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HISTORY OF RECOGNITION OF AZERBAIJAN'S DE FACTO STATE INDEPENDENCE AT THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE



Ali Mardanbek Topchibashi, the president of Azerbaijani diplomatic delegation at the Paris Peace Conference

The *de facto* recognition of the state independence of Azerbaijan by the Supreme Council of the Entente was the main aim of the Azerbaijani diplomatic delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, which arrived in the capital of France on 9 May 1919 headed by A. M. Topchibashi.

The process of the recognition of the Azerbaijani state proved time-consuming and difficult, demanding a lot of effort on the part of members of the Azerbaijani diplomatic delegation in Paris.

From mid-June 1919, the main focus of the efforts of the Azerbaijani as well as Georgian and North Caucasus delegations was to combat the claims of the White government of Admiral A. Kolchak formed in Omsk in order to win recognition as the official government of the territories that were formerly part of the defunct empire of the Romanovs. The leaders of the Russian White movement were adamant supporters of a "united and indivisible Russia" and they refused to recognize the right of the non-Russian peoples of the former Russian Empire to independence, making an exception only for the Poles.

Mandate of A. M. Topchibashi, delivered by Prime Minister N. Ussubbekov

آذربایجان جمهوریهسی
 هیئت وکلا مددی
 President
 du Conseil des Ministres
 de la Republique
 d'Azerbaïdjan

16. January 1920

№ 254

M A N D A T E.

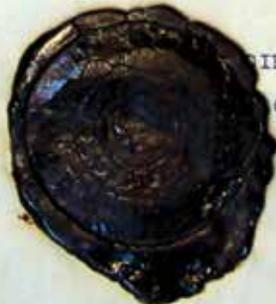
The bearer of this Mr. ALI MARDAN BEY TOPTSCHIBASHEFF President of the Azerbaïdjanian Peace Delegation is hereby appointed the representative of the Azerbaïdjan Government and entrusted with full power to enter into negotiations with the Government of His Britanic Majesty on all political and financial questions concerning the Azerbaïdjan Republic.

The Azerbaïdjan Government begs His Britanic Majesty's Government to have confidence in all the declarations of Mr. ALI MARDAN BEY TOPTSCHIBASHEFF in this matters made in the name of the Azerbaïdjan Government.

MINISTER PRESIDENT OF THE AZERBAIDJAN
 REPUBLIC *N. Ussubbekov*

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS *F. Khoisny*

DIRECTOR OF THE
 CHANCERY *Rhouramov*





Members of the Azerbaijani diplomatic delegation at work

It should be noted that the issue of Kolchak led to sharp differences in the British government, the mainly of the Whites in the supply of assistance in weapons, equipment and uniforms. Winston Churchill, the Secretary of State for War of the British Empire, was a strong supporter of Kolchak, Denikin and other White generals, having an indifferent and often hostile attitude to the national aspirations of the non-Russian

peoples. In his view the Caucasus should return to Russia after the overthrow of Bolshevism; he believed that British troops should remain there only in order to support Denikin, not allowing the local governments to take any action against him.

The opposite view was held by Lord George Curzon, who worked as acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from the summer of 1919 and officially took this

position in October of the same year. The former Viceroy of India Curzon was well aware that the aim of any Russian imperial government will inevitably be expansion into the South and the Middle East, which threatened British interests in these regions, argued for the creation of independent states not only in the Caucasus but also in Central Asia, to build a reliable barrier to the further expansion of Russian imperialism. For the same reason, British officers who were in the Caucasus were also divided into two categories. The officer corps of the 27th British Division, which was stationed on the Baku-Batumi line from the end of 1918 and consisted of officers of the so-called "Indian Service", had a generally negative attitude to both White and Red Russian imperialism. On the contrary, officers who served in British units on the Western front during the First World War had a sympathetic attitude to the White movement, seeing them as yesterday's allies.

Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who had little trust and sympathy with the Russian White movement, served as a kind of regulator of relations between Churchill and Curzon, and in principle, was favorably inclined toward the small nations of the former empire of the Romanovs. Nonetheless, the main priority for him was to grapple with the debt crushing British finances after the First World War (1). It is from this perspective that Lloyd George considered the matter of military aid to the Volunteer Army of General Anton Denikin operating in southern Russia and the presence of British troops in the Caucasus.

In March 1919, the presence of British troops in the Caucasus was a big subject of discussion in the cabinet, where Lloyd George, Churchill and Curzon expressed their views on this issue. Aware that Britain would have to withdraw its troops from the South Caucasus for financial reasons, as well as that in this case, Azerbaijan and Georgia would remain one on one with the Volunteer Army, Curzon put forward his own scheme for the settlement of the problem, which minimized, at least in the near future, the risk of the Transcaucasia republics being occupied by the Whites.

On 6 March, the Inter-Departmental Committee, which met under the chairmanship of Lord Curzon, decided to recommend the following tripartite policy to the government: 1. Start preparations for the evacuation of the Caucasus. 2. To compensate for this, to supply General Denikin with arms and military equipment, as well as to send a British military mission to Yekaterinodar. 3. To make such support conditional on the fact



Lord George Curzon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the British Empire in 1919-1924

that General Denikin should not interfere in the affairs of the independent states in the Caucasus (2).

Thus, Curzon considered the supply of arms to General Denikin as a means of giving him the opportunity to fight against Bolshevism on the one hand and on the other, to prevent the possible aggression of the Volunteer Army against the Transcaucasian states. According to Curzon, it was necessary to delay supplies to the Volunteer Army for several months, giving the weapons in stages in order to maintain control over Denikin (3).

Although Churchill did not feel sympathy for Azerbaijan and Georgia, he was also against drawing Denikin into a conflict with these republics, rightly considering that it would lead to the scattering of the White forces, whose main aim was to fight the Russian Bolsheviks. As a result, the aforesaid scheme of relations with Denikin was adopted, which allowed London to gain the necessary leverage over the Volunteer Army, despite the fact that by September 1919, British troops were withdrawn from Azerbaijan (4). Although in the second half of July 1919 the Volunteer Army managed to temporarily occupy the North Caucasus, creating a direct threat to Azerbaijan from Dagestan and the Caspian Sea, Denikin, who depended on military assistance from the Entente, did not dare to invade the Transcaucasia.

In the same month, Curzon managed to get Oliver Wardrop, one of the founders of Georgian studies in Britain, a renowned expert on the Caucasus, and in

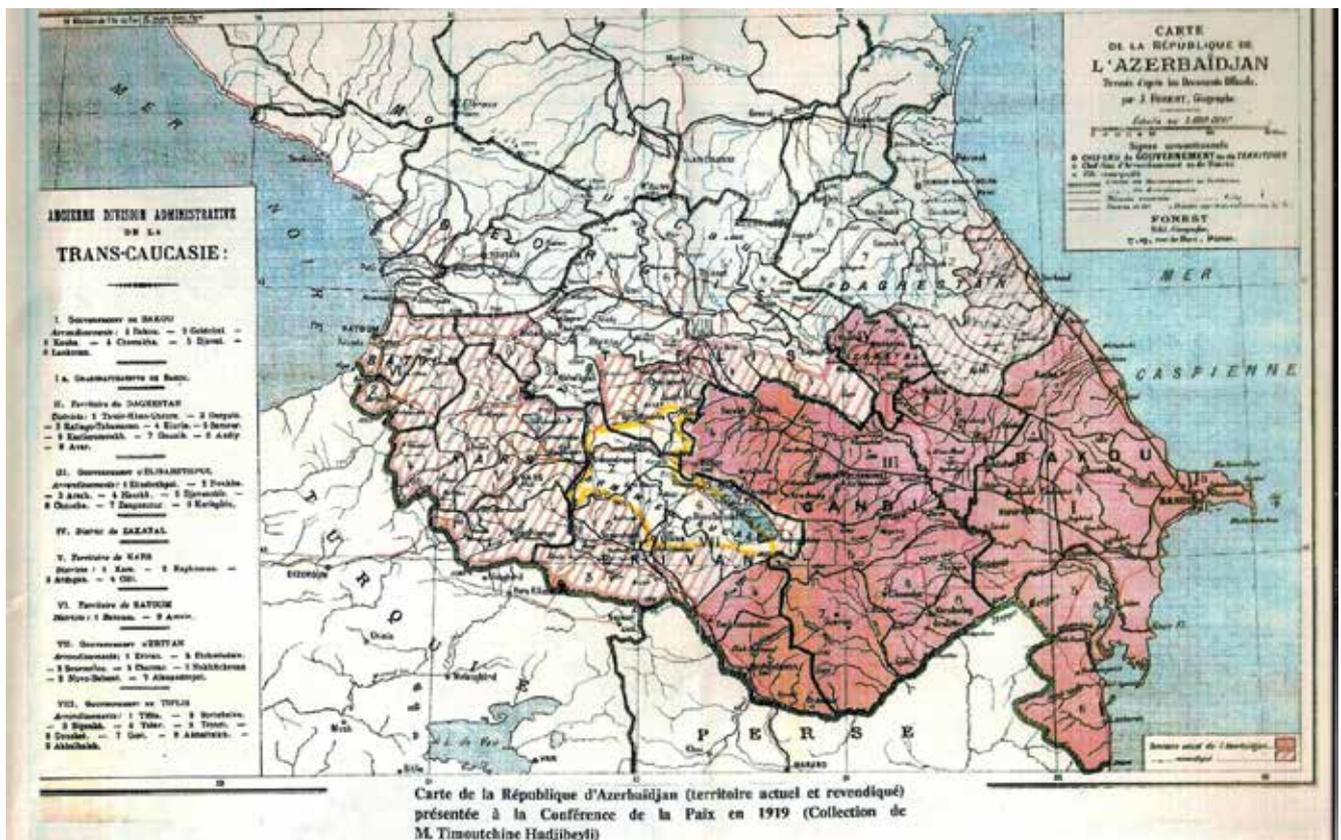


Members of the Azerbaijani diplomatic delegation reviewing press

general, a staunch supporter of the independence of the Caucasian peoples, appointed as British High Commissioner in the Caucasus. On 5 August, before his departure to Tiflis, Wardrop turned to Curzon with his recommendations, and one of the main recommendations was the issue of recognition of the independence of the South Caucasus states by London. According to Wardrop, Britain should recognize the republics, as was already done in 1918 by Germany and Turkey, which recognized Georgia and Azerbaijan. If the decision could not be taken immediately, London had to give Wardrop the right “[...] to inform the three republics that His Majesty’s Government is ready to recognize them so soon as they have given undoubted proof of their intention to live in peace and amity together and maintain a benevolent attitude towards General Denikin so far as his policy is directed to the support of a free, democratic government truly representative of a regenerated Russia” (5).

On 12 August, the day of his departure to the Caucasus, Wardrop himself visited the Azerbaijani delegation and made a “good impression” on Topchibashi. Fully understanding the importance of regional cooperation for the state independence of the peoples of the Caucasus, in his conversation Wardrop made a major emphasis on the need for a maximum rapprochement between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia (6).

Arriving on 29 August in Tiflis, where representatives of the Georgian government gave him an enthusiastic welcome (7), Wardrop immediately made arrangements for the structural organization of his commissariat. In all the important cities of the South Caucasus, officers subordinate to him were appointed, and their purpose was to inform the High Commissioner of the developments on the ground in a timely manner and accurately. In Baku, this representative of the High Commissioner was the Indian-born Colonel Claude Bayfield Stokes, a career intelligence officer, who was British



The map of the Azerbaijan Republic submitted at the Parisian peace conference

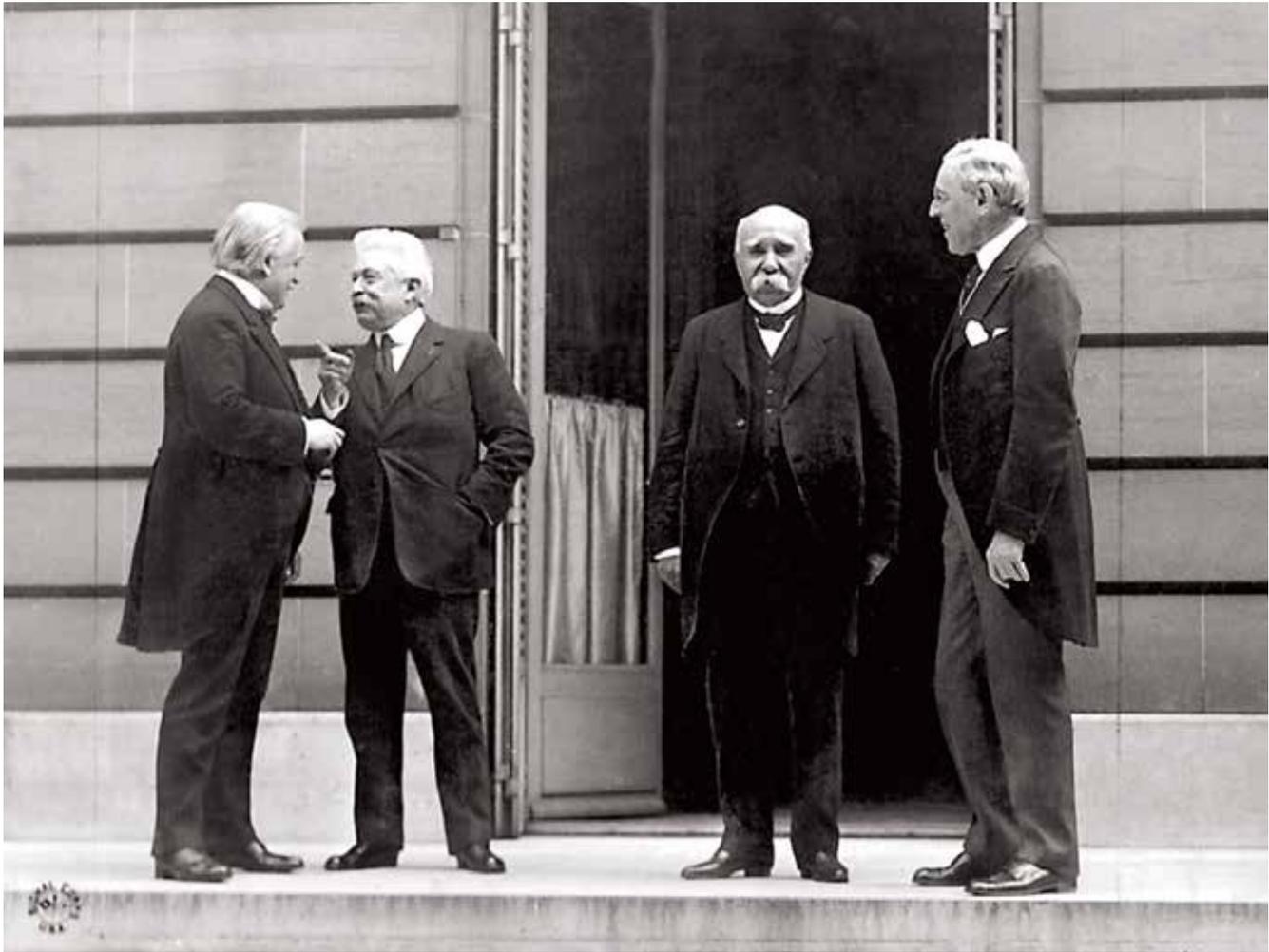
military attaché in Tehran in 1907-1911 and served in the intelligence department of the General Staff of the Indian Army before the First World War. Like most other British officers of the "Indian Service" and by virtue of his posts, Stokes was well aware of Russian imperial ambitions in the Middle East (8). In the words of Stokes himself, he had an extremely good attitude to Azerbaijanis and was a staunch supporter of the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia (9).

Seeing totally eye-to-eye on this issue, Wardrop and Stokes regularly sent messages to London in an effort to persuade the British government to recognize the independence of the South Caucasus republics. Initially, these reports did not find support in the UK government, as in September and October 1919 the Volunteer Army was on the crest of a military success and its units were near Orel and in the Moscow direction.

Then, however, under the influence of the rapidly developing military failures of the Volunteer Army, which quickly fell back under the pressure of the Bolsheviks in late October, the opinion of the Allied Supreme Council in relation to the concept of "one and indivisible Russia" became more and more critical and

began to change for the better in relation to the South Caucasus states.

Although in the first week of November, those changes only began to emerge in the foreign policy of the Entente states, Topchibashi immediately noticed them, stressing in his report on 6/10 November 1919 that "in the last three days the press, especially the British press, has been full of information related to apparent changes in the radical attitude of the Entente to the Soviet government of Russia. First, the British Parliament and then the London and Paris press (despite the electoral campaign) began to discuss the conditions of peace (or truce) proposed by the Bolsheviks. From the French newspapers that were sent, you will see what shift is happening in relation to the Bolsheviks. Even "Le Temps" ceased to flaunt its sympathy for anti-Bolshevik elements of the Russians and already speaks about an armistice with the Bolsheviks and about the Entente drawing attention to the states that formed on the territory of former Russia and the interests of small nations. [...] I feel that a period is beginning when our hopes for free and independent existence get stronger and aspire to spill into an actual form", Topchibashi summed up his observations (10).



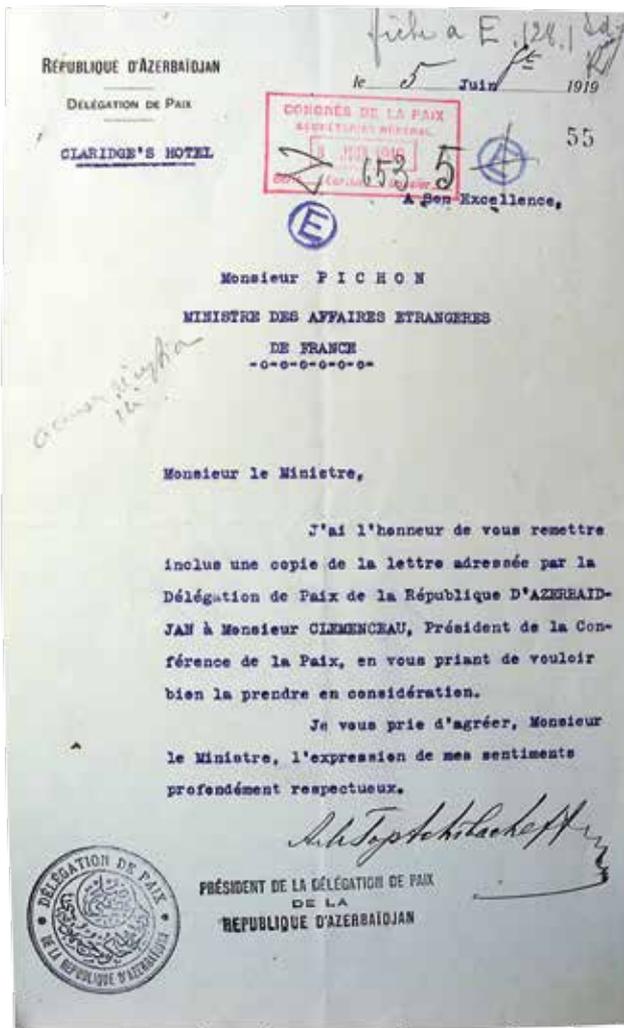
The Big Four: - David Lloyd George, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Georges Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson

In December, when the total defeat of Denikin became completely clear, the British government began to tend to recognize the independence of the South Caucasus republics, and to discuss with the allies how to proceed.

On 11 December, during a meeting held in London between French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Curzon, the latter, among other issues, raised the question of the Caucasus. Though severely disappointed in Denikin, Clemenceau was well aware that it was no longer possible to expect the Whites to win, he still continued to oppose the recognition of the independence of non-Russian peoples, saying that “[...] he was opposed to any attempt to set up any separate states in Russia, as in that case the people of Russia would claim that we were trying to dismember Russia” (11).

Nonetheless, the Anglo-French consultations on the recognition of the South Caucasus states were

continued. On 22 December, Curzon and Philippe Berthelot, Secretary General of the French Foreign Ministry, had a meeting in London where, in addition to the settlement of the Turkish issue, the sides also discussed the recognition of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the North Caucasus. In order to prepare his French counterpart for this possibility, Curzon said that Britain is interested in a great power obtaining a mandate over the Caucasus. Britain defends the Caucasus countries from Denikin, but still does not recognize them *de facto* or *de jure*, because it entails specific responsibilities. At present, it is necessary to closely monitor the developments in southern Russia, where the Bolsheviks are pressing Denikin. Personally, Curzon would like to see these Caucasian states with autonomous status, cooperating with each other, and possibly after the victory over Bolshevism, with a federal link to restored Russia if it exists. If this winter sees a catastrophe with Denikin, next spring, the Allies could consider the rec-



Letter from the head of the Azerbaijani delegation M. Topchibashi to the chairman of the Paris Peace Conference

ognition of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Dagestan, which is part of Denikin's sphere of influence, is in a different situation (12). 🌟

To be continued in the next issue

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