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Britain and the Armenian Question 1915–1923

Akaby Nassibian



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1915-1923

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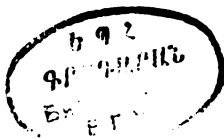
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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used throughout:

Arm. Nat. Deleg. Papers, microf.	Armenian National Delegation Papers, micro- film (at the Armenian General Benevolent Union Library, Saddle Brook, New Jersey)
BAC	British Armenia Committee
BDOW	<i>British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898–1914</i> (ed. G.P. Gooch and H. Temperley)
CAB	Cabinet
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
C. in C.	Commander-in-Chief
CO	Colonial Office
DBFP	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939</i> (The 1st Series has been used throughout)
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
EC	Eastern Committee (of the War Cabinet)
fn	footnote
FO	Foreign Office
IDCE	Inter-Departmental Conference on the Middle East
MP	Member of Parliament
min.	minute
n.	note
n.d.	no date
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office, London
Rep. of Arm. Archives	Archives of the Republic of Armenia (at the Archive Centre of Dashnaktsutun, Boston, Massachusetts)
S.S.	Secretary of State
WO	War Office

British official documents have been cited first by series, then by volume number, file number and document number. For example, FO 371/2488/51009/123491 refers to Foreign Office series 371 (political), volume 2488, file 51009, document 123491.

**TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER**

Preface

This book is a discussion of Britain's attitude both towards the Armenian people after Turkey's entry into the First World War on the opposite side to her, and towards the Republic of Armenia created consequent to the break-up of the Russian Empire. It necessarily examines the policy of the British government as shaped by the evolving strategic, political, imperial and economic considerations. It pays close attention not only to Cabinet minutes and Foreign Office despatches, but also to the views of the India Office, since Britain was the greatest Moslem power in the world; to the War Office which had assumed a heightened influence because of the War; and to Lloyd George who often conducted a personal diplomacy, superseding the Foreign Office. The book also examines, through documents hitherto unused, the activities of pro-Armenian groups, all following a strong British humanitarian tradition, and trying to influence the government during this period of transition from the old 'aristocratic' notion of foreign policy to the 'democratic'.

Such a discussion was best served by a thematic approach — without neglecting chronology — in order to give to the themes unity of thought and clarity. On the other hand, despite the care taken, some overlapping and repetition was unavoidable. The book has naturally drawn heavily on British manuscript sources. But use has also been made of important Armenian archival material in Boston and New Jersey, USA. The internal history of both Britain and Armenia lies beyond the scope of this study and no attempt has been made to deal with it except where essential to an understanding of the central theme.

The pro-Armenian groups often referred, during 1915–23, to past British responsibility as regards Armenia. It was necessary, therefore, to have an introductory chapter tracing Britain's involvement in the Armenian Question since 1878. The British interest, before the First World War, was to prevent Russian influence in the Armenian territories. Reforms to benefit the Armenian people, therefore, were considered much less important than the strategically valuable Armenian territories. Chapter 2 outlines the work and the unflinching devotion of the pro-Armenian pressure groups and relief organisations up to 1918. Chapter 3 documents for the first time the use the British Foreign Office made, for the war effort, of the Armenian holocausts of 1915, and examines the background of the British 'pledges' to the liberation of Armenia. Chapter 4 outlines Britain's post-war dilemmas: her inability to reconcile her sympathetic statements about Armenia with her

reluctance to assume responsibility for a territory in which she had now lost her interest — once she had secured predominance in the Persian Gulf. It also considers her contradictory policy in the Caucasus and the disproportion between her objectives and her financial resources. Chapter 5 discusses Britain's illusions — both as regards Anatolia and the Caucasus — , the result of her unprecedented prestige acquired under world conditions at a time when her armies and power were shrinking under domestic pressures: illusions which proved to be disastrous for Armenia. Chapter 6 describes the post-war efforts of the pro-Armenian humanitarian groups to force the British government into giving effective help to Armenia and their bitter disappointment in its response. Their pressure could only induce the British government to *show* what it was doing; thus, they indirectly contributed to the illusory hopes of the Armenian people who preferred to depend on far-away Europe instead of following a determined policy of accommodation in the Caucasus. The book concludes that Britain's sympathy with the Armenian people and her strategic interests were never moulded into a single policy forming a rounded whole.

This book would have been impossible without the help of many people. But as the greater part of it is based on my doctoral thesis for the University of Oxford, I am grateful above all to my supervisor, Dr Agatha Ramm, D. Litt., whose guidance and advice at all stages have been invaluable. She has given of her deep knowledge of, and experience in, diplomatic history, and of her time for the discussion of my drafts, both as regards substance and style, most generously. I am also indebted to Professor M.S. Anderson for his constructive suggestions and to Dr Albert Hourani who has always kindly shared with me his profound understanding of the history and people of the Near East. Dr A. Beylerian, in Paris, has been unfailing in replying to my queries about the Armenian history of this period, and I wish to express my sincere thanks to him. I am also greatly indebted to the Principal and Fellows of Lady Margaret Hall, my college in Oxford, for the great kindness and encouragement I enjoyed there at all times as a research student.

I am most grateful for the help given to me by the staff of: the Archive Centre of Dashnaktsutun, Boston, Massachusetts; the Armenian General Benevolent Union Library, Saddle Brook, New Jersey; the Bodleian Library, Oxford, where the greater part of my work was done; the Bristol University Library; the British Library, London; the Churchill College Library, Cambridge; the History Faculty Library, University of Oxford; the House of Lords Record Office; the Imperial War Museum; the India Office Library; the Labour Party Archives, London; Lambeth Palace Library; the Public Record Office; the Religious Society of Friends, London; Rhodes House Library, Oxford; St Antony's College Middle East Centre, Oxford; St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden; and Trinity College Library, Cambridge.

The Hon. Mrs Hogg of Brenchley, Kent; Mrs Elizabeth Brooks of

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I realise that it is impossible to name here all those friends whose interest in my work and unfailing kindness have been a great source of encouragement for me. I thank them all most warmly.

A.N.