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Framing the Lachin Corridor Crisis: Selective Discursive Convergence in Azerbaijani, Chinese, and Institutional Communication

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Abstract. *This article examines how the 2022–2023 Lachin Corridor crisis was framed in Azerbaijani official / news communication, Chinese foreign-policy and news-agency communication, and international institutional texts. The purposive corpus comprises 25 texts, with the main analytical window running from December 2022 to August 2023 and limited contextual material outside that period. Using qualitative frame analysis, the study compares problem definition, causal attribution, evaluation, remedies, agency visibility, evidential calibration, humanitarian salience, toponymy, and intertextual authority. Azerbaijani communication shifted from environmental-resource framing to sovereignty-security framing after the April 2023 checkpoint and then to regulated-access humanitarian framing. Chinese communication was less episode-specific and recast the dispute through dialogue, international law, territorial integrity, and regional stability. International institutions increasingly foregrounded freedom of movement and humanitarian access, though their mandates produced different evidential registers. The article conceptualizes this pattern as selective discursive convergence: overlap in high-level norms without equivalent agreement on causal narratives or remedies. It also identifies salience asymmetry and strategic attenuation as useful dimensions of third-party foreign-policy communication.*

Keywords: *Lachin Corridor, Azerbaijan; China, political communication, framing, strategic narratives, sovereignty, humanitarian access, South Caucasus*

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Laçın dəhlizi böhranının təqdimatı: Azərbaycan, Çin və institusional kommunikasiyada seçmə diskursiv yaxınlaşma

Liu Yuşa

Xülasə. *Bu məqalədə 2022–2023-cü illərdə Laçın dəhlizi ətrafında yaranmış böhranın Azərbaycanın rəsmi açıqlamalarında və xəbərlərində, Çinin xarici siyasət açıqlamalarında və xəbər agentliklərinin materiallarında, eləcə də beynəlxalq qurumların mətnlərində necə təqdim olunduğu araşdırılır. Məqsədli seçmə əsasında formalaşdırılmış korpus 25 mətndən ibarətdir.*

Əsas təhlil dövrü 2022-ci ilin dekabrından 2023-cü ilin avqustunadək olan müddəti əhatə edir; bu dövrdən kənar məhdud sayda material isə kontekst üçün istifadə olunur. Keyfiyyət əsaslı çərçivələmə təhlili vasitəsilə problemin müəyyənləşdirilməsi, səbəblərin kimə və ya nəyə aid edilməsi, qiymətləndirmə, təklif olunan həll yolları, fəaliyyət subyektlərinin mətndə görünürlüğü, iddiaların sübut səviyyəsinə uyğun ifadə edilməsi, humanitar məsələlərin ön plana çıxarılması, toponimlərin istifadəsi və digər mətnlərə istinadla əsaslandırma müqayisə edilir. Azərbaycanın kommunikasiya materiallarında 2023-cü ilin aprelində sərhəd-buraxılış məntəqəsinin yaradılmasından sonra ekoloji məsələlər və təbii resurslardan istifadə üzərində qurulan çərçivədən suverenlik və təhlükəsizlik çərçivəsinə, daha sonra isə tənzimlənən keçidə əsaslanan humanitar çərçivəyə keçid müşahidə olunur. Çinin kommunikasiya materialları ayrı-ayrı hadisələrin təfərrüatlarına daha az yönəlir və mübahisəni dialoq, beynəlxalq hüquq, ərazi bütövlüyü və regional sabitlik kontekstində təqdim edir. Beynəlxalq qurumlar hərəkət azadlığını və humanitar yardımın çatdırılması imkanlarını getdikcə daha çox ön plana çıxarır, lakin onların fərqli mandatları sübutların təqdim edilməsində müxtəlif yanaşmalar doğurur. Məqalədə bu nümunə selektiv diskursiv yaxınlaşma kimi izah edilir: ümumi prinsiplər üzrə uyğunluq səbəblərin izahı və ya həll yolları üzrə eyni dərəcədə razılıqla müşayiət olunmur. Həmçinin məsələyə ayrılan diqqətin qeyri-bərabərliyi və mübahisəli məqamlara vurğunun strateji şəkildə azaldılması üçüncü tərəflərin xarici siyasət kommunikasiyasının təhlilində faydalı ölçülər kimi müəyyənləşdirilir.

Açar sözlər: *Laçın dəhlizi, Azərbaycan, Çin, siyasi kommunikasiya, çərçivələmə, strateji narrativlər, suverenlik, humanitar yardıma çıxış, Cənubi Qafqaz*

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1. Introduction

After the Second Karabakh War, few transport routes in the South Caucasus acquired as much political meaning as the Lachin Corridor. Paragraph 6 of the trilateral statement of 10 November 2020 defined a five-kilometre-wide connection between Karabakh and Armenia under the control of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, while Azerbaijan undertook to guarantee the safety of persons, vehicles, and cargo moving in both directions (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020). The arrangement tied everyday mobility to peacekeeping, sovereign authority, security, and the wider problem of post-war order.

From 12 December 2022, movement along the route generated sharply different descriptions. Azerbaijani official communication foregrounded environmental concerns, alleged illegal resource exploitation, and claims that humanitarian passage remained possible. Armenian officials and several international actors emphasized obstruction, freedom of movement, and humanitarian consequences. On 22 February 2023, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), at the provisional-measures stage of Armenia v. Azerbaijan, ordered Azerbaijan to take all measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles, and cargo in both directions. The Court stressed that the order did not prejudge jurisdiction or the merits and did not grant all measures requested by Armenia (ICJ, 2023a).

The article makes two contributions. Empirically, it traces shifts in the selected Azerbaijani texts from environmental-resource claims to sovereignty-security framing and then to regulated-access

humanitarian framing, while showing that the selected Chinese texts remain more abstract and less attributional. Conceptually, it develops selective discursive convergence to distinguish shared high-level norms from agreement on event-specific explanations and proposed responses, and uses salience asymmetry and strategic attenuation to capture differences in communicative intensity and abstraction.

Three research questions guide the analysis. RQ1: How did selected Azerbaijani official and news texts frame the Lachin Corridor between December 2022 and August 2023, and how did those frames change over time? RQ2: How did Chinese official and news-agency communication incorporate the Lachin issue into its broader representation of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations? RQ3: Where do Azerbaijani, Chinese, and international institutional vocabularies converge or diverge on sovereignty, security, humanitarian access, causal responsibility, and preferred remedies?

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Framing, attribution, and conflict vocabulary

Framing research is concerned with selection and salience: communicators make some aspects of an issue more prominent in ways that define problems, diagnose causes, evaluate actors, and make particular responses appear appropriate (Entman, 1993). In conflict reporting, these functions are especially consequential because disputed facts often enter news through sources representing different institutional positions, while labels for territory, actors, and actions may reflect differing political perspectives. Frame analysis therefore needs to examine more than tone. Nomination, agency, attribution, evidence, temporal context, and proposed remedy work together to organize interpretation.

Work on the Karabakh conflict illustrates these difficulties. Bayramov's (2023) analysis of 188 Dutch news items on the Second Karabakh War demonstrates that external media can reproduce simplifications through source selection, historical schemata, and recurring geopolitical assumptions.

Maharramova (2026) offers a useful lexical and methodological extension. Her comparative study operationalizes conflict reporting through event nomination, agency visibility, attribution, legal-status labels, humanitarian representation, place naming, and verification vocabulary.

2.2. Security framing and the limits of securitization claims

The April 2023 checkpoint introduced a more explicit security vocabulary into Azerbaijani communication. Securitization theory is useful because it draws attention to the discursive construction of threats and to the forms of control that such constructions can help justify (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). Balzacq (2005), however, stresses that securitization is audience-centred, contextual, and shaped by power.

That distinction keeps the analysis within the evidence. Security language indicates a security frame, but it does not by itself establish audience acceptance or settle the legal validity of the policy being defended. Humanitarian language requires the same caution: it can accurately report operational need without proving every causal allegation attached to the crisis.

2.3. Strategic narratives, third-party communication, and China in the South Caucasus

Strategic-narrative scholarship helps explain why third states often discuss a regional crisis at a different level of abstraction from the immediate parties. Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2013) describe

strategic narratives as attempts to organize understandings of international order, actors, and policy choices. A third party may therefore respond to a disputed episode by locating it within a broader story about dialogue, stability, international law, or development rather than adjudicating the parties' competing factual claims. China's growing economic and diplomatic engagement in the South Caucasus makes that distinction especially relevant. German (2022) links China's greater prominence to the region's geostrategic position and transit potential.

3. Case Context: From a Post-War Corridor to a Border Management Issue

The legal-political starting point is paragraph 6 of the 10 November 2020 trilateral statement. It placed the Lachin Corridor under the control of Russian peacekeepers, provided for a new route to be determined, and assigned Azerbaijan a safety guarantee for movement in both directions (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2020). The text did not specify how every later question of inspection, protest activity, customs practice, border control, humanitarian passage, or sovereign jurisdiction would be handled. Those unresolved questions later supplied material for competing legal and political interpretations.

The December 2022 episode centred on Azerbaijani activists who described their actions as environmental protest against alleged illegal mineral exploitation. Azerbaijani official briefings stated that the government was not restricting movement and that protesters would facilitate civilian and ambulance traffic (MFA Azerbaijan, 2022). Report.az and AZERTAC reinforced this environmental-resource frame by foregrounding monitoring demands and reports that humanitarian traffic could pass (Report.az, 2022a, 2022b; AZERTAC, 2023). Other institutions emphasized different concerns. The ECtHR, indicating an interim measure on 21 December, described Azerbaijan's degree of control as disputed and unclear at that stage and directed Azerbaijan to ensure safe passage for seriously ill and certain stranded persons within its jurisdiction (ECtHR, 2022). The UN Secretariat, which was not present in the corridor, said it could not verify the competing claims (UNSC, 2022).

The ICJ's order of 22 February 2023 became one of the most frequently cited legal texts in the dispute. The Court found that movement had been disrupted and indicated a binding provisional measure requiring Azerbaijan to take all measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement in both directions. It did not grant the requested measure directing Azerbaijan to cease alleged orchestration of the protests, and it found insufficient evidence for the requested utility-restoration measure (ICJ, 2023a).

4. Data and Method

This study uses a purposive comparative qualitative corpus because the research question concerns framing across institutionally different text genres rather than population estimates. The principal analytical window runs from 12 December 2022 to 31 August 2023. Three Chinese agency items extending to November 2023 are retained as contextual material for the peace-process macro-frame, and the 2020 trilateral statement serves as the legal-political baseline. The corpus contains 25 texts used in the analysis: seven Azerbaijani official/news items, seven Chinese official/agency interventions, and eleven legal, humanitarian, or multilateral documents. Appendix A identifies each item and its analytical role.

Texts were included if they directly addressed the protests, corridor movement, the April checkpoint, or humanitarian access, or—in the Chinese contextual subset—if they articulated relevant peace-process principles on sovereignty, territorial integrity, or regional communications. The Azerbaijani material includes Foreign Ministry statements and English-language reporting by Report.az and AZERTAC. The

Chinese material includes the Foreign Ministry's direct response, two Security Council interventions, and Xinhua items. The institutional subset includes the 2020 trilateral statement, ECtHR and ICJ materials, ICRC updates, UN records, PACE, and the Council of Europe Commissioner.

Analysis proceeded in two passes. The first identified each text's dominant problem definition and preferred remedy; the second compared lexical clusters, attribution patterns, and temporal change. Interpretive claims were checked against source status and whether a proposition appeared as authorial wording, an attributed claim, a procedural finding, or an operational observation. No frequency estimates are generalized from this small, deliberately heterogeneous corpus; 'dominant' and 'salient' refer only to repeated qualitative prominence within the selected texts.

Terminology is treated as evidence. Source-specific names such as 'Lachin Corridor', 'Lachin-Khankendi road', 'Karabakh', 'Khankendi' are preserved when describing a source. In the author's analytical prose, less contested terms are used where possible. The same rule applies to 'blockade': it is treated as an attributed frame rather than a neutral synonym for disruption.

The study has no audience-reception component. It therefore identifies security-oriented framing and textual framing strategies, not successful securitization or measurable media effects. Nor are international institutional texts treated as a neutral benchmark. They form a heterogeneous reference cluster with legal, humanitarian, and political mandates of their own. Their comparative value lies in showing which dimensions became institutionally salient and what evidential standards accompanied those claims.

Table 1
Analytical coding scheme

Dimension	Operational question	Typical indicators
Problem definition	What is presented as the central problem?	environmental/resource issue; blocked/restricted access; sovereignty; border security; humanitarian need; peace-process instability
Causal attribution	Who or what is said to have produced the problem?	protesters; state authorities; alleged illicit transfers; institutional failure; lack of dialogue; unnamed “sides”
Evaluation / legal register	What makes the situation legitimate, illegitimate, urgent, or risky?	sovereignty; territorial integrity; 2020 statement; ICJ order; humanitarian law; freedom of movement
Preferred remedy	What action is normalized as the solution?	monitoring; regulated passage; checkpoint; reopening/unimpeded movement; alternative route; negotiation
Agency visibility	Are actors named as agents or placed in passive/attributed constructions?	direct accusation; balanced attribution; passive description; non-attributive diplomacy
Evidential calibration	How are claims qualified?	assertion; attribution; “reported”; “alleged”; judicial finding; humanitarian operational observation
Humanitarian salience	How visible are civilian needs and access?	medical evacuation; food/medicine shortages; family reunification; humanitarian convoys

Dimension	Operational question	Typical indicators
Toponymy	Which place names encode a political or institutional perspective?	Lachin Corridor; Lachin-Khankendi road; Karabakh; Khankendi
Intertextual authority	Which prior texts authorize the frame?	trilateral statement; ICJ/ECtHR; ICRC; UN; bilateral declarations

5. Findings

5.1. Phase I: environmental-resource framing and the contest over the "blockade" label

The first recurring Azerbaijani frame, visible from December 2022 into early 2023, centred on environmental and resource-governance claims. The Foreign Ministry's 15 December briefing presented the protests as a civil-society response to unresolved ecological concerns and explicitly denied that Azerbaijan was restricting traffic (MFA Azerbaijan, 2022). Report.az and AZERTAC reinforced that interpretation by foregrounding ecological slogans, mineral deposits, monitoring demands, and reports that humanitarian or emergency vehicles could pass (Report.az, 2022a, 2022b; AZERTAC, 2023).

This frame presented a different account of the actors and their roles. If illegal resource exploitation is defined as the central problem, the emphasis falls on protesters' monitoring requests and civic concerns. Reports of humanitarian vehicles passing also supplied evidence for challenging the word 'blockade' as an overgeneralized description. The frame therefore affected both problem definition and causal attribution.

5.2. Phase II: the checkpoint and a shift from environmental to sovereignty-security framing

The border checkpoint established on 23 April 2023 produced the clearest shift in Azerbaijani official framing. Environmental monitoring remained in the background, but sovereignty and security moved to the foreground. The Foreign Ministry linked the checkpoint to alleged misuse of the road for military personnel, weapons, ammunition, and illicit trafficking, presenting the measure as a response to security threats (MFA Azerbaijan, 2023a). A follow-up statement described the checkpoint as an exercise of a sovereign and legitimate right while reiterating Azerbaijan's interpretation of its obligations concerning movement (MFA Azerbaijan, 2023b).

Three changes are especially clear. The object of dispute changes from a protest site to a state border; the relevant agent changes from civil-society protesters to border authorities; and the preferred remedy changes from monitoring resource exploitation to regulated passage. Taken together, these changes amount to a shift toward security-oriented framing: the road is represented as a channel that, according to the official statements, requires regulation to address military and sovereignty-related concerns.

5.3. Phase III: humanitarian-route contestation and regulated-access framing

By mid-2023 humanitarian access had become the central discursive conflict. ICRC reporting provides a useful operational anchor: in February it reported evacuations, family transfers, and deliveries along the corridor (ICRC, 2023a); on 25 July it stated that it could not then bring humanitarian assistance through the Lachin route or other routes, including Aghdam, while some medical evacuations continued

(ICRC, 2023b). In August it again reported prolonged interruption of food and medical deliveries (ICRC, 2023c).

Binary coding would obscure that structure. A text can accept the need to deliver medicine and food while discussing the route and regulatory conditions under which delivery takes place. A humanitarian organization can also insist on rapid, unimpeded access without endorsing either party's wider political narrative. The ICRC's September delivery through both the Lachin Corridor and the Aghdam road falls outside the main analytical window, but it offers useful contextual confirmation that multi-route access could emerge through a negotiated 'humanitarian consensus' (ICRC, 2023d). By then, the dispute had become as much about the architecture of access as about the existence of humanitarian need.

5.4. China: low salience, non-attributive diplomacy, and strategic attenuation

Chinese communication has a different profile. The most direct official response came at the Foreign Ministry press conference on 15 December 2022. The TASS question embedded a specific causal premise, describing Azerbaijani nationals as having blocked the corridor. Wang Wenbin did not repeat that premise. He moved instead to a regional-level appeal for dialogue, communication, peace, stability, and peaceful lives (MFA China, 2022). The response did not create several possible meanings so much as remove the contested attribution from the centre of the answer. In this article, that move is treated as strategic attenuation.

China's intervention at the Security Council on 20 December was more detailed but followed the same pattern. Geng Shuang expressed concern about the situation and its humanitarian impact, called for disputes surrounding the corridor to be addressed through dialogue and consultation, welcomed diplomatic efforts, and urged Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve disagreements under international law (UNSC, 2022).

5.5. The institutional reference layer: law, humanitarian operation, and rights-based salience

International institutional texts form a third cluster, but one divided by mandate. The ICJ's language was judicial and provisional, focusing on CERD obligations, risk of irreparable prejudice, and a concrete measure on movement while preserving the non-merits status of the proceedings (ICJ, 2023a, 2023b). The ECtHR's December 2022 communication was narrower: it addressed interim protection for seriously ill and stranded persons and stated that Azerbaijan's degree of control over the situation was disputed and unclear at that stage (ECtHR, 2022).

The ICRC reported operational capacity rather than legal responsibility. Its updates documented medical evacuations, family reunification, deliveries, and later the inability to bring certain humanitarian supplies through either of the routes under discussion (ICRC, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). This genre is useful for media analysis because its evidence is concrete: what teams delivered, whom they evacuated, and when deliveries ceased. It generally does not adjudicate the parties' competing political narratives.

For journalism, these genre differences matter. A provisional court order, humanitarian field update, parliamentary report, and foreign-ministry statement carry different kinds of authority. Treating them as interchangeable can turn provisional findings into final judgments, operational observations into legal attribution, or attributed statements into independently established fact.

Table 2
Comparative evolution of dominant frames, December 2022–August 2023

Period / trigger	Azerbaijani communication	Chinese communication	International institutional layer
Dec. 2022–Feb. 2023: protests and first legal interventions	Environmental/resource monitoring; denial or narrowing of "blockade"; emphasis on humanitarian exceptions and road openness	Dialogue, consultation, peace and regional stability; concern over humanitarian impact without episode-level blame	Safe passage; inability to verify competing claims (UN); interim protection (ECtHR); unimpeded movement order (ICJ)
Apr.–Jun. 2023: checkpoint	Sovereignty, border competence, security threats, regulated passage; alleged illicit use of route	Peace-process context; mutual accusations are attributed; territorial integrity and stability remain macro-frames	Existing ICJ measure remains relevant; rights/access concerns continue; PACE foregrounds freedom of movement and humanitarian consequences
Jul.–Aug. 2023: access crisis	Regulated-access humanitarian counterframe: medical passage, controlled access, Aghdam alternative, rejection of a politicized crisis narrative	Non-attributive diplomatic framing: dialogue, international law, "meet halfway", regional stability	ICRC reports inability to deliver assistance for a period; UN/CoE foreground reported humanitarian deterioration and access
Nov. 2023 contextual endpoint	Sovereignty and post-conflict reintegration become broader official context	Mutual recognition of sovereignty/territorial integrity and jurisdiction over communications becomes the dominant peace-process vocabulary	Outside main crisis window; institutional attention shifts to consequences of September 2023 events

6. Discussion

6.1. Selective discursive convergence

The central finding is a convergence of abstract norms without convergence of accounts of developments. Azerbaijani and Chinese communication both give positive weight to sovereignty, territorial integrity, international law, regional stability, and peaceful settlement, but those concepts do different work. In the selected Azerbaijani texts, sovereignty increasingly provides the stated basis for border control and responses to external descriptions of the situation. In the selected Chinese texts, sovereignty and territorial integrity appear mainly as principles of interstate order and peace negotiations, while discussion of Lachin emphasizes dialogue and consultation.

Bilateral documents adopted after the main study period provide contextual triangulation but should not be read backward into 2022-2023. The 2024 Azerbaijan-China strategic-partnership declaration placed regional peace, stability, and development within the bilateral framework, while the 2025 comprehensive

strategic-partnership statement strengthened mutual support on sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024, 2025).

6.2. Salience asymmetry and strategic attenuation

Salience asymmetry adds a second dimension to the comparison. Foreign-policy communication is shaped not only by how an issue is framed but also by how much attention it receives and at what level of specificity (Soroka, 2003; Oppermann & Spencer, 2013). Azerbaijan communicated frequently because the route implicated territorial jurisdiction, international reputation, and immediate policy choices. China communicated intermittently and at a more general diplomatic level, reflecting its role as a third party concerned with regional stability and connectivity.

Strategic attenuation describes the textual mechanism behind this lower-salience posture. A disputed allegation enters the Chinese communicative setting, but the response brackets the disputed attribution and substitutes a general remedy of dialogue, law, and stability. This differs from strategic ambiguity, which preserves multiple plausible readings (Zhang & Han, 2013; Bach, 2025), and strategic silence, which withholds a position (Dadabaev & Sonoda, 2023).

6.3. Frame circulation and recontextualization

The case also shows how foreign-policy messages change as they move between institutions. A claim originating in a ministry, court, or humanitarian organization is rarely reproduced without alteration. Azerbaijani news outlets recontextualized official and activist claims into recurring stories about environmental monitoring, vehicle passage, and sovereignty. International institutions recoded the controversy into legal or humanitarian categories. Chinese communication placed the developments within a broader diplomatic discussion of stability. These are genre-specific transformations, not simply different opinions about the same event.

6.4. Implications for conflict-sensitive international journalism

The findings have several implications for conflict-sensitive reporting. Observable movement conditions should be separated from the political label assigned to them. 'Blockade', 'open road', 'regulated passage', and 'humanitarian corridor' carry different assumptions about agency, intentionality, and completeness. Attribution should remain visible when facts are contested. Claims about weapons transfers, intentional obstruction, or the use of humanitarian issues for political purposes should not migrate from a party statement into the reporter's unattributed voice without independent verification.

Limited coverage alone does not establish a particular diplomatic position. China’s limited direct treatment of Lachin nevertheless expressed identifiable diplomatic priorities. It consistently privileged a particular level of analysis: interstate dialogue, international law, stability, and peaceful settlement.

Table 3
Selective discursive convergence across the three communicative clusters

Dimension	Azerbaijani official/news cluster	Chinese official/agency cluster	Institutional reference cluster
Shared high-order norms	Sovereignty; territorial integrity; peace/stability	Sovereignty; territorial integrity; peace/stability; international law	Movement obligations; rights; humanitarian access; international law (varies by mandate)
Issue salience	High; frequent and granular	Low-to-moderate; comparatively abstract	High during legal/humanitarian interventions
Causal attribution	Often explicit; Armenia/illicit use/external politicization are recurrent attributed causes	Deliberately limited; parties are urged to negotiate and meet halfway	Varies: courts delimit findings; ICRC reports operations; political bodies may use stronger attribution
Preferred remedy	Monitoring → regulated border control → alternative/controlled access	Dialogue, consultation, diplomatic settlement, international law	Unimpeded/free movement, humanitarian access, compliance with institutional measures
Core discursive function	Explanation of national jurisdiction and policy	De-escalation and preservation of diplomatic flexibility	Legal/humanitarian problem definition and institutional response
Degree of convergence with Azerbaijan	—	High at normative level; limited at episode level	Partial on sovereignty context; lower on access framing during mid-2023

7. Limitations

The study is intentionally bounded. The purposive corpus cannot represent Azerbaijani or Chinese media as a whole, much less public opinion. Direct Chinese material on Lachin is particularly limited, so the comparison combines a small number of episode-specific interventions with a contextual set of Xinhua items on the peace process. That asymmetry is part of the finding, but it also restricts generalization.

The analysis uses English-language or officially translated material. Chinese-, Azerbaijani-, and Russian-language versions may contain different nuance or salience. A multilingual follow-up could test whether strategic attenuation is equally visible in domestic-facing communication.

No audience data are used, so the article makes claims about texts and institutional framing rather than persuasion, reception, or successful securitization. The institutional cluster is also heterogeneous: the ICJ, ECtHR, ICRC, UN Secretariat, PACE, and Council of Europe Commissioner have different mandates and evidential practices. They are grouped only for comparative purposes, and the analysis preserves those mandate-specific differences.

8. Conclusion

The Lachin Corridor crisis shows how a geographically narrow route can become a dense site of political communication. Between December 2022 and August 2023, the corridor was represented as an

environmental-protection dispute, an access problem, a sovereign border, a security vulnerability, a humanitarian lifeline, and a test of regional diplomacy. The relative prominence of these frames changed as the institutional and material context changed.

In the selected Azerbaijani material, framing moved from environmental monitoring and rejection of the 'blockade' label to sovereignty-security claims after the April checkpoint and then to a regulated-access humanitarian counterframe centred on medical passage and alternative routes, especially Aghdam.

Chinese communication followed a different trajectory. Direct statements remained comparatively sparse and shifted episode-level controversy toward dialogue, consultation, international law, and regional stability. Xinhua's wider peace-process reporting made sovereignty and territorial integrity visible, but those shared principles did not become detailed endorsement of Azerbaijan's causal account of the Lachin crisis. This is the core of selective discursive convergence: high-order normative overlap accompanied by divergence in salience, attribution, and remedy.

For international journalism, the implication is practical. Disputed labels should remain attributed, procedural status should be reported precisely, and humanitarian observations should be distinguished from attributed political statements. These are not minor stylistic choices. In a contested post-conflict setting, they determine whether reporting preserves the difference between evidence, interpretation, and advocacy.

Declarations

• Funding. This research received no external funding.
• Conflict of Interest. The author declares no conflict of interest.
• Data Availability. All primary documents and media texts analysed in the article are publicly accessible through the links listed in the references and the corpus appendix.
• Ethics Statement. The study uses publicly available documents and media texts and does not involve human participants, personal data, or animal research.

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