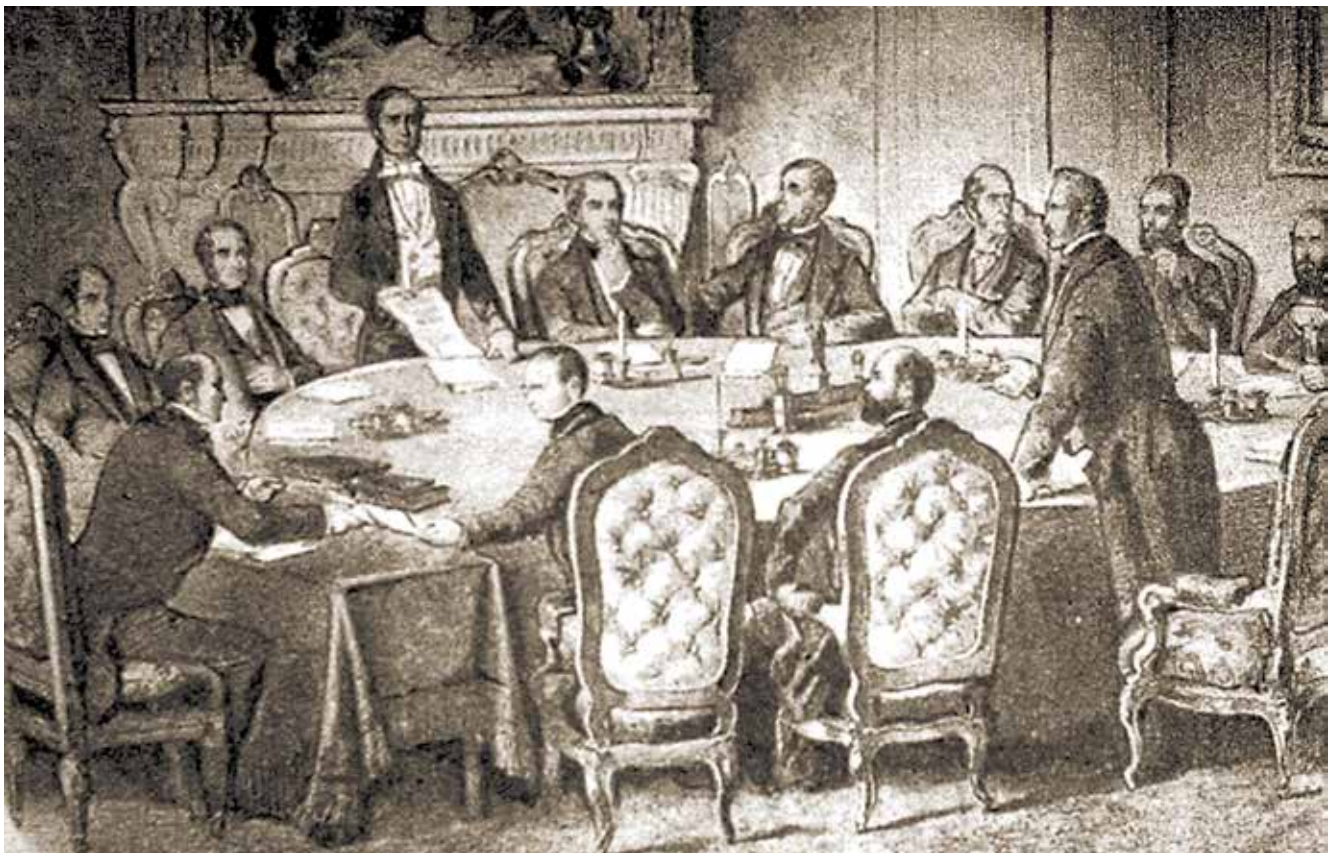


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# BRITAIN'S "ARMENIAN POLICY" IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS (1917-1920)

In the context of the clash of the geopolitical interests of the great powers, the place of the "Armenian question", the study of the mass killings carried out by Armenians who were armed and gained strength in accordance with the policies of these states, the identification and analysis of the heavy consequences for Azerbaijan

of the problem that arose as a result of rivalry and instigations on the basis of archival materials from foreign sources is of extremely scientific and political importance. As is known, the Armenians claim to have been subjected to genocide in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and are promoting these allegations around the world. However-



*Discussion of the “Eastern Question” at the Berlin Congress in 1878. Engraving of 1878*



er, historical documents prove the opposite and reveal that Armenians carried out genocide in both Azerbaijan and eastern Anatolia. This study was prepared mainly on the basis of documents of the National Archives of the United Kingdom. The UK archives contain precious materials that play a key role in revealing the truth about the crimes committed by Armenians. These documents contain correspondence between British officials and top secret reports signed by senior officials, which shows the importance of the Armenian factor for major powers, particularly the United Kingdom.

The documents in the UK archives are critical in terms of uncovering historical realities and evaluating the problem under review on the basis of more objective criteria, because Armenians and their supporters in the Western world claim that materials from both Azerbaijan and Turkey are not impartial but biased. Of course, the materials in the archives of Turkey and Azerbaijan are of great significance in revealing the historical truth, but we believe that in terms of objective value, it is more useful to study the issue on the basis of UK archival materials. Considering that proving the crimes committed by Armenians on the basis of documents in the Azerbaijani and Turkish archives is not so convincing for the Western public and with that in mind, we decided to reveal the reality on the basis of documents in the UK archives. These materials prove that the Armenians were used as a barrier for the elimination of the ideology of Panturanism, and the creation of an independent Armenian state by cutting ties between Turkey and Azerbaijan and indirectly the Turkic

world was in the interests of the Entente countries, and Armenian detachments funded and armed for this purpose carried out a systematic policy of genocide against the local population of the South Caucasus, particularly of Azerbaijan in 1917-1920.

**The place of the “Armenian question” in Britain’s geopolitical plans.** Britain’s geopolitical interests regarding Azerbaijan and its Caucasus policy in general should be regarded as an integral part of the “historical Eastern question”. It is undeniable that historically, while carrying out its imperialist policy, any great power used various excuses and factors. In the events currently taking place in the world and the geopolitical interests of the great powers, it is possible to observe these factors. One of the factors that played a key role in the implementation of Britain’s geopolitical interests in Ottoman territories and in the South Caucasus in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Armenians. It should be noted that although the Armenians turned into conductors of Britain’s geopolitical interests in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they demanded that this great world power provide guarantees for “the Armenian state” planned to be built in the future. In other words, British-Armenian relations can be characterized as a kind of “mutual use and benefit relations”. As mentioned, Britain played a major role in the emergence of the “Armenian question” and its transformation into an international problem and used the Armenians as a primary means in its expansionist policy on Ottoman lands and in its geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus. Before looking into this issue, we



*Catholicos Mkrtych Khrimyan. Artist V. Surenlyants. 1909. M. Khrimyan headed the Armenian delegation sent to the Congress of Berlin. But because of the huge demands, the Congress did not receive the Armenian delegation*

think it important to take a look at the history of relations between the British and Armenians.

The root of relations between the two nations dates back to the Middle Ages. Some sources say that Armenians were present in England in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (1, p. 48; 2, p. 73). The Armenians came to Europe in this period as a result of the expansion of the Arab-Islamic state, and some of them settled in England. The relations that began in the Middle Ages developed mainly at religious and trade levels. Ahead of the crusades, Armenians in Cilicia and those who joined these crusades from England established relations at the highest level, and this attitude by Armenians, who established an alliance with the crusaders against the Turks, was greatly welcomed by the English just like other crusaders. Turkish researchers Sedat Laciner and Ihsan Bal comparatively analyze the reports of some Armenian sources that "Armenians fled the Turkish invasion and took refuge in England and even engaged in propaganda against the Turks in Europe, and as proof of relations between the two nations, English King Henry III and Hetum corresponded with each other", and reveal that both ahead of and after the

crusades, the Armenians sought support from England and other European Christian countries and counted on aid from foreign powers against other peoples in the territories where Armenians lived. (2, p. 74)

Armenians later became an important part of British foreign policy. It was, first of all, due to the fact that some Armenian merchants who were in contact with the English knew Eastern languages (Ottoman, Persian, Hindi etc.). Along with that, their Christian faith also gave the Armenians a great advantage. During this period, Armenians could be a very favorable means for Britain, which was pursuing a policy of colonizing India and the whole of Asia, and this bore its fruit. The Armenians played a major role in Britain's invasion of India. Armenians, who knew the area very well and had no language problem, initially volunteered to help Britain. They even gained a significant share of Britain's Eastern trade. Armenians had an important share not just in India, but also in the Britain-Iran line. They mainly traded in silk, fabric and spices (3).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the services of Armenian merchants were taken into account and they were awarded the Royal Charter and granted the status of free citizens of Britain. This success in trade further increased the sympathy of the British for Armenians and this sympathy later manifested itself in politics too (2, p. 75). It should be noted that behind this sympathy were British national interests. The rich and strategic territories of the Ottoman Empire, which gradually lost power in the period from the Seven Years' War (Note) to World War I and was called the "sick man", attracted the attention of Britain, as well as many colonial powers. These colonial powers were in fierce rivalry with each other for the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The most important issue for the main imperialist powers such as Britain, Russia, France, and then Germany and Italy was how to divide Ottoman territories and how to use non-Muslim ethnic elements of the empire in their interests.

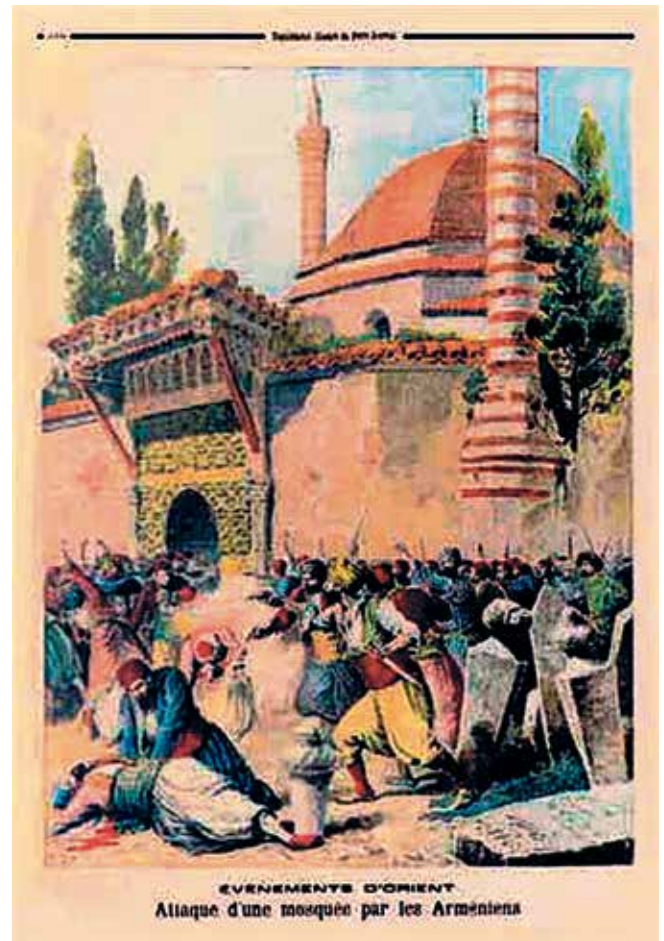
Although Britain, which pursued a policy of defending the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, did not seemingly abandon its traditional policy based on the principles of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire after the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-1878, it adopted a policy of taking over the territories of the state of strategic importance to itself or at least increasing its control and influence over

*In the European press, Ottoman Turks were always presented as killers. When there were no documentary sources, artists were involved in propaganda*

these territories. In other words, Britain, which previously defended the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, adopted a policy aimed at overthrowing the Ottoman Empire from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main reason was that British political figures previously believed that the Indian way would be guaranteed by the Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity. However, Britain realized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that this state would collapse in a very short period of time and decided to create new states on the territory of the Ottoman Empire and thus protect India and the Indian way. The main objectives of Britain were as follows:

- a) To prevent the possessions of the Ottoman Empire, which is unable to protect its territorial integrity, from falling into the hands of a country that might harm the interests of Britain and threaten its colonies;
- b) In order to guarantee the safety of colonies, Britain, which previously protected the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire in order to prevent Russia from accessing the warm seas, aimed to create dependent states on the territory of the Ottoman Empire as it saw the approaching end of this state (see details: 4, pp. 564-567 5, pp. 200-201).

The Armenian question was part of British policy, and British-Russian rivalry played a major role in the emergence of this policy of global nature. By raising the Armenian question, Britain simply aimed to dismember Ottoman territories, establish hegemony over the dismembered territories and prevent Russia from accessing the Mediterranean Sea. As is known, Britain was the world's greatest maritime power and kept world trade in its hands. With its victories, it became an unbeatable force. Britain's supreme strategy was based on a strong diplomatic and strategic balance. In the 1890s, Britain competed with France in the high seas, Africa, the Middle and Far East, with Germany in Europe and with Russia in the Middle East, the Balkans, Anatolia and Asia for control over Ottoman possessions and in Afghanistan and China. At the same time, Britain was very interested in the lands of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Britain wanted to gain an advantage in rivalry with Russia, France and Germany by creating Bulgaria in the Balkans, Armenia in Anatolia and dependent Arab states in the Middle East. From the British point of view, the meaning of the "Armenian question" was to use it for gaining an advantage (6, p. 223; 5, pp. 129-131).



It should be noted that Article 16 of the 1878 Treaty of San Stefano worried Britain as it thought that Russia would occupy Ottoman territories. Had Russia gained access to the Gulf of Basra through Iskenderun in Anatolia on the one hand and Mesopotamia on the other, Britain could face serious and grave consequences. According to Britain, the only way to remove this threat, as mentioned above, was to maintain the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire even if temporarily and establish control over its territories. To implement this plan, Britain wanted to sign an agreement with the Ottomans on defense against the Russian threat before the Berlin agreement (7, p. 22). The fact that Britain's Foreign Secretary Robert Salisbury said in the face of pressure from Russia that Britain would fight not for the Turks but for the Ottoman Empire is very thought-provoking (8, p. 5). This phrase explains a lot, actually. It becomes clear that Britain had no interest in the Turks at all. According to Salisbury, the Russians would not content themselves with the takeover of Kars and would dismember Anatolia as they did in the Balkans. In order to prevent this situation, it was important for Britain and



*An Armenian squad fully equipped and armed with European and Russian weapons. While Europeans accused the Ottomans, Armenian parties created terrorist groups*

the Ottoman Empire to sign an alliance agreement that would provide for the protection of Asian lands (7, p. 5). It was decided to sign the new agreement in Berlin. The Ottoman Empire hoped that Britain would support it in Berlin. But Britain decided to make threats at the Berlin Congress as it was aware of the tense situation of the Ottoman Empire and managed to take the island of Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire temporarily. According to the agreement signed on 4 June 1878 and approved by Abdul Hamid II on 15 July 1878, the Ottoman government would conduct reforms for the Armenians living in Eastern Anatolia in coordination with Britain. Britain would keep Cyprus until the Russian threat was eliminated in Eastern Anatolia. Thus, Britain guaranteed the security of the shortest way to India (9, p. 15). Apparently, Britain sought reforms not to protect the Armenians, but to protect its own interests and seized the island of Cyprus as a base against Russia.

Following the election of Gladstone, who was known for his anti-Turkish sentiment, as British Prime Minister in 1880, Britain turned into a kind of lawyer for Armenians (9, p. 168). Gladstone first reconsidered the "Armenian question" and sent a note to the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman Empire – E. Sh.) demanding reforms in areas populated by Armenians. In its response, the Ottoman Empire said reforms had already been carried out (4, p. 570). This initiative by Gladstone gave rise to great hopes among Armenians. Beginning from the 1880s, the Armenians who felt Britain's support intensified their activities and began to establish various societies to create an independent Armenian state and raised anti-government uprisings. The clashes between Muslims and Armenians were presented in Europe as killings of Armenians by Turks. Britain, France and Russia raised the issue of reform again. The ambassadors of the three countries in Istanbul issued a memorandum to the Sublime Porte on 11 May 1895 on the basis of

the principles of the Armenian Patriarchate and presented a draft for reform in six provinces - Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Istanbul, Diyarbakir and Harput. Although Britain wanted to add an article on the appointment and dismissal of governors in the provinces by the powers, Russia and France rejected the offer, because had this proposal been accepted, it would have allowed Britain to interfere in the "Armenian question" as it wished. Britain informed the Ottoman Empire that if it did not respond positively to this project as soon as possible, it would use military force. In turn, this threat could not but disturb Russia. Realizing that the true intention of British "Armenian policy" was to keep the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions of the Ottoman Empire under its control and that if the British established hegemony over the Armenians living here, this would affect the Armenians within its borders, Russia expressed its opposition to the use of military force. Feeling bolder, the Ottoman Empire rejected the draft reform presented by Britain. Although in the face of Russia and France, which understood its intentions, Britain did not exert too much pressure on the Ottoman Empire regarding reforms, it continued to create new problems (4, pp. 569-571). These problems can be characterized by the promotion of Protestant missionary activities in Ottoman lands by Britain, its support for geopolitical psychosocial movements and the transformation of ideological anti-Turkish views from an idea into practice owing to arms supplies. These activities played a great role in the revival of radical Armenian nationalism. It should be noted that the Armenian national identity emerged as a result of the different expectations and even conflicting interests of geopolitical forces. Armenian terrorist organizations were used as the main weapon in a manner that would serve geopolitical goals. The separate geopolitical plans of the great powers had a major influence on Armenian terrorist organizations (see details: 4, pp. 571-580; 5, pp. 184-188; 10, p. CXLVI-CXLIX). It is the result of this influence that a large number of Turkish-Muslim people became victims of Armenian terror organizations that began to be established from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The arming of these terrorist organizations led to bloody crimes in Anatolia and the Caucasus.

One issue is particularly important to note. Despite

the geopolitical rivalry between them, the states that sought to take advantage of these terrorist organizations for their own interests, in particular, Russia and Britain began to draw closer to one another from 1895 in the face of strengthening Germany. More precisely, the fear of Germany was the most important factor that drew both countries closer to each other. Aiming to resolve their disputes through mediation, Russia and Britain signed an agreement in 1907 re-establishing their relations and began to act together within the framework of the Entente. Both states were interested in keeping Germany away from the "Eastern" issue and taking over the strategic territories of the Ottoman Empire (see: 3, pp. 443-450; 5, pp. 128-136). However, towards the end of the First World War, significant changes took place on the political landscape of the world. Following the October 1917 coup, Russia, which was one of the key members of the Entente, was forced to withdraw from the war. In the Entente, Russia was replaced by the US. Thus, complete control over Armenian organizations, so to speak, went to Britain. ✪

### More in the next issue

**Note:** Britain's famous political figure Prime Minister Winston Churchill refers to the Seven Years' War as the First World War. This war, which took place in 1756-1763, involved many states along with their colonies - Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Prussia, Austria, most of the German principalities that were part of the Holy Roman Empire, Russia, Sweden, Saxony and Sardinia participated in the war in the Far East, from India to Europe and in all areas as far as the American continent. The war won by Britain and its allies is regarded as the First World War (see: H.V. Bowen. War and British Society (1688-1815). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 7).

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*A cartoon showing the true causes of anti-Turkish propaganda in the European press*

