

Boghos Nubar's Papers
and the
Armenian Question
1915-1918

Documents

Edited and translated by
Varohe Ghazarian

Waldham
Indagant Publishing



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This publication was made possible by a generous grant from
The Dolores Zohrab Liebmann Fund

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 96-078307

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Boghos Nubar's Papers and the Armenian Question: 1915–1918

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Mayreni Publishing, P.O. Box 1022, Waltham, MA 02154, U.S.A.

ISBN: 0-9653718-3-2

MAYRENI PUBLISHING 1996

To the survivors of the Armenian genocide and their descendants.

A special word of appreciation to:

- My wife, Barbara Mooradian Ghazarian, whose assistance in the realization of this project was instrumental;

- Messrs. Arsen Nubar Mamourian and Hagop Hacikian of Montreal, Canada, for the initial translation of some of the documents;

- Mr. Krikor Keusseyan of Watertown, Massachusetts, for his assistance in translating French source material.

- Mr. Nazareth Tobalian of Paris, France, for his assistance in checking some proper names.

- Mr. Raymond Kévorkian of Bibliothèque Nubar, Paris, France.

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Glossary

Allies - See Triple Entente.

Armenia Major - A term synonymous with Greater Armenia, indicates all the territories inhabited by Armenians since the dawn of history, excluding Armenia Minor and Cilicia. At the beginning of the twentieth century Greater Armenia included the six Armenian provinces under Ottoman rule, and Armenia, Karabakh and Nakhitchevan under Russian rule.

Armenia Minor - The trans-Euphrates section of Armenia, west to Greater Armenia. The boundaries of Armenia Minor underwent many changes throughout history. In its largest form it lay between the southeastern shores of the Black Sea (including Trebizond) and the Taurus Mountains in Cilicia. At the turn of twentieth century, Armenia Minor was mainly included in the vilayet of Sivas, with parts of it in the vilayets of Erzerum, Trebizond, Kharput (Mamuret el-Aziz), Aleppo, and Adana. Armenia Minor was also called Lesser Armenia.

Catholicos - The supreme religious leader of the Armenian people.

Duma - The Russian Parliament.

Greater Armenia - See Armenia Major.

Lesser Armenia - See Armenia Minor. In this book the term Lesser Armenia is given to Cilicia, most probably based on the fact that the boundaries of Lesser Armenia once reached the Cilician Taurus mountain ranges.

Quai d'Orsay - The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Six Provinces - See Vilayet.

Sublime Porte - The Ottoman/Turkish government.

Tetrad Entente - The Triple Entente was also called Tetrad Entente after Italy joined Great Britain, France, and Russia against the Triple Alliance in 1915.

Triple Alliance - A name originally given to a treaty signed in 1882 between Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Italy. However, when World War I broke up in 1914, Italy first remained neutral. Instead, Turkey joined Austria-Hungary and Germany. In this book Triple Alliance is the unity of Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Turkey.

Triple Entente - Great Britain, France, and Russia.

Upper Armenia - The first province of Greater Armenia, known also as Province of Karin after its main city's name. From this highland begins the Euphrates River and other rivers. It was composed of nine districts in the seventh century and corresponded to the vilayet of Erzerum at the turn of the twentieth century.

Vilayet - Administrative unit in Turkey established in 1866, based on the Constitution of 1864. In late nineteenth century, the Armenian territories under Ottoman rule were included in the vilayets of Van, Erzerum, Bitlis, Kharput, and Trebizond. Cilicia was included in the vilayet of Adana. During World War I, there were six Armenian vilayets (provinces) which are mentioned in this book—Van, Bitlis, Erzerum, Kharput (Mamuret el-Aziz), Diyarbakir, and Sivas.

Preface

At the moment when the Great War began Armenia, divided between Russia and Turkey, repressed by force or actual massacre, had no defense ... A grim alternative was presented to the Armenian leaders ... They took the remarkable decision that if war should come, their people in Turkey and in Russia should do their duty to their respective Governments. They thought it better to face fratricidal strife in the quarrels of others than to stake their existence upon the victory of either side...

When Turkey attacked Russian Armenia, the Czar's Government, fearing that a successful defense of Caucasia by Armenians would dangerously inflame the Nationalist aspirations of the race, conveyed a hundred and fifty thousand Armenian conscripts to the Polish and Galician fronts and brought other Russian troops to defend Armenian hearths and homes in Caucasia. Few of these hundred and fifty thousand Armenian soldiers survived the European battles or were able to return to Caucasia before the end of the War. This was hard measure. But worse remained. The Turkish war plan failed. Their offensive against Caucasia in December, 1914 and January, 1915 was defeated. They recoiled in deep resentment. They accused the Armenians of the Turkish eastern districts of having acted as spies and agents on behalf of Russia, and of having assailed the Turkish lines of communication. These charges were probably true; but true or false, they provoked a vengeance which was also in accord with deliberate policy. In 1915 the Turkish Government began, and ruthlessly carried out, the infamous general massacre and deportation of Armenians in Asia Minor. Three or four hundred thousand men, women, and children escaped into Russian territory and others into Persia or Mesopotamia; but the clearance of the race from Asia Minor was about as complete as such an act, on a scale so great, could well be. It is supposed that about one and a quarter millions of Armenians were involved, of whom more than half perished. There is no reasonable doubt that this crime was planned and executed for political reasons. The opportunity presented itself for clearing Turkish soil of a Christian race opposed to all Turkish ambitions, cherishing National ambitions that could only be satisfied at the expense of Turkey and planted geographically between Turkish and Caucasian Moslems. It may well be that the British attack on the Gallipoli Peninsula stimulated the merciless fury of the Turkish Government. Even, thought the Pan-Turks, if Constantinople were to fall and Turkey lost the war, the clearance would have been effected and a permanent advantage for the future of the Turkish race would be gained...

The arrival of the Grand Duke Nicholas in the Caucasus at the beginning of 1916, his masterly capture of Erzeroum in February, 1916, and his conquests of Turkish territory in North-Eastern Asia Minor revived Armenian hopes. The entry of the United States raised them higher. But the Russian Revolution quenched this flicker.

Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis—1918–1928: The Aftermath* (New York, 1929) 428–433.

Armenian Delegation for Europe and appointed Boghos Pasha president, this name suddenly gained an unprecedented popularity ... It became a pharos of hope to which all eyes turned.”²

Furthermore, Odian recalls Poincaré, the French president, referring to Boghos Nubar as “one of those few people who combines a highest moral with a great intellect.”³

Charged to represent a nation with no independent country as the head of the Armenian National Delegation and the official representative of the Catholicos of All Armenians, Boghos Nubar was politically the most centripetal Armenian figure during the years 1913 through 1918.

Boghos Nubar (1851–1930) was born in Constantinople to a family known for its dedication to the well-being of the Armenian people.

His great-great-grandfather, Nubar, ruled the Chaventour district in Karabakh. It is told that Nubar was a great warrior who successfully protected his district against enemies until the assassination of Mekhitar Sparapet, the head of the Armenian army, in 1730. After Mekhitar’s death, Nubar was forced to abandon his homeland and settle in Smyrna, in the Ottoman Empire.⁴

Boghos Nubar’s father, Nubar Pasha (1825–1899), was an astute politician who was thrice appointed prime minister of Egypt and was instrumental in introducing judiciary reforms in Egypt. He was also credited for playing an important role in the opening of the Suez Canal.⁵

Boghos Nubar was a graduate of Ecole Centrale of Paris as a technician-geometrician. In 1900, he was awarded a French gold medal and honorary degree for the invention of an automated plough. In 1906, he was again awarded a gold medal and another French honorary degree at Milan’s agricultural exposition.

In 1905, as the delegate of the Egyptian government to the first general convention of Rome’s International Agricultural Institute, Boghos Nubar was instrumental in founding the International Institute of Agriculture which then helped improve agricultural techniques in many parts of the world.

Boghos Nubar also helped reorganize the railway system in Egypt, and founded the town of Heliopolis adjacent to Cairo.

Over the years, Boghos Nubar was awarded the Belgian Ordre de Léopold and the Egyptian “Mejidieh,” “Osmanieh,” and “Nile” honorary degrees and medals for distinguished services.⁶

² Yervant Odian, *Boghos Pasha Nubar* (Istanbul, 1913), 3–4.

³ *Ibid.*, 92–93.

⁴ V. and B. Zartarian Bros., *Hishadagaran* (Monument), vol. II (Istanbul, 1911), 277.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 284–287.

⁶ *Nubar and Nubarashen*, a publication of the General Directorship of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (Paris, 1929), 5–7.

Boghos Nubar's services to the Armenian people began in the late nineteenth century after his election as chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Armenian Diocese in Alexandria, Egypt. As chairman he provided shelter and jobs to Armenian refugees fleeing the Ottoman massacres of 1895–1896. These massacres, perpetrated by Sultan Abdul Hamid, took 300,000 lives and forced tens of thousands additional Armenians to flee the Ottoman Empire and find refuge in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

Boghos Nubar's most significant Armenian achievement is generally considered to be the founding of the Armenian General Benevolent Union in Cairo, Egypt, in 1906. This membership organization, which soon boasted chapters throughout the world, became the largest Armenian philanthropic association in history. Though presented as nonpolitical by the founders,⁷ the union was political in nature.⁸ It was formed to "help the Armenians of the East advance intellectually and morally; improve their financial conditions; and encourage any publication which serves the stated purpose."⁹

Boghos Nubar remained life-president of the union until his retirement in 1928. He donated his time and money to the strengthening of the union.

The union, in turn, brought widespread recognition for Boghos Nubar among Armenian communities throughout the world. He emerged as the kind of nonpartisan leader capable of channeling the unified participation of most Armenian political and nonpolitical organizations toward the realization of national goals. His personal wealth and his father's reputation as the brightest Armenian politician of modern times also were contributing factors in his emergence as a unique leader.¹⁰

Therefore, his appointment, in December 1912, to head the Armenian National Delegation by the spiritual leader of the Armenian people, the Catholicos of All Armenians, Kevork V, was accepted by all parties with almost no objection.

⁷ *Vosgemadian Haygagan Parekordzagan Enthanour Mioutian* (Golden-Album of the Armenian General Benevolent Union), Silver Jubilee: 1906–1931, vol. I (Paris, 1935), 25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 452–453. Vahan Malezian, the general director of the union, stated that precautionary measures were taken to not indicate that the purpose of the union was to assist all those who suffer for being Armenian, and to try to free Armenians everywhere.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰ During the negotiations at Berlin in 1878, Nubar Pasha Nubarian presented a plan for Armenian reforms, suggesting that Armenians ask for civil liberties under an Armenian general governor to be appointed for a term of six to seven years, with a structure similar to the one implemented in Lebanon. The Armenian representatives to Berlin rejected Nubar's plan as "very modest." Kapriel Lazian, *Hayasdan yev Hay Tade Hayevroun Haraperoutiounnerou Louysin Dag* (Armenia and the Armenian Case in Light of Armeno-Russian Relations) (Cairo, 1957), 42–48.

On the Armenian Question

A lesson of iron spoon

The origin of the Armenian Question dates back to the fourteenth century when the last Armenian kingdom in Cilicia (Southern Anatolia) collapsed in 1375. It was then that the aspiration of reestablishing Armenian sovereignty was planted. However, the question officially gained recognition in the nineteenth century as part of the Eastern Question.

The term Eastern Question was first used in 1822, during the congress of the Holy Alliance in Verona, where the powers discussed the tense situation in the Balkans, upon eruption of the Greek liberation movement. At this point, the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor became a major issue in world politics for the first time.¹¹

The Armenian Question, as such, surfaced at the end of the Russo-Turkish war of 1878, during negotiations which resulted in the Treaty of San Stefano (March 3, 1878) and its Article XVI. The article stated: "Since the evacuation of Russian troops from the territories which they occupy in Armenia and which ought to be returned to Turkey could give rise to conflicts and complications prejudicial to the maintenance of good relations between the two countries, the Sublime Porte, with no further delay, promises to bring about the improvements and reforms called for by local needs in provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their safety against the Kurds and the Circassians."¹²

Article XVI, however, was soon changed into Article LXI during the Congress of Berlin on July 8, 1878. This version bound the Porte to introduce "without further loss of time such ameliorations and reforms as are called for by the local conditions of the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to take measures to protect them against the Circassians and Kurds."¹³

¹¹ "Eastern Question...means the problem or group of problems that result from the occupation of Constantinople and the Balkan Peninsula by the Turks ...The solution of the problem...depended upon the answer to two questions: Was Turkey to be executed entirely from Europe, and if so, how was her territory to be distributed? Was Russia, or Austria, or any other Power to win practical mastery of the Danube and Dardanelles by establishing a semi-protectorate over the Balkan nations or Turkey?" Charles Seymour, *The Diplomatic Background of the War 1870-1914* (New Haven, 1916), 195.

¹² Yves Ternon, *The Armenians—History of a Genocide* (New York, 1981), 51. This document is significant in many ways. Turkey accepted that the occupied territories called the Armenian provinces were Armenia; that there was a need for reforms; and that there was an issue of physical safety for the Armenians.

¹³ Sir A. W. Ward and G. P. Gooch, *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy 1783-1919*, (New York, 1923) 141.

The Treaty of Berlin sparked a turn in Armenian political thought. Disappointed Armenians embraced the idea of armed struggle—a by-product necessitated by the oppressive Ottoman regime. In a February 20, 1894, telegram Paul Cambon, the French ambassador to Constantinople, attributed the birth of the Armenian revolutionary phenomenon to the intrigues of the Ottomans.¹⁴ Many scholars adopted Cambon's theory,¹⁵ while others, such as Roy Douglas, related the rise of Armenian revolutionary tendencies to the failure of the European powers to take effective actions.¹⁶

This approach, however, wrongly deprives Armenians of their role as active participants in determining their destiny. No doubt, the Armenians were subject to manipulations by the Ottoman authorities and the European powers. But also, no doubt, they were keenly aware of the logic of history in the nineteenth century—armed resistance is the means of realizing national aspirations, whether modest or ambitious, whether security of life or independence.

Liberation movements in Turkish Europe,¹⁷ and the events in Zeitun,¹⁸ all preceding the Treaty of Berlin or coinciding with it, taught Armenian leaders that none of their national aspirations could be realized without the use of power. This belief was well illustrated by Archbishop Khrimian in a sermon delivered at Constantinople in 1878. Khrimian compared the Treaty of Berlin to a dish of liberty from which the Bulgarians, Serbs, and Montenegrins took their shares thanks to their iron spoons, while the Armenians ate nothing because their spoon was made of paper.¹⁹

The organization of Armenian armed societies and revolutionary parties took place at a time when the major European powers and the Ottoman

¹⁴ Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide* (Providence, 1995) 34–36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34–36. See also Yves Ternon, *The Armenians—History of a Genocide* (New York, 1981), 73.

¹⁶ Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide* (Providence, 1995), 36.

¹⁷ Serbia gained autonomy from the Ottoman Empire in 1815, after a revolt in 1804; Greece gained independence after the eight years' war in 1829; Bulgaria's independence in 1878 was a result of a rebellion which began in 1876.

¹⁸ Zeitun, known as the Armenian Montenegro, was granted semiautonomy in 1622. The Sublime Porte later made constant attempts to subjugate the town. In the nineteenth century, Zeitun revolted twice against Ottoman oppressive policies. The first was the revolt of 1862, which ended with a French intervention and the appointment of a Turkish governor, and the second began in 1877 and resulted in the reinstatement of the semiautonomous status of the town in 1879.

¹⁹ Louisa Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement—The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), 28–29.

Empire were in constant conflict, and the European powers increased the intensity of their interventions on behalf of the Ottoman Empire's Christian population.

One such intervention was in May 1895, when the British, French, and Russians called for reforms in the Armenian provinces. The call was answered by widespread massacres organized by Abdul Hamid II. The sultan played on the conflicting interests of the powers to claim the lives of at least 300,000 Armenians.

This protogenocide offered the first evidence of a Turkish policy of ridding the empire of the Armenians and the Armenian Question.²⁰

Did Armenian revolutionaries provoke these massacres, and, later, the genocide? Ronald Suny brilliantly presents the hierarchy of preceding developments: how the failure of reform in the Ottoman Empire on legal grounds precipitated the search for alternatives (organized resistance); how resistance provoked responses which, in turn, provoked more resistance and foreign interventions; how the Ottoman government planned to eliminate the Armenian threat.²¹

In 1908 the Young Turk movement and the declaration of a new constitution brought the Armenians some hope that they would finally enjoy the freedom, justice, and equality they sought as Ottoman subjects. But the Young Turks soon demonstrated their intentions to follow the policy of their predecessors, when in the spring of 1909 approximately 30,000 Armenians were massacred in the Cilician city of Adana and surrounding villages.²²

The Balkan War of 1912–1913 ended with a partial dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey lost, almost entirely, its holdings in Europe. Thus, the Armenian Question was brought to a new juncture.

On the War and its Aims in Asia Minor

"Certain of the European states have desired that Ottoman power should be weakened if not destroyed, while others have desired that it should be reaffirmed. But to none of them has the fate of the Turkish Empire been a question of indifference."
C. Seymour, *The Diplomatic Background of the War 1870–1914* (New Haven, 1916) 197.

World War I began on July 28, 1914, exactly a month after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo, Serbia. Pan-Germanism clashed with Pan-Slavism. The culmination of all colonialist

²⁰ In the sixteenth century, Sultan Selim I intended to massacre the whole of the Christian population of his dominion. Selim's designs became possible in the twentieth century when German advisors began to counsel the Turkish government. J. Selden Willmore, *The Great Crime and its Moral* (New York, 1917), 213–214.

²¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *Armenia in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 1983), 16–17.

²² J. Selden Willmore, *The Great Crime and its Moral* (New York, 1917), 213–214.

plans divided Europe into two major groups—the Triple Entente, and the Triple Alliance.

On July 28, 1914, the Austro-Hungarians declared war on Serbia. Soon after, on August 1, Germany declared war on Russia; two days later France and Germany were caught in war; on August 4, Great Britain declared war on Germany; a day later Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia; a week later Britain and France jointly declared war on Austria-Hungary; and finally Turkey came to the picture, entering the war on November 1, 1914.

The stage was set. One of the most crucial dramas of the Armenian Question began to play.

* * *

Turkey's ambition included restoration of the Ottoman Empire and its development into a Pan-Turkic state, or, at least, the maintenance of its territorial integrity in Asia Minor. To do so, Turkey aligned with Germany, wrongly believing that Germany had no territorial ambitions, except a desire to strengthen the Ottoman Empire. By this time Britain had already established itself in Egypt; Italy had seized Tripoli in Africa; France was known for its desire for Syria; and Russia had demonstrated determination to possess Armenia and the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. It was not known, perhaps, to the Young Turks that the Germans "were striving for a gradual occupation of the entire territory in the form of a protectorate," as was concluded by the Austro-Hungarian military attaché at Constantinople.²³

Djemal, the Turkish war minister, was convinced—a belief probably shared by other Young Turks—that the Entente powers had promised to deliver Constantinople to Russia.²⁴ This led to the secret Turko-German treaty of August 2, 1914, by which Turkey agreed to intervene in any struggle in which Germany and its Austro-Hungarian ally might be engaged.

In order to maintain its territorial integrity, Turkey also had to rid itself of any and all internal threats. "The war gave the Turks the opportunity they had so long desired...the opportunity namely of settling the racial problems in their empire. In 1915, they struck out on a policy of 'Turkification' or of destruction outright of the alien elements in their midst. The Armenian deportations represented an extreme case of their activities."²⁵

The threat to hold Turkish leaders responsible for the Armenian massacres by the Allies, in 1915, apparently became an additional reason for the Turkish leaders to look upon Germany "as their only shelter from punishment by outraged Christianity."²⁶

²³ Bernadette E. Schmitt, *The Coming of the War 1914*, vol. I (New York, 1930), 92.

²⁴ Djemal Pasha, *Memoirs of a Turkish Statesman* (London, 1922), 67.

²⁵ Frank P. Chambers, *The War Behind the War 1914–1918* (New York, 1939), 87.

²⁶ Charles F. Horne (ed.), *Source Records of the Great War*, vol. III (National Alumni, 1923), xxxi.

Since the days of Peter the Great and Catherine II, Russia's aim had been to rule the northeastern Mediterranean, turning the Black Sea into a Russian lake, and securing the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus under its control.²⁷

Upon Russia's defeat in Manchuria at the hands of Japan, winning control over the Straits became Russia's first concern. The rise of Germany had sealed off the Baltic Sea. Access to the Pacific Ocean was cut off by Japan, and reaching the Persian Gulf was sacrificed to Great Britain in 1907.²⁸

On August 16, 1914, the British, French, and Russian governments, unaware of the Turko-German pact, offered a guarantee of independence and territorial integrity to Turkey on the condition that it continue its neutrality—a game Turkey played successfully until its army was fully mobilized. It was only after Turkey's entry into the war that Russia was freed to revert to its historical ambition.²⁹

The Dardanelles was a pivotal area also desired by Austria-Hungary because of its importance to Austrian trade. Gaining control over the Danube River was meaningless without control of the Straits. Especially after Austria's defeat in Prussia in 1866, and its lost hopes for control over Central Europe, Austria's ambitions turned toward southeastern Europe where it confronted the Slavic resistance and Russia, the Slavic protector.

Germany was new to the game. It wasn't long ago that for Bismarck the whole Eastern Question was not worth the bones of a single "Pomeranian grenadier." But things changed. In its search for new markets, Germany turned its eyes to Mesopotamia, believing it could penetrate without much trouble.

The Turkish concession granted to Germany in 1899 to extend a railway from Konia to the Persian Gulf was the first step in the German plan. The emerging Baghdad railway project also meant emerging German domination in Mesopotamia, certainly seen as a threat by both Russia and Britain.

Rohrbach, the German ideologue—generally considered the mastermind behind the idea that led to the deportation of the Armenians to Mesopotamia as a reinforcement to the Baghdad railway project—had a theory that "England can be attacked and mortally wounded by land from Europe only in one place—Egypt."³⁰

²⁷ "For Russia the whole Eastern Question is summed up in these words: Under whose authority are the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles? Who is their possessor?" S. Goriainow, *Le Bosphore et les Dardanelles* (Paris, 1910), 1.

²⁸ Charles Seymour, *The Diplomatic Background of the War 1870–1914* (New Haven, 1916), 198–199.

²⁹ Edward Grey, *Twenty-Five Years*, vol. II (London, 1925), 173–174.

³⁰ Charles Seymour, *The Diplomatic Background of the War 1870–1914* (New Haven, 1916), 206.

After all, as described by Bismarck, Egypt was the “neck of the British Empire.” The loss of Egypt would mean cutting Britain from India, as well as from central and east Africa.

Rohrbach also suggested strengthening Turkey as a way to defeat the British and to gain control over the Moslems in Asia.

William II's address to the sultan, asking him to tell the 300 million Moslems of the world that the kaiser is “their friend,”³¹ clearly indicated the link between Rohrbach's theories and German diplomacy.

In 1913, when the German government sent General Liman von Sanders to Constantinople to train the Ottoman troops, the friction between Russia and Germany escalated into a direct confrontation. In a communique sent by Paul Cambon, the French ambassador to Constantinople, to the French government, it was stated that with Liman von Sander's contract *the key to the straits* was put into German hands.³²

This was the state of affairs on the eve of World War I.

The Allies did not have a collectively formulated war aim. The war aims that developed sprang “from a tangle of contradictory motives. Each wanted to improve its position—almost as much against its present partners as against Germany.”³³

The first mutual agreement was reached between Russia and Great Britain against Germany to counter the threat to Mesopotamia and the straits. The Russians made it clear that they wanted the Straits. King George V, on November 13, 1914, told the Russian ambassador that the Straits must be Russian. Five days later, the British announced their intent to annex Egypt.

This was the prelude of negotiations for partitions in war zones and beyond after the war was over.

The negotiations led, on January 3, 1916, to the Sykes-Picot Agreement between France and Great Britain. However, the agreement was modified on April 26, 1916, to gain Russia's approval. Another modification happened later, in April 1917, to include Italy in the agreement by allotting certain Ottoman territories to Italy.

By April 1916, the Sykes-Picot Agreement allotted Syria, Cilicia, and three Armenian provinces to France; Mesopotamia and Palestine to Britain, with the exception of Jerusalem; and Russia received Constantinople with the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, the province of Trebizond, and the remaining three Armenian provinces in Eastern Anatolia.

The Russian Revolution upset this whole scheme.

³¹ Herbert Henry Asquith, *The Genesis of the War* (New York, 1923), 82.

³² Sidney Bradshaw Fay, *The Origins of the World War* (New York, 1930), 515.

³³ *Ibid.*, 537.

On the Armenian National Delegation

A tool for Russia!

The sociopolitical condition of the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan War alarmed Armenians living in the Caucasus. In October 1912, Russian Armenians convened and appealed to the czar for an intervention. Later, on November 25, 1912, the Armenians of the Caucasus created a National Bureau in Tiflis, the Georgian capital.

Meanwhile, on November 10, 1912, the Catholicos of All Armenians invited Boghos Nubar to head the Armenian National Delegation³⁴ to advocate the Armenian problem before European powers who were discussing the Balkan War in London.³⁵

The Armenians worked on three levels: Boghos Nubar in Paris and London; Dr. Hagop Zavriev in Petrograd; and the Security Council of the Armenian Parliament in Constantinople.³⁶

The Security Council, in a report dated December 4, 1913, stated that even though the National Delegation was appointed by the Catholicos in response to the appeal of the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, and by the consent of the Russian government, the Security Council was the directing force, and Boghos Nubar closely collaborated with it.³⁷

Despite this statement, the tone for the activities of the National Delegation, and of the concerned Armenian bodies in general, was set by the Russian government.³⁸

³⁴ The National Delegation was comprised of Archbishop Kevork Utugian of Paris, primate of the Armenians in Europe; Yakoub Artin Pasha of Egypt, a founder of the Armenian General Benevolent Union and the president of the Egyptian Academy; Minas Cheraz of Paris, secretary of the Armenian Delegation to the Berlin Congress in 1878; and Haroutioun Mosditchian of London.

³⁵ Kapriel Lazian, *Hayasdan yev Hay Tade* (Armenia and the Armenian Case): documents (Cairo, 1946), 144–145.

³⁶ Ibid., 145.

³⁷ Ibid., 146–165.

³⁸ Evidence for Russia's predominant role is abundant. According to the above-mentioned report, the Armenian Patriarchate was supposed to formulate the final proposal "after obtaining the views of the Russian government about it." Kapriel Lazian, *Hayasdan yev Hay Tade* (Armenia and the Armenian Case): documents (Cairo, 1946), 151. After the proposal was ready, the Russian government told the Patriarchate that it preferred that the proposal be rephrased and submitted to the powers by Andre Mandelstam, the first dragoman of the Russian Embassy in Constantinople. Ibid., 152. Boghos Nubar stayed in Paris instead of going to London because of the Russian government's opposition. Vorontsov-Dashkov, in his letter of December 22, 1912, immediately after Nubar's appointment, told the Catholicos that the imperial government "finds that it would be more beneficial for the Armenians to

The Armenian National Delegation's aim was to secure reforms in the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, based on the Treaty of Berlin and the reforms project of 1895, under collective supervision of the powers.³⁹ Asking for autonomy or independence was not part of the proposals of the delegation.

After negotiations between the Armenians and major European powers on one hand, and between major European powers and Turkey on the other, Turkey agreed to the reforms project and signed the agreement on February 8, 1914.

Thus, the Armenian National Delegation's mission was successfully completed. Even though the outcome did not meet the expectations of most Armenians, it was considered a major success, and Boghos Nubar was credited accordingly.

The outbreak of the Great War necessitated the activation of the Armenian National Delegation with a chain of events identical to the initial phase—the National Bureau of Tiflis, disturbed by news reaching it from the Armenian provinces, appealed to the Catholicos to intervene; the Catholicos, in turn, appealed on August 4, 1914, to the czar through the viceroy of the Caucasus; Vorontsov-Dashkov replied on September 2, 1914, announcing that Russia would see that the reforms in the Armenian provinces be carried out, provided that all Armenians, whether in the Caucasus or across the borders, follow his instructions.⁴⁰

According to the Catholicos' letter of August 4, the Armenians wanted: (1) to create an integral region from the Armenian provinces of Anatolia; (2) to appoint, in that region, a Christian governor suggested by Russia; (3) to apply self-governance in the region with equal representation of Christians and Moslems; (4) to trust the supervision of reforms exclusively to Russia.⁴¹

refrain from presenting the Armenian problem to the consortium of the powers in London, because [the Russians] suspect that the powers would reach an unanimous decision in that respect." Kapriel Lazian, *Hayasdan yev Hay Tade Hayevrou Haraperoutiounnerou Louysin Dag* (Armenia and the Armenian Case in Light of Armeno-Russian Relations) (Cairo, 1957), 156–157. In Paris, Boghos Nubar went to the Russian ambassador and asked him whether it was time to appeal to the powers or not. Jon Giragosian (ed.), *Hayasdane Mitchazkayin yev Sovedagan Ardakin Kaghakaganoutian Pasdatgheteroun 1828–1923* (Armenia in the Documents of International and Soviet Foreign Policy 1828–1923) (Yerevan, 1972), 168–169.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kapriel Lazian, *Hayasdan yev Hay Tade Hayevrou Haraperoutiounnerou Louysin Dag* (Armenia and the Armenian Case in Light of Armeno-Russian Relations) (Cairo, 1957), 174.

⁴¹ Nersesian and Sahagian (eds.), *Hayeri Tseghasbanoutiounne Osmanian Gays-routiounoun* (The Genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire) (Yerevan, 1991), 331–332.

Immediately after Turkey's entering the war, the Catholicos reformulated the Armenian demands in a letter dated November 8, 1914, in which he requested that an autonomous Armenia be formed comprised of the six Armenian vilayets and Cilicia.⁴²

An ambiguous response was delivered this time by the czar himself to the Catholicos in Tiflis: "A bright future awaits the Armenians," and "The Armenian Question will be solved according to the expectations of the Armenians."⁴³

Discussions followed between Armenian representatives and the Russian foreign ministry in Petrograd. The result was a document prepared by the Armenians which outlined their demands and was considered as a plan of action, with no Russian commitment with regard to its realization (see document 8). Consequently, the revival of the Armenian National Delegation was decided.

On April 28, 1915, a telegram by the Catholicos to Boghos Nubar signaled the beginning of the second phase of the mission of the Armenian National Delegation.

During phase two, the delegation went through four stages:

(1) A period of active negotiations during a time when the Allies were optimistic about the outcome of the war⁴⁴ and were preoccupied with their military operations;

(2) A period of stalemate, when it was clear that the war would last longer than anticipated, and during which discussions of the minor problems of minor nations were placed on the back burner. This period ended with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which included the Armenians;

(3) A period of heavy involvement in organizational matters related to Armenian volunteers and refugees. During this period, the Allies were in dire need of the manpower of minor nations, such as the Armenians. Characteristic of this period was sporadic negotiations and the reformulation of the Armenian demands in accordance with international developments, especially once the United States entered the war (April 6, 1917), and again when the Russian Revolution led to the final break-up of the delegation from Russia;

(4) A final period of extensive negotiations, together with the Delegation

⁴² Kapriel Lazian, *Hayasdan yev Hay Tade* (Armenia and the Armenian Case): documents (Cairo, 1946), 196–197.

⁴³ Jon Giragosian, *Aratchin Hamashkharhayin Baderazme yev Arevmdahayoutioun* (The First World War and the Western Armenians) (Yerevan, 1967), 229. Gilbert comments: "With these words, the fate of hundreds and thousands of Armenians was endangered, as Turkey saw in its own large Armenian minority a source of fifth column activity, treachery and disloyalty." Martin Gilbert, *The First World War—a Complete History* (New York, 1994), 108.

⁴⁴ Carlton J. H. Hayes, *A Brief History of the Great War* (New York, 1920), 80

of the Republic of Armenia, to ensure that Armenian aspirations would be satisfied by the Paris Peace Conference and subsequent treaties. This period was embarked upon in 1918, and continued until 1924, when the delegation was dissolved.

This book brings to life the first two periods and the sporadic negotiations which took place during the third period.

On Conflicting Interests

A matter of numbers...

What were the real intentions of the Allies vis-à-vis Western or Turkish Armenia and its population, and was it possible to match Armenian interests and demands with those of the Allies collectively or any one of them separately?

Great Britain had no interest in controlling the Armenian provinces. British foreign policy and aspiration focused on northern Africa and Mesopotamia. Britain's concern in the Armenian territories extended only in relation to its interests in Mesopotamia. The Armenian territories were primarily French and Russian concerns.

Given the British focus, its reluctance to give a positive answer to the Armenian appeals for an expedition in Cilicia is understandable,⁴⁵ and its hesitation to sign the collective warning issued on May 25, 1915, against the Sublime Porte, which held Turkish officials personally responsible for the Armenian massacres becomes clearer.⁴⁶

The massacres, however, were exploited by Britain in order to influence American public opinion especially and to bring the United States into the war.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Seemingly a French opposition put an end to Kitchener's initial plan of sending an expedition to Cilicia. An agreement dated January 27, 1915, between Churchill and Ogagnord clearly indicated French interests' supremacy in Cilicia.

⁴⁶ Benckendorff wrote to Sazonov about Grey's hesitation about signing a joint declaration. Jon Giragosian (ed.), *Hayasdane Mitchazkayin yev Sovedagan Ardakin Kaghakaganoutian Pasdatgheroun 1828–1923* (Armenia in the Documents of International and Soviet Foreign Policy 1828–1923) (Yerevan, 1972), 376–377. The British government had to be concerned not to provoke anti-British sentiments among its Moslem subjects. It was with similar concerns that the British government demanded that French authorities remove the Armenian survivors of Musa Dagh from Port Said, Egypt, which was a British protectorate. Akaby Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915–1923* (London, 1984), 91.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 74–75, 80. Also see Arthur Beylerian, *Les grandes puissances l'Empire Ottoman et les Arméniens dans les archives Françaises 1914–1918* (Publication de la Sorbonne, Paris, 1983), 67.

The tactic of engaging the United States in war by way of the Armenian issue was considered equally by Russia. Russian encouragement of the Catholicos of All Armenians to appeal to the president of the United States is evidence of its desire to involve both countries in the war.

Russia's interest in the Armenian provinces dated back to the days of Peter the Great. By 1912, during the Balkan War, Vorontsov-Dashkov initiated a new policy designed to agitate pro-Russian sentiments among the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the territories of Eastern Anatolia that might easily become a battleground for Russia.⁴⁸

This change, though, was not accompanied by a change in policy vis-à-vis Turkish territorial integrity. Russia's primary concern was to maintain the territorial integrity of its neighbor in Asia for two reasons: (1) to prevent any European presence in the region as a result of an Ottoman disintegration; (2) to prevent an autonomous Armenia on its borders which might ignite disturbances among the Armenians of the Caucasus who were not happy Russian subjects.⁴⁹

This policy was perpetuated in Russia even after the Sykes-Picot Agreement of April 1916. Russia's preference, as stated by the foreign minister on December 21, 1916, was an independent Turkish state, as large as possible, inclined politically and economically toward Russia.⁵⁰

48 Kapriel Lazian, *Hayasdan yev Hay Tade Hayevrous Haraperoutiounnerou Louysin Dag* (Armenia and the Armenian Case in the Light of Armeno-Russian Relations) (Cairo, 1957), 150–153.

49 Sazonov, in a letter dated November 30, 1912, addressed to the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, stated that he advised the Turkish ambassador in Petrograd that Turkey should initiate reforms in Western Armenia in order to prevent any European intervention or any unpleasant development such as the "misfortunate war in the Balkans." Sazonov asked his ambassador to convey a similar message to the Turkish Foreign Minister—who was Kapriel Noradounghian at the time—that Russia was friendly towards Turkey, and that Russia would like to avoid disturbances on its border. Jon Giragosian (ed.), *Hayasdane Mitchazkayin yev Sovedagan Ardakin Kaghakaganoutian Pasdatghteroum 1828–1923* (Armenia in the Documents of International and Soviet Foreign Policy 1828–1923) (Yerevan, 1972), 154–155. It is interesting to know that, in 1911, Sazonov was convinced that a fast collapse of Turkey was not desirable, and that Russia should do everything possible within the sphere of diplomacy to postpone such an event. This was a reflection of the overall Russian diplomacy vis-à-vis Turkey. A Russian diplomat in the same period stated that it was better for the Turkey of the Young Turks to ignite in flames rather than collapse and become a share for all kinds of ambitions. Jon Giragosian, *Yeridturkere Badmoutian Tadasdani Arach* (The Young Turks Before the Judgement of History), vol. I (Yerevan, 1982), 191.

50 Kapriel Lazian, *Hayasdan yev Hay Tade Hayevrous Haraperoutiounnerou Louysin Dag* (Armenia and the Armenian Case in Light of Armeno-Russian Relations) (Cairo, 1957), 193.

It might be safe to conclude that the Russian policy was: (1) to maintain as a priority, if possible, the integrity of the Ottoman Empire; (2) otherwise, to annex and russify as much territory as possible, in case the dismemberment of the empire became inevitable in Asia Minor.

An Armenian autonomy was never welcomed by czarist Russia, and the Russian government's real intentions were clearly demonstrated by its colonization of Armenian provinces in Turkey.⁵¹

After Russia consented to allot Syria and Cilicia to France, the Armenian Question became dependent mainly on Russian and French policies, though the British were still involved and partners in deciding conditions of peace, as seen in the London pact of September 5, 1914.⁵²

The fact that Boghos Nubar was asked to revive the National Delegation in late April 1915, after Russia had secured both British and French agreement to annex Armenia and the Straits, indicates a possibility that the revival of the delegation was initiated by Russia to "renege from its commitment"—a conclusion rightfully reached by Boghos Nubar after his meeting with Izvolski on May 26, 1915.⁵³

The plan which guided Boghos Nubar's negotiations,⁵⁴ called for an autonomous Armenia—the six Armenian vilayets and Cilicia—within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire and under Allied protection.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Many military or civilian administrators of the Caucasian front suggested populating the occupied Armenian territories with Russian refugees. Kapriel Lazian, *Hayasdan yev Hay Tade Hayevrou Haraperoutiunnerou Louysin Dag* (Armenia and the Armenian Case in Light of Armeno-Russian Relations) (Cairo, 1957), 185–186. Accordingly, Catholicos Kevork V and the National Bureau of Tiflis raised their concerns to the Russian government in June and July, 1915, only to receive Machiavellian answers. Ibid., 186–189. When Sazonov suggested on June 27, 1915, a moderate policy vis-à-vis occupied Armenian territories, as opposed to two extreme tendencies—autonomous Armenia under Russian protection, or the replacement of Armenians with Moslems—Vorontsov-Dashkov agreed immediately. Furthermore, he stated: "There is no Armenian problem within the current borders of the Russian Empire;" meaning the borders prior to the occupation of the Armenian provinces. Jon Giragosian (ed.), *Hayasdan Mitchazkayin yev Sovedagan Ardakin Kaghakaganoutian Pasdatghteroum 1828_1923* (Armenia in the Documents of International and Soviet Foreign Policy 1828_1923) (Yerevan, 1972), 396_399. The Russian colonization of Western Armenia was a theme constantly discussed in the Duma, the Russian media, and in the policies of General Yudenich, the commander of the Caucasian army, in the occupied Armenian territories. A. N. Mnatzaganian, *Hay Zhoghoverti Voghperkoutioun* (The Tragedy of the Armenian People) (Yerevan, 1965), 68–69.

⁵² R. B. Mowat, *A History of European Diplomacy 1914–1925* (London, 1928), 7.

⁵³ See document 29.

⁵⁴ See document 67.

⁵⁵ See document 8.

Since the Russian government had agreed to allot Cilicia to France, it made no open commitment to the Armenian plan. Russia placed the burden of the plan's realization upon the Armenians themselves.

Furthermore, Russia declared to France that it would grant autonomy to Armenia rather than annex it.⁵⁶

The importance of this message lay in the possibilities it offered to the Armenians in shaping the theory of annexation of Cilicia to an autonomous Armenia in order to turn Armenia into a vibrant and self-sufficient state. Boghos Nubar developed the idea brilliantly in his memoranda and during his negotiations.

Thus, from the very beginning, Armenian aspirations were caught in the middle of conflicting Russian and French interests, both of which were based on the theory of annexation rather than autonomy.

After the failure of the Allies in the Dardanelles, Boghos Nubar—who was a pacifist and a conservative, and who categorically opposed the idea of armed struggle—came, in July 1915, to the conclusion that the Armenians should rely on themselves and on their volunteers.⁵⁷ It was too late though, for two reasons: (1) by mid-1915, close to 800,000 Armenians had already been massacred, depriving the Armenian provinces of the manpower to fight; (2) the Allies suffered from a severe shortage in ammunition, therefore, practically, they were unable to give any to the Armenians. In addition, by this time Russia was limiting the number of Armenian volunteers, fearing that they may bring about a movement of national liberation against it.⁵⁸

In August 1915, the Russian intentions were expressed through the first interpreter of the Russian Embassy in London. Sablin stated that Russia must annex Armenia for the good of the Armenians; otherwise, a new problem will be added to Russia's already existing problems with Poland and Bulgaria—Armenia irredanta.⁵⁹

By the end of 1915, Boghos Nubar arrived at three main conclusions: (1) because of the extermination of at least 800,000 Armenians, the Armenian Question was transformed into a new issue; (2) the volunteer movement was a source of trouble, being used by the Young Turks as justification for their Armenocidal plans; and (3) there was no sense in continuing negotiations with the Allies when all efforts would be fruitless.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See document 16.

⁵⁷ See document 122.

⁵⁸ Dzadour Aghayan, *Hay Zhoghoverti Azadakragan Baykari Badmoutiounits* (From the History of the Struggle for Liberation of the Armenian People) (Yerevan, 1976), 373. Besides the 5,000 volunteers, there were 200,000 Armenians serving in the Russian army during World War I. Ibid., 373.

⁵⁹ See document 145.

⁶⁰ See document 171.

The hopes for Armenian autonomy, according to the initial plan of the Armenian National Delegation, suffered further by August 1916. France made it clear in March 1916 that it would not oppose any Russian policy in Armenia;⁶¹ England stated that it was giving Russia a free hand in settling the Armenian case despite its dissatisfaction with the Russian desire to annex Armenia;⁶² and Russia exposed its real agenda against Armenian autonomy under its new foreign minister Stürmer.⁶³

By mid-1916 it was time for Boghos Nubar to reformulate Armenian interests and to identify and acknowledge France as the state with which Armenian interests best coincided. According to the reformulated Armenian desires, France was to be allotted as vast a territory as possible in Asiatic Turkey, provided that France granted autonomy to the Armenians.⁶⁴

The French government insinuated that the Armenians could count on its total goodwill.⁶⁵ By the end of 1916, this evolved into a commitment by France to grant autonomy to the Armenians, especially after Boghos Nubar was included in the Sykes-Picot Agreement negotiations, and France received Boghos Nubar's agreement for Armenian legions to fight alongside France in Asiatic Turkey, and particularly in Cilicia.⁶⁶

This success was put at stake after the United States entered the war in April 1917, and after the Russian Provisional Government revised the foreign policy of Russia. It was time for the Armenian National Delegation to once again reformulate the Armenian desires. This time, the delegation reverted back to its initial plan with some modifications—the creation of a neutralized autonomous Armenia (the six vilayets and Cilicia, together with Mersin, and Alexandretta) under Allied protection, with a mandate to one power, preferably the United States.

The documents in this book do not cover the developments that followed and led to the Treaty of Sévres (August 10, 1920), which treated Armenia favorably, or later, to the Treaty of Lausanne (July 24, 1923), which reduced the Armenian Question to a matter of minority rights.

Despite Boghos Nubar's talent, and despite the commitment and courage of the many Armenian volunteers, the Armenian Question, in the sense of establishing Armenian autonomy, and, eventually, sovereignty in Western Armenia and Cilicia, was doomed to failure for a very simple yet significant reason—by 1918 the six Armenian provinces and Cilicia were almost entirely depopulated of Armenians due to deportation and genocide.

⁶¹ See document 181.

⁶² See document 188.

⁶³ See documents 202 and 204.

⁶⁴ See documents 204 and 225.

⁶⁵ See document 227.

⁶⁶ See documents 215 through 220, and 229.