the Republic of Armenia, I express my deep gratitude to my French counterpart for resolute and, at the same time, impartial position of France since the very beginning of the war. The statements of President Emmanuel Macron were very important for us, where the latter clearly highlighted the aggressor and touched upon Turkey's extremely harmful and dangerous involvement in the war, as well as the transfer of jihadist terrorist fighters to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone...».²⁸ In contrast to many countries, the French president made targeted statements, especially mentioning the involvement of terrorists and Turkish support. Resolutions on the need to recognize the independence of Artsakh were adopted by the Senate and the National Assembly. However, the French

²⁶ Bachelet M., Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Bachelet warns of possible war crimes as attacks continue in populated areas, <https://bit.ly/3vH2Z34> (20.11.2020).

²⁷ Mercenaries in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone must be withdrawn – UN experts, <https://bit.ly/3zCovlv> (05.12.2020).

²⁸ The press statement of the Foreign Minister of Armenia Ara Aivazian for the media representatives during the press conference following the meeting with Foreign Minister of France Jean-Yves Le Drian, 08 December, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3gEMzUR> (15.01.2021).

government rejected both resolutions. Most likely, the government's refusal is due to the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian. The Minister noted that such a decision would be tantamount to France's withdrawal from the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, within the framework of which Paris, Moscow and Washington are participating in the settlement of the Karabakh conflict. It would mean giving up our role as mediator.²⁹

The war coincided with the US presidential election. Some researchers attribute the passive role of the US to this fact. But we hold the opposite opinion. The American leadership did not condemn the aggression of Azerbaijan. The United States has not taken any serious steps to end the war and about war crimes committed by Azerbaijan except for statements. This issue also concerns the situation after the ceasefire, in particular of Armenian POWs and captured civilians which were taken hostage by Azerbaijan. About last issue and the aggressive actions of Azerbaijan some steps are taken by individual senators among whom the most famous is Bob Menendes, the chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. One important observation: The United States is a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, which deals by regulation of the Artsakh conflict. In fact, the United States did not take any active steps to end the war or resolve the conflict.

The Russian Federation was active during the war due to several reasons: the South Caucasus region is a zone of Russian vital interests, Russia is a strategic ally of Armenia, Russia also has collaborative relations with Azerbaijan and Russian-Turkish multilayered and multifaceted relations. Russian President Vladimir Putin several times referred to the Artsakh conflict during the war. We have singled out two important observations from his speeches: Artsakh is a part of Azerbaijan from the point of view of international law and this conflict is an ethnic issue, which started earlier, in particular with the massacres in Baku and Sumgait and each side has its own truth.³⁰ In fact, there was mentioned the ethno-political nature of this conflict, in the conditions of which the Armenian-populated Artsakh cannot be part of Azerbaijan. The Second Artsakh war ended by ceasefire signed through V. Putin's direct mediation on November 10 in 2020.³¹ Russian peacekeepers' contingent was deployed in Artsakh, which together with Artsakh Defense Army ensures the security of the population and the issue of Artsakh's status is left to the future. This means that the Artsakh conflict has not yet been resolved, so further military escalations and even war is not excluded.

²⁹ Melkumyan H., The government of France rejected also the decision of the National assembly regarding Karabagh, Azatutyun radio station, December 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2SeSir4> (10.01.2021).

³⁰ Big press-conference of Putin, Kommersant, 17.12.2020, <https://bit.ly/3q7NzE9> (02.05.2021).

³¹ The statement of Putin, Aliiev, and Pashinyan about the ceasefire in Karabagh, November 10, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3zGt45B> (10.11.2020).

Conclusion

On September 27 in 2020 Azerbaijan violated the peace negotiation process and began a large-scale war against the Artsakh Republic. This war was provoked and aided by Turkey. The Second Artsakh War is a part of the geopolitical processes taking place in the South Caucasus. In this regard, the role of Turkey and her vision about Turkic world is very important.

During the war we witnessed many war crimes committed by the Turkish-Azerbaijani tandem, which primarily were directed against the civilian population of Artsakh. In the XXI century, when democracy and human rights must be priority values, we again face the genocidal policy of Turkey and Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan carried out ethnic cleansing during the war and continues its policy of cultural genocide after the war. In order to prevent cultural genocide the state structures of Armenia and Artsakh appealed to international organizations, including UNESCO. However, no international organization takes practical steps to preserve the Armenian cultural heritage, instead, Azerbaijan continues to destroy and falsify Armenian monuments. In general, the international reaction to the aggression of Azerbaijan was indifferent. On the other hand, until now Azerbaijan continues to hold the POWs and civilians and by which she violated the ceasefire of November 10. The Azerbaijani side is trying to use this circumstance for political bargaining, as well as she has a purpose to put psychological pressure on the Armenian society.

Materials referred to above allows us to conclude the following: a) Artsakh cannot be part of Azerbaijan, b) Within the framework of the right of self-determination, the people of Artsakh must be given the right to self-determination or separate from Azerbaijan, c) We must accept that international reaction is also a policy and, unfortunately, the Artsakh issue has become a subject of international political speculation.

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