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8 Striving To Create a Republic

Transcaucasia and the March Revolution

The Russian–Armenian volunteer units which had been formed in 1914 were a focus of national feelings in that year and the early part of 1915, and of significant military benefit to the tsarist armies; but thereafter the Russian military leadership saw them as unwelcome centres of political aspirations, and ordered their disbandment in December 1915.¹ All Armenian soldiers henceforward had to serve as regulars in the Russian regiments. Discussions of Armenian political aims was suppressed too. The old Great-Russian steamroller, squashing the smaller nationalities, seemed to be in motion again.

The Russian armies scored a series of remarkable victories in the first six months of 1916: Erzerum was taken on 16 February, Trebizond on 18 April and Erzindjan on 25 July. In the south, the whole of Lake Van was in Russian hands by the early summer.² Earlier in the war such successes would have been an occasion for celebration by Armenian leaders in Tiflis; yet now the captured Armenian towns and villages were empty of Armenians. Only corpses and skeletons remained.

The tsarist army has been blamed for inefficiency and bureaucracy, but one cannot overlook the scale of these victories. The danger, however, lay in the manner in which they were achieved, since all Russian officers treated their men in an arrogant and bullying manner. They believed, blindly, that their social and military structure would last for ever; and when it fell apart, so too did the authority that they had unthinkingly wielded.

In March 1917 the edifice collapsed. The tsar abdicated, a liberal 'Provisional government' took power, and soviets (councils) of workers and soldiers were set up.

The March revolution was warmly welcomed in Transcaucasia. Despite tsarist censorship, ideologies which mixed socialism and nationalism in varying proportions were rife there. Among the Georgians, Menshevik socialism was strong; a number of educated Tatars of south-east Transcaucasia – later to become Azerbaijan – adhered to the Musavat or 'equality' party, basically a Muslim nationalist party, but one which was also coloured with a sinister, pan-Turkist hue, in view of its connections with the Ittihadists of Constantinople. Bolshevism had a small but dedicated following in Baku and Tiflis, but very little elsewhere.

Among the Armenians, the Dashnaks were especially popular throughout Transcaucasia, and with good reason: their arms had defended the people

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against the combined onslaughts of imperial Cossacks and Tatars in 1905. They had strong support from both peasantry and townsfolk. Some educated Armenians, however, were critical of Dashnak methods of secrecy and propaganda, and of their tendency to form close alliances with other political groups. This opposition was represented by the Populist, or Zhoghovrdakan, party, made up partly of liberal-minded teachers and doctors, and also of Armenian businessmen in Tiflis and Baku. The Populist party was the Caucasian equivalent of the Constitutional Democrat (Sahmanadir Ramkavar) party, which had been founded in

Cairo in 1908, and which drew support from Armenians all around the Mediterranean. The Hunchaks were not strong in the Caucasus. Their only real strength had resided in Cilicia, and remained in cells in Europe and the United States. After a split in 1896, when the non-socialists left the party and founded the Verakazmial, or Reformed, Hunchaks, the party only occasionally emerged into the forefront of Armenian affairs.

Throughout Transcaucasia Georgians, Armenians and Tatars were strongly intermixed with one another. Tiflis and Baku had large Armenian populations, both of the merchant and the working class. (Tiflis was the Transcaucasian centre of Armenian political, cultural and intellectual life, and at the time its mayor, Alexander Khatisian, was an Armenian.) However, the mass of the Armenian peasantry lived in the Yerevan province; so that, although Yerevan was no more than a dusty provincial town, it held a definite primacy as the centre close to the mass of the people.

The three nationalities of Transcaucasia did not seriously consider the notion of independence of their region. It was well integrated into the Russian empire. The tsarist authorities, for their part, had had no intention of granting it any autonomy. Indeed, after the anticipated capture of Turkish Armenia, they had planned to fill the land with Russian colonists; and to this end, by a secret Anglo–Russian agreement of May 1916, Russia had secured acceptance of the idea that most of Turkish Armenia should come under her administration in the event of an Allied victory.³ But this agreement, together with tsarist rule itself, was swallowed up in the earthquake that shook Russia in 1917.

Soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers were set up throughout Transcaucasia. The Tiflis soviet was Menshevik-dominated; that in Baku inclined to the Bolsheviks, under the leadership of the popular and able exiled Bolshevik Stepan Shahumian.

The local soviets were one aspect of the political structures that emerged after the March revolution. The other derived from the central authority of the Provisional government. In Transcaucasia this led to the establishment of a Special Transcaucasian Committee (known as the Ozakom, an acronym of its Russian title), whose purpose was to administer Transcaucasia and the Ottoman areas that Russian forces were holding. For Turkish Armenia under Russian occupation a liberal administration was devised.⁴ Armenians were put in positions of authority over the provinces of Van, Erzerum, Bitlis and

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Trebizond. It seemed like a flowering of hope – Armenians with executive power in their own lands; a light after decades of Ottoman darkness.

Would the front hold? This was the vital question. Soon after the March revolution the Russian army showed signs of demoralisation: soldiers flouted orders, and taunted their formerly arrogant superiors. 'Revolutionary unrest' has been blamed; but what agitation there was found fertile soil in the rigid structure of the tsarist army.

The recapture of Turkish Armenia was a desirable prize for the Turkish army; yet throughout 1917 little advantage was taken, and the frontier shifted only marginally. The Turkish Second Army did, however, recapture Moush and Bitlis. On this occasion it was commanded by Mustafa Kemal, with Kiazim Karabekir as his second-in-command.⁵

The loss of Moush was sufficiently worrying to the Armenians for them to appeal to Kerensky in Moscow to keep the Caucasus front firm. An Armenian delegation discussed the matter with the Provisional government, pointing out that the front could best be reinforced with Armenian soldiers, released from service on other fronts – men who had their homeland to fight for, rather than Russian soldiers, fighting what appeared to them as a pointless, imperial war. Several thousand Armenians did, as a result, head for the Caucasus, but many only got as far as Baku, denied further passage.⁶

The Provisional government was in deep trouble by the summer. It was seen to be incompetent in running both the war and the economy. In Transcaucasia, too, the government hardly deserved the name, and the Ozakom was criticised for being unrepresentative and ineffective. Two important conferences held in October 1917 showed how opinion on the ground was forming: the First Regional Congress of Caucasian Bolshevik Organisations, and the Russian Armenian National Congress. The Bolshevik congress demanded local self-determination – but not separation from Russia – and cultural autonomy, and claimed that only the Bolsheviks could solve the nationality problem.⁷

The Armenian National Congress met in Tiflis in October. It was a quasi-Parliament of all the Armenians in the Russian empire (estimated at 2 million). Two hundred delegates arrived, selected on a rough-and-ready but fairly representative basis. Politically it was dominated by Dashnaktsutun, which held the allegiance of the greatest number of Russian Armenians. The congress proposed elections, and hoped for the emergence of a democratic spirit in Transcaucasia, especially in Armenia. This posed great difficulties, since for centuries Armenians had associated government *per se* with oppression and extortion, and unlike their neighbours (both Muslim and Christian) there was no native class which was accustomed to rule. The delegates also discussed possible boundaries for an autonomous Armenia, a very difficult problem in view of the intermixture of nationalities throughout Transcaucasia.

The Armenian National Congress also established two bodies later to be of importance when independence was thrust upon Armenia: a National Assembly, to act as a legislature for all Russian Armenians; and a National

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Council, to act as an executive. The significance of the National Council was that, amid the growing political turbulence and uncertainty, it was a body to which almost all sections of Armenian opinion had given their assent, and which would take control when all else collapsed.⁸

The Bolshevik Revolution

Transcaucasia reacted to the Bolshevik revolution (7 November 1917) with extreme caution. Cat-like, it sat and observed. On the one hand, none except the Bolsheviks and far left groups wanted to throw in their lot with Bolshevik Russia, and they were a small minority. But on the other hand, none wanted to see Transcaucasia separated from Russia, for then it would be isolated and at the mercy of the Turks. Hence the shifting, pending, temporary nature of the councils that were set up at this time, tentative structures which outside events would solidify into hard political edifices.

With hindsight we see the vast implications of the Bolshevik revolution of 7 November; but at the time, and in Transcaucasia, it was seen by all except the local Bolsheviks as only another leftist feud. Local soviets remained loyal to the Provisional government after November – except for Baku, led by the Bolshevik Shahumian.

The Transcaucasian Commissariat

A further 'provisional' body, the Transcaucasian Commissariat, was formed in Tiflis in November 1917, to act as government of the Caucasus until, as was envisaged, the

Constituent Assembly met in Petrograd. (At that moment elections were taking place for the Petrograd assembly.) The formation of the Commissariat was another interim measure, designed to fill the vacuum until outside events clarified themselves. Portfolios were handed out to members of all three major Transcaucasian parties. The president was a Georgian Menshevik, Yevgeny Gegechkori. Armenian Dashnaks acted as commissars for finance, public welfare and food.⁹

The commissariat was at once faced by the war. The Bolshevik revolution had further weakened relations between officers and men. A truce between Transcaucasia and Turkey was thus essential. Delegates from both sides met in Erzindjan in 15 December, and three days later a truce was signed, which permitted Transcaucasia to keep virtually all of the Russian conquests of 1916.¹⁰

The Turks understood well the dilemma of Transcaucasia, and saw their chance: to detach Transcaucasia finally from Russia (by, say, forcing diplomatic recognition on it); once it was independent, to betray the promises made to coax it to independence; then to overrun it – and pursue eastwards, to Turkestan, Bokhara and beyond. The pan-Turkist dream might come true, and

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Enver himself might regain the prestige lost amid the snow-clad woods of Sarikamish.

The Turks Move

So in mid-January 1918 General Odishelidze, Caucasus Army Commander (based at Erzerum), received a note from Enver Pasha, communicated through his commander of the eastern front, Vehib Pasha. Enver wished to enquire about establishing relations with the independent government of Transcaucasia.¹¹ The Commissariat hedged and delayed, in the face of this attempt to force it out into the open by declaring the *de facto* situation *de jure*; a muffled reply was sent back to Vehib two weeks later, asking for three weeks' more grace.

Within those three weeks, however, the situation at the front had deteriorated. Atrocity and counter-atrocity by Turk and Armenian alike had brought the situation to flashpoint, particularly at Erzindjan. Wherever the truth about the atrocity stories lay (and it seems probable that the Armenians, seeking to avenge the genocide, were killing Turks without compunction), it was the Turkish forces that were poised to deliver an attack: the truce was broken in early February, and soon the Turkish forces, led by Kiazim Karabekir, had closed in and captured Erzindjan. By nightfall of the 13th the Armenians were compelled to evacuate the town. Most of them had been rehabilitated there since the deportations of 1915; of them General G. Korganoff says:

Their flight, in the middle of the night, on a road covered by a thick layer of snow, was extremely arduous, and was made more difficult by the necessity of repelling the attacks of the Kurds. All along the precipitous slopes the service wagons overturned into the Euphrates or plunged into the snow. Men were frozen. The retreat cost the lives of more than 100 refugees who perished on the way.¹²

Desperately Transcaucasia looked around for a foundation on which a more permanent peace could be built. An armistice was useless; what was needed was a treaty, to secure a lasting peace, and a legislature, to empower the Commissariat to sign a peace. Hence the Transcaucasian Seim (or 'Sejm'; Polish for 'assembly') came into existence. It was created

simply by trebling the number of delegates elected the previous November to the abortive Constituent Assembly in Petrograd, making allowance for the minorities. President was to be the leading Menshevik Nikolay Chkheidze, veteran of the Petrograd soviet.

Peace was the Seim's first priority. But what boundaries would be accepted? Realistically, the Seim realised that the boundaries of 1914 would most likely be demanded by the Turks: Turkish Armenia, the focus of so much fiery hope

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and frozen despair, would be lost again. With this mandate, a peace delegation was to leave for Trebizond on 2 March 1918.

Brest-Litovsk

Then, on that very day they were leaving for Trebizond, an appalling telegram from the Bolshevik diplomat, Lev Karakhan, reached the Transcaucasian leaders: the Brest-Litovsk treaty, by which Bolshevik Russia pulled out of the war, would demand that the districts of Kars, Ardahan and Batum be handed over to Turkey.¹³ Shock and disbelief swept through Transcaucasia – that these three districts, freed from Turkish rule since 1878, should be annexed by the Young Turks. Two questions exercised the minds of the leaders of Transcaucasia: what right had Soviet Russia, which held no authority in Transcaucasia, to sign away the three districts; and what right, too, had Germany to demand them?

In reality, such questions were arid legalities. The Brest-Litovsk treaty was imposed on Russia by Germany, and Russia accepted it in order to get out of the war at any cost, to get a breathing-space for the revolution: this was the intention of Lenin. No rights were recognised at Brest-Litovsk; these, the Bolsheviks believed, would be won later.

Bolshevism and Armenia

The Bolshevik attitude to Armenia was bound up with the Bolshevik view of the Russian empire that they supplanted. The nineteenth-century engulfing process of imperialism was hateful to Lenin. With the world-wide fostering of revolution the system of rival imperial advance and conquest would collapse.

In May 1917 Lenin had demanded that the Russian armies be withdrawn from Turkish Armenia. The principle on which this demand had been based was that of self-determination. However, reality diverged from theory. The immediate issue at stake was otherwise: to withdraw the Russian armies would be to permit the forces of Ottoman Turkey to re-enter the area, and to slaughter those Armenians who had been rehabilitated. Armenia wanted her freedom, but not yet. At that moment she needed a shield. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks held that for a socialist party to adhere to the annexationist policies of the tsars, whatever the circumstances, would be hypocrisy. But Lenin's hope for the establishment of 'an independent Armenian republic', enunciated at the first All-Russian Congress of Soviets (22 June 1917) was illusory while such a hypothetical republic was menaced by a powerful non-revolutionary Turkish army. One observer wondered whether the Bolshevik decision was due to ignorance, *naïveté* or cynicism.¹⁴

Bolshevik policy towards Turkish Armenia after the November revolution

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was a development of the earlier views. A decree 'about Turkish Armenia' (drafted by Shahumian and the young poet Vahan Terian) was published in *Pravda* in January 1918: it called for the withdrawal of Russian troops, the establishment of a local Armenian militia, the return of refugees from wherever they had been forced to flee, and the setting up of a soviet.¹⁵ But again, the underlying assumption seems to have been that the Imperial Ottoman army would somehow disappear.

In the same issue of *Pravda* in which the decree was published, the commissar for nationalities, Joseph Stalin, poured scorn on the historic interference of the powers in Armenia, and their endless self-interested diplomatic shuffles. He was of course correct to do so; but the alternative that he offered, liberation through the workers' revolution, was meaningless unless that revolution spread to Turkey too, and curbed the expansionism of the Turks. Could his statement have been motivated in part by the need to withdraw Russian troops from the Caucasus?

Anyway, Bolshevik policy with regard to Turkish Armenia was dissolved by the signature on the Brest-Litovsk treaty. Immediate necessity proved more powerful than theories.

Conference at Trebizond: the Fighting Continues

Despite the news of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, the Transcaucasian delegation set out for Trebizond on 2 March. When the talks began 12 days later, after absurd delays foisted on the delegates by the Turks, who tried to humiliate them as much as possible, it was clear that the two sides were irreconcilable. The point at issue was Brest-Litovsk: even before the start of any peace talks Enver had demanded, through Vehib, the evacuation of the districts of Kars, Ardahan and Batum. Transcaucasia refused to give them up.¹⁶ So, before the talks began at Trebizond, Turkey launched an attack, aimed at clearing Anatolia of Caucasian troops. Since December 1917 the Caucasus front had been defended by local troops. A Georgian corps defended the approaches to Batum. Armenians held the front from Erzindjan to Van; total corps strength was 20,000. Two of the three divisions were made up of Russian Armenians, led by General Tovmas (Foma) Nazarbekian, with Dro as civilian commissar. The third was commanded by the intrepid guerrilla fighter Andranik. Further south, guarding north Persia, was a mixed corps comprising a Chaldaean brigade (under their spiritual leader, Agha Petros), a Nestorian brigade (commanded by the Mar Shimun) and an Armenian battalion. The task that the local forces had set themselves was almost impossible; but there is no doubt that they prevented the Turkish troops having a virtual walk-over, and made a small but significant contribution to the Allied war effort.¹⁷

Erzerum fell before the talks began: Kiazim Karabekir launched a great assault, and the city was captured on 12 March. For the Armenians of

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Erzerum there was another panic-stricken, last-minute evacuation, and as they streamed eastwards, local irregulars harassed them mercilessly. One hundred and twenty Armenians, unable to flee the town in time, were slaughtered by the Turkish forces.

For the rest of March, and into April, Ottoman forces overran the temporary establishment of Armenian rule in Turkish Armenia, extinguishing the hope so recently raised.¹⁸ This was a notable and tragic moment for Turkish Armenians, and for Armenian nationalists altogether: it was the liquidation of Armenian – or indeed non-Turkish – rule in

Western Armenia. With the spring offensive of 1918 the homeland, *yerkirë*, was taken back by the Turks, and, despite the hopes raised at the Paris peace conference, has remained Turkish to this day. Korganoff remarks laconically, 'With the loss of Erzerum the struggle for Turkish Armenia ended, and the war crossed the frontier of Transcaucasia.'¹⁹

Meanwhile the talks at Trebizond were making little progress. The Turks were meticulously trying to force Transcaucasia to define its status: if it was part of Russia, then the treaty of Brest-Litovsk definitely applied; if it was an independent state, then it must declare itself as such. For their part, they were happy to consider Transcaucasia as part of Russia for the purpose of imposing the terms of Brest-Litovsk on her, but preferred her to be independent when they desired to seize more than that treaty permitted. The Transcaucasian leaders hesitated and dithered, speaking in nebulous conundrums about the status of the land they represented. With the advance of Turkish forces actually beyond the 1914 boundaries and into Ardahan (19 March) the situation became farcical, as the diplomats laboured each theoretical point about the status of Transcaucasia, while the Turkish army moved in regardless.²⁰

The Turkish delegates grew sick of talking. They knew that they could seize any part of Transcaucasia that the delegation refused to hand over. They issued an ultimatum: use the treaty of Brest-Litovsk as a basis for discussion, or war; and give your answer within 48 hours. After telegraphing Tiflis, Chkhenkeli answered that Brest-Litovsk would be used as a basis. But despite agreeing to this, so unstable was the situation that both sides found themselves at war.

The 'March Days' in Baku

Throughout Transcaucasia at this time the political and racial relations between the different peoples deteriorated. On the one hand, with every mile that the Ottoman forces advanced, further atrocities were committed. According to Firuz Kazemzadeh, 'Wherever the Turkish army advanced, Armenian massacres followed. The Soviet Russian government felt compelled to intercede with the Germans on behalf of the Armenian civilian population.'²¹

At the same time the Armenians showed that they were as capable of killing

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off large numbers of non-Armenians (in this case Azerbaijani Tatars) as the Turks were of killing them.

In Baku the political situation at the time was somewhat paradoxical. The soviet held full control in the city, which meant that the city was virtually in Bolshevik hands – the able, if impulsive, hands of one man, Stepan Shahumian. But the political allegiance of the majority of the people was for the petty bourgeois Musavat party, which was aligning itself more and more with the racist pan-Turkism of Enver and his colleagues, under the guise of being an authentically Muslim party. A Turkist army, too, had been formed, under the command of Enver's relative Nuri. Although both the Bolsheviks and the Musavatists had been prepared to work together to some extent immediately after the November revolution, in recognition of their complementary strengths, by March 1918 relations were very tense. The Bolsheviks derided the Musavatists in their publications. Then, on 9 March, the commander of the Tatar *Dikaia Diviziia* (Savage Division), just arrived in Baku, was arrested by the soviet. Suspicions ran high. Three weeks later a report was circulated that the Musavat-inclined crew of the vessel *Evelina* was armed, and ready to attack the soviet. The soviet

disarmed the crew. A mass meeting was held in the courtyard of a Baku mosque: return the crew's arms to them.²²

Then shooting started in the streets; civil war – known as the 'March days' – was soon raging in Baku. Allied with the Bolsheviks were all the other parties – Mensheviks, Dashnaks, Kadets, Social Revolutionaries. The Bolsheviks saw the Musavat defiance as counter-revolution; the Dashnaks in less ideological terms.

The shooting intensified in early April, and vast mobs ran riot, killing, burning, pillaging. The two sides that laid into one another with special vigour were the Armenians and the Azerbaijani Tatars, the Armenians having the edge over the Tatars in ferocity. The bloodshed spread to the countryside, to the Yerevan province, throughout the land until the country seemed to be degenerating into atavistic anarchy; Kazemzadeh comments, 'The struggle which had begun as a political contest between the Musavat and the Soviet assumed the character of a gigantic race riot.'²³

War between Transcaucasia and Turkey: Chkhenkeli Hands over Kars

In these circumstances the war had resumed. Batum rapidly fell to the Turks. The Georgians' defiant stand turned to an eager search for compromise and peace. But for the Armenians the situation was still threatening. Besides the harbour of Batum, the other important defensive position in Transcaucasia which the Turks demanded under the Brest-Litovsk treaty was the fortress city of Kars, a vital defence for Armenia. Armenian leaders met at Alexandropol on 20–21 April to decide on whether to hand it over to the Ottoman forces or to defend it. Military experts had inspected it on the 19th, and decided it could

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withstand an assault for several months. At Alexandropol they decided on defence.²⁴

But other political currents were active in Transcaucasia which made a decision such as this appear as the busying of ants beneath a fall of rock. Transcaucasia was hurtling towards independence. The Azerbaijani members of the Seim had demanded the independence of Transcaucasia; if not, they would sign their own peace treaty with Turkey. The fighting spirit had been knocked out of the Georgians by the fall of Batum. The Armenians hesitated; but at the session of the Seim of 22 April a majority of them voted with the rest for the independence of Transcaucasia.

Akaki Chkhenkeli, the Georgian Menshevik who had led the delegation to Trebizond, a man who was a leading proponent of peace, was designated as prime minister. He believed that only acceptance of the terms of Brest-Litovsk would enable Transcaucasia to talk on equal terms with Ottoman Turkey.

Chkhenkeli acted fast. Before he was officially installed as prime minister he ordered the evacuation of Kars (23 April). Several days of confusion, astonishment and fury followed. The Armenians never forgave him for handing over Kars behind their backs. The population of Kars was given no time to evacuate in an orderly fashion, so impatient were the Turks. The exodus of civilians was more hasty and terrible even than those of Erzindjan or Erzerum: it was night, and several buildings were on fire, perhaps lit deliberately, or possibly fired accidentally in the confusion. In this flickering light the faces of the frightened refugees could be seen, terrified at the approach of the Turks, clutching what few belongings they could take with them, fleeing the approach of Kiazim Karabekir and his troops, eastwards to Alexandropol and an unknown future. In the evening of 25 April the Turks entered the city, which they found stacked with military supplies.

Transcaucasia Independent

Under the shadow of the loss of Kars, the first Transcaucasian Cabinet was formed. Chkhenkeli was prime minister, and his own foreign minister; Georgians also took the portfolios of war, the interior and agriculture. The Azerbaijanis held five ministries; their leader, Fat'h-Ali Khan Khoisky, became minister of justice. The Armenians held four; finance, welfare, food and labour, respectively Alexander Khatisian (Dashnak), Hovhannes Kachaznuni (Dashnak), Avetik Sahakian (Dashnak) and Aramays Yertzinkian (Social Democrat). They were definitely the junior partners in the alliance.²⁶

In his opening speech to the Seim as prime minister, Chkhenkeli made a number of points that seemed to signify that a new sense of realism had come to Transcaucasia. There could be no more indecisiveness. A constitution, agreed frontiers, ending the war, imposing the rule of law and land reform – these he promised. And, on the subject of frontiers, the leader of the Musavatists reminded the Seim that Baku was not yet part of the new state.

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Realism in Tiflis; but a victory for Constantinople. The Turks could argue that their own force of arms had compelled Transcaucasia to declare its independence. If the Turks had not smashed through Erzindjan and Erzerum, if they had not exposed the absurdity of Transcaucasia's negotiating position at Trebizond and gone on to capture Batum, Transcaucasia would not have declared its independence.

Transcaucasia for its part, now an independent sovereign state, recognised by Ottoman Turkey, sought even more urgently than before a permanent peace with her western neighbour.

The Batum Conference

Turkey and Transcaucasia met at Batum for peace talks on 11 May. The Transcaucasian delegation consisted of between 45 and 50 self-styled diplomats, an absurdly large figure, made necessary by the mutual suspicions of the members of different nationalities and factions within Transcaucasia.²⁷

Khalil Bey, minister of justice, led the Ottoman delegation. Vehib Pasha was beside him. Present too, at the request of their government, were three high-ranking Germans: General von Lossow, military attaché in Constantinople, the fashionable and elegant sportsman Count von Schulenberg, former German vice-consul in Tiflis, whose pre-war hunting trips in western Transcaucasia were widely held to have been reconnoitring expeditions; and Otto von Wesendonck, adviser on Caucasian affairs. Their presence was a small indication that German and Turkish interests might not be identical.

Soon after the start of the conference Khalil made it clear that the Turkish side would no longer accept the treaty of Brest-Litovsk as a basis for negotiation. Stunned, the Transcaucasians waited to see what he would demand instead. The most devastating aspects of his new draft treaty – for it was only to be a basis for discussion – were those that dealt with the new frontiers of Transcaucasia. The Armenian regions were all but wiped out. From the Yerevan province was taken the district of Surmalu (which contains the town of Igdir and the northern slopes of Mount Ararat) – a region which the Turks had only intermittently set foot in during past centuries – and all the territory up to and including the Kars–Julfa railway,

including the city of Alexandropol. From the Tiflis province the districts of Akhalkalak and Akhaltsikhe, the majority of whose population was Armenian, were lost.

The Transcaucasians searched for a diplomatic formula which would halt the relentless emulation by the Young Turks of their imperial forbears. Chkhenkeli proposed mediation by the Central powers, hoping that Germany would curb Ottoman demands. Khalil rejected this: the treaty was a matter between Turkey and Transcaucasia only.

By 14 May no agreement had been reached on the new treaty, especially with regard to the railway. So late that night Khalil wrote to Chkhenkeli infor-

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ming him that in view of the breakdown of the negotiations, the following morning he would begin troop movements in the direction of Julfa, along the Kars–Julfa railway. It was necessary for him (he said) to reach north Persia, to combat the British threat. But this was a smokescreen, since the British were still some way away. The real reason could be found in Enver's relentless pan-Turkish fixation with Baku and Central Asia.

No message reached the front in time; and as General Nazarbekian was informed of the Turkish advance, it was occurring; soon the Turks were at the outskirts of Alexandropol. After a morning's fierce fighting, enabling the civilians to evacuate, Nazarbekian gave the order to retreat. He moved his headquarters east yet again, to Karakilisa.^{*28}

The Battle of Sardarabad

Only a small area of Armenian territory now remained unconquered by the Turks, and into that area hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees had fled. It seemed only a matter of time before that too would be overrun.

By 22 May the Turks had captured Hamamli (modern Spitak), half way between Alexandropol and Karakilisa.²⁹ Communications between Tiflis and Yerevan were now cut. Then, from Alexandropol, Turkish forces began a three-pronged attack, in an attempt to seize all that remained of Armenia. In this encounter, usually known as the battle of Sardarabad, Armenian forces finally hurled back the Turkish army and saved the eastern heartland of Armenia from the Turks.³⁰

The Turks attacked Nazarbekian at Karakilisa, and forced him back towards Dilidjan. But there he stood firm. Around Yerevan itself the Armenian forces were commanded by General Silikian (Silikov). Two prongs of the Turkish advance were aimed directly at Yerevan. To halt their approach from Hamamli, Silikian formed a thousand-strong force of riflemen, under the command of the Dashnak partisan leader Dro. This force held the Turkish advance at the defile of Bash Abaran. Just a little way west of Echmiadzin, the Armenian holy city, the third section of the Turkish advance was held, at Sardarabad. Indeed, the Armenians not only held them, they managed to throw the Turks back, until by the evening of 24 May Silikian had forced them back 50 kilometres from Sardarabad, and a few days later Dro had driven them back towards Hamamli.³¹

In this time of supreme crisis for the Armenians they halted the Turkish advance for the first time since the dismal evacuation of Erzindjan, and succeeded in throwing it back. Had they failed, it is perfectly possible that the word Armenia would have henceforth denoted only an antique geographical

* Modern Kirovakan. Not to be confused with Karakilise in Turkish Armenia, modern Agri, the largest town in the Alashkert valley.

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term (like Cappadocia). But despite being outnumbered by about two to one, and being deserted by their 'colleagues' in the Transcaucasian Federation (for the Georgians had obtained German protection, and the Tatars had no desire to hinder an advance of the Ottoman forces), they defeated the Turks in all three encounters.

Just as the Armenians had seized the initiative, and appeared able to force the Turks to retreat to Alexandropol and perhaps to Kars, Silikian received the order from Nazarbekian – 'Cease fire'. A truce had been concluded in Batum. Silikian and his men were amazed and angry, since the Turks were running like rabbits; he was advised to disregard the order, declare himself dictator and continue the counter-attack. But he obeyed the order, notwithstanding, for which there were in fact pressing reasons, since ammunition was extremely low, and it was doubtful whether the Armenians could have reached Alexandropol before Turkish reinforcements had been brought up.³²

The Transcaucasian Federation Disintegrates

Despite this most significant victory for the Armenians, the political deterioration in Transcaucasia was so serious that there was no cause for rejoicing among Armenians.

At the Batum conference the Turks had seemed insatiable for territory. Khalil Bey's new treaty had been a blow to all the delegates, except the Tatars. The Georgians, as much as the Armenians, were having their country devoured by the Turks; and seizing on the point that German and Turkish imperial ambitions diverged over the Caucasus, Georgia had sought the protection of Germany. Germany had been cultivating influence in Georgia before the war, and willingly gave her protection. She had no wish to give assistance to the Young Turks' grandiose schemes for expansion to the east. Indeed, at this juncture, German generals were trying to persuade the Turks to send more troops south to the Arab provinces, threatened by the British advances.

On 24 May von Lossow failed in his attempt to mediate between Transcaucasia and Ottoman Turkey, and on that same day he reached a secret agreement with Georgia to grant her protection when she declared herself independent. Georgia's move was a skilful one. Turkey would hardly dare to attack another ally of her senior partner (although on one brief occasion, this did indeed happen!). The following day von Lossow sailed from Batum, with the documents necessary for the treaty, to arrive at Poti (another Georgian port) a day or so later, after Georgia had declared her independence.³³

With that splendid paradox of which the Georgians are such masters, their Menshevik ideals of a universal socialist brotherhood had emerged in practice as a desire to maintain their place in the sun, a somnolent colony comfortably supported by imperial Germany and doing as little fighting as possible.³⁴

Already, on 21 May, the Georgians had discussed independence and the

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future borders with the Azerbaijani Tatars, and neither party seriously thought that the Armenians had a chance against the Turks, so they were not even discussed. On the day following the Georgians privately decided on independence;³⁵ and on 26 May – at the moment that the Armenians were fighting with all their strength – Georgia declared her independence. With customary abuse against the other nations of Transcaucasia, Irakli

Tsereteli dissolved the Seim, the Parliament of the state that had never really been. Georgian leaders then rushed to Poti, to meet von Lossow, and sign their first agreements with Germany.

The Azerbaijani Tatars followed suit on the 27th, establishing 'eastern and southern Transcaucasia' as the independent republic of Azerbaijan.³⁶

The Armenians were dismayed with the Georgian proclamation. Their leaders were deeply divided on whether to declare independence, for many held the view that an independent Armenia would be at the mercy of Ottoman Turkey.* Yet peace was vital; and since Georgia had quit the Transcaucasian Federation, the delegation at Batum (there since 11 May) had disintegrated. There was now no mechanism with which to make peace.³⁷

Armenia Declares its Independence

The Armenian National Council, the body set up in Tiflis in October 1917, was by now acting as a government for the Armenian people of Transcaucasia; and realising that there was now no hope for Eastern Armenians but as an independent state, and that no peace could be signed at Batum by any body except an independent Armenia now that the Transcaucasian Federation was defunct, it prepared a declaration. Armenian members of the delegation at Batum were told they could negotiate a peace on behalf of an entity that might call itself 'the Republic of Armenia'.

It was not until the evening of 29 May 1918 that a decision was finally made on the declaration of independence; only by then were the last doubters convinced. Armenia's declaration of independence (made on 30 May, but with effect from the 28th) must be one of the most defensive of such documents ever written. It read:

In view of the dissolution of the political unity of Transcaucasia and the new situation created by the proclamation of the independence of Georgia and Azerbaijan, the Armenian National Council declares itself the supreme and only administration for the Armenian provinces. Due to certain grave circumstances, the National Council, deferring until the near future the formation of an Armenian national government, temporarily assumes all

* Andranik condemned the move to independence. He left the Caucasus shortly after the war, dying in Fresno, California, in 1928. He is buried in the Père Lachaise cemetery, Paris.

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governmental functions, in order to pilot the political and administrative helm of the Armenian provinces.³⁸

No brave words about freedom or rights, no 'cherished goal' rhetoric – not even the phrase 'Republic of Armenia'. Just a bare statement of the situation, from which one can sense the doubt, anguish and unwillingness that the Armenian leaders experienced. The Republic of Armenia, born amid the political collapse of Transcaucasia and taking its first breath of life on the battlefield of Sardarabad, could hardly be otherwise.

Independence had been thrust upon Armenia. Simon Vratsian had been an advocate of independence while others wavered; nevertheless in his history of the republic he likened Armenia's declaration to the birth of a sick child.³⁹ Certainly, in the circumstances of May 1918, the independence of Armenia was an occasion for sorrow rather than joy.

Independence was declared because Transcaucasia had collapsed politically; as a ruined and desolate district of a once great city that has been bombed and cut off, local leaders assumed power in the dust-blown lots that survived. Yet that is only one way of looking at Armenia's situation. Increasing autonomy was an ideal that Armenian political thinkers had been striving towards for half a century, as they struggled to rid their people of the imperial bureaucracies that encompassed them. They wanted to put the destiny of the Armenian people into Armenian hands. Even at this moment, as Armenia was still in danger of being swept away by a strong Turkish current, Armenian leaders were assuming the power to determine their people's future. The compromises would have to be massive, but *theirs* would, henceforward, be the executive decision; and theirs too the responsibility. Armenia independent, even amid her war-broken misery and suffering, had entered a new category.

The Treaty of Batum

The first action of the infant republic was to make peace with Turkey; the treaty of Batum was signed on 4 June. The terms were humiliating for Armenia, but unavoidably so. As Germany had held the pen at Brest-Litovsk, so now Turkey held it as Armenia signed. Again, it was territory that the Ottomans seized above anything else. All that was left to Armenia was the district of Nor Bayazid (around Lake Sevan); parts of Sharur (to the south), of Yerevan and Echmiadzin, and of Alexandropol in the north. The Kars–Julfa railway and the town of Alexandropol were gone. The republic consisted of only 11,000 land-locked square kilometres – about the size of Lebanon. Turkey had taken all of Surmalu and Nakhichevan, as well as the predominantly Armenian districts Akhalkalak and Akhaltsikhe. The only railway left to Armenia was about 50 kilometres of track in the north, and 6 kilometres extending west from Yerevan.⁴⁰

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The Condition of the New Republic

The land was rocky and scrubby, lacking cultivation or industry. The fields of Kars had been seized by the Turks, as had the industrial centre of Alexandropol. On the land which remained to the republic there were 300,000 Armenians, and another 300,000 hungry, penniless refugees; and a further 100,000 Tatars. The circumstances of the birth of the Armenian republic – war, chaos and disaster – could not have been less propitious.

The Armenian National Council, which had declared the independence of Armenia, now chose the new state's first prime minister: Hovhannes Kachaznuni, a highly educated Dashnak thinker from Akhalkalak. This distinguished-looking figure was able, unlike others in his party, to compromise with non-Dashnaks. His cabinet – also at the behest of the National Council, itself echoing the wishes of Dashnaktsutiu – was to be a coalition.⁴¹ Their main colleagues were to be the Populists; but the Populists, disliking what they saw as Dashnak adventurism, dictatorship and managed democracy, blamed Dashnaktsutiu for the state of affairs, and refused to join. (However, it is doubtful whether the Populists could have done any better; and it is also arguable that in a period of extreme crisis, such as a pan-Turanian offensive, a strongly motivated authoritarian regime is better able to cope than a group of open-minded liberals.)

It was the end of June – a month after the independence declaration – that Kachaznuni formed his five-man Cabinet; all Dashnaks, except for the non-partisan minister of war.^{*42}

Not until 19 July 1918 did the Cabinet reach Yerevan; only with difficulty, and regretfully, did Armenia's leaders relinquish non-territorial politics. They must have seen the irony of the situation in which there were more Armenians in Tiflis, now the Capital of Georgia, than in the backward district called the Republic of Armenia. In the seven-week absence of the official government, Dashnaktsutiun had shown its strength at dealing with situations at grass-roots level. In January 1918 Dro and Aram had established a tough 'popular dictatorship' in the Yerevan province, which was able to keep control and stave off disaster in the isolated, friendless republic.⁴³

A republic had to be constructed from virtually nothing. The tsarist autocracy had left almost nothing in Yerevan, no machinery of government that could be taken over and modified, as we are used to seeing in the new states of Africa and Asia today. All that the Armenian government inherited were a few government offices and police cells. The country itself presented a Bosch-like vision of limitless suffering. Starving, stricken refugees, homeless, ragged and verminous, lurked in every sheltering spot. For none of the popula-

* Prime minister: Hovhannes Kachaznuni
Foreign minister: Alexander Khatisian
Minister of the interior: Aram Manukian
Minister of finance: Khachatur Karjikian
Minister of war: Hovhannes Hakhverdian

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tion was there anything but the smallest quantity of food; many dug for roots, and harvested the grasses of Yerevan. Death was the only constant in a world of many variables.

If the republic was to survive, diplomatic approaches had to be made to Constantinople and Berlin. So, in these last months of the war, Hamazasp (Hamo) Ohandjanian left for Berlin, and Avetis Aharonian set up a mission in the Turkish capital.⁴⁴ Both went with begging bowls in hand; but their submission was short-lived, since the Central powers were disintegrating, and the war was drawing to a close.

Baku, Dunsterville and the Turkish Army

But before the end of the war there was one further disaster for the Armenians. It occurred at Baku. At the end of May 1918 Baku was 'a Bolshevik island in a non-Bolshevik sea' (Firuz Kazemzadeh).⁴⁵ After the battle of Sardarabad, the Turks pressed on eastwards across the Yerevan district, towards the Tatar oil city. They reached the welcoming city of Gandja,* Azerbaijan's temporary capital, in early June. Baku was well aware of the threat to itself. Moscow could offer little help at the time; however, the British, in the form of a 'hush-hush army', the schoolboy's-wheeze-come-true Dunsterforce, had reached Enzeli, on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, on 27 June. The intentions of this force, and its commander, General L. C. Dunsterville, have been the subject of fierce debate. On the one hand, the official British version is that General Dunsterville's sole purpose was to keep the Caucasus, and specifically Baku, from the Central powers. But there are several puzzling features which do not quite fit in with such a simple explanation. In the first place, there is Dunsterville's avowed and deeply held hostility towards revolution, and Bolshevism in particular, which almost amounted to an article of religious faith. Since the defence of Baku would have meant co-operation with the Bolsheviks, Dunsterville seemed a curious choice. In the second place, Dunsterville received his orders to move from India to the Middle East only the day after an Anglo-French agreement of 23 December 1917, which awarded 'the Cossack territories, the

territory of the Caucasus, Armenia, Georgia, Kurdistan' to Britain as 'zones of influence'.⁴⁶ Did the simple defence of Baku square with this award, which would certainly need to be secured? Thirdly, from June 1918 the British vice-consul in Baku, Ranald McDonnell, was actively financing right-wing, anti-Bolshevik plots, according to his own memoirs.⁴⁷ And fourthly, there was the arrival in Baku of Captain Reginald Teague Jones, intelligence officer attached to General Malleon (who was then commanding a small force in Persia). Teague Jones made it clear to McDonnell that Britain's new policy was to do all in her power to oust the Bolsheviks,

* Gandzak in Armenian. In tsarist times, Yelizavetpol; today, Kirovbad.

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by rallying any forces in the outposts of the Russian empire opposed to Bolshevism.⁴⁸ British resolve about the defence of Baku is further brought into question by comments by Prime Minister Lloyd George at the Cabinet meeting of 24 June 1918. Part of the minutes for that session read:

Mr Lloyd George expressed the opinion that it would be better for us for the Turks to hold Baku, as it was not probable they would ever be dangerous to our interests in the east, whilst, on the other hand, Russia, if in the future she became regenerated, might be so.⁴⁹

It was appearing that the war with Germany was as good as over, and that the intervention against Russia had begun. The Turkish alliance with Germany was ceasing to matter, and the Turks were returning to the position that they held in the days of Disraeli, when confrontation with the Russians was an end in itself, and the Turks were a handy stick to beat them with.

The Baku soviet, for its part, was divided on the question of letting the British in. The Bolsheviks, led by Shahumian and Prokopii Japaridze, were opposed to it, echoing the sentiments of Lenin and Stalin. But Baku was in a state of siege by mid-July, as the Turks pressed forward. On 25 July the soviet voted by 259 to 236 to allow the British in.⁵⁰ This was a virtual vote of no confidence in Shahumian. A week later, with the Turks at the outskirts of Baku, the Bolsheviks resigned.

An uneasy coalition of right socialists succeeded, known as the Centro-Caspian Dictatorship. Within a few days the first British troops began arriving; and the Turks launched an attack on the centre of Baku, which was repulsed by mainly Armenian forces.⁵¹ However, by 17 August, when the last British troops had disembarked, the defenders were dismayed to find that their reinforcements numbered only about 1,500.⁵² Enver, meanwhile, was massing an army of 15,000.

The disagreements and misunderstandings between the Centro-Caspian Dictatorship and General Dunsterville were endless; the no-nonsense British general found Baku's new rulers as distasteful as the Bolsheviks; and the different factions in Baku had an infuriating tendency to discuss and pass resolutions rather than act, even with the Turks pressing close to the city. On 1 September Dunsterville wrote to the Dictatorship, saying bluntly that 'no power on earth can save Baku from the Turks,' and that he would be withdrawing his troops from the front line.⁵³ But the Turks were slow to break through, and it was 14 September before they were in a position to launch an attack on the heart of the city. That very same evening, under cover of darkness, Dunsterville and his troops sailed back to Enzeli. Baku, having lost the Bolsheviks in order to gain the British, had now lost them too.

A terrible panic in Baku ensued, as the Turks began to enter the city. As many Armenians as could crowded the harbour in a frantic effort to escape the fate that they knew always accompanied a Turkish conquest.

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Regular Ottoman troops were not permitted to enter the city for two days, so that the local irregulars – *bashibozuks* – could perform their historic role of looting and pillaging. And the fury with which they turned on the Armenians knew no bounds. Khristofor Mikhailovich Evangulov, in charge of posts and telegraphs, one of those who negotiated the surrender of the city and vainly tried to prevent the worst excesses, noted:

Robberies, murders and rapes were at their height [at 4.00 p.m. on 15 September]. In the whole town massacres of the Armenian population and robberies of all non-Muslim peoples were going on. They broke the doors and windows, entered the living quarters, dragged out men, women and children and killed them in the street.

From all the houses the yells of the people who were being attacked were heard. ... In some spots there were mountains of dead bodies, and many had terrible wounds from dum-dum bullets. The most appalling picture was at the entrance to the Treasury Lane from Surukhanskoi Street. The whole street was covered with dead bodies of children not older than nine or ten years. About eighty bodies carried wounds inflicted by swords or bayonets, and many had their throats cut; it was obvious that the wretched ones had been slaughtered like lambs.

From Telephone Street we heard cries of women and children and we heard single shots. Rushing to their rescue I was obliged to drive the car over the bodies of dead children. The crushing of bones and strange noises of torn bodies followed. The horror of the wheels covered with the intestines of dead bodies could not be endured by the colonel and the *asker* (adjutant). They closed their eyes with their hands and lowered their heads. They were afraid to look at the terrible slaughter. Half mad from what he saw, the driver sought to leave the street, but was immediately confronted by another bloody hecatomb.⁵⁴

Estimates for the number of Armenian dead are around 20,000; the figure may easily have been higher. In this way the government of Azerbaijan installed itself in Baku, backed by Ottoman Turkish forces.

And what of Shahumian and his comrades? They had twice attempted to quit Baku since their resignation; the second time they were arrested and imprisoned by the Dictatorship. But as the Turks approached on 14 September, they finally escaped in a small vessel, the *Turkmen*. From Baku Shahumian hoped to sail to the Bolshevik-held ports in the north of the Caspian. But the winds were unfavourable and the crew were unwilling to sail there. So the vessel sailed due east, to Krasnovodsk, where a right-wing government of Social-Revolutionaries, with headquarters at Ashkhabad, held sway.⁵⁵ The Ashkhabad committee was, in turn, working very closely with General Malleon (who was based at Meshhed). When, on 17 September, Malleon heard of the arrival of the commissars in Krasnovodsk, he requested

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that they be transported to India; he considered that their presence in Transcaspia was undesirable. But the Ashkhabad committee made other plans. Meeting on the evening of the 17th, with the British intelligence officer Captain Teague Jones present, they decided to shoot the commissars.⁵⁶ Despite this decision, Teague Jones made no reference to Malleson's declared request to have them taken to India.

Very early in the morning of 20 September the former commissars of Baku were woken up, and 26 of them were told to get ready for a journey to Ashkhabad. The young Anastas Mikoyan asked if he could go with Shahumian, but he was told to stay behind. The 26 were put on a train, and taken 210 kilometres east of Krasnovodsk. There they were bundled out, and immediately killed – some shot, others slain with hatchets and knives. They were buried unceremoniously where they lay. Of the 26, 22 were Bolsheviks, 2 were left Social Revolutionaries, 1 was a Dashnak and 1 was a non-party Jew. The affair of the 'Twenty-Six Commissars' was one which was to have profound and lasting effects on Anglo–Soviet relations, centring on the fairly clear connivance, if not complicity, of Teague Jones in the murder of the commissars.⁵⁷

The Mudros Armistice

By the Mudros armistice of 30 October 1918 Ottoman Turkey acknowledged her defeat. However, it let her off comparatively lightly. The complete demobilisation of Ottoman armies was not demanded; a force was permitted to stand 'for surveillance of frontiers and the maintenance of internal order' (clause 5). The size and disposition of this force was to be decided jointly by the Allies and the Ottoman government; but anyone who knows the terrain and distances of Anatolia would know that this would be a virtually impossible task for the Allies. The phrase was a vague one, and left the door open for the formation of a new Turkish army in eastern Anatolia. In essence, the Allies were not concerned with the interior of Anatolia. Beside the Arab provinces, there were only three things that they wanted from the Ottoman empire: access through the Dardanelles, occupation of Baku and Batum and the railway that joined them (these two together would ensure that Baku's oil reached the British fleet in the Mediterranean), and access to the Taurus tunnel system of the Baghdad railway.⁵⁸ Turkey was not compelled to withdraw to the 1914 borders, and only 'in case of disorder in the Armenian vilayets' would the Allies occupy any part of them (clause 24). A supplementary clause did demand that the Turks evacuate the Kars district; but the occupiers were able to prevent its immediate implementation by means of delaying tactics. *The Times History of the War* made an accurate assessment of the armistice when it wrote:

The armistice made the military and naval situation of the Allies perfectly

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secure but they were less severe than the Turks had reason to expect. ... The weakness of the armistice lay in that it did not bring home to the Turks in Anatolia the completeness of the defeat they had sustained and that no adequate provision was made for the security of the Armenians.⁵⁹

Even as they were withdrawing, the Turks manifested bitter, defeated malignancy towards the unfortunate Armenians. A cable from the British General Officer Commanding, Mesopotamia, dated 21 December, relates the following:

An American officer name[d] Arrol who arrived from Yerevan saw on 4 and 5 December at Alexandropol Turkish regulars removing large quantities of household goods, railway engines and trucks, building material ... cotton, foodstuffs which Turkish officers told him were going to Kars and into Turkey. On 2 and 3 December between Yerevan and Alexandropol there were wagonloads of grain and cotton at every station awaiting removal. Turkish officers state [?they] were dealing Armenians final blow and had taken from this district 7,000,000 poods [approximately 112,000 tons] of wheat, 200,000 poods [3,000 tons] of cotton, household goods, thousands of people and transport of all kinds. Where they were unable to remove wheat, the Turks let it rot. At every station there were large quantities being ruined by rain, and the people forbidden to touch it under penalty of death. During past few months Arrol has personally seen numbers of cases of raped children from 3 to 12 years old, numbers of Armenians who had been beaten until unable to stand, and once near Karakilisa over sixty corpses of women and children. He had also witnessed the perpetration of abominable tortures by Turkish troops.⁶⁰

The Basis of Armenian Hopes

Few of the combatants in the first world war had greater hopes of the Allies than the Armenians. Enormous, verbose and rhetorical promises had been made throughout 1917 and 1918 to them for their restitution, at the very same time as the leaders of the Allied countries were giving the final revision and polish to their secret agreements for the division of the Ottoman spoils. In the House of Commons on 20 December 1917 Prime Minister Lloyd George described Armenia as a land 'soaked with the blood of innocents' and declared that it was one of the countries which would 'never be restored to the blasting tyranny of the Turk'. The following month, in a speech to the TUC, he affirmed that Armenia was one of the former Ottoman territories 'entitled to a recognition of their separate national condition'. In the summer of 1918 the same voluble premier proclaimed that Britain would 'not forget its responsibilities' to the Armenians.⁶¹ (This was at about the same time as he was advocating the Turkish conquest of Baku.) French leaders made similar declarations.

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Armenian assistance to the Allied war effort was frequently cited: the holding of the Caucasus front after the collapse of Russia, and the contribution of the mainly Armenian Légion d'Orient in Palestine as part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force under General Allenby, notably at the battle of Arara, near Nablus, fought on 19 September 1918. On 8 November 1918 an Anglo–French joint declaration on Middle Eastern policy stated its aim to be

the complete and final liberation of the peoples who have for so long been oppressed by the Turks, and the setting up of national governments and administrations that shall derive their authority from the free exercise of the initiative and choice of the indigenous populations.⁶²

Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando announced grandly in the same month, 'Say to the Armenians that I make their cause my cause.'⁶³ But perhaps the greatest sympathy for the Armenian people came from the United States. With the extermination of Turkish Armenians, Americans had seen the endeavours of 80 years collapse into nothing –

endeavours which had been initially missionary, but which in the last few decades had taken on a more cultural and political hue. To most Americans their political concern was a natural development of their missionary interests. For them the issues at stake were an earthly representation of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. (Very few Americans knew of the conflicting elements of imperialism, nationalism and ideological religion that fuelled local hatreds.) American sympathy for Armenia was both practical and theoretical. An immense sum of money was contributed to the relief of suffering Armenians, although not all of it was distributed;* and a lobbying group was formed known as the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia (ACIA). President Wilson had a great personal sympathy for the Armenians, and the twelfth of his Fourteen Points had a direct relevance to Turkish Armenia:

The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.⁶⁴

Armenia's hopes for the post-war settlement were pitched high, with some justification. Yet there were some points, of great importance, which were in the main overlooked. In the first place, in order to establish herself as a state, Armenia needed a protective power to act as mandatory. The most natural power for this purpose was Russia, but revolution and civil war had placed her, in the eyes of the Entente, in the position of a pariah nation. Looking at the

* The American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR) was founded in November 1915. It changed its name to the American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE) in 1918, and to Near East Relief (NER) the following year.

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map, it is very hard to see which other power could undertake the job. Besides the problem set by geography, Britain and France were both sick of war, and had no wish to take on onerous burdens with a questionable return. Italy declared her adherence to the principle of *sacro egoismo*, in which it is difficult to discern anything at all *sacro*. Finally, America was widely touted as a possible mandatory for Armenia. But there were formidable problems here: in the first place, the desire not to get involved in Europe's affairs ran wide and deep in American political life, and would quite possibly submerge the brief emotional burst of sympathy for suffering Armenia, and secondly, America had no experience in administering Eastern peoples.

The Paris Peace Conference

When the peace conference convened in Paris in January 1919, nearly all the participants foresaw that provision would be made for an independent Armenian state to be established within secure boundaries – at last the 'great powers' would be able to make amends for the murder and devastation that their policies had inflicted on Armenia for the past 40 years. But this was not to be; indeed, the suffering and wretchedness of Armenians – the pitiful, starving hopelessness – was worse in the years following the war than at any time except during the Ittihadist organised mass murder of 1915–16. Nothing that the statesmen said or did at Paris made any difference to Armenia; their weighty and wordy declarations appear, when one reads them, as utterances designed to give the speaker an aura of satisfied charitable well-

being. For all the good they did Armenians they might as well have been random nonsense syllables. Hence the peace conference need not detain us for long.

Encouraged by Allied declarations and assurances, the Armenians staked out large claims at Paris. Already there (since 1912, see p. 79) was Boghos Nubar, as head of the Armenian national delegation. But in February 1919 a delegation arrived representing the Republic of Armenia, headed by the author and poet Avetis Aharonian. Nubar and Aharonian were widely dissimilar in background and outlook; Nubar with his origins in a wealthy Levantine minority, at ease among the statesmen of Paris, intensely conservative by nature; Aharonian, a man of ironical wit, as rugged as the Caucasian scenery that had given him birth; Nubar with unlimited faith in the 'civilised' west, Aharonian more sceptical, believing – as would anyone who had been close to the turmoil of the birth of independent Armenia – that the people's own strength on the ground is more valuable than the guarantee of a foreign statesman. Nevertheless the two agreed to merge their delegations into the 'All-Armenian Delegation' (Délégation de l'Arménie intégrale), and to agree on all major issues.⁶⁵ They presented their joint memorandum to the peace conference in February 1919. Reviewing past Ottoman oppression, and the enormous losses that the Armenian people had sustained during the war (which

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gave them the right of the title 'belligerent'), they now claimed their independence. Their state was to include the '*six vilayets*' of Turkish Armenia (Van, Bitlis, Diyarbekir, Kharput, Sivas and Erzerum), excluding a few marginal non-Armenian districts; also the province of Trebizond, to give access to the sea. It should also include the Republic of Armenia as it was then constituted, plus Mountainous Karabagh to the east, Zangezur to the south, and to the north some Armenian-inhabited lands which it claimed from Georgia. But that was not all. Armenia also claimed the four districts of Cilician Armenia, on the Mediterranean coast, where there was quite a large Armenian population (both urban and agrarian) dating from the period of the medieval kingdom. Armenia would have been a gigantic country; yet the proposal differed only in some small particulars from the British and American proposals then current. (France opposed, since the Armenian claims for Cilicia and the land stretching north-east to Sivas, Kharput and Diyarbekir conflicted with France's share of the Ottoman carve-up as agreed by Sykes and Picot in 1915.) In this huge country Armenians would only be a small minority; but the Armenians insisted on including in their demographic estimates with some justification all those Armenians murdered as a result of the Turkish government's policies of 1915–16. Not to have done so would be to acquiesce in the Turks' government-sponsored genocide. This argument was also trenchantly put by Sir Eyre Crowe, a member of the British delegation in Paris. He wrote to a London colleague on 1 December 1919: 'To consider and decide the Armenian question purely on the basis of present numbers would surely amount to countenancing and encouraging the past Turkish method of dealing with the problem of their subject nationalities!'⁶⁶ Nevertheless, throughout 1919 and 1920 the Turks and their supporters naïvely laid claim to Armenian lands, on grounds that there were no Armenians living in the areas, feigning ignorance of the policies of 1915–16. In their submission, the Armenians requested general protection for 20 years either from the Allies or the League of Nations, and the direct guidance of one specific mandatary.⁶⁷

In response to this and every other request or appeal addressed to them the Allies did nothing. Despite their grandiose public statements, and despite the closeness at this date of Armenian bids to British and American policy outlines, nothing was done to secure a lasting Armenia out of the wreckage and disaster of the war. The Allies would not even recognise the Republic of Armenia, so keen were they to pursue their vendetta with the Bolsheviks, and

so fearful of upsetting Russian ‘democrats’, who would demand the incorporation of Armenia into a reconstituted Russia. Their immobility in the face of continuous reports of Armenian wretchedness, starvation and death was as icy as their inaction during Abdul Hamid’s persecutions. And here there was a further twist of fate. No decision was reached. At least the Berlin congress, for all its haughty imperialism, had been over in a month; but after 1918 it took, as we shall see, four and a half years for the wise statesmen to sort out a treaty that would stick. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the great powers were

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if anything more greedy, jealous and self-interested than formerly. The only action that they did sponsor was so foolish, short-sighted and ill-conceived that it proved, in its implications, disastrous to the non-Turkish peoples of east and west Anatolia, and to the designs of the powers themselves. That was the Greek occupation of Smyrna (Izmir), 15 May 1919.

Armenia Pitches into a New War

The Republic of Armenia was, in the meantime, appearing more like a normal state, not a mere patch of earth swarming with refugees, run by a dictatorship. The Populists (Zhoghovrdakans – eastern equivalent of the Ramkavars) agreed to take part in the government, and held four of the portfolios in Kachaznuni's new (4 November 1918) government.*⁶⁸

However, no sooner was the Republic reasonably secure than it was involved in a tiresome and possibly avoidable war with Georgia. The origins of the conflict dated back to June 1918, when the Georgians, in order to forestall a Turkish advance on Tiflis, occupied (temporarily, allegedly) the region of northern Lori which was about 75 per cent Armenian. Towns in the area included Sanahin, Alaverdi and Uzunlar. After the Mudros armistice, when the Turks were withdrawing from Transcaucasia, the Georgians indicated that they desired to take their place. Iraklii Tsereteli maintained, with that self-denying altruism for which the Georgians are so renowned, that the Armenians would after all be safer from the Turk as Georgian citizens. The Armenians were suspicious, and rejected a Georgian proposal of a quadripartite conference to solve the conflict.⁶⁹ The participants were to have been the Mountaineer Republic of the North Caucasus (capital: Temir Khan Shura), Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. In December the Georgians, who had imposed a tsarist-style military bureaucracy upon the Armenian peasantry of the district, were confronted by a rebellion, centring chiefly upon the town of Uzunlar. Within days hostilities began between the two republics. The Dashnaks seem to have been keen to prove that they could emulate the Georgians in their socialist imperialist aspirations, because the Armenian army, under Dro's command, pushed north far beyond the regions with an

*The complete Cabinet comprised:

Prime minister: Hovhannes Kachaznuni (Dashnak)

Foreign affairs: Sirakan Tigranian (D)

Interior: Aram Manukian (D)

War: Hovhannes Hakhverdian (non-party)

Finance: Artashes Enfiajian (Populist)

Justice: Samson Harutiunian (P)

Public instruction: Mikayel Atabekian (P)

Welfare: Khachatur Karjikian (D)

Food: Levon Ghulian (P)

Armenian majority, and came to within 50 kilometres of Tiflis. Fighting continued for a fortnight; by the end of it the Georgian army, which had initially fared disastrously, began to stage a come-back. This pointless, damaging, Gilbert-and-Sullivan escapade came to a conclusion on 31 December with a cease-fire arranged by the Allies, who had been aghast at the petty squabble they had been witnessing.⁷⁰

The war was inconclusive for both sides. But the real damage was that in the eyes of the world; here were two states, that had been born amid the fire and ice of the last four years, which had suffered deprivation and fearful onslaught, but which were now, while the rest of the world was healing its wounds and longing for peace, laying into one another like two hostile cats. Supporters of the Armenians, who had regarded the people they championed as a blameless, eternally suffering nation, received a rude shock. They appeared to be rather like everybody else.

Weather Conditions

The winter of 1918–19 was the most severe in memory in Armenia. For the republic, painfully constructing itself, this was a very serious setback.⁷¹ Just under 20 per cent of the country's population was wiped out. Villages were desolated. The situation for the 300,000 Turkish Armenian refugees, lacking shelter or food, was catastrophic. Even the settled population of Armenia hovered on the edge of starvation, since the supplies which in former times would have reached Armenia from north of the Caucasus were now cut off by the Russian civil war. Appalled relief workers sent harrowing descriptions to Europe and the United States, and the phrase 'Starving Armenians' gained widespread and justified currency. It elicited genuine compassion from Europeans and especially Americans. Large shipments of food and clothing were sent to the suffering country.

For those Turkish Armenians who struggled to return home after the cruelties of the deportations the situation was ferociously bleak, and the utter lack of help that they received highlights again the distinction between the words and deeds of those powers with the power to be of assistance.

The Turks seemed not to consider that the war had ended, or that their government had signed an instrument of defeat. *The Times* (London) reported on 4 January 1919 that atrocities were continuing, homes were being wrecked and all available goods were being carried away by the Turks.⁷² The same paper described on 16 January how the deported Armenians were struggling to return home: 'few have any transport, and they are making long journeys on foot from the Mesopotamian deserts to the snow-bound districts in the north, barefooted, half-clad, hungry, sick, and exhausted.'⁷³ Within Ottoman Turkey itself, the Allied occupation extended no further east than Konya, and all Armenians were still terrified of further massacre.⁷⁴ *The Times* summed up the

situation in a leading article of 2 May 1919:

The Turkish soldiery, disbanded but not disarmed, is still wandering about the more inaccessible districts of Armenia. Famine has followed massacre, and with it, as so often, has come typhus and other diseases. Since the armistice the Armenians have been sustained by political hopes, soon destined, we hope, to be fulfilled; but a nation

cannot live on politics alone, and the appeal now made is for the elementary needs of basic sustenance.⁷⁵

The British in Transcaucasia

But instead of elementary sustenance, the Armenians found themselves occupied by the British, who, rather than show a humane, impartial and healing hand after the agony of the past four years, seemed keener to play at politics, in a disconcertingly parade-ground manner. British policy in the Caucasus was never clearly formulated. Its ostensible bases were to enforce the armistice terms, to secure communications between Baku and Batum, and to maintain law and order. In practice, two strands can be discerned. The first was to keep Bolshevism out of the area; and the second was to extract and appropriate as much of Baku's oil as possible.⁷⁶

The first of these objectives involved them in a contradiction before even setting forth in the country. For in the first place they were committed to support General Anton I. Denikin, commander of the Volunteer Army, and in the second place their strategy demanded that they support, as far as possible, the existing regimes in the Transcaucasian republics, thereby implicitly recognising the independence of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, Denikin was determined to crush the republics; he was an old-fashioned Great-Russian chauvinist, who believed that the empire of the tsars should be re-established in all its majestic tyranny.⁷⁷ Hence international recognition was withheld from Armenia throughout 1919, when it would have benefited her enormously, for fear of upsetting Russian 'democrats'.

Very large quantities of oil were taken from Baku: almost half a million metric tons by August 1919, and another quarter-million by the end of the year. Altogether this amounted to just under 45 per cent of the annual production.⁷⁸ As the occupation continued, it was becoming clear that Azerbaijan was being considerably favoured by the occupying power at the expense of Armenia, and suspicion was expressed that the oil was determining policy, and that wartime promises and assurances were being disregarded.

Britain was in the Caucasus to smooth the way for the implementation of the decisions of the peace conference. But since the peace conference made no difference to conditions in Transcaucasia, the decisions of the British officers in the region had surprisingly long-term effects.

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The British and the Disputed Territories

Thus it was the decisions of the senior British officer in Baku, General W. M. Thomson, and of his successor, Colonel D. I. Shuttleworth, that determined the fate of Karabagh and Nakhichevan (which Armenia disputed with Azerbaijan), and of Kars, whose Turko-Tatar leaders, having killed or expelled all the Armenians, had declared it a self-governing 'state'.

The consequences in Karabagh for the majority of its inhabitants were tragic, and persist to this day. In November 1918 General Andranik had been poised to capture Shushi, the capital of Mountainous Karabagh (whose population was 85 per cent mountaineer Armenian). But General Thomson told him to cease his advance, since all further matters would be solved at the peace conference; Andranik, trusting the British, complied.⁷⁹

Soon afterwards Thomson appointed Dr Khosrov Bek Sultanov as provisional governor-general of Karabagh and Zangezur. Sultanov was the owner of vast tracts of Karabagh. He was also an ardent pan-Turkist, a friend of the Ittihadists of Constantinople, and a terror to all Armenians. Thomson can hardly have failed to know this; but evidently his upbringing told him that a powerful local landlord – one of 'our traditional friends' – was likely to squash any 'unrest' in the region.

The people of Karabagh resolutely refused to recognise Sultanov's authority. They insisted on the right of self-determination. The British compelled them to stop all political activities in April 1919. At the same time a local Azerbaijani detachment encircled the Armenian quarter of Shushi, demanding the inhabitants to surrender their fortress. Shots were fired, but the Armenians were too well dug in. The British mediated, and the Armenians agreed to surrender to them.

But the methods of Sultanov were not so straightforward as those of his British backers. Like other similar local potentates, he could muster a large number of mounted 'irregulars'. In mid-June this force, about 2,000 strong, attacked, looted and burnt a large Armenian village, Khaibalikend, just outside Shushi. When they had departed, it and the surrounding hamlets were in ruins, and approximately 600 Armenians lay dead.

The Karabagh affair was a grave one for the British. Accusations of direct British complicity in Armenian massacre cannot really be sustained; but the killings were a result of the almost unconscious British tendency to support 'our traditional friends' – the wealthy – and to disregard the wishes of the majority. This had been the basis of over half a century of pro-Turkishness among the British.

Even after widespread criticism, the British refused to remove Sultanov from his post; and the Armenians sickened by the prospect of further bloodshed, eventually agreed to Azerbaijan's provisional control of Karabagh. Provisional, however, it never was; and Mountainous Karabagh with its large Armenian majority remained Azerbaijani throughout the pre-Soviet and Soviet

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Map 8. Armenia and the Transcaucasian Disputed Territories

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period, being an autonomous region of the Azerbaijani SSR today; all dating from Andranik's trust of the word of a British officer, and the partiality of that officer and his successor to Azerbaijani landowners.⁸⁰

However, the British were not so successful in installing their protégé south in the other highland region of Zangezur. They wanted to put him there to 'maintain order'. The Armenians retorted that there was order there, and by a policy of bluff, demonstrations and armed resistance, they were able to frighten Suttleworth into quitting Zangezur's capital Goris in a hurry, and successfully defying his fellow officers' decisions.⁸¹

As the British began slowly to realise that numbers of their admired Turks and Tatars were in fact Ittihadist agents, they crushed an outgrowth of Turkism – the 'South-West Caucasian Republic'. This dubious entity had been established by Turko-Tatars, and by the grace of the still armed Ottoman Ninth Army, in the former province of Kars. For some months the British seemed content to let it remain, even though a supplementary clause to the Mudros armistice had demanded the withdrawal of Ottoman troops from Kars. The South-West Caucasians even demanded recognition from the peace conference, claiming that their republic was established in accord with the Wilsonian principles of self-determination – easy

to claim, when 25,000 Armenians from Kars had been killed, and another 100,000 were refugees! The British reluctantly moved against the Turks in April 1919, expelling the quasi-government and awarding the southern part of the Kars district to Armenia. (Olti and part of Ardahan remained under British military control.) The gain for Armenia, beyond the obvious fact of having more territory, was that thousands of refugees could go home, and that the agriculturally rich land of the province – the granary of Armenia – could help alleviate the severe shortages throughout the country.⁸²

Nakhichevan, too, to the south-east of Yerevan, was added to the republic in May 1919, when the British decided to relinquish it from their military governorship. Here, too, the decision seems to have been taken only after the attempt to put the territory under the control of the Turko-Tatar 'proper chaps' had gone awry with the discovery that the trusted proconsuls were in league with Ottoman and Azerbaijani pan-Turkists.⁸³

The 'Act of United Armenia'

Nothing had yet been done for the Western Armenians; they were still refugees in a country which they did not recognise as home. They wanted an authority – indeed a government – which would represent them, and declare its sovereignty over their homeland, even though the peace conference had not yet awarded any parts of Turkish Armenia to the Armenian state. The existing Armenian republic the Turkish Armenians referred to as the 'Republic of

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Ararat'; Armenia was only a dusty province without the *yerkir*, the homeland, of Turkish Armenia whose salvation Armenians had been seeking for 40 years.

In consequence of this pressure the government in Yerevan proclaimed, on 28 May 1919, the first anniversary of the Republic, the unification of Western and Eastern Armenia: the 'act of United Armenia'. It was an act of hope only, an attempt to goad the peace-making powers into creating a new reality.

But the result of this symbolic gesture was, instead of uniting Armenia, to divide the Armenians among themselves. Boghos Nubar, head of the National Delegation in Paris, believed that the government in Yerevan was trying to pre-judge the issues that his delegation was painfully trying to push through at the peace conference; he called the proclamation of the Act a 'painful surprise'. Within a matter of days the Populist members of the coalition had withdrawn from the government, even though they had initially approved the proclamation.⁸⁴

Party Differences: the Elections of June 1919

The dispute that the Act of 28 May brought to the surface is fundamental to Armenian political and social attitudes. The conflict – which endures to this day, although time has mellowed its harsher outlines – is an almost instinctive suspicion between the Ramkavars (Populists in Russian Armenia) and the Dashnaks. The Ramkavars, or Constitutional Democrats, were cautious, reformist and believed in evolution rather than revolution. They were the party of Armenian big business, but they were also charitable, and founded a number of hospitals and schools. Their opponents have portrayed them as collaborationist yes-men, but this is unfair; having firm roots in Turkish Armenia, they realised that they had to proceed slowly, dealing on the one hand with the despotic empires, and on the other with a peasant population which in our arrogance we call 'simple', but which was merely innocent of

the corrosion of industrial society, clinging instead to its ancient soil and ancient Church. The tenets of the Ramkavar party never added up to an ideology, and their organisation was correspondingly lax. The Dashnaks, by contrast, were a product of the revolutionary, socialistic ferment in the Russian Caucasus in the declining days of tsardom. They were well organised and active, and were not frightened to use strong-arm methods against fellow Armenians, as well as non-Armenians, when they suspected them of collaboration with the enemy. They laid stress on obedience, holding that members should carry out the dictates of the Bureau, the party's supreme executive body, without question or demur. At the same time, the Bureau drew its authority from the local and general congresses of party members.

In an atmosphere of growing political rancour, elections were held throughout the republic on 21–3 June 1919. The Populists withdrew officially from them; the results distributed the 80 seats in the Parliament as follows:

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Dashnaks	72
Social Revolutionaries	4
Tatars	3
Independent Peasants' Union	1 ⁸⁵

The Dashnaks won what *The Times* described in another context as an 'inartistic majority'.

Any realistic opposition to Dashnaktsutiun had been eliminated; the two groups with alternative policies, the Populists and the Bolsheviks, had declined to take part – the latter on the grounds that the elections were a Dashnak exercise, although their opponents claimed that they boycotted them because they knew they would capture only a fraction of the vote. The net result – whichever side was to blame – was that the politics of Armenia remained largely in the world of secret decisions. Opposition was non-existent, government was entirely Dashnak, and parliamentary questions might not be asked without the approval of the Bureau of Dashnaktsutiun. In a much-quoted passage Hovhannes Kachaznuni later put it thus:

Armenia was a democratic republic. It had the proper organs of a democratic, parliamentary government: a legislative body composed of the people's representatives and a responsible administration. The parliament was composed of representatives from four existing parties and minorities with the widest true democratic principles. The government received its authority from the legislative body and was responsible to it. This was the form. But the reality was otherwise.

In practice our party [Dashnaktsutiun] tended to subject to itself and to control the legislature and the government. We did not have the courage or ability openly to declare a dictatorship, yet did not wish to remain within parliamentary limits either. Instead we tried to establish in Armenia the Ittihadist system – a party dictatorship disguised as a democracy. An intolerable dualism resulted from it: on the surface, the parliament and the government; behind the scenes, invisible, the party and its organs.

There was no parliament; it was an empty form without content. The problems of state were being discussed and solved behind closed doors, in the rooms of the Dashnak faction, and then declared from the rostrum of the parliament.

In reality, there was not even a parliamentary faction, because the latter was under the very strict supervision of the Dashnak Bureau, and was obliged to carry out its orders. There was not a government either. This too was subject to the Bureau; it was a kind of executive body for the Bureau in the state. This was the Bolshevik

system. But what the Bolsheviks are doing openly and consistently, we were attempting to veil under democratic forms.⁸⁶

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Kachaznuni's strictures belittle the immense problems posed by the growing menace of Tatar sedition, and the perpetual threat of Armenia's western neighbour. In these circumstances 'open government' was a mirage. The only practical disadvantage of the lack of democratic forms was that it led European democracies to think twice before committing aid to Armenia.

It would, however, be wrong to ascribe the setbacks and disasters that Armenia suffered in the succeeding months entirely to the structure of the Dashnak party. The situation in Armenia itself was still too disturbed following the war, and external events were moving too fast and unpredictably for even the most experienced politicians to cope. When Armenia's new prime minister, Alexander Khatisian, introduced his all-Dashnak Cabinet* to the Parliament he spoke of the serious condition of the country, and the need for massive new legislation. The administration had to be thoroughly reformed; feudal and church lands to be nationalised; the Armenian question had to be solved and the refugees from Turkish Armenia repatriated.

Kemalism and Bolshevism

Yet as he spoke events were taking place in Anatolia which would ensure that the Armenian question was not solved. The Allies' delay in completing a Turkish treaty at the peace conference had enabled the Turks to create an organisation capable of preventing the imposition on Turkey of the terms fitting for a defeated empire at the end of a world war. Together Mustafa Kemal and Kiazim Karabekir (commander of the Ottoman Fifteenth Corps, which was 18,000 strong) were preparing to defy any terms that the Allies might impose on Turkey. By July they were strong enough to hold a congress in Erzerum⁸⁷ – significantly 'the capital of Turkish Armenia'. For the Armenians the most noteworthy resolution to be passed at that congress was: 'The return of refugees to the eastern vilayets is strictly forbidden without the permission of the representative committee.'⁸⁸

Other resolutions made it clear that the main priority of the Nationalists – as the followers of Kemal and Karabekir became known – was the prevention of the establishment of an Armenia in any part of the six provinces of Turkish Armenia.

Within a few months this new organisation had seized the attention of the traditional Turkish leaders in eastern Anatolia. The burning resentment engendered by the Greek occupation of Smyrna found expression in support

* Prime minister and foreign affairs: A. Khatisian
Minister of the interior and justice: A. Giulkhandanian
Minister of finance: S. Araratian
Minister of labour and public health: A. Sahakian
Minister of education and fine arts: N. Aghabalian
Minister of war: Major-General K. Araratian (non-partisan)

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for the Nationalist movement, determined at all costs to reject the imposition of Allied peace terms. Soon the influence of the Nationalists had spread to Constantinople, and swept away

the government of Damad Ferid Pasha, which had been obedient to the dictates of the Allies. By October the Nationalists could call the tune in Constantinople: that is, a group of rebels, upon whom the Allies could not impose their terms, was now in control in Turkey.

The effect of this in diplomatic terms was enormous. No longer would the Allies be able to force Turkey to sign a treaty of their bidding. By delaying so long in deciding on a Turkish treaty and by not disarming the Ottoman army entirely at the end of the war, they had ensured that they could not impose a treaty upon it that would do justice to the peoples who were subjects of the defeated Asiatic empire. The Kemalists were 'outlaws' and 'outcasts', upsetting the dilatory, self-interested games that the winning powers were playing in various locations of western Europe, in a manner which was worse than their nineteenth-century counterparts. The Kemalists at least would solve matters in their own way.

The other power outlawed by the Entente was Soviet Russia. It was not long before the two were making overtures to one another. The friendship between Bolshevik internationalism and Turkish nationalism was based only on temporary interest: one has only to look at subsequent events like the murder by the Kemalists of the Turkish Communist leader Mustafa Subhi, and the whole course up to the present day of Russo–Turkish relations, to see that the post-war warmth was only an irregular interlude in the historic enmity between the two states. Yet while it lasted it was strong enough to accomplish, among other things, the destruction of Allied influence in the Caucasus, and the wreck of independent Armenia.

Debate on the Future Status of Armenia: the Harbord Commission

While the new world was taking shape in Turkey and Russia – while the Kemalists were still considered as mere 'brigands' by the powers – the question of a mandate for Armenia was being raised. In May 1919 Britain announced that she intended to terminate her occupation of the Caucasus in August, and at the same time Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon approached the Americans with a view to their taking on the mandate for Armenia. The American ambassador, J. W. Davis, gave him a very accurate assessment of the likelihood of his hope being fulfilled. Davis said it was very unlikely that America would take on a Caucasian mandate. The main reason that he gave was America's unwillingness to be entangled in foreign alliances; and he also pointed out, with prophetic clarity, that philanthropy would not survive expediency.⁸⁹

President Wilson himself despatched a commission in August 1919 to enquire about the possibility of America taking on the Armenian mandate. Headed by Major-General J. G. Harbord, it spent two months travelling through Turkish Armenia and the Armenian republic.⁹⁰ The commissioners

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heard tales of woe from the remaining Armenians in Turkish Armenia, and saw the abject state of wretchedness they were still living in, persecuted by the relentless Turks and near starvation. They also met Mustafa Kemal in Sivas, who impressed them as a realist, a forceful politician, and no fanatic. They crossed into the Armenian republic on 25 September, where the boundless faith of the people and their leaders in America was immediately apparent. Everywhere they went the commissioners were fêted as saviours. The country was still on the edge of starvation, and had to support half a million refugees; Oliver Wardrob, the scholar and diplomat who had been appointed Chief British Commissioner to Transcaucasia in July 1919, described Yerevan thus, after visiting it in October of that year:

The aspect of the city is pitiful. The streets are ill-kept, and the wind carries clouds of infected dust. Everywhere there are wretched refugees in rags, hungry, diseased, demoralised ... this great mass of suffering ... the appearance of some of the children was very painful to see; they were picking up refuse in the streets and eating it ... Yerevan at present is more depressing than any other place I have seen.⁹¹

Faced with a resurgence of Turkish aggression and infiltration from both Ottoman lands and Azerbaijan, Armenia looked desperately for a protector.

Harbord's report did not come to any specific conclusion; it merely gave 13 arguments against and 14 in favour of an American mandate. Points in favour were humanitarianism (meaning the ending of the starvation, wretchedness and desolate wreckage which was the lot of most Armenians at the time), and America's technical ability to put things to rights. Against were the traditional unwillingness of the United States to get involved in Old world politics, and the consequent lack of experience of America in administering colonial or mandated people.⁹² There was the cost, too: estimated expenditure for five years was put at \$757 million.⁹³

The Harbord commission, however, exercised no discernible effect on American policy, and despite the labours of its members the Armenians benefited not a whit from it. It reached President Wilson in November 1919, a month after he had had his first serious stroke; it was April 1920 before he submitted it to the Senate, and when in the following month the senate voted on an American mandate for Armenia, the proposal was rejected. America, dragged half-heartedly and superficially from her isolationism, had now returned to it; in future 'realistic' matters, like the Chester railway concession for Turkey, were to determine policy, rather than any attempts to restore a wrecked nation.

Armeno–Azerbaijani Conflicts

British troops were withdrawn from the Caucasus in late August 1919, and a farcical plan to replace them with Italians came to nothing. The decision to withdraw was taken on two grounds: that Turkey was complying with the

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armistice, and that British troops were in heavy demand elsewhere.⁹⁴ Only the district of Batum remained occupied by Allied forces. The withdrawal led to a sharp increase in hostility between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and to increasingly harsh treatment by the Armenian government of their Tatar minority, and by the Azerbaijani government of the Armenians whom they controlled *de facto* in the disputed territories of Karabagh and Nakhichevan. Already, in the early part of 1919, the Azerbaijani diplomatic representative in Yerevan, Khan Tekinski, had sought to subvert the existence of Armenia, successively attempting to create economic difficulties for Armenia and then, more seriously, planning a revolt of Armenia's Tatar population, and trying to co-ordinate it with the movement of Azerbaijan's forces. The Armenian government, which had been deciphering Tekinski's cables, insisted on his recall.⁹⁵

On 18 July, shortly before the British withdrawal, a Tatar rising in Nakhichevan began. It was commanded by a Turkish colonel, Khalil Bey. Soon the insurgents were in control of Bash Norashen (Norashen on today's maps). The revolt spread north-west, towards Yerevan; within weeks Armenia was compelled to withdraw its authority from Nakhichevan and Sharur as far north as Kamarlu (modern Artashat).⁹⁶ At the same time the Turko–Tatars

did not limit their actions to military operations; there occurred the usual concomitant of slaughter of the defenceless Armenian village population. T. B. Hohler, of the British embassy, Constantinople, reported privately to a colleague in London on 4 August, 'There seems to be a fine old massacre going on in Nakhichevan.'⁹⁷

Armenia, so recently expanded, was surrounded on almost all sides by a fire of insurrection and massacre. On 20 September Avetis Aharonian recorded that the Armenian government had been forced temporarily to evacuate Kars; that the Tatars were threatening the Ulukhanlu–Echmiadzin section of the railway, very close to Yerevan itself, and that they had taken Davalu and Kulp (south and east of Yerevan). In these operations, they were led by Turkish officers.⁹⁸ The very existence of the Republic of Armenia was threatened.

The conflict erupted further in Karabagh. Although Azerbaijan held this territory more securely than the other disputed areas, its Armenian populace suffered the full fury of 'our traditional friend', the landlord Dr Sultanov, who brought fire and death to his Armenian tenants.

The only possible mediator was the representative of the peace conference, Colonel Haskell. Haskell had strong influence with the Azerbaijanis for dubious reasons which will become apparent later. He initially persuaded them to recognise Zangezur and Nakhichevan as a neutral zone under American authority, while holding on to Karabagh. But the violence continued; fierce battles were fought in all areas in mid-November. Haskell's deputy, Colonel Rhea, managed to get Armenia and Azerbaijan to sign an agreement on 23 November.⁹⁹ Under it they agreed to end hostilities and settle their conflict by arbitration, but it had little effect, for in mid-December Tatars from Ordubad, in the southernmost tip of Nakhichevan, fell upon the nearby town of Lower

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Akulis (whose population was 80 per cent Armenian), and sacked the town, killing as many Armenians as they could. Some Armenians were able to escape to the stronghold of Upper Akulis.¹⁰⁰ This was destroyed, too. The Armenian government took heavy reprisals; according to Fat'h Ali Khan Khoisky, they destroyed about 40 Tatar villages in Zangezur.¹⁰¹ The earlier policy of the Armenian government of conciliating the Muslims was discarded in favour of one of suppression, which in turn only hardened Muslims into non-recognition of the Yerevan government, and of acting more vigorously as agents for Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Armenia in Early 1920

Rather surprisingly, Simon Vratsian says that the year 1920 started well:¹⁰² there was peace in the country and along its borders and work for the people in rebuilding the nation. The country was (he said) unrecognisable from its condition of one year earlier. But the forces threatening Vratsian's vision of Armenia were strengthening themselves in all ways. They were able to operate in the vacuum created by the Allies' inability to come to grips with the Armenian question – the future of Turkish Armenia. It was over a year now since the end of the war, and still the Allies had decided nothing about the future of Armenia. Chiefly responsible was President Wilson, and his delays were now compounded with the problems of an unco-operative Congress and his own serious illness. Britain's resolve, too, was weaker, with the growth of agitation among Indian Muslims and their supporters, who held that any diminution of the Turkish empire was an offence against Islam. Other things that boded ill were the crumbling of Denikin's Volunteer Army, which Armenia had cautiously hoped

might be of assistance (it collapsed altogether in March 1920) and the strengthening *entente* between the Bolsheviks and the Turkish Nationalists.

The Bolshevik-Milli (Turkish Nationalist) alliance was rooted in the common interests of both parties. It was not an ideological pact, although in the propaganda of both parties it often appeared to be so. The Turkish Nationalists were, like most nationalists, more concerned with the extent of the land they governed than about the nature of the government. Under the terms of the 'National Pact' of February 1920 they demanded all of Turkish Armenia, and Kars, Ardahan and Batum as well. They did not demand Surmalu, on the northern slopes of Mount Ararat, an important point in view of later negotiations. The Bolsheviks for their part detested nationalism, and believed that it would soon disappear under the impact of the workers' revolution. Nevertheless the two were drawn together by the hatred of the Allies, and a determination to stamp out the power of the Entente. Hence the opposition of both Bolsheviks and Milli to the Transcaucasian republics, which they saw as puppets of Britain and France.

Another factor, too, drew them together. This was the attempt by the

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Bolsheviks to win over Muslim opinion (by pointing out the vast exploitation of the Muslim peoples by the 'Christian' West) with a view to shaking Britain's rule in India. The sheer *numbers* of the Muslims made them attractive to the Bolsheviks – as they had been for complementary reasons to English imperialists half a century earlier. With blandishments from Nationalist Turkey and Bolshevik Russia, it is hardly surprising that Azerbaijan was unable to tell the difference between the two when a *coup* was staged in Baku in April 1920.

Thus the picture for Armenia in early 1920 was not good. She had clung blindly to the Allies, but had received nothing tangible in return, except relief supplies. As a result of her devotion to the Allies she could expect only hostility from the new Turkey and Russia, which were growing stronger every day. (Moreover, the new Turkey, as personified by Kiazim Karabekir, commander of the eastern front, seemed as keen to make the extermination of the Armenians an axiomatic to Turkish policy as any of the older Turkeys.) And, most serious of all, those very Allies to whom Armenia looked for salvation were appearing as irresolute, devious, self-interested and quarrelsome as their forerunners of a generation back. Already Italy, like a grand lady scorned and derided at the banquet of the Allies, was arming the Turkish Nationalists, out of little more than pure spite. France had already sent an envoy to Ankara; her position in Cilicia (see below, pp. 292–303) was precariously weak, and after the Kemalist assault on Marash (February 1920) it was little more than one long retreat. Britain was keeping her ear to the ground for signs of discontent among Indian Muslims, and was far less disposed to listen to Armenian claims than a year earlier. And finally America was paralysed by Wilson's personal and political difficulties.

Allied Conferences in London and San Remo

It was in these circumstances that Britain and France convened the first London Conference, with the aim of working out a treaty with Turkey (December 1919 – March 1920).¹⁰³ Plans more realistic for the future size of Armenia prevailed now than those put forward in Paris in February 1919. The idea of a Greater Armenia from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean had been scrapped, even if largely because it conflicted with French territorial aspirations for a 'mandate' area embracing Cilicia and stretching north-eastwards as far as Kharput and Diyarbakir. Both Britain and France realised that any areas of Turkish Armenia that would

become an Armenian state would now encompass parts of the provinces of Bitlis, Van, Erzerum and (to enable Armenia to have a coastline) Trebizond; this was the recommendation of an Allied Commission in its report of March 1920.

But what to do with Turkish Armenia once its size had been decided? A mandate was essential; in contrast to Allied propaganda and pretensions in the Arab world, where blatant colonialism was half hidden under the unconvincing

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fig leaf of 'bringing the peoples up to a level of civilisation', Armenia, ruined by massacres and heavy warfare during the world war, and now starving, really needed the assistance of a stronger power. Yet each power in turn said apologetically that it could not take the mandate for Armenia. At the London Conference the powers agreed to ask the League of Nations to accept the mandate.

The League considered the matter on 9–11 April. In its report it pointed out that it was not a state, and had no army and no finances. It could not accept and exercise a mandate; only give a right to supervise one. A power had to be found.¹⁰⁴

Still hoping that America would, somehow, accept the mandate, the Supreme Council of the League (Britain, France, Italy and Japan) met in San Remo (18–26 April) to try to bring their deliberations about the former Turkish empire to a conclusion. There is a pathetic triviality about the proceedings, as far as they related to Armenia, occurring as they did on the very eve of the Bolshevik *coup* in Azerbaijan, which tightened further the hold of the anti-Entente forces in the Caucasus. As if they were paying an elaborate and formal game of croquet, the world leaders spent nearly all the brief time they allotted themselves to discuss Armenia scoring off one another over the matter of whether or not the city of Erzerum should be included in the proposed Armenia. Like players in the game making careful strokes merely to send their opponents flying from the hoops, so our modern Atlases marshalled their arguments about Erzerum – Lloyd George and Signor Nitti against its inclusion in Armenia, Lord Curzon and M. Berthelot in favour.¹⁰⁵ Since none of them intended actually to do anything on the ground to help this Armenia come into existence the exercise was of tedious aridity – without even a suggestion of the excitement afforded by a real game of croquet.

The upshot of the deliberations at San Remo was that the leaders decided once more to appeal to President Wilson to accept the mandate, or, failing that, to fix boundaries of the state.¹⁰⁶ But when the president proposed the acceptance of the mandate to Congress on 24 May, the Senate, after four days' discussion, voted by 52 to 23 to decline to take it on.¹⁰⁷ So the president was left to draw the map of an Armenia which seemed unlikely to come into existence at all; his stroke through the next hoop. Meanwhile on 11 May Britain and France handed to Turkish representatives from the puny puppet government in Constantinople the text of the treaty with which they intended to wind up the affairs of Turkey and solve the Eastern Question, the treaty to be known as the treaty of Sèvres, perhaps the most elegant and pointless of all the shots in the game.

Recognition of Armenia: Further Clashes with Azerbaijan

On 3 January 1920 Oliver Wardrop, British Chief Commissioner in Transcaucasia, cabled London: 'It would be prudent to consider possibility of

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complete collapse of Denikin at an early date. This would immediately be followed by vigorous Bolshevik attack on Transcaucasia.¹⁰⁸ He had been urging recognition of the Transcaucasian republics since his arrival in Tiflis four months earlier, and now the threatening situation reinforced his appeal.

Within three weeks the republics received *de facto* recognition. *De jure* recognition would follow when the peace treaty with Turkey was signed. Armenia was recognised on 19 January; Yerevan was swept with a tide of joy. Yet the Allied move had nothing to do with the intrinsic importance or value of Transcaucasia and the struggle of the peoples who lived there. It was an attempt to keep Bolshevism out of the Caucasus – or rather, to create the conditions under which Bolshevism could be withstood – and to weaken the Soviet–Kemalist alliance.

There is a disastrous significance in the grounds for this diplomatic recognition. During the world war, and in the period immediately after it, Armenia was, according to the statements of representatives of the Entente powers, something valid *in itself*; freedom and a secure future for Armenia were apparently one of the axioms of a post-war settlement.¹⁰⁹ Now Armenia was a mere pawn in the struggle to contain Bolshevism, and the interest of the Allies in her was merely a function of their own global manoeuvrings. When they had ceased to be interested in Transcaucasia, they would drop her like a stone.

Judging from its policies, the Armenian government would seem to have been largely unaware of the grim diplomatic outlook. Throughout January and February Armenia was embroiled in her struggle with Azerbaijan, carrying on a guerrilla war in the disputed and cross-populated areas. Ronald McDonell, formerly British consul in Baku and now desk-bound at the Foreign Office, held that the Dashnaks themselves were to blame; and notwithstanding the anti-Dashnak attitude typical of British officials of the time, it is hard not to blame the militant, activist members of the ruling party at the time for the lack of any conciliatory policies.¹¹⁰ Lord Curzon addressed a letter to Avetis Aharonian, briefly in London, 'impressing on his people the necessity of reconciliation rather than revenge'.¹¹¹ But the fighting continued, increasing rather than decreasing in violence.¹¹²

Crisis in Azerbaijan

In the early months of 1920 Armenia's eastern neighbour, Azerbaijan, was racked by a series of internal government crises. These centred around the attitude that Azerbaijan should take towards the victorious Bolsheviks, now just the other side of the Caucasus.¹¹³ Since the establishment of the three Transcaucasian republics Azerbaijan had been the least anti-Bolshevik: as one of the most politically sophisticated Muslim nations of the time, she was very aware of her common detestation with the Bolsheviks of the exploiting 'Christian' nations of the West which had done so much to impoverish Muslim

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peoples. In recent months the alliance between Turkish Nationalists and Bolsheviks had strengthened pro-Bolshevik sentiment in Azerbaijan, with the presence there of Khalil Bey and Enver's relative Nuri, former Ittihadists who now, like many others, were working all out for Mustafa Kemal and the Nationalist movement.

Throughout January and February 1920 Chicherin, Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, was conducting a 'dialogue' with the administration of Nesib Bek Usubbekov. As the Red Army virtually came into view across the mountains, the government in Baku became paralysed with uncertainty and fear, and resigned in March. Formation of a new government

was put in the hands of the weak pro-Bolshevik Mahmed Hasan Hajinski; but he was unable to assemble a Cabinet. The Red Army massed on the northern frontier, while almost the whole of the Azerbaijani army was tied up in Karabagh. As the government was still politically paralysed and incapable, the Baku Bolsheviks and the Military Revolutionary Council of the Eleventh Red Army made their own arrangements: an uprising would be staged in Baku, which would give legitimacy to the entry of Soviet troops.

Soviet Azerbaijan

And so, at midday on 27 April, the local Communist bodies in Baku handed an ultimatum to the president of the Azerbaijani Parliament, demanding that power be handed over to the Communists. The government (such as it was) was given 12 hours in which to reply.¹¹⁴

Hours before midnight Soviet troops were pouring across the frontier. By 11.00 p.m. that same night Baku was in the hands of the local Communists. Next day it was a Soviet city.¹¹⁵ Only one man was killed in the entire operation.¹¹⁶

The Sovietisation of Azerbaijan was a triumph above all for Mustafa Kemal. Russian arms and supplies were now physically very close. The only obstacle remaining between the two was Zangezur, disputed territory at the time in the hands of the Armenians.

Armenia was now face to face with Soviet power; and it was in this position that the final act of her independence was played. Throughout the next five months Soviet opposition to Armenia was to be territorial, political and logistical. The territorial aspect was to be the least important, although viewed from strongly nationalist Yerevan it often appeared the most important. The relentless Soviet Azerbaijani demands for Karabagh and Zangezur were part of the logistical battle to secure a link between Soviet and Kemalist forces, and of the political fight to squeeze Armenia as hard as possible while she remained pro-Entente and anti-Bolshevik. Ultimately, the conflict was one which existed purely in an international dimension, since the Soviet desire to give weaponry to Kemalist Turkey was not through any love of Turkish nationalism, but

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because Kemal and his colleagues were dedicated to smashing the power of Britain and France from Thrace to Erzerum.

The new Soviet Azerbaijani regime instantly applied territorial pressure against Armenia: Yerevan received an ultimatum to quit Karabagh and Zangezur, and to stop taking severe measures against the Tatars within Armenia, 'otherwise the Revolutionary Committee of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan will consider itself in a state of war with the republic of Armenia'.¹¹⁷ Armenia was given three days to make up its mind.

Bolshevism in Armenia: May Day Celebrations

As if in defiance of this threat, the Armenian government resolved to celebrate May Day in grand style, with marches, parades and demonstrations, to show that it would not be intimidated by Bolshevik threats, and that the Armenian people were behind their government. In Yerevan a demonstration was organised in which different factions took part; besides pictures of Dashnak founding fathers Kristapor Mikayelian, Stephen Zorian (Rostom) and Simon Zavarian there were posters of Lenin and Shahumian.¹¹⁸ There was some pushing and shoving, but it was mostly good-humoured.

Before the October revolution there were almost no Bolsheviks in Armenia; the country was overwhelmingly agricultural, with almost the only industry at the railway centre of Alexandropol. In late 1918 a number of Armenian Bolsheviks who were not native to Armenia – most were from Georgia and Azerbaijan – fled to Armenia, to escape persecution in their own countries; they were allowed in, on condition that they desisted from political activity. But engaging in political activity is a necessary condition of being a Communist; and by the end of the following year they were spreading propaganda among the Armenian armed forces, telling them not to fight the insurgent Tatars in Buyuk Vedi and elsewhere. Arrests followed. In January 1920, at the party's secret conference, two opposing strategies emerged: one, proposed by Sargis Kasian, was that the party was not ready yet to attempt to establish a Soviet regime in Armenia; with only 500 members it lacked the strength, organisation and the ability to defend itself militarily against an invasion from Georgia; and the wretched condition of the country, with thousands still dying from starvation and exposure, meant that an armed Communist uprising was not, for the moment, relevant. The opposing policy, put forward by the young hothead Avis Nurijanian, was for the immediate overthrow of the government and the establishment of Soviet order, and this strategy appears to have been adopted.¹¹⁹

Now, on May Day, three days after the Bolsheviks had taken Baku, their comrades in Armenia were full of confidence. There was also another current of feeling prevalent among many of the ordinary people – a current which was to broaden and swell in the coming months. This was a yearning to be rejoined

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with Russia, and an almost instinctive belief that only this way would the starvation and suffering end – only this way would the condition of Armenia change; the silent winter deaths, and the chronic diseases of summer. It was as though they guessed that the European diplomats, who in a year and a half had only delivered to them a few crumbs, might now desert them completely, and instead they looked to their old protector, Russia.¹²⁰

Uprising in Alexandropol

In contrast to the festive co-operation in Yerevan, the Bolsheviks in Alexandropol took advantage of the relaxed atmosphere to stage an uprising. Amid the celebrations local Communists hoisted the Soviet flag, and, from an armoured train, *General Vardan*, proclaimed a Soviet government.¹²¹ From this train, under the command of Captain Sargis Musayelian, the insurgents sent a stream of telegrams, proclaiming their 'state of tense war with the Dashnak anti-revolutionary government', begging Baku for provisions, and so forth. When news of the Alexandropol uprising reached Yerevan, the minister of war ordered Musayelian to the Kamarlu front; he refused, and instead proclaimed a Bolshevik Military Revolutionary Committee,* which declared itself in command of the country. The committee captured Alexandropol station, gaining the loyalty of some army units.

Next, Musayelian telegraphed Yerevan, requesting that the government should hand over full powers to him. Telegrams were also despatched to Sarikamish, Kars and Karakilisa, claiming that the Revolutionary Committee was in control.¹²² The telegrams found a measure of response in the armed forces, and also among the non-Armenian populations, such as the Tatars (understandably, in view both of the Kemalist and the Bolshevik propaganda to which they had been subjected, and the uncompromising way in which the Armenian government dealt with their disloyalty) and Russian minorities such as the Molokans.† On 9 May a

military revolutionary committee was set up in Kars, demanding recognition of the Soviet government in Alexandropol. Kars stayed in rebel hands for two days. In Sarikamish some of the soldiers mutinied, and sent fraternal greetings to Turkish soldiers. The revolt spread to Kaghizman, too. Near Nor Bayazid the situation was more serious. At Basar-Gechar Hamazasp's volunteer regiment rebelled, and a local schoolmaster, one Sarukhanian, took command of the rebel troops. In an inflamed speech he bid his listeners overthrow the government. The troops themselves arrested General Silikian and all the officers; then moved on to Nor Bayazid itself, and captured the city with little fighting on 17 May.¹²³

* President and military commissar: Sargis Musayelian
Commissar for foreign affairs: Avis Nurijanian
Commissar for the interior: Artashes Melkonian

† Russian dissenters who had been settled in Transcaucasia during tsarist times.

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After a moment's hesitation, the Armenian government took severe steps to crush the rebellions. At a special session of Parliament the resignation of Alexander Khatisian's government was accepted: and then Parliament itself was declared closed for one month. The entire Bureau of the Dashnak party entered the government;*¹²⁴ government was henceforward synonymous with party dictatorship. A state of emergency was declared. Every member of Dashnaktsutiu was ordered to 'put himself completely at the disposal of the party'.¹²⁵ The army was mobilised, and a special division created, under the command of General Sebouh, to recapture Alexandropol. First, though, Prime Minister Hamo Ohandjanian telegraphed Musayelian, ordering him to end the rebellion, adding that the guilty would be amnestied. In reply, the Military Revolutionary Committee sent a flat refusal. Thereupon the government decided to move against the rebels.¹²⁶ The headquarters of the revolt was still the armoured train, moving uncertainly in the northern part of the Alexandropol–Yerevan railway, its occupants, despite their tough talk, not venturing outside its armed exterior. On 13 May it was between Ani and Aghin stations.¹²⁷ There it had an encounter with government troops in which the rebels were considerably worsted. The armoured train sped off, and as it left its crew attempted to blow up bridges. The rebels, realising they had not won the support they had hoped for, tried to salvage the remnants of their revolt in Alexandropol itself, but without success. They finally resolved upon surrender; the government's terms were that the armoured train be surrendered in good condition by 6.00 a.m. on 14 May. They escaped by night: some fled to Akbaba, while others hid in Alexandropol. Government forces entered the town without bloodshed on the 14th; Musayelian and Melkonian were arrested, but Nurijanian escaped, to return six months later and wreak a terrible revenge not only on leading Dashnaks but upon Armenia itself.¹²⁸

The Old and New Order

April and May 1920 were the two months in which the new order began to appear, and the old to disintegrate. The Sovietisation of Azerbaijan was hardly noticed in that embodiment of the old, America, and yet its impact on Armenia was greater than any number of petitions to Congress, or the utterances of the bellicose and chauvinistic organisation, the American Committee for the

* The 'Bureau government':
Prime minister and foreign minister: Hamazasp (Hamo) Ohandjanian

War minister and minister of the interior: Ruben Ter-Minasian
Minister of finance and justice: Abraham Giulkhandanian
Minister of agriculture and labour: Simon Vratsian
Minister of communications: Arshak Djamalian
Minister of education and arts: Gevorg Ghazarian
Minister of public care and repatriation: Sargis Araratian

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Independence of Armenia (ACIA). At the same time, the true mettle of certain of the Americans actually there, on the ground, in Armenia was proved.

The Americans in Armenia are remembered above all for their generosity in sending relief. Individuals and organisations poured thousands of dollars into funds for the starving Armenians. Men like Barton and Green worked untiringly for the distribution of relief supplies.¹²⁹ The charity of individuals had been formalised into Allied policy when in July 1919 Colonel William H. Haskell had been appointed Allied High Commissioner in Armenia, a man who seemed the embodiment of disinterested American justice and concern. Yet Haskell was a crook, who during his time in the Caucasus was systematically selling to the Azerbaijani government the food supplies given by charities in the West to Armenia. (Thereby Azerbaijan was able to continue her campaign against Armenia in Karabagh and Zangezur.) On 5 May 1920, with the Caucasus shaken by the uncertainties of the Bolshevik *coup* in Azerbaijan and the uprising in Armenia, Haskell received notice that an investigative commission, together with auditors, was on its way. Quick as a flash he and his staff fled from Tiflis, giving away stores right and left. His excuse was his fear of the growth of Bolshevism. He gave orders that records were to be destroyed. Similar orders were given to his staff in Yerevan. All this is related in a memorandum by Rev. H. W. Harcourt, who had been sent out by the Lord Mayor's Fund, the main British relief charity.¹³⁰ Hinting, too, at the reasons for Haskell's sudden departure, but too polite to disclose them, is Sir Harry Luke, in his witty autobiography *Cities and Men*. Luke noted that 'Haskell occupied one of the more imposing private residences of Tiflis':

The four Allied and Associated flags surmounted his desk and the door of his palace; his official stationery, of somewhat unorthodox heraldry, was similarly emblazoned; an achievement the size of a hatchment, composed of the colours of the four powers, filled almost completely the panels of his car.¹³¹

Haskell, in fear of a full-scale investigation (Dr Frederick MacCallum had already visited Tiflis, with auditors), quit without giving any notice of the fact to the Allied missions.¹³² Luke adds that with all his flags it looked as though the Allies were themselves leaving. A shiver of panic ran through the pro-Entente peoples of the Caucasus. Another leaf had fallen off the withering bough of the old order.

The Levon Shant Mission: Negotiations with the Bolsheviks

Already the Armenian government had decided that it had to come to terms with the new order. Much as it looked to the Allies, and to Europe, it was not blind to what was happening around it: it saw that the Allies had delivered

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nothing but promises and uncertain amounts of food, even though it continued to trust those promises. Armenia had to have some sort of dialogue with Russia's new masters, for practical reasons, not least because of the shortages in Armenia, of food and (since the Sovietisation of Azerbaijan) *mazout*, the fuel on which the trains ran, obtained after kerosene had been extracted from petroleum.¹³³

Hence Armenia realised that, whatever the Allies might think, she must negotiate with the Soviet government. On 30 April 1920 a three-man delegation left Yerevan for Moscow; it consisted of Levon Shant (an author and playwright whose works were known in Russia), Hambardzum Terterian and Levon Zarfian. The delegation was authorised to sign a treaty with Soviet Russia along the following lines:¹³⁴

- (i) Soviet Russia will recognise the independence of Armenia, including Karabagh;
- (ii) Russia will accept at least in principle the notion of the annexation of Turkish Armenian provinces to Armenia;
- (iii) Russia will not interfere in the internal policy of Armenia, either directly or indirectly;
- (iv) Soviet Russia will permit the return to Armenia of Armenians stranded in the North Caucasus and Russia;
- (v) Armenian workers would receive some compensation for their hardships during the 'imperialistic' war.

It was 20 May before the delegation reached Moscow. At their first meeting with Chicherin, the Soviet commissar for foreign affairs spoke of quite another matter: the vital need of the Bolsheviks to secure their alliance with the Nationalist Turks, who were resolutely opposed to Britain and France. At the moment (Chicherin continued) Turkey was prepared to attack the Allies, but was frightened that Armenia would strike her from the rear. Hence the Soviet government desired to reconcile Armenia to the Turks, and make her abandon the Allies. This would be the principle which would animate the proposed friendship treaty with Yerevan.¹³⁵

This was a modification so radical that the Shant delegation felt it could not accept it without demur. They suspected that the Soviet moves were part of a Turkish ploy to make Armenia rid herself of the Allies and lose what she stood to gain from the Allies' treaty with Turkey (the treaty of Sèvres). They also felt that the Soviet government was trying to force the Allies to recognise it by using the Turkish threat. According to Terterian's account, the reply that they gave to Chicherin – a prophecy almost too accurate to be true – went as follows: 'We know the Turks best. They will use your supplies to attack first the Armenians, then the Greeks. Then they will abandon Russia and come to an agreement with the Allies.' But Chicherin was not to be outdone. 'We are giving aid to the Turks because this will lead to the Sovietisation of Turkey,' he

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replied. 'And of Armenia?' asked the Armenians. 'No,' replied Chicherin, 'since we shall then be seen as an oppressor of small nationalities.' Then the Armenians raised another point. 'What of the National Pact' (by which Kemalist Turkey claimed not only Turkish Armenia but Kars and Ardahan as well); 'the Allies have promised us much of Turkish Armenia.' Chicherin: 'Look at the past record of the Allies. Besides, to claim Erzerum for Armenia is unsupportable.' 'There are many monuments of Armenian culture there.' 'These belong to the period of Tigranes the Great. Today there are no Armenians there.' 'That's the kind of

argument that bourgeois nationalists use: they accept accomplished facts, and thereby justify mass murder and deportation.' An uneasy truce was reached, with both sides accepting the axiom that the soil belongs to the worker. Chicherin also asked for a set of population statistics for the six provinces of Turkish Armenia: *he* would delimit the Turkish–Armenian frontier. Clearly the Soviet government believed that it could persuade the Turkish Nationalists to give up part of Turkish Armenia.¹³⁶

A Turkish Nationalist delegation, headed by Bekir Sami Bey, was in Moscow at the same time. Terterian and Zarafian were in favour of making contact with them, with the possible idea of drawing up a treaty directly between the two; but Shant demurred, on the grounds that Yerevan had not authorised them to do so, and that he felt unable to negotiate with mass-murderers and war criminals.¹³⁷ Whatever Shant's scruples, his decision lost an opportunity.

In mid-June the Shant delegation had another meeting with Chicherin. They declared their readiness to accept the Soviet proposal of mediation, a very significant reversal. In reply the commissar said that he would secure certain territories for Armenia, and also an outlet to the Black Sea. As regards the disputed territories, he declared that Zangezur and Nakhichevan would be assigned to Armenia, while Karabagh would continue to be disputed, until its final status was determined by a referendum. Soviet Russia would also make large gifts to Armenia to build her shattered economy.

Then, delay. Even though all seemed settled and final, there was no meeting to discuss final details leading to the signing. It became clear that this was due to the sabotaging activities of the Armenian Bolsheviks, frustrated and bitter after the failure of the May uprising in Alexandropol, and the subsequent crack-down on Bolsheviks in Armenia. (On 15 June the Armenian authorities executed 17 leaders of the revolt.¹³⁸) Those who could had fled to Baku, where they sent exaggerated and distorted accounts of what had happened to Moscow. Chicherin was trying to solve the Armeno–Turkish dispute along lines most favourable to the Soviet state, but *they* sought only the Sovietisation of Armenia, and were determined to make this Moscow's official policy.¹³⁹

At the end of June, the Shant delegation was presented with a new proposal on the disputed territories: Nakhichevan to Armenia, Karabagh to Azerbaijan, and the status of Zangezur to be decided by the Soviet emissary who was to be despatched to the spot, B. V. Legrand. (His name is sometimes spelt 'Legrans'.)

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Levon Shant himself was opposed to signing a treaty along those lines; he felt quite unable to sign away Karabagh. So the delegation cabled Yerevan for guidance. It was a month later before they received an answer – by which time Chicherin had declared that the negotiations in Moscow had ended, and would be continued at a later date in Yerevan between Legrand (acting with plenipotentiary powers) and the Armenian government.¹⁴⁰

Armeno/Bolshevik Clashes and the Agreement of 10 August

As the Bolsheviks delayed the negotiations, so their military squeeze on Armenia began. On 5 July a division of the Eleventh Red Army invaded Zangezur, via Karabagh, and reached Goris. The Armenians, commanded by General Dro, counter-attacked, and re-occupied all of Zangezur. The Bolsheviks received reinforcements, and seized Goris again; and also attacked from Kazakh on the north-east. By early August Armenia saw no end to the conflict, and sued for peace. On 10 August the two sides signed an agreement, intended to be a preliminary to a

final peace settlement.¹⁴¹ Armenia agreed to an occupation, stipulated as 'temporary' by the Bolsheviks, of all of Karabagh and Zangezur, and of Nakhichevan south of Shakhtakhti.¹⁴² Ironically, this was far more than Chicherin had demanded from the Shant delegation in Moscow, and to which the Armenian government had sent its firmly worded negative telegram. The month-long war had nevertheless also brought clear gains to the Armenian government, since it had been able to re-establish its authority over Zangibasar, Buyuk Vedi and Sharur as far as Shakhtakhti railway station (south and south-east of Yerevan), as well as Surmalu, regions to the west almost as far as Olti, and the Karakunli district north of Lake Sevan.¹⁴³

The British protested vigorously against the agreement. Commander Harry Luke, Chief Commissioner, expressed himself strongly against it, since early in July the Armenian government had received a consignment of British weapons. * He described the agreement as 'almost an act of revolt against Great Britain' – unusually exaggerated language for Luke, for in truth the Armenian government had hardly any other option at the time.

* 25,000 Ross rifles, 400 light machine guns, 40,000 uniforms, 500 telescopes (W. L. Woodward and R. Butler (eds.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 1st series (London, 1947–63), vol. XII, p. 629). They arrived at the Georgian port of Poti; the Georgians took 27½ per cent of the consignment as payment for permitting it to cross their territory. Prime Minister Ohandjanian said that he feared that the consignment had arrived six months too late. Moreover, according to another memorandum by Revd. H. W. Harcourt, the Canadian Ross rifle

is heavy, difficult to manipulate, and the mechanism is of a complicated type, easily thrown out of order – and no straps for carrying them were sent out with those that came to Armenia: it has also an almost useless bayonet which, on all the examples examined at Erevan, did not fit properly, but wobbled about. It is scarcely to be expected that a weapon that proved useless to trained British troops could be of much service to the ignorant peasants of Armenia, yet

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The Treaty of Sèvres

By coincidence, 10 August was also the day upon which the treaty of Sèvres was signed. This was the peace treaty with Turkey that the great powers had been labouring, but more often not labouring, to produce ever since the end of the war. This treaty has been widely condemned as imperialist, as the imposition of the dictates of the Western powers for their own political and economic ends, and there is certainly some truth in that. But it was not nearly so imperialist, so greedy for other people's territory, as the conditions which the Kemalists demanded and ultimately obtained. Let us remember again a central fact: the Ottoman empire was itself an *empire*, a system of government of one ethno-linguistic group over a number of others. The treaty of Sèvres provided for what we describe today as *decolonisation* – with the difference that many of the territories liberated from Turkish rule were taken under the wing, either overtly or covertly, of other powers. (Parallels for this can be found today, too.) Certainly there was nothing imperialist in the six articles of the treaty (88–93) that related directly to Armenia. In them, Turkey recognised Armenia as a free and independent state (88); the signatories agreed to let the president of the United States determine the boundary between the two (which would pass through the provinces of Erzerum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis), and to prescribe an outlet for Armenia to the sea (89). Turkey renounced any claim to the ceded land; and the powers who drew up the treaty also made it clear that Armenia would have to assume financial obligations in proportion to the former Turkish territory which was awarded to her. (Since, in the treaty, the Western powers

proposed to cripple the new Turkey financially, it is curious that for all their expressions of sympathy for 'starving Armenia', they proposed to transfer some of these financial burdens on to Armenia too.) Articles 91 to 93 referred to the establishment of a boundary commission, to the determination of the Caucasian frontiers (by the states themselves, or failing that, by the Western powers), and to the protection of non-Armenian citizens within Armenia.¹⁴⁵

The fault with the Armenian clauses of the treaty of Sèvres was not that they were imperialist, it was that they were more than a year out of date. They embody the wistful idealism of the old order – albeit underpinned by the Western money-grubbing that even the current of liberal idealism that had

they, called up in September, had in October to face the Turks with the weapons in their hands. In the rain and snow of the exposed positions in the region of Kars these rifles rapidly became jammed, and with an unworkable weapon in their hands the soldiers lost all confidence. It is not too much to say that the Ross rifle had much to do with the degeneration of the Armenian army in three weeks from what appeared to British and French military observers a stout and well-disciplined force to the disorganised rabble which gave up one position after another with very little fighting. It is noticeable that the demoralisation did not take place to any large degree in the artillery, where the men had good guns and knew how to handle them (FO 371/6265.46, p. 5).

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coursed through so wide a span of public and official opinion after the first world war had been unable to sweep away. A glance at the financial clauses of the treaty will show that the West had, in over 70 years of direct financial transactions with the Ottoman empire, lost none of its desire to squeeze the last piastre out of Turkey. According to the Sèvres treaty, the Turkish finance minister was to be wholly subject to a financial commission composed of representatives of Britain, France and Italy. No budget could be presented without the approval of this commission. This was capitalistic imperialism of the crudest and most blatant sort. Little wonder that the treaty was denounced in both Moscow and Ankara. The shame was that the eminently reasonable Armenian clauses should have appeared amidst all the farrago of greed that the treaty represented.

The treaty of Sèvres was never implemented. It would have required another war to impose it now, over a year after Mustafa Kemal had held his congress at Erzerum; and none of the Allies had any intention of committing any more men against Turkey, at least in Asia. (Indeed, just one month earlier, on 7 July, the last Allied troops had left Batum.) It remains a mystery how any of the signatories expected the treaty to take shape on the ground; it seems most likely that, in the face of all the evidence, they still clung to the myth that the Turks were incompetent idlers, incapable of organising themselves for a nationalist end. Even in mid-1920 many people who should have known better still dismissed Kemal and his followers as mere 'brigands'.