

LAST SPRING OF THE FIRST REPUBLIC

End. For the beginning, see IRS- Heritage 1(24)-2016

*The last government Cabinet of the Azerbaijan Republic.
At the head of the table: Prime Minister N. Usubbayov*



As we showed in the first part of this article, the influence of the Russian and Turkish factors was the key reason for the fall of the ADR. However, an equally important role in the decline of the First Republic was played by the lack of full-fledged military, political and diplomatic support from the allies - the victorious powers of World War I (the US, Britain, France, Italy and Japan, which formed the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference that opened on 12 January 1919. Later, in March 1919, after Japan was “cut off”, it became a “Council of the Four”).

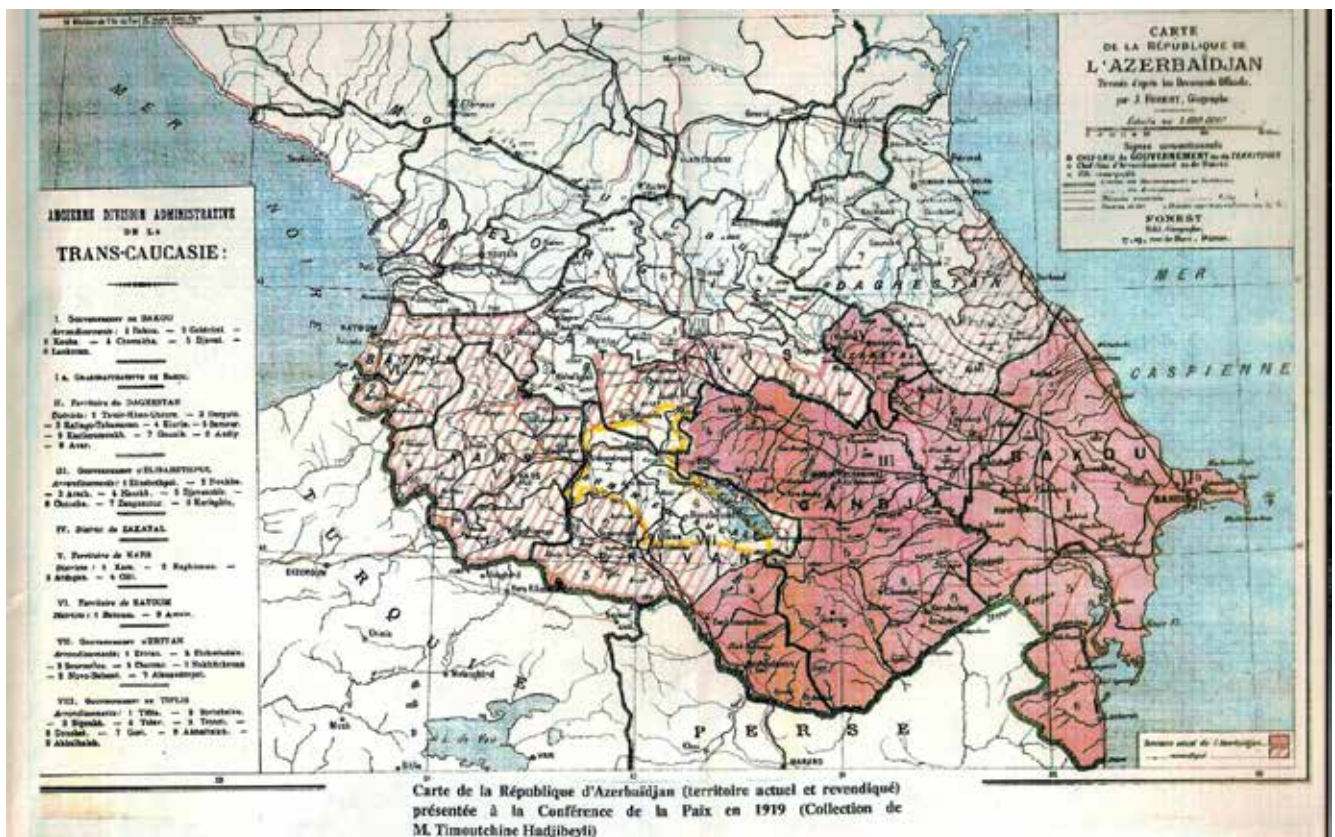
In the strategy of the “G4” countries, recognition of the independence of the ADR and other national republics established on the outskirts of the former Russian Empire was seen not as an independent objective, but as an objective derived from relations with Soviet

Russia. The recognition of the independence of the ADR strongly depended on the settlement of the so-called “Russian question”, by which they meant the success or failure of their policy to restore the monarchical or bourgeois-democratic system in Russia. Therefore, **the ADR was supported by the “allies” only insofar as it met the interests of the economic blockade of Bolshevik Russia and narrowing of the scope of its influence in the European and Transcaucasian directions.**

At the initial stage - in 1918-1919, the leading Allied Powers were unanimous in the need to weaken the geopolitical positions of Soviet Russia around the perimeter of its borders, seeing it as a source of the Bolshevik threat to the civilized West. The most active supporter of the emerging anti-Russian policy of the Allies was London – it had the most profound reasons for wanting to weaken Russia. Britain traditionally viewed it as a geopolitical rival across the Eurasian continent and was not interested in a strong centralized state, which could claim the British zone of interests in the Balkans, the Middle East and particularly in India, reviving in place of imperial Russia.

As a result, it was London that became the main instigator of the armed intervention in Soviet Russia. At the end of the war with Germany, the British government adopted a number of decisions aimed at the further expansion of the intervention against Russia, which started earlier (British troops were sent to Russia in the spring and summer of 1918). In particular, it was

Map of the Azerbaijan Republic presented at the Paris Peace Conference



decided to provide assistance and support to General Denikin and Admiral Kolchak.

However, in spite of their belligerent attitude, **at the beginning of 1919, the ruling circles of Great Britain felt the limit of their ability to exert military pressure on the Bolsheviks.** In this country, there was such a political situation that the expansion of the armed anti-Bolshevik intervention and the continued economic blockade could cause serious domestic political and economic turmoil. The British government faced more important domestic and foreign policy issues: the settlement of the financial crisis in the country, the fight against the parliamentary Labor opposition, which opposed the intervention in the civil war in Russia, the rapid rise of the strike movement against the background of the growing influence of trade unions and soldiers' uprisings demanding immediate demobilization.

The situation in the countries of the British colonial system was not stable either. National liberation movements spread in varying degrees in almost all the colonies and dependent countries, particularly Egypt and India. The unrest in these countries showed how vulnerable the position of London was in the colonies and its limited ability to preserve its influence in the Caucasus. Chief of the British General Staff Henry Wilson wrote in

this regard in April 1919: "All my efforts are now linked to withdrawing our troops from Europe and Russia and concentrating all our efforts on new outbreaks of the uprising, i.e. England, Ireland, Egypt and India." (1, 404)

In addition, after the end of the First World War and the capitulation of Germany, Anglo-French disagreements began to escalate. France was left with a huge army after the war and sought to be a leader in Europe, which Britain was not going to tolerate. Soviet historian V. Trukhanovskiy noted in this connection that "to defend its interests in the forthcoming diplomatic fight with France, Britain needed all its available forces, and therefore, it could not distract them in any significant degree to fight Soviet Russia." (2, 188)

All these processes affected the British government's policy towards the ADR. There came **the final stage of the re-evaluation of its capacity to support the independence of the Caucasian republics - especially Azerbaijan and Georgia, and curb the irreversible process of the restoration of control over this region by Moscow.** In the middle of 1919, the British Foreign Office noted in a memorandum that "British interests were not strong enough to provide more than brief implementation of this thankless mission (the guardianship of the Transcaucasian region - author)." (Cited in 3, 45.)

Map showing locations of Azerbaijani genocide committed in 1918-1920



As a result, British troops, who were considered guarantors of the fragile independence of the ADR, were withdrawn from the Caucasus by the end of August 1919, not counting a small garrison in Batumi and the diplomatic mission in Baku headed by the High Commissioner for the Caucasus Oliver Wardrop.

As far as the US is concerned, they were much more concerned about promoting their project of a new world organization - the League of Nations - at the Paris Conference. At the heart of Washington's European policy in late 1918 and early 1920 was to create an equilibrium system, in which the Germans would deter Britain and France and the small countries of Europe – large ones. Only such a system could ensure the leading position of the US in the post-war world and its role as a European and world arbitrator. "To put ravaged Europe at the mercy of the enormous economic power of the United States, to create a global organization led by the United States, to consolidate the shift in world politics, which was the result of the sharp weakening

of Europe in 1914-1918, to stop and block the social revolution in Eastern and Central Europe and to triumphantly return to the US after that, leaving its name on the tablets of history and the United States at the head of the world," this was the political line of Woodrow Wilson in Paris. (4, 462)

As for the Russian direction of American policy, it was derived from the above line. Russia became an element of the European system of checks and balances, counterbalancing Germany. For this reason, **the question of the new republics proclaimed on the territory of the former Russian Empire was considered not in terms of their recognition, but in the context of creating a counterweight to Russia**, pushing the Bolshevik government to fulfill the role that was assigned to it.

A determining factor for the Russian policy of the United States was the fact that they had relatively small stakes in Russia in comparison with their European allies - from the point of view of trade, investment and security interests. According to the American historian

*Map of the Azerbaijan SSR from
28 April to 1 November 1918*

A. Mayer, Russia was of relatively little interest to America: "In light of the fact that America is primarily a naval power and Russia is a continental power, it does not represent a threat to America. In this sense, the main goal of Washington is probably Japan's expulsion from Eastern Siberia rather than creating a zone of American influence there." (4, 506)

In connection with the above, the US was not in a hurry to recognize and give political support to the newly independent republics of the former Russian Empire, including the ADR. It is this position of the US that the chairman of the Azerbaijani delegation at the Versailles Peace Conference, Ali Mardanbay Topchubashov, drew attention to in his reports from Paris. He noted that at the meeting of the delegation with US President Wilson held on 28 May 1919, the latter clearly and unambiguously determined the position of his country:

- 1) The USA does not want to divide the world into small pieces;
- 2) It would be better for Azerbaijan to be filled with the idea of forming a confederation in the Caucasus;
- 3) This confederation could be under the protection of some power on behalf of the League of Nations;
- 4) The question of the recognition of the ADR cannot be resolved before the Russian question (5, 61).

As for the position of continental Europe, in conversations with members of the ADR delegation at the Paris Conference, representatives of Italy even said that if the "a Russian Federal Republic (meaning not a Bolshevik, but a bourgeois-democratic republic - author) is established, then, perhaps, the Caucasian Confederation will join the Russian Federation". (5, 65) In June 1919, developing this approach with the active initiative role of Britain, the Allied Powers considered the question of recognizing Kolchak as the ruler of the territory of the former Russian Empire, which caused protest notes from the delegations of Estonia, Latvia, Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine and Azerbaijan.

Following the resignation of the government of Orlando on 19 June 1919, Italy's interest in the Transcaucasian region further weakened. The new Prime Minister Francesco Nitti (he lasted until June 1920) repealed the May 1919 promise of Rome – given not without pressure from London – to send Italian troops to the Caucasus to replace the British. The new government



was faced with more pressing domestic problems. With regard to foreign policy, the priority here was not Azerbaijan but the settlement of territorial disputes with Greece (because of Albania) and Yugoslavia. As a result, Rome's position on the Azerbaijan issue was clearly articulated on 31 July 1919 in a telegram from the head of the Italian military mission in the Transcaucasia, Colonel Gabba, to ADR Foreign Minister Jafarov: "No Italian troops will be dispatched to the Caucasus to replace the British troops." Italian priorities lay in a completely different area. "The Government of the Kingdom of Italy wants to maintain friendly relations with the government of your country and contribute to the development of commercial, financial and industrial relations between the two countries," the document said. (6, 302-303) To develop this course, Azerbaijan was visited by an Italian military mission in May 1919, and on 22 February 1920, a representative (33 people) Italian trade delegation led by Senator Conti arrived in Baku.

France was even less willing than its allies to support the independence of the ADR, which was not included in the scope of its interests. In December 1917, France and Britain divided spheres of "responsibility" in the territory of the former Russian Empire (London confirmed the validity of this agreement on 13 November 1918). In accordance with this division, the UK area of responsibility was the North and South Caucasus, while France was responsible for Ukraine, Crimea and Bessarabia.

In addition, supporting the anti-Russian policy of its allies (the United States, Britain and Italy), Paris pursued somewhat different purposes. As a country that suffered the most damage in the war, France was most concerned about the neutralization of Germany in European affairs and for this reason, it acted not against Russia



as such, but against its Bolshevik government - Germany's ally in the Brest peace. It was interested in a regime that would be a counterweight to Germany being established in Russia. But, knowing that the appearance of such a regime is not a matter of the nearest future, Paris relied on Poland as its outpost in Eastern Europe and a counterbalance to Germany, and in this respect, it tended to support the Polish (and Romanian) territorial claims against neighboring Lithuania and Ukraine. On the other hand, in the context of its strategic confrontation with Germany, France was interested in supporting the separatism of the Baltic states and Ukraine, considering the independent status of these countries to be a barrier to a potential German-Russian rapprochement and the strengthening of its Rhine neighbor.

As part of the postwar rivalry between France and Great Britain, which was emerging but could already be felt at the Paris peace talks, Paris, of course, was worried about London's attempts to seize the oil wealth of the Baku region, which, given British dominance in the Persian Gulf, could make it a monopolist in the field of oil production. However, this concern did not result in significant steps in the South Caucasus direction. The ADR was not a subject of careful and interested attention of French diplomacy.

Thus, despite the fact that Bolshevism was still considered by the Western allies, and, above all, the United Kingdom, which had interests in Persia, Turkey, India and the South Caucasus region, to be a major factor destabilizing their regional positions, they were in no hurry to tie their hands in relation to future Russia - perhaps friendly to the West - through the recognition of the ADR.

But at the end of 1919, when there was a change during the Civil War in Russia and a threat of a Bolsheviks advance on Persia and Turkey through the Caucasus, the "moment of truth" came for the Allies. On 17 November 1919, British Prime Minister Lloyd George made a speech in the House of Commons and expressed deep concern about the situation in the Caucasus and the threat of a Bolshevik advance on the Middle East. It is notable that in his speech the prime minister mentioned Azerbaijan twice as a country that does not want to be part of Soviet Russia. In late November, Lloyd George had a conversation with the head of the US delegation to Paris, Polk, warning him that united Bolshevik Russia was becoming a serious threat to Europe, so "Georgia, Azerbaijan, Bessarabia, Ukraine, the Baltic provinces and Finland, as well as, possibly, Siberia, too, should be independent." (Cited in 2, 203).

The development of a more resolute policy of the Allies, especially of the United Kingdom, was largely furthered by reports of British representatives in Baku and Tiflis, who desperately urged Britain not to “surrender without a fight” this strategically important region which was rich in oil and opened the way to London’s traditional “areas of interest”.

On 5 January, in a detailed telegram analyzing the situation in Azerbaijan, the British emissary in Baku, Colonel Stokes, stated: “If His Majesty’s government is in favor of maintaining friendship with Azerbaijan or establishing control over it and eliminating Turkish influence and Bolshevism, it is important to provide it with his immediate support”. Noting the need to supply small arms and ammunition to the Azerbaijani army, he called on London to take decisive action: “The threat coming from the Bolsheviks in Azerbaijan can be eliminated only in one of two ways: a) Immediate friendly support for Azerbaijan and b) sending of British troops to Baku.”

On the basis of this message, on 6 January Wardrop telegraphed Lord Curzon from Tbilisi: “The Bolsheviks were not able to shatter Europe and agreed with the Muslims (Turkey - author) to attack the UK. ... The swift collapse of Denikin is very likely, and the Transcaucasia is becoming the bridge that Britain should protect”. “I would like to convince the government of His Majesty of the need to take immediate action to support the Transcaucasia against the Bolsheviks and the Turks,” he noted further.

The question of what British policy in the Middle East should be like and how to respond to the Bolshevik threat in the Transcaucasia was considered at the 9 January meeting of the so-called “Eastern Committee” - a special body of the British government established in 1918 to develop a coherent British policy in the Middle East (the chairman of the Committee was Lord Curzon). It was attended by the minister of finance, representatives of the Ministries of Maritime Affairs, Indian Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Aviation and the secretary of state for defense (7, 197-199). Representatives of the Ministry of Defense suggested considering three lines of defense against a possible Bolshevik attack. But while discussing these options, they stated that they had no ability to allocate two divisions. Moreover, it was noted that even if they had such divisions, they would use them more effectively on the Polish front, where there were hostilities between Pilsudski’s army and the Red Army, or in the south of Russia to support General Denikin. Aviation Ministry officials said that it was impossible to allocate aircraft to defend the Caucasus.

In contrast to the general staff and aviators, representatives of the British naval forces supported the need to retain Batum and expressed their readiness to protect the Caspian Sea if Baku remained under control. The point of view of the Ministry of Defense finally prevailed and was brought to the attention of members of the British delegation to the Peace Conference in Paris in a telegram dated 12 January. Its essence was as follows: “To maintain control over the Caspian Sea, it is necessary to hold the line of defense from Batumi to Baku with the help of two allied divisions, and their number may have to increase. Due to the situation prevailing throughout, these forces cannot be assigned from British resources. As for the provision of **financial assistance to the armed forces of Georgia and Azerbaijan, this issue is not being considered in the light of the possible imminent collapse of General Denikin. In this case, such assistance will not be able to help these countries to protect themselves from the Bolsheviks until troops are sent their aid.** In light of the above, the presence of British forces in Batum makes no sense until other allies send two divisions. Therefore, the General Staff’s position is that they should be evacuated as soon as the resistance of General Denikin is finally broken and before it entails additional obligations for us, which we cannot accomplish.”

The British Admiralty, disappointed with the outcome of the meeting, sent a telegram to Lord Curzon on 13 January criticizing the position of the Ministry of Defense, which, as noted, “pretended to be ill and showed complete indifference to any efforts to prevent the Bolshevik invasion of this region”. “If two divisions were sent to hold the Baku-Batum line in order to strengthen the two republics, the Admiralty would make efforts to restore control over the Caspian Sea within the next month,” Lord Harding said. He warned that as a result of the position taken by the military, Georgia, Azerbaijan and perhaps Armenia will fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks. “Our position will be humiliating and detrimental to our prestige in the East as long as the military policy retreats from anywhere where there is a threat,” Harding concluded.

As a result, London refused plans for the active armed defense of the region and military support for the ADR. However, it could not “wash its hands of it” completely and move away. Persistent telegrams from Wardrop and Stokes, the Admiralty’s position, the rapprochement of the Kemalists and Bolsheviks, and most importantly – the increasing “red menace” to the British



S. M. Kirov and communist leaders at a parade in Baku

zone of interests resulted in London developing a compromise position: “yes” to recognition and “no” to sending of British troops.

The position of Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Foreign Secretary Lord George Nathaniel Curzon was quite important in this situation. In his policy, Lloyd George prioritized four main tasks - the strengthening of the British Empire and its trade, ensuring the dominant position of Britain at sea in order to protect the empire and its trade, as well as maintaining the balance of power in Europe to prevent any attempts to challenge British interests. In this regard, signals about the Bolshevik threat arriving from Baku and Tiflis met the full sympathy of the head of government.

As for Curzon, this staunch advocate of the “civilizing” mission of Britain in the East, a brilliant representative of the “Eastern School” of British diplomacy, whose name is associated with the strengthening of British positions in India (in 1899-1905, Curzon was its viceroy), expedition to Tibet in 1904, the establishment of de facto British protectorate over Kuwait and London’s monopolistic influence in Afghanistan and the conclusion (in August 1919) of the Anglo-Iranian agreement “On British help to promote the progress and welfare of Persia”, which established Britain’s actual protectorate over this country, could not indifferently watch the advance of the Bolsheviks on Azerbaijan, which opened the road to Britain’s “native” Persia, Turkey, Afghanistan and India. As an energetic conductor of London’s expansionist policy in the East, he also believed, as noted by a diplomat and member of the British delegation to the Paris Conference, Harold Nicolson, who knew him personally, that an ideal world order is one in which Britain does not interfere in the affairs of Europe and Europe does not interfere in the affairs of Asia and Africa, i.e. the affairs of

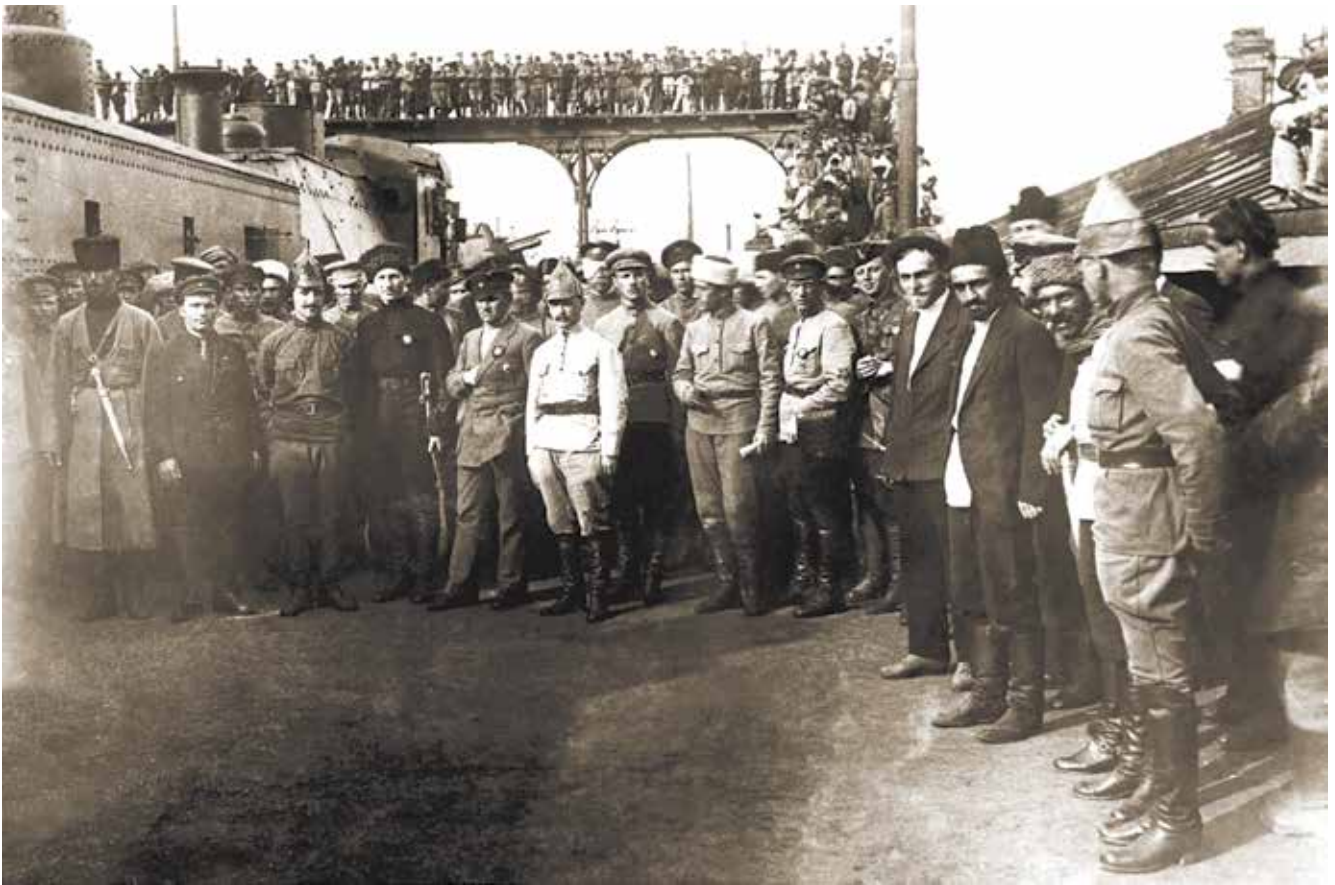
Britain (1, 440). It was on the initiative of Curzon that the so-called “second Paris conference” was convened on 10 January (the main “first” conference completed its work with the signing of the 28 June 1919 Treaty of Versailles between the Allies and defeated Germany) with the participation of the foreign ministers of Britain, Italy and France, as well as the US and Japanese ambassadors to France. Speaking at this session of the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers, Curzon gave an analysis of the situation in the Caucasus on the basis of the telegrams from his representatives in the region, warning about the threat posed by the Bolsheviks and their possible alliance with the Kemalists. On 11 January, the Supreme Council adopted a resolution on Curzon’s proposal, noting that **“the allied and united powers jointly recognize the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia at the de facto level”**. This decision was made by representatives of Britain, France and Italy. Later it was joined by Japan, while the United States expressed its refusal.

On 15 January, the French Foreign Ministry hosted an official ceremony to hand over this decision to the Azerbaijani delegation. On 15-19 January, the issue of providing military assistance to the two recognized republics was discussed at the level of military experts. According to Azerbaijani historian Jamil Hasanli, who has carried out a great deal of work to study the heritage of the ADR in the US archives, on 19 January, the Supreme Council attended by the heads of the Azerbaijani and Georgian delegations once again thoroughly discussed ways to support the Transcaucasian republics.

The report of military experts was presented by Marshal Ferdinand Foch. Clemenceau, Foch and War Minister Churchill spoke in favor of sending troops to the Caucasus, while the premiers of Britain and Italy, Lloyd George and Nitti, offered only weapons and equipment supplies. Hasanli notes that during the discussion, Foch said that he considers the defense of the Caucasus as part of the struggle against Bolshevism and that for the sake of this purpose, it is necessary to support countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Bessarabia, Poland, Estonia and Latvia. Moreover, he called for the creation of an alliance of Eastern European and Caucasian republics against the Bolsheviks (8, 13-15).

Summing up the meeting, the British prime minister spoke about the urgent need to provide assistance to the republics of the Caucasus in the form of weapons, military equipment and munitions. At the same time, he

Communist leaders in Baku against the background of the 11th Red Army armored train. April 1920



reiterated the impossibility of sending troops to Azerbaijan and Georgia, noting that these republics should strengthen their defense at the expense of their own armies. As a result, the Supreme Council adopted a resolution, according to which **the Allies, not having the ability to send troops to the Transcaucasian republics, express their intention to help with supplies of weapons, military equipment and food.**

In fact, the Allies did not render any major arms assistance to the ADR. Canadian researcher Margaret MacMillan says that recognizing the Caucasian republics, the United Kingdom supplied them with a certain amount of weapons. "The Ministry of Defense took advantage of this situation in order to get rid of surplus Canadian weapons made by the Ross company, which were famous for their ability to jam even in non-combat conditions," she wrote. (1, 443)

Moreover, **the de facto recognition of the ADR by European countries did not evolve even into a stable political support.** The level of political and diplomatic support for the independence of Azerbaijan was still tied to how the strategic "Russian question" was being resolved for the allies. 🌟

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