

# BRITISH THESES ON THE ARMENIAN QUESTION (BASED ON BRITISH DOCUMENTS, 1920)

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## **Abstract:**

The analyses in British documents under the headings of the 'Armenian Question' or the formation of the 'Greater Armenia' mainly consisted of politically-natured theses and arguments. In terms of items of a 'political' nature, one can possibly also obtain this kind of data from sources belonging to other related countries. That is, when the political theses of the great powers, including Great Britain, in the 19th and 20th centuries are considered, it can easily be seen that during this time there was a logic and consistency in their policy relating to the handling of the issue of the Eastern Question within the context of the 'dissolution of empires—with the expected inclusion of the Ottoman Empire' at the top of the list. Since the Cold War, however, the nature of the issues concerning the Armenian Question is quite different from that of the past two centuries. The current problem is not due to the varying political designs or interests of the great powers, but rather to global imperialism with a pseudonymous cast. For this reason, it would be constructive to make a 'conceptual analysis', instead of concentrating solely on blaming the policies of Turkish side or the Armenian side or those of the great powers. This study will cover a number of British political assessments of the Armenian Question, which had a significant place within the intense political manoeuvring leading up to the Peace Treaty of Sèvres signed between the Allied powers and the Ottoman Empire in August 1920. The project for a 'Greater Armenia' gained momentum during the time in question, which involved the process prior to an Allied occupation of Istanbul on 16 March, 1920. In this context, this study will try to demonstrate how the Armenian Question was perceived within British policy by referring to British archives.

**Key Words:** Armenian Question, Greater Armenia, Ottoman State, Turkey,

Great Britain, massacre, terror, imperialism, Neo-Colonialism (1914-45).

Although between August 1919 and July 1920 Great Britain gradually withdrew from the Caucasus, which it had occupied soon after the Armistice of Mudros which was signed between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire in 1918, its strategy regarding the territory persisted; this had concentrated on enlarging the territories of Armenia (the Greater Armenian project), which had been established in the south Caucasus in 1918 after separating from the Ottoman Empire, and also on keeping the Tashnak administration in Erivan under control.

This study will cover a number of British political assessments of the Armenian Question, which had a significant place within the intense political manoeuvring leading up to the Peace Treaty of Sèvres signed between the Allied powers and the Ottoman Empire in August 1920. The project for a 'Greater Armenia' gained momentum during the time in question, which involved the process prior to an Allied occupation of Istanbul on 16 March, 1920. In this context, this study will try to demonstrate how the Armenian Question was perceived within British policy by referring to British archives, including those of the Foreign Office-FO, Cabinet Papers-CAB and Parliamentary Debates-PD.

It should be mentioned here that this type of analysis is not blinkered in nature, aiming to give rise to accusations and criticism, but on the contrary stems from the need to develop a comprehensive and analytical approach regarding the issue of Armenian Question - which still has ramifications today - by examining its different political roots and the surrounding international environment during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so, this study aims at creating a better understanding of the "politicized" aspects of the issue at hand, thus attenuating the problems stemming from previous differences of perception in order to establish a platform for reconciliation that will contribute to world peace.

Among the unresolved British priorities regarding the fate of the Ottoman Em-

pire at the beginning of 1920 were the future of the Turkish capital, the matter of assigning the region of Thrace - extending as far as Çatalca - to Greece, full control of the Straits and the establishing of an international power within the region, close supervision of the financial position of the Turkish government from Istanbul, and the handing over of Izmir to Greece. Added to this was the issue of the creation of a greater independent Armenia, including Erzurum and the region then referred to, by the British, as Turkish Armenia, and the probable recognition of an independent Kurdistan located in the southern region of the territory in question. All of these issues need to be evaluated within the strategy known as the 'Eastern Question', which was the centuries-old aim of various imperial powers to partition the Turkish Empire; the section relevant to the 'Armenian Question' can be construed as a two-dimensional political basis justified by the concern for the future of minorities:

- Rhetoric of protecting the rights of minorities (*e.g.* Armenians, Nestorians, Chaldeans and other native Christian elements);
- The so-called 'Armenian massacres'.

While British policy enforced the hypothesis holding the Turkish government in Istanbul responsible for the "massacres", it also resorted to multipurpose sanctions [*for example*, effective occupation, the control of state institutions (the military, the police, the gendarmerie, the postal-telegraphic service), the arrest of not only incompetent ministers, but also the leaders of the Turkish National War and the ex-leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (the C.U.P) which had ruled the Ottoman Empire between 1913 and 1918 and been deemed by the Allies as dangerous, and finally, the probable closure of the Ottoman Parliament, etc]. In this regard, the main arguments used by the British in public propaganda were as follows:

- The matter of Turkey's violation of the terms of the Mudros Armistice, and its refusal to comply with instructions.

- Instability, disorder and the risk posed to the lives of Christian elements.
- The inability of the Turkish government to establish authority.
- The duty of the Allies to guarantee the security of the Sultan, the Turkish Government, the Allied forces and the public in general.
- To prevent the risk of the foundation of a Turco-Arabian collaboration ‘*against the foreigner*’ and to diminish the probability of the Allies’ losing their advantageous position in the rivalry for control of the oil reserves within the region stretching from Mesopotamia to the Caspian.
- To lessen the effect and eliminate the possibility of a probable joint threat on behalf of the Turkish Nationalists of the *de facto* Ankara Government and the Bolsheviks, by sustaining tension between Ankara and Moscow over the issues of Armenia and Batoum.
- The British effort to safeguard and establish a ‘Greater Armenia’ – *which was perhaps to some extent also an attempt to create a ‘British Armenia’ within the orbit of her interests* – ‘as a humane duty’<sup>1</sup> on behalf of all the Allies against both the Turks and the Bolsheviks, by arguing that the Armenian population of the region that they preferred to depict as ‘Turkish Armenia’ had decreased in number due to the so-called massacres.
- To direct the efforts to establish ‘fair governance and equal treatment to all’ within the region under British guidance by asserting that the Armenians in Turkey were densely concentrated mainly in two regions<sup>2</sup>.
- The necessity to have a hold over the Turkish administration with a view to punishing Turkey for the ‘1915 Deportation’ and the ‘Marash Incidents in 1920’, and to prevent the reoccurrence of such cases.

On the one hand, the echoes of the Allied decision to leave Istanbul to Turkish rule as of January 1920 continued; on the other, French military forces, with the

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1 David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, Vol. II, New Haven, 1939, p. 810.

2 From the British viewpoint these two regions consisted of: a). The surroundings of Mount Ararat, where the old frontiers of Turkey-Russia-Persia intersect, that is to say, the *Greater Armenia*; b). Cilicia, the meeting point of Asia Minor and Syria on the Mediterranean Sea- or *Little Armenia*. See the speech of A. Williams (who had been the Chairman of the British Armenia Committee for years since its formation) in the House of Commons, PD, Vol.125, 26 February 1920, pp. 2032-3.

cooperation of Armenian local guerilla battalions, had entered into conflict with Nationalist local civil resistance forces - namely, *Kuvayı Milliye* - in the environs of Cilicia (Çukurova) and the western sections of the region, with special reference to Marash. This fighting was a consequence of events that had started with the transfer of regions in Syria and Cilicia (territories which had been under British occupation after the Mudros of Armistice) from Great Britain to France, with the take-over agreement – the *Syrian Agreement* – being signed in September 1919. British documents which give emphasis to the Marash Incidents of January and February of 1920 state that France's mishandling of affairs had led to local incidents more serious in nature and thus had given rise to the Marash tragedy. Moreover, it was quite clear that the consequences of these local incidents in Cilicia paved the way for the resignation of the Ali Rıza Pasha government in Istanbul.<sup>3</sup> According to these British documents, the French failure in Cilicia had put pressure on the Ali Rıza Pasha government, and this, quite evidently, had caused its collapse. Although the Allied resolution of January 1920 that the Turks were not to be removed from Istanbul strengthened the argument of the Turkish government, the threat addressed to Istanbul that 'if Turkey directed massacres against Armenians and resisted the Allied and Greek powers', the peace conditions presented to Turkey would become harsher, increased the severity of the situation for the government.

The British Cabinet meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> January 1920 drew attention to the importance for the protection of the road to India of the Batoum-Baku line on the outskirts of the Caucasus, and the advantages of staying on good terms with the Turks for the benefit of the line in question. Moreover, it also emphasized, as did military circles, the necessity of maintaining the Turks in Istanbul.<sup>4</sup> Still, in a note of 12<sup>th</sup> December 1919 evaluating the pros and cons of removing Turkish control from Istanbul, Berthelot, the Secretary General of the French MFA, also referred

3 Br.Doc.VII:422, Appendix 1: Telegram to the British High Commissioner; FO371/5166/E2306/262/44, From Robeck to Curzon, No.358, Istanbul 15 March 1920; Br.Doc.VII:298-9, The Note of the British Minister in the Allied Conference, 28 February 1920.

4 CAB23/37, Conference 18, 5 January 1920, p.121

to the four principles mentioned below which gained the support of the British Cabinet on 5<sup>th</sup> January:

- The crushing of Turkish militarism, as that of Prussian militarism.
- The custody of the Straits, from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, to be entrusted to an international organisation which shall effectively secure their neutrality and free passage.
- Freeing of the Armenians from Turkish domination.
- Not to return the Arab and Syrian populations to the domination of the Turk.<sup>5</sup>

When examining the approaches of the British Foreign Ministry, Government and Parliament in general, one can see that the dominant tendency was the belief, in line with the assertion of Lord Curzon, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, that “*She (Armenia) lost no fewer than 800,000 of her people massacred by the Turks since the beginning of the War, not to speak of 200,000 who were expatriated and deported from their own native country to other parts of the Turkish Empire*”<sup>6</sup>. To him, the Armenians, Syrians, Arabs, Kurds and other subject-populations had been misgoverned and it was for this reason that he had foreseen the necessity for certain arrangements and entries involving the minorities in the peace treaty that would end World War I. Curzon believed that the Turks were left by the Peace Treaty those homelands of Asia Minor which were fairly homogeneous in race, in language, and in creed. This territory had been larger than Spain and equivalent to an area three times bigger than Austria. Curzon believed that with the aid of Europe, the Turks, in the future would be able to build ‘a stable and peaceful kingdom’ on these lands.<sup>7</sup>

Curzon evaluated the two states within British policy, *i.e.* the foundation of “Armenia and Kurdistan” within the territory ranging from the eastern point of the

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5 Ibid., p.117.

6 PD, House of Lords, Vol. 41, 4 August 1920, p.734.

7 Ibid., p.736.

Mediterranean to the western borders of India, and believed that the political mechanisms that governed this extensive territory needed to be renewed.<sup>8</sup> In other words, in his assessment of the Armenian Question, he supported the artificial foundation of Greater Armenia, leaning towards a belief in a state, an Armenia, that would be established under the supervision of Britain 'on the condition of annexing Turkish territories'. Nonetheless, when considering this thesis, he drew attention to the fact that great care had been taken not to produce a negative effect on the project for a second artificial state—Kurdistan. According to the British thesis, from a political perspective most of the Kurds were no different from the Turks and were thus under the influence of those who had dedicated themselves to the Turkish National War under Mustafa Kemal. However, although the Kurds who were against the National War were divided amongst themselves, it was believed that if the situation was handled carefully by the British they would be able to take advantage of circumstances and use the Kurds '*as a counterpoise to Kemalism, Bolshevism and forces of sheer disorder*'. Then again, the Allied powers were quite apprehensive due to the advantages they had granted the Armenians, the borders of the region they planned on giving the Armenians and the act of including a big section of the region populated by the French or the probability of partitioning the area in question between Britain and France; for these reasons they were to be drawn closer to the Turks and establish a close relationship with them.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Prime Minister David Lloyd George, inspired by the Greek President Venizelos, had a variety of schemes concerning this matter. Venizelos's telegram of 5 October, which had been passed on to the Cabinet by Lloyd George himself, had evoked the vision that the proposed State of *Pontus* would be virtually a *Greek* State and that this new State, collaborating with Armenia and Georgia, would form a solid barrier set against Pan-Islamism, and, eventually, against Russian Imperialism.<sup>10</sup>

8 CAB24/107, C.P.1434, The Memorandum of Curzon: 'The Future administration of the Middle East', 8 June 1920, p.1.

9 See WO106/1505/Appreciation of the Situation in Turkey, 9 March 1920; FO371/5056/E12474/3/44, From Robeck to Curzon, No.1349, Istanbul 28 September 1920, Appendix: "Memorandum by Ryan".

10 CAB23/22, Vol.54 (20), 12 October 1920, pp.262-4.

Lloyd George believed that the arguments contained in the Turkish thesis – as defended by Montagu – had removed any possibility that peace conditions be just, and believed that this had led to it being unfairly sacrificed for the sake of the Greeks, Armenians and others. According to the British Prime Minister, some operations were being undertaken independently by the Greeks, while others, at necessary points, had been carried out with the collaboration of both the Greek and British forces under British command. These attempts had been for the sake of all non-Turkish populations, in order to release them from Turkish sway. At this point, everyone, whether inside or outside of the British Parliament, had been in consensus; even so, the issue of leaving Istanbul to Turkey had been discussed quite vigorously, even on the eve of signing the peace treaty. Yet again, according to Lloyd George, the only difficulty they were up against was the matter of Armenia. He stated that he had wished the difficulty would be overcome without trouble, stating that “*If we allowed Mustafa Kemal, or any man of his type, to organize forces in order to break down that policy, Europe would have failed dismally in its duty.*”<sup>11</sup> Lloyd George reminded of the fact that it was not necessary to exaggerate the force and capacity of Turkey, and that, compared to the total sum of 80 thousand Turks, the power of the Allies had been equivalent to 160 thousand soldiers; he did not neglect to reprove, saying that if 2 soldiers of the Allied powers, whether French, British, Italian or Greek, were unable to defeat 1 Turkish soldier, then, under such circumstances, one should ask the Turks to determine the peace proposals.<sup>12</sup>

On the military side, the Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, and the Chief of General Staff, Henry Wilson, warned the Foreign Ministry that the occupation of Istanbul and the resources to be used for this means would not be worth the expense and would cost the British their existence in Batoum and the Caspian Region. They were worried that Turkish politics would thrust the Turks into the embrace of the Bolsheviks, and the effects of this would be felt in all of

11 PD, House of Commons, Vol. 130, 23 June 1920, pp.2259-60.

12 Br.Doc.VII:416, The Note of the British Minister in the Allied Conference, 5 March 1920.



the Middle East and India. Churchill believed that the occupation of Istanbul would needlessly burden the Turkish side and in accordance with this opposed the act, stating that to pursue such a goal would be too expensive and serve no purpose.<sup>13</sup>

In short, Churchill felt quite anxious as he believed that Turkey would not accept severe conditions unless there was further military intervention and the financial means to back this up. Churchill's approach was probably due to the British-French defeat experienced at the Battle of the Dardanelles in 1915. At that time Churchill had become so desperate that in a communication to his colleagues on 20 October 1915, he suggested the use of 'mustard gas'<sup>14</sup> in great amounts to break the Turkish defense lines. What is more noteworthy is the fact that in his efforts to try to find an excuse for the use of such an element, he had referred to 'massacres conducted against the Armenians by the Turks'.

The Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, questioned how and where the British planned to provide the required military force, stipulating 'not from India'. He emphasized that not even 20 or 30 divisions could be gathered together when necessary, expressing the opinion that from the perspective of layout, it was inevitable in the case of the Christian Chaldeans in Armenia and Eastern Anatolia "for Christians under Muslim and Muslims under Christian rule". For this reason, he believed that one should not support both sides in order to maintain an aggressive attitude, and that it was certain that no great state would accept an Armenian mandate. Moreover, unless the borders of Armenia were not formed from the eastern section of Erzurum, war and chaos would continue; thus Montagu believed in and defended the importance of the Kurdistan project to protect the Chaldeans. Lastly, Montagu added that it was wished to extend Armenian borders during the present Turkish peace, and this would create a great threat for

13 See CAB23/21, Vol. 24(20), 5 May 1920; E.L. Knudsen, *Great Britain, Constantinople and the Turkish Peace Treaty 1919-1922*, London 1987, pp.190-1; M. Kent; *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, London 1984, pp.191-2; P.C. Helmreich; *From Paris to Sevres*, Ohio 1974, p.279.

14 M. Gilbert; *Churchill: A Life*, London 1991, p.327.

the minorities which, in actual fact, were considered as the main element to be protected.<sup>15</sup>

When looking at the discussions on the Armenian Question that occurred in the British Parliament, one can easily come across some interesting and unique comments that were made in the House of Commons on 26 February 1920. For instance, Bonar Law suggested that there would be possible risks – *such as Mustafa Kemal ignoring altogether the instructions from Istanbul or the possibility of further massacres* – in the matter of protecting minorities through monitoring by the Turkish government in Istanbul; however, he emphasized the fact that it would be quite wrong to assume that controlling Istanbul and evacuating the Turkish elements would not eventually mean that the minorities would also be free of the Turks. Major Earl Winterton also related that he met a lot of Christians during his stay in the Ottoman Empire. They had all stated that they did not want any Turkish subjects to be exiled from Istanbul, and they did not think nor believe that this circumstance would mean a safer environment for Christian lives. It was just the opposite; according to Earl Winterton, they had wanted the Powers to show consideration in not presenting any conditions to the Turks that would upset and thus agitate Islamic fanaticism.<sup>16</sup>

At this point, Sir Donald Maclean presented a fierce outburst on the matter of the Armenians, questioning what was being done to prevent the massacres designed against them. Sir E. Carson, likewise, asked how it was planned to protect the Armenians and how solutions were to be realized in reality and not just on paper. Furthermore, Lord Robert Cecil, who did not find the severe policies of Lloyd George oriented against the Turks – in a sense – harsh enough, among many criticisms called attention to the importance of Cilicia for the future of Armenia and demanded a clear explanation as to whether the borders of Armenia were to

15 CAB24/103, C.P.1046, From Montagu to Hankey, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India, 9 April 1920, p.194.

16 PD, House of Commons, Vol. 125, 26 February 1920, pp.2012-3, 2051-3.

be extended or not.<sup>17</sup>

In answer to all the criticisms and questions, Lloyd George reminded everyone of the warning he had issued; 'Istanbul was left to the Turks, however, they would take it back if massacres recommenced. Whilst supporting the policy of freeing the non-Turkish communities from the Ottoman influence, as well as areas mainly populated by Greeks, Armenians, Kurds and Arabs from Turkish rule, he drew attention to the necessity of bearing in mind the fact that the old feeling of "*Christendom against the Crescent*" might be re-awakened and find voice even in India. Whilst Istanbul was left to the Turks on the condition that there would be no threats concerning the minorities, he added that great consideration was given to leaving Turkey without a naval force and that the Turks were no longer in charge of supervising the Straits. In addition to this, he suggested that there were advantages in contacting and attending peace meetings with Ottoman administrative circles in Istanbul - a region under Allied supervision and open to the world - rather than attending these conferences in a setting such as Konya, isolated from foreign or international influence as the Sultan's center of administration.<sup>18</sup>

Air Commodore Surtees also suggested that rather than supporting any kind of development that would result in Bursa and Konya becoming the center of the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul should be left as it was - the center of the Turkish administration - and be monitored without any difficulty, and that the matters of *Istanbul*, *Armenia* and *Anatolia* be assessed as three different issues. Colonel Wedgwood also thought that rather than having the Sublime Porte in Konya as the new center of administration, it would better serve the Armenian's benefits if Istanbul was under the guns of the British fleet.<sup>19</sup>

Amongst British Parliamentary discussions, the questioning of two members of

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17 PD, House of Commons, Vol. 125, 26 February 1920, pp.1951-5, 1958, 1971.

18 PD, House of Commons, Vol. 125, 26 February 1920, pp.1963, 1966-70.

19 PD, House of Commons, Vol. 125, 26 February 1920, pp.2020, 2023.

parliament who had been to the Near East and Anatolia gave rise to an interesting analysis of the situation. Aubrey Herbert, who had served in the Near East, drew attention to the fact that the notion of a Greater Armenia could not be realized by provoking the Kurds to rebel or by removing the Turks from Istanbul. He also mentioned that the whole country was well armed and prepared to fight, and it would be quite wrong to create an atmosphere that would put the Armenians or other Christian minorities located in these regions (such as Sivas, Konya, Afyonkarahisar etc) to any risk or danger. In fact, it would be better to assess circumstance from the perspective of whether the British Empire would remain true to the promises they had made to the Muslims rather than considering it within the context of whether to allow Muslim idealism to blossom or not.<sup>20</sup>

The evaluation of Lieutenant Colonel Guinness, who served in Turkey, was also quite striking. He spoke of 'Asia Minor', a very complex and mountainous region between Asia and Europe measuring about 900 miles from East to West and about 300 miles from North to South, as a state which is inhibited by many religions and races and which has witnessed many conquests and migrations. He also added that the Armenian plateau, with its civilization, was to be united to Russian Armenia as the Republic of Erivan, '*so it need not really concern us in our picture of the conditions of Asia Minor, nor need we consider for the moment Cilicia. We hope France will take a mandate for the control of that area, and that she will take the largest possible powers for looking after the interests of the religious minority*'. Guinness warned that within the context of the present situation, this in reality did not concern Britain in any way. Moreover, bearing in mind British interests, he wondered why a force was not sent to Turkey, to take full control of the region and subject Turkey to certain reforms under British guidance; basically to become more active within the region. Referring to the Christians in Turkey, Guinness stated that conditions for those who lived in Western Anatolia was good, however conditions in the mountains and villages situated in southern Armenia was pretty bad; adding that there had been Christian minorities living under conditions of

20 PD, House of Commons, Vol. 125, 26 February 1920, p.2002.

terrible grinding slavery and most of them had consisted of Chaldean Catholics, Nestorians, and Jacobites pertaining to the Chaldean race. Moreover, he drew attention to the fact that these people, who were very little known, lived under far worse conditions than those Armenians in Cilicia.<sup>21</sup>

Towards the month of March, parallel to the issue of the foundation of a Greater Armenia, another subject that had also frequently engaged the agenda of discussions was the significant progress recorded in the matter of Istanbul's statutes. A change in policy concerning the occupation of Istanbul by the Allied states on 16 March made *bloc*<sup>22</sup> policy that much more difficult and thus impossible to execute. In reality, indicators of these developments had been given one month previously by the British authorities. During the conference of the Allies, on 28 February 1920, Lloyd George threw light on the matter and showed everyone that he chose to have a harsh attitude regarding Turkish policy. In order to protect the Armenians, to restore the reputation of the Allied powers and due to the Armenian incidents in Cilicia, he stated that '*if necessary, the Grand Vizier and his Secretary of War (or Secretaries), together with other Ministers will be arrested.*'<sup>23</sup> Approximately one week later, there arose the possibility of applying a comparatively lenient policy (such as the *bloc* policy) within the Allied circle which had materialized at about the same time as the rise to power of Grand Vizier Salih Hulusi Pasha on 8 March. That is, when the three Allied High Commissioners—Robeck, de France and Imperali—met on 3 and 4 March, they emphasised that it would be impossible for the Allied states to occupy Istanbul or maintain an assertive attitude of similar harsh measures at that time or in the near future, however serious the events in Cilicia. Nevertheless, there were severe requirements associ-

21 PD, House of Commons, Vol. 125, 26 February 1920, pp.1990-1, 1994-5.

22 The *Bloc* policy had involved assisting those who had been against the National War by assembling the comparatively lenient circles of the Sultan, to be protected by the Allies. In this respect, the Allied High Commissioners had presented a peace involving more lenient conditions. Br.Doc.VII:413, The Note of the British Minister in the Allied Conference, 5 March 1920. These comparatively lenient conditions allowed for Turkish suzerainty, at least over a substantial portion of the Eastern provinces of Asia Minor, in Izmir and Eastern Thrace-including Edirne. Br.Doc.VII:379, The Note of the British Minister in the Allied Conference, 3 March 1920, Appendix 2 (from Robeck 29 February 1920).

23 Br.Doc.VII:302, The Note of the British Minister in the Allied Conference, 28 February 1920.

ated to the foundation of an independent Armenia which would also include the Erzurum region within its borders, amongst decisions which were made when considering the future of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>24</sup>

According to the report of the British Secretary of State for War, before the actual occupation of Istanbul - when assessing the probable strength, military force and political tendencies of the Turks - the issues of power settlement, indigent communication and financial difficulties had all affected the method and process of those who had devoted themselves to the National War. Parallel to this was the fact that if Istanbul was occupied by the Allied powers, the Turks would maintain a policy of attrition against the Powers by staging attacks on the Greek population in the Thrace (Trakya) region, Istanbul and Izmir, and on the French located in Cilicia. They would also strike Armenia and Mesopotamia and attack the Christian population using guerrilla tactics. Moreover, they would utilize general defense tactics, or just stand by to await the development of events.<sup>25</sup>

High Commissioner Admiral de Robeck, who had also been on duty in Istanbul, drew attention to the fact that the occupation of Istanbul and partitioning of Turkish territories for Greece and Armenia would have set the Near East and Central Asia on fire. In light of developments in Cilicia, Robeck criticized the attitude of the Allied Council regarding the Turkish peace conditions, and presented this situation as an unsound policy which had meant the construction of an attempted peace with permanent solutions on the back of an 'event'. In his opinion, if the occupation of Istanbul was known it would produce the risk of massacres being triggered within Anatolia. Nevertheless, under existing conditions and as the lesser of two evils, an 'Allied' occupation would be better than a 'Greek' one.<sup>26</sup>

24 FO371/5042/E1093/3/44, Robeck=>Curzon, No.191, Istanbul 5 March 1920; FO406/43/E946/3/44, From Curzon to Robeck, No.187, London 6 March 1920.

25 WO106/1505, Appreciation of the Situation in Turkey, 9 March 1920; Br.Doc.XIII:29, The Memorandum of General Staff, 15 March 1920.

26 Br.Doc.XIII:53-4, Robeck=>Curzon, No.317, Istanbul 1 April 1920; Br.Doc.XIII:19, from Robeck to Curzon, Istanbul, 9 March 1920.

Lord Curzon, on the other hand, answering a question as to why the Allied Council allowed the Sultan to stay in Istanbul announced that the Sultan was kept as a hostage by the Council against the prospect of future problems.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, he believed that the British had two choices. They were either to maintain a harsh attitude toward the issue as suggested by Lloyd George, or to have a comparatively more lenient approach as put forth by the High Commissioners. However, he also suggested that these lenient peace conditions would eradicate all hope for a reconstituted Armenia.<sup>28</sup>

In short, prior to March 1920, Lloyd George and Curzon informed that they could keep Istanbul in pledge to prevent any possible Armenian massacres that could arise in the future.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the apparent justification of the 'temporary' occupation of Istanbul by the Allies was to be expressed as to punish the misconduct in Cilicia of those who partook in the National War. On 15 March the High Commissioners held their last meeting before the occupation; next day Istanbul was occupied<sup>30</sup>, after which Grand Vizier Salih Hulusi Pasha reminded of the fact that the Turkish National Movement in Anatolia had been founded as a result of the atrocious events that had occurred during and after the occupation by the Greeks, which later had been fueled by the rumors of the intention to create a Greater Armenia and a Greek Pontus State and could do nothing else but to irredeemably condemn the occupation of Istanbul.<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The analyses in British documents under the headings of the 'Armenian Question' or the formation of the 'Greater Armenia' mainly consisted of politically-natured

27 Br.Doc.VII:298-9, The Note of the British Minister in the Allied Conference, 28 February 1920.

28 Br.Doc.VII:413-4, The Note of the British Minister in the Allied Conference, 5 March 1920. Curzon assessed the realization of an Armenia of a certain size which was to be constituted as an alternative peace which could be pursued through revision.

29 See Br.Doc.VII:414 (for Curzon), 417 (for Lloyd George), the Note of the British Minister in the Allied Conference, Istanbul 5 March 1920. Lloyd George, *ibid.*, Vol.II, p. 832.

30 FO406/43/E1693/3/44, from Robeck to Curzon, No.238, Istanbul 16 March 1920.

31 Br.Doc.XIII:43, from Robeck to Curzon, No.247, Istanbul, 18 March 1920.

theses and arguments. In terms of items of a '*political*' nature, one can possibly also obtain this kind of data from sources belonging to other related countries. That is, when the political theses of the great powers, including Great Britain, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are considered, it can easily be seen that during this time there was a logic and consistency in their policy relating to the handling of the issue of the Eastern Question within the context of the 'dissolution of empires—with the expected inclusion of the Ottoman Empire' at the top of the list. Since the Cold War, however, the nature of the issues concerning the Armenian Question is quite different from that of the past two centuries. The current problem is not due to the varying political designs or interests of the great powers, but rather to global imperialism with a pseudonymous cast. For this reason, it would be constructive to make a 'conceptual analysis', instead of concentrating solely on blaming the policies of Turkish side or the Armenian side or those of the great powers. Further to this, one can assess the terminologies used within the Armenian Question under four general headings:

### **1. Massacre – Atrocity – Deportation – Genocide:**

Whilst acknowledging the developments related to the Armenian incidents of 1915 and 1920, the first three of the above terms are to be found in British documents from the Mudros Armistice Era (1918-1922). The last term (*genocide*) was intensively used subsequent to the political panorama of the Cold War, starting in 1945; an era when the international imperial theses involving the topic of the so-called *Armenian 'genocide'* started to become quite popular.

The political expression of Armenian 'massacres or acts of cruelty' conducted by the Turks increased during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the Cold War era, however, severe accusations started to gain weight, even referring to the conduct of the Turks as an act of 'genocide' against the Armenians. This can be interpreted as an attempt to create controversy regarding the matter of the 1915 Relocation adopted during World War I; when considering the era which had characterized the incident as massacre or atrocity, the governmental decision of



*Relocation and Settlement* of 1915 cannot even be considered an act of ‘*deportation*’, moving people out of their homeland.<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, it should be perceived as a temporary *evacuation* towards ‘assigned and allocated locations’ in the direction of Syria and Palestine, which were both within the borders of the Ottoman Empire at that time. This Relocation<sup>33</sup> was an act originating in a state of emergency and the necessities of War, and enforced on the understanding that of people would return to their homes after the Great War. Therefore, the 1915 Relocation should not be confused with ‘deportation’, which implies the banishment, exile or expulsion of ‘natives or foreign residents’ from a country. The Ottoman use of the term ‘deportation’ meant temporary ‘forced relocation’ within the territories of the country; and was thus distinctly different than expulsion from the national territory. The Relocation was used as a ‘temporary governmental solution’ to deal with war-time *regional security-related issues* during the last Ottoman era. Furthermore, it was not applied specifically to the Armenians or to any other natives of the regions, but was enforced for the sake of the security of all inhabitants of the regions, which had become extremely agitated by war-time chaos and internal conflicts.

Moreover, when considering the events in Marash and the region of Cilicia at the beginning of 1920, one can clearly see that a standing army was not established by the Turkish side until the end of that year. During the Marash incidents, a Turkish paramilitary resistance, predominantly civilian in character, not a regular Turkish army, defended the lives and rights of the civil population against the unrestrained attacks of the French standing army in collaboration with Armenian guerilla battalions.

32 E. Aslan, for instance, emphasized the importance of preparing a specialized dictionary, with explanatory notes, of Turkish and International concepts involving Turco-Armenian Relations. Esat Aslan, “Fransa Ulusal Meclisinde ‘Ermeni Soykırım Yasası’nın Kabul Edilmesinden Sonraki Yeni Değerlendirmeler”, *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze Ermeni Sorunu*, Ankara, Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2001, pp.238-9. Sonyel also referred in detail to false reporting or miscommunication for propaganda purposes. Salahi Sonyel, *The Great War and the Tragedy of Anatolia*, Ankara, TTK Publications, 2001, Section 6.

33 The decision of the Ottoman administration can be expressed as ‘*the Provisional Law of Relocations*’. Sonyel, *The Great War and*, p.114.

## **2. Occupation – Invasion – Annexation:**

An *occupation* aims at overseeing or controlling strategic points (such as train stations, bridges, harbours, communication networks, military barracks, police stations, administration centers) by military force. An *invasion* is the rearguard of an occupation, with a dimension of pillage, including material gain.

The project for a ‘Greater Armenia’ was a project of *annexation*, being far removed from an attempt to ‘occupy’ or ‘invade’. It involved international imperialistic plans to incorporate the Eastern Anatolian territories of the Ottoman Empire into the Erevan Republic in the Caucasus –that is, the *annexation* of “*vilayati sitte* (the six provinces-*Erzurum, Elazığ, Diyarbakır, Sivas, Bitlis, Van*) and Cilicia by Armenia.

## **3. Turco-Armenian Relations/ Turkey-Armenia Relations/ The Armenian Terror:**

When referring to Turco-Armenian relations in the strictest sense, one should bear in mind that it signified the position of the ‘Ottoman-Armenian *millet*(*religious community*)’ within Ottoman society, and its interaction with the State; or, at present, diverse subject headings such as the political and socio-cultural interaction of the Armenian ‘citizens’ in the Turkish Republic.

‘*Turkey-Armenia relations*’ refers mostly to the versatile and ‘governmental/state’ dimension of external relations.

The fundamental question that arose for the Turkish Republic during the Cold War era, and which needs to be assessed apart from the two concepts mentioned above, is the problem of *terror*. This reflects the intrigues of the powers from an imperialistic dimension over the Armenians and not as an ethnic problem, *i.e.* the Armenian Question, caused by the ‘Armenian’ identity.

Therefore, the so-called ‘Armenian terror’ should not be regarded simply as an

ethnic-based Armenian activity directed against the Turks and caused by the 'Armenian' desire for retaliation. Instead, it should be regarded as an international political turbulence resulting from imperialistic greed against humanity and world peace. Thus it would be perhaps more appropriate not to label the problem as the 'Armenian' question, which wrongly defines the problem as if it were an 'ethnic' one.

#### **4. Neo-Colonialism (1914-45) and the Dissolution of Empires:**

In general terms, the Neo-Colonialist Era which fell between the two world wars witnessed the '*dissolution*' of the empire and not its '*fall*'. In this respect, Neo-Colonialist approaches had started to restructure after the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ultimately triggering a process of partition which was put into practice through the formulas of '*mandate* and '*colony*' designed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, due to the conditions of the Neo-colonialist era, it would not be out of place to see Anglo-French projects for partition in particular (along with those of the other great powers) within the context of expressions consisting of certain '*ethnic*' approaches concerning the 'Armenian' Question described in British documents during the 1920s.

Greater Armenia and Kurdistan were two artificial projects of state which were designed by the great powers of the era to partition the Ottoman Empire. These plans, however, could not be put into action due to the military, diplomatic and political success of the Turks, as well as to the rivalry among the Allied powers themselves. These two political themes reappeared during the Cold War to confront Turkey from a different angle, that of *terror*. The probable goal of these projects seems to involve the adoption of a method to draw upon political designs reflecting international competition rather than, for example, the need for or belief in the creation or otherwise of a greater Armenian state to serve for Armenian interests.

In other words, as 20<sup>th</sup> century political competition, which was perceived as having the *most 'complex cast' and intricate connections of all time*, had probably accurately assessed; for the Turks did not massacre the Armenians as claimed, and those who were evacuated or transferred were moved towards Syria-Lebanon within the terms of the Relocation of 1915 - though on condition that they did not come up against any hardships associated to natural difficulties, or any unforeseen disruptions or problems with individuals caused by the harsh conditions of the era during the journey. On the other hand, if it was commonly believed that the reports of so-called 'massacres' were true - and not that a transfer had taken place in 1915 in the direction of Syria-Lebanon - then *terror* would not have consciously and/or deliberately chosen the territories of Lebanon, the epicenter of ASALA and the PKK terrorists, as the logical location for the manipulation and production of incorrect declarations or propaganda by misusing Armenian sensitivity. To considering the information on the issue under discussion from a different angle; if the intention of the Ottoman administration was to 'massacre' the Armenians, then why did they go to such lengths to protect those who had been transferred to such a distant destination, trying to assure the safety of the route for approximately 900 km by air (the approx. distance as the bird flies), *nor* would they have picked Lebanon as the location for the transfer as it had an Armenian population that could easily verify whether the transferees had arrived at the intended destination or not.

In the final analysis, the expression of the '*Armenian Question*' also included the artificial justification which had given the emphasis to imperialism and the political theses that had been established regarding the 'Armenian identity' with the struggle in question and international rivalry of the era. In fact, if the Armenian Question had been a 'historical fact' and not a 'political thesis', the Ottoman territories which had been intended to supplement the territories of Armenia in the Caucasus within the terms of the 'Greater Armenia' project during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (an era which is also included within the present study ) would not have been incorporated -this time- within "the PKK terrorists' dream

of a ‘Kurdistan’” at the approach of the Cold War era. In short, if the ‘Armenian Question’ had been solely assessed according to *historical readings* and *scientific facts*, it would not have been an issue that was carried through the political arena within the framework of overlapping ‘artificial state’ theories referred to in different processes, devoid of historical basis and confronting the contradictions within itself.

