

# THE ARMENIAN QUESTION IN THE EARLY COLD WAR: REPATRIATION SCHEME

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## **Abstract:**

*This article focuses on Armenian repatriation scheme supported by the Soviet government at the end of the Second World War. This issue was first raised by the Soviets in the summer of 1945 in the following sense that Turkish provinces of Kars and Ardahan, formerly inhabited by Armenians, should be annexed to Soviet Armenia. Thereafter, the Armenian diaspora organisations in America, in the Balkans and in the Middle East simultaneously presented memorandums on several occasions to the world leaders, Churchill, Attlee, Truman and Stalin and to world organisations, urging the cession of the Turkish territories to Soviet Armenia, and facilities for the repatriation of those one and a half million Armenians living outside the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, who might wish to return there. After a short propaganda campaign, the Soviet Union put the Armenian repatriation scheme into effect in March 1946. To do so, a Committee was set up by the Soviet Armenian Government to administer the migration. The Armenians living in Romania, Greece, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq were targeted by this scheme. Soviet diplomats in these countries took a great part in it.*

## **Keywords:**

*Armenian repatriation, Second World War, Soviet Armenia, Armenian diaspora, Soviet Union*

## **INTRODUCTION**

**B**etween the two World War period, the Great Powers seemed not interested in Armenian affairs. During this period, there was no conflict between the Great Britain and the Soviet Union over the region. The USSR also was very much concerned with her domestic affairs and left the foreign policy as secondary matter. However, during this period, Armenian diaspora organisations maintained their campaign against Turkey. The largest and best organised of the Armenian-American

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organisations was the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, with headquarters in Boston. This was the American branch of the strongly nationalist Tashnag Party, which long strove for the establishment of an independent Armenia and followed a bitter anti-Soviet policy. The Federation had a daily newspaper, *Hairenik*, which advocated a complete Armenian Republic. Realising the futility of this program, the organisation officially renounced its anti-Sovietism in July 1944. Pro-Communist Armenian Americans were formed the Armenian Progressive League of America in New York City, which had been consistently enthusiastic about the role of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Soviet Union. The Armenian Democratic Liberal Union of Boston, an American branch of the Ramgavar Party, had liberal views, anti-Communist and constantly in dispute with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, on the other hand increasingly friendly towards the Soviet Union. This Union had a daily newspaper called *Baikar*. Occasionally *Baikar* condemned 'Soviet Tyranny' but in general, it was friendly to the USSR, because the Soviets was considered as their protector against Turkey.<sup>1</sup> The differences between these factions were united by a common dislike of Turkey.

Since the Hitler's defeat had removed the chief *raison d'être* of the Grand Alliance, the capability of co-operation in the war turn into conflict, when the post-war settlement was brought into the agenda. Faced with the Soviets' constant pressure regarding the East European countries the Western powers became more careful about the Soviet policies, on Turkey. When Turkey had broken off her diplomatic relations with Germany and Japan, and declared war on these countries on a demand by Roosevelt and Churchill, the Soviet press launched a daily campaign of criticism against Turkey early in March 1945. The main lines of such criticism were the following: Turkish courts tried to appear as 'champions of democracy' by penalising the Communists, while 'the Partisans of Fascism, the Pan-Turanians' were leniently treated. In fact, there was evidence that the Turkish government was penalising Communists, but that they also penalised Pan-Turanians. Ridiculing the Turkish declaration of war at this late stage, although there had been a hint by the Soviet delegations to the

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<sup>1</sup> Public Record Office (PRO), HS 3/227 Memorandum by Office of Strategic Services Foreign National Branch on Armenian Press in the United States, 16 December 1942; PRO FO 371/48795, R 1689/11137/44, Wright (Washington) to Southern Department, no. 1388/16/45, 26 September 1945.

Turks at the Yalta Conference that they should enter the war by 1 March.<sup>2</sup>

### **SOVIET UNION'S DEMANDS FOR THE ARMENIANS**

Moscow put pressure on Turkey in order to dictate its objectives by using the Armenian card in the following sense, that Turkish territory formerly inhabited by the Armenians should be annexed to Soviet Armenia, thus enabling the Armenians abroad, who had variously estimated at one or one and a half million in number to return to the motherland. Though Molotov claimed the territories of Kars and Ardahan from Sarper in June 1945 and also Stalin in December 1945 told Bevin in Moscow that the Soviet Government was claiming the pre-1921 frontier in Caucasus, these claims had not been publicly put forward by the Soviet government and population pressure in Armenia was only being gradually built up the early June 1946 with the return of Armenians from overseas.<sup>3</sup> The Armenian expectations in this campaign were to obtain some compromise at the expense of Turkey and envisage an Armenian State that was planned at the abortive Sèvres Treaty of 1920. The political conjecture was also suitable for such demands since the victorious powers of the Second World War had gathered for the post-world settlement. They believed that they had a great advantage as the Armenians openly supported the Allied Powers in the war. Whereas Turkey stayed in a neutral position until very last moment of the war. Besides, regarding to the put the Sèvres Treaty into effect Armenians believed that the Western Powers had a word from the previous world war.

Whether the claim to Turkish territory was in the first instance raised by the Armenians spontaneously or at Soviet instigation did not perhaps matter much. There was little doubt that the Armenians in Romania, the Middle East and particularly in the US, who put the claim forward in the summer of 1945 at the time of the Potsdam Conference and later, did so with Soviet approval. As a matter of fact, by playing the Armenian card, the Soviets were after pushing Turkey for making some concessions in favour of Soviet Union regarding the Montreux Convention of 1939, such guaranteeing a military base and a joint administration in the

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<sup>2</sup> PRO FO 371/48773, R 4972/4476/44, PRO FO 371/48773, R 4972/4476/44, Foreign Office to Moscow, no. 1383, 20 March 1945.

<sup>3</sup> FO 371/59227, R 12306, Roberts (Moscow) to FO, no. 2714, 20 August 1946.

Straits. Thus, Moscow would be in a position to dominate the Mediterranean affairs. The Soviet territorial claims from Turkey on behalf of the Armenians well understood one if one looks from this perspective.

Indeed, one could not deny the role of Moscow in this campaign, as was seen in the election of a Supreme Catholicos. The Armenian Church Council in February of 1945 was accorded permission by the Soviet Government to elect a Supreme Catholicos, an office which had been vacant since 1938. During this interim the affairs of the Armenian Church had been conducted by the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, an arrangement which did not appear to have given the Soviet Government any particular concern. As the result of the election Archbishop Corekciyan was elected as Catholicos, then named KevorkV (1945-54). Afterwards Moscow gave special privileges to the Catholicos of Echmiadzin in the line of other churches. Making the Church accepted single religious authority Soviet Union would be in a position to use the Armenian question for their own cause.

It was shortly after the announcement of this pending church election that the Soviet government denounced the Russian-Turkish Treaty and subsequently informed the Turkish government of the condition that it considered indispensable to a renewal of friendship. A few days after the election of the new Catholicos at Echmiadzin, Kevork V. had a contact with Washington and London so that Kars and Ardahan should return to Soviet Armenia. Simultaneously, Armenian National Council presented its memorandum to the San Francisco Conference, including charges of mistreatment of Armenians by the present Turkish Government.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, inspired from Moscow, the Armenian diaspora organisations in America, in the Balkans and the Middle East presented memorandums on several occasions to the world leaders, Churchill, Attlee, Truman and Stalin and to world organisations, urging the cession of Kars and Ardahan to their sole legal representative, the Soviet Armenia, and facilities for the repatriation of those one and a half million Armenians, living outside the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic who might wish to

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<sup>4</sup> PRO FO 371/48795, R 1689/11137/44, Wright (Washington) to Southern Department, no. 1388/16/45, 26 September 1945.

return there.<sup>5</sup> The Armenian National Council in Syria and Lebanon organised meetings at Beirut, Aleppo, Damascus and Zahlel in September 1945. At the end of these meetings the conclusion was reached that 'the time was ripe to incorporate Armenian lands occupied by Turkey in Soviet Armenia.' To do so, an appeal was made to Stalin, Truman and Attlee to win them over to this cause.<sup>6</sup>

A resolution with similar basis was passed at the National Meeting of Armenian Refugees in Romania at the end of July 1945. It was drawn up by Dangoulov, the Head of the Press and Propaganda Department at the Soviet Legation, who was of Armenian origin and consequently much interested in the activities of the Armenian community in Romania.

In Greece, the president of the Committee for the Vindication of Armenian Rights took part in this campaign against Turkey by addressing a letter to Clement Attlee with a confirmatory signature by Mazlumian, the Archbishop of the Armenian Community of Greece. In this letter it was claimed that the Armenians had been left alone to deal with the Turks although they had fought heroically on the side of the Allied armies during the First World War, as a result of which three million unarmed Armenian inhabitants of the Armenian provinces in Turkey, were 'so mercilessly and brutally slaughtered or faced leaving their homes to take refuge in foreign countries.'<sup>7</sup>

The American Committee for Ensuring Just Treatment of Armenia and the Armenian National Council in Egypt and Lebanon also took part in this campaign by sending telegrams at the beginning of 1946 to the General Assembly on the question of the transfer of Armenian territory occupied by the Turks to Soviet

<sup>5</sup> PRO FO 371/48795, R12420/11137/44, Roberts (Moscow), no. 3268, 23 July 1945. The Armenian National Committee once again presented a similar memorandum to President Truman and Byrnes on 22 September 1945, which, in addition to above the two demands, claimed reparations from Turkey for property confiscated during the First World War. PRO FO 371/48795, R 1689/11137/44, Wright (Washington) to Southern Department, no. 1388/16/45, 26 September 1945.

<sup>6</sup> PRO FO 371/48795, R 1638/11137/44, Roberts (Moscow), no. 4385, 29 September 1945.

<sup>7</sup> The Armenian stand in the Second World War, once again standing against tyranny and with the organised regular armies of the Soviet Armenia, strengthening the British and American Armies, was also underlined in this letter. As they had paid their share of blood for the cause of liberty the Greek Armenians requested Attlee to use all possible means to set right 'the injustices of 1914-18, so that all the historical Armenian provinces of Turkey could be united with Soviet Armenia, thus enabling a million and a half wandering Armenians to settle within the boundaries of their historical land'. PRO FO 371/48795, President of the Committee for the Vindication of Armenian Rights in Greece to Attlee, 10 September 1945.

Armenia. These stressed Armenia's legal rights recognised by international treaties and the great sacrifices made in the joint struggle of the UN against tyranny; the second demanded the return to Soviet Armenia of Armenian lands under Turkey from which Armenians had been forcibly ejected and their property seized.<sup>8</sup> The latter claimed that European and Asiatic countries used Armenians as pawns in their disputes, while only the Soviet Union had given Armenian territory security and cultural advantages. A later problem was the presence of over a million hungry and oppressed Armenians in the Near East.<sup>9</sup> The newly established American Committee for Attainment of a Just Attitude to Armenia and the Armenian National Council in America had sent a telegram at the end of December 1945 to the foreign ministers in Moscow, dwelling on the Turkish persecution of Armenians and calling for arrangements for their repatriation. The telegram of the new committee dealt at length with President Wilson's recommendations for the revision of Armenian's frontiers and called on the foreign ministers in Moscow to reach agreement on Armenia's frontiers and the creation of an Armenian home. Telegram from the Armenian council demanded the liberation of Armenia's historic home within the frontiers defined by Wilson.<sup>10</sup> The Radio and the press in the USSR took up these themes; Tass gave the widest publicity to these activities. The main theme was that European and Asiatic countries used Armenians as pawns in their disputes while only the Soviet Union had given Armenian territory security and cultural advantages. A later problem was the presence of over a million hungry and oppressed Armenians in the Near East.<sup>11</sup>

### **REPATRIATION SCHEME**

While Washington was in the process of taking a firm stand against the Soviet policy in the region, the Soviet Union, after a short break in her war of nerves the Soviet Union devoted increasing attention to the Middle East area generally, and to Turkey in particular by putting the Armenian repatriation scheme into effect in March 1946. To do so, a Committee had been set up

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<sup>8</sup> PRO FO 371/59246, R 1150/145/44, Roberts, no 297, 22 January 1946.

<sup>9</sup> PRO FO 371/59246, R 1995/145/44, Roberts, no. 523, 7 February 1946.

<sup>10</sup> PRO FO 371/48795, R 21571/11137/44, Clark Kerr, no 5486, 28 December 1945.

<sup>11</sup> PRO FO 371/59246, R 1995/145/44, Roberts, no. 523, 7 February 1946.

by the Soviet Armenian government to administer the migration. Papken Asvatzadourian was the president of this committee and Sahag Karabetian, Haigaz Marzarian, Mardiros Sarian, Ardashes Melik Adamian were the members of it. Its aim was to send of its members on a visit to the Balkans and the countries of the Middle East in order to facilitate migration of Armenians. For instance, when the departures were to commence during the months of July 1946 in Greece, in order to accelerate this emigration scheme, two representatives from Soviet Armenia, Kourken Koverkian and Serko Manousian, arrived in Athens, where they were accompanied by Vahan Takasian, uncrowned chief of Armenian Communist newspaper, *Vie Nouvelle*. This movement was sponsored by 'People's Organisation of Armenians in Greece', the political complexion of which was decidedly left. The head of this organisation was Mazlounian, the Armenian Arc-Bishop in Athens, who had already organised means by which Armenian students might travel from Greece to the USSR or Soviet Armenia for study at Soviet or Armenian universities. The first batch of Armenians for repatriation, which was estimated about 2,000 persons some of whom registered unwillingly as a result of pressure, left Greece towards the end of this July.<sup>12</sup> The cost of this repatriation was 50 dollars per person, and was being borne by Greek Armenian Community and by the Armenian Benevolent Society in US.<sup>13</sup> Looking from another aspect, the repatriation movement served, to some extent, for the Greek government's cause in a view that this might prevent any perceptible number of Armenian Communists from joining the armed bands of Atika and Thessaly since the majority of Armenians in Greece were known to be of left-wing sympathy. Therefore, Athens welcomed to seeing more Armenians involved in the repatriation scheme. For instance in April 1946 Soviet Embassy in Athens notified the Greek Aliens Department of Ministry of Interior that all Armenians without Greek or foreign passports should be allowed to emigrate to the USSR. The Aliens Department agreed to this suggestion at first. However, when the Soviet Embassy proposed that any Armenian wishing to travel to the Russia should be issued with a Russian passport. It was opposed on the ground that an Armenian, once in possession of a Soviet passport, they might possibly continue to reside in

<sup>12</sup> It was officially announced that the number of Armenian, who had registered under the scheme, was between 30,000 to 35,000. A reliable source stated. However, that this figure was grossly exaggerated, and that the actual figure did not exceed 5,000 to 6,000.

<sup>13</sup> FO 195/2597, BCIS (Greece) HQ LF (G), Special Report no:195, 26/53/46, 19 July 1946 Armenian Affairs

Greece. It was finally agreed, between the Aliens Department and the Soviet Embassy that all Armenians, leaving Greece would be issued with Greek papers. Once they had crossed the Greek frontier the Soviets could then supply them with whatever papers they desired.<sup>14</sup>

The Armenians living in Romania, Greece, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq were affected by this scheme. Soviet diplomats in these countries took a great part in it. As the result, fifty thousand Armenians from Aleppo registered for repatriation, and all of them were encouraged to think that they would leave very shortly; whereas in fact only ten thousand were likely to be repatriated from their region within the year. This state of uncertainty dislocated the economy of the community, which anti-Communists circles at Aleppo suspected to have been the aim of the USSR in sponsoring repatriation. In the end, approximately three thousand Armenians returned to Soviet Armenia in two caravans from Syria and the same number from Greece in the summer of 1946.<sup>15</sup> However, as regards the Armenian in Iraq they were advised by the Soviet officials that although the Soviet government approved the admission of Armenians living abroad into Soviet Armenia and into other territories which would be annexed in the future, 'the time was not yet ripe for registration of Armenians in Iraq.'<sup>16</sup>

There was naturally a good deal of discussion among the Armenians in Istanbul, and particularly those who had relatives in Syria. The passage of the Soviet ship named Garcia, carrying Armenian repatriates through the Straits' did not give rise to any agitation in Istanbul. There were no meetings or organised activity among the Armenian colony in Istanbul, nor was any move made by the Soviet Consulate. The general trend of opinion, however, was to take no precipitous action but wait to see how things would turn out. The reasons for this cautious approach were that the Armenians in Istanbul were not subject to any solid doses of Soviet propaganda and were fairly sceptical about the conditions of life in USSR. They were waiting to find out how the repatriates from other areas fared in their new home. Another factor weighing against any sudden move was that the Armenians hoped that steps

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> PRO FO 195/2597, BCIS (Greece) HQ LF (G), Special Report no:195, 26/53/46, 19 July 1946 Armenian Affairs.

<sup>16</sup> State Department Archives, 761.67/1-2546, Schoenrich to Byrnes, no. A-22, 25 January 1946.



would be taken to improve their conditions of life in Turkey. So on this account also, they were waiting to find what the future held in store. During the process of the Soviet recruitment of Armenians throughout the world, 1,200-1,400 Armenians in Istanbul also registered for immigration. After the Turkish government's announcement, however, that they would facilitate their departure, there were a number of withdrawals. Armenian language newspapers in Istanbul published articles declaring the complete loyalty of the Armenian community to the Turkish government. "Jamanak", one of these newspapers, added that 'every single Armenian will do his duty with the other nineteen million Turkish citizens.'<sup>17</sup>

It is not true to say that all the scattered Armenian people, were willing to migrate to the presumed homeland, a great many of them did not dare take the risk. However, pressure was being brought to bear on those who, though not communists, had registered for repatriation, and they were told that their chances of being included in the list for embarkation depended on their conversation to communism.<sup>18</sup> Some of them suspected that all these schemes were being supported by the Soviet government with the intention of exploiting them for their own cause. For instance, the Armenian community in Romania were disturbed by the Soviet propaganda against Turkey, and they refrained from any nationalist propaganda. Following the return campaign several Armenian holders of Nansen passports<sup>19</sup> applied to the Romanian authorities for Romanian identity papers fearing that they might eventually be deported to the USSR.<sup>20</sup>

Some political and religious leaders in the Levant were also annoyed by the repatriation scheme and by Soviet activities of every kind in Lebanon. The Tashnak Party leaders criticised the local Repatriation Committee for having rushed into the scheme without proper preparation or recognition of the financial difficulties involved. They accused the Committee of having upset the community by encouraging an appetite for mass repatriation,

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<sup>17</sup> PRO FO 195/2597, no. 26/43/46 26 August 1946; PRO FO 371/59240; R 4436/52/44, Helm to Hayter, 11 March 1946.

<sup>18</sup> PRO FO 195/2597, no. 121/404-26/46/46, 2 July North Syria: Repatriation of Armenians, 9 July 1946.

<sup>19</sup> This was an identification card for displaced persons mostly given to White Russians, to the Armenians from Turkey, and, later, to the Jews from Nazi Germany.

<sup>20</sup> PRO FO 371/48795, R 13912/11137/44, Le Roujefel (Bucharest) to Ernest Bevin, no. 263, 9 August 1945.

without possessing the means to satisfy it; and they urged that, as it was obvious that the great majority of local Armenians would have to remain where they were, there was great danger that their patriotic urge return to their motherland might be exploited as a political weapon by the USSR to further an aggressive policy in the Middle East.

Leon Pasha, the principal leader of the Tashnak Party in Iraq, believed that Soviets' intention was to make use of the Armenians for their own cause; he pointed out that the departure of Armenians from Syria for Soviet Armenia to the effect that they were not going to Armenia but to the USSR and she would use them against Turkey. He also was of the opinion that the USSR would attack Turkey when preparations were further forward and that she would put the Armenians in the front line of the battle. Moscow was only endeavouring to secure her boundaries. Therefore, Leon Pasha decided not to encourage any of his followers to return to Soviet Armenia.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the more extreme Tashnaks considered that emigration to Erivan was the last thing that an Armenian, who wished to preserve a characteristic Armenian individuality, should favour; Soviet Armenia and the Levant Community would do better to work for the establishment of an independent Armenia under the patronage of some Western power, and within the framework of the Treaty of Sevres.<sup>22</sup>

Karekin Hovsepian, Catholicos of Antilyas, was deeply concerned that this repatriation scheme might prejudice the political status of the Levant Armenians. He therefore refused to be drawn into arguments about the merits of the scheme. He was sure that the emigrants would regret their decision to move and were being made the victims of high politics. He also asked the political leaders to take a far stronger line against the local Communist Party.<sup>23</sup>

There was little doubt that the Armenians in Romania, the Middle East and particularly in the US, who put the territorial

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<sup>21</sup> PRO FO 195/2597, no. 5467, 120/1/484, The report of the British Embassy in Ankara on Tashnak Opinion, 20 August 1946.

<sup>22</sup> PRO FO 195/2597, no. 121/399-26/46/46, 2 July 1946, Levant States-Political: Armenian Repatriation, 2 July 1946.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

demand from Turkey forward in the summer of 1945 at the time of the Potsdam Conference and later, did so with Soviet approval. In a conversation at a reception in Ankara, in reply to Vinogradov's suggestion to make a little effort to improve two countries' relations, Sümer told him that his government would do its best if Moscow withdrew its request regarding the eastern provinces and the Straits. Vinogradov replied that the Soviet government was obligated by its constitution to defend the interests of various Soviet Republics, that a request for the eastern provinces had been made on behalf of the Armenian representative and the Soviet government, and therefore, that the request could not be withdrawn. In a private conversation, Vinogradov remarked 'We waited long time regarding arrangement we wanted with Poland and finally got it, we can wait regarding Turkey.'<sup>24</sup> No doubt such statements from Soviet quarters made the situation worse as Turkey felt the Soviet threat at her back. In addition to all these activities, Soviet military dispositions on the Caucasian border raised the question in Turkish circles as well as among the Western powers as to whether Moscow had decided to use force to achieve its assumed objectives. Ankara was not exaggerating the need to be anxious as the Soviets expended considerable efforts in endeavouring to win over the Kurds on the Soviet-Turkish and Iranian-Turkish frontiers. With little progress on Armenia, a new offensive opened on another front Turkish Kurds at the summer of 1946 at a time which coincided with opening of Foreign Minister Conference.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, with propaganda campaign for autonomous Kurdistan, the Kremlin could scarcely expect to make

<sup>24</sup> State Department Archives, RG 59, 761.67/2-1346, Wilson to Byrnes, no. 4949, 13 February 1946.

<sup>25</sup> State Department Archives, RG 59, 761.67/6-1746, Decimal File 1945-49, Smith (Moscow) to Byrnes, no. 5799, 17 June 1946. As a matter of fact, the Soviet propaganda regarding the Kurdish case was given a start in the initial phase of the war. According to SOE sources, the Soviets brought about a thousand Kurdish youths into the USSR without the knowledge of the Turkish authorities taught them Russian and succeeded in winning them over to the communist cause. In addition to the youths, the Soviets had been smuggling aged and unemployed Kurds into the Caucasus on the understanding that they would give them work and food. As a result of this, many Kurds near the Soviet frontier regarded the Soviets as their friends. Further Russian activities had been noticed around Erivan where they had managed to organise large numbers of Armenians under the Armenian committee. In the final stages of the war, Soviet propaganda was naturally being disseminated in Turkish Kurdistan, the main theme being that the Turkish Kurds must give every assistance to the Red Army, which would be fighting on their behalf for the establishment of a 'Greater Kurdistan'. As Turkey was to be finished off with a lightning blow, irrespective of whether the Red Army went into action at the same time or not, the Kurds must carry out their various tasks without any hesitation as soon as the signal was given. Kurds from the Red Army were being demobilised and infiltrated into Kurdistan with the object of acting as partisans when the time arrived. See PRO HS 3/221, Chastelain to Directorate of SOE, no. 1734/13/18, 8 February 1943; PRO FO 195/2595, Soviet propaganda in eastern Turkey, no. 18/8256, 24 January 1946.

more progress towards inducing the creation of an autonomous Kurdistan than it had in bringing about the return of the Turkish Armenians to their Soviet motherland. It seemed that the Kurdistan campaign was not designed to achieve its pretended aims. Its objectives should have been the renewing of the war of nerves against Turkey on a new front; and raising a smoke screen over the issues at the Foreign Minister's Conference which embarrassed the USSR

British Foreign Office circles reached the conclusion that their attitude to the successful outcome of the campaign of 'investing Mount Ararat with the nostalgic glow of an Armenian Zion remains sceptical, but what was certain was the Soviet Government's shrewd appreciation of the value of this minor religious development to its designs upon the warm waters not only of the Mediterranean but also - for there are Armenians in Iraq and Iran - of the Persian Gulf.'<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, London was worried that some scattered Armenian societies who had stood for an independent Armenia by supporting the Soviet policy might honestly believe that an Armenia expanded into Turkish territory would be a viable State. However' from the view points of the British Foreign Office experts, it seemed both wrong and inexpedient to allow a historic Armenian claim to be exploited for what might be no more than the strategic advantage of the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> Their view was strengthened by consistent Tass reports which overemphasised the importance of these various Armenian organisations in the US. Therefore, the Foreign Office instructed their diplomats in Washington and the other capitals not to give any encouragement to these Armenian Societies who had followed the general line of pro-Soviet Armenian groups.<sup>28</sup> As part of this policy the British controlled Iraq CDI was ordered to make things difficult for any

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<sup>26</sup> PRO FO 371/48795, R 1689/11137/44, Wright (Washington) to Southern Department, no. 1388/16/45, 26 September 1945. Wilson also reported to the State department that the USSR would use indirect methods of aggression against Turkey, such as employing Armenian and Kurdish fronts in the Eastern Provinces, rather than take the risks involved in open war. Thus, the Soviets stood to gain by postponing action against Turkey and letting time work in their favour. The Soviets were consolidating the position in Iran, which meant the eastern prong of the pincers closed on Turkey. After the Greek elections, British Government could hardly withstand the pressure to withdraw troops from Greece, which would open the door to civil war, and intervention by Tito and Company, and creation of a friendly government in Greece, thus closing the western prong of pincers and isolating Turkey from British help through the Mediterranean. 761.67/3-1846 Wilson to Byrnes, 18 March 1946.

<sup>27</sup> PRO FO 371/48795, R 17431/11137/44, Armenian Claim to Turkish Territory 5 October 1945.

<sup>28</sup> PRO FO 371/59247, R 6228/145/44, Mr. Maclean, no. 827/3/46, 16 April 1946.

Armenian resident of Baghdad who indicated a desire to go to Soviet Armenia.<sup>29</sup>

Similar line also had taken by the US authorities. In a letter to the Secretary of State, James Byrnes, Admiral Leahy, the Joint Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, postulated a common cause between the US, Britain and Turkey to the effect that the Soviet demands for the provinces of Turkey was a manifestation of the Soviet desire to dominate the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. In other words, the objective of Soviet policy was to acquire a 'new springboard for further Soviet expansion' in order to 'access the extensive oil resources in the Middle East; full utilisation in both peace and war of Black Sea ports to include ingress and egress therefrom and the prospect of alienating the Muslim World from British and US influence'.<sup>30</sup> Thus the defeat or disintegration of the British Empire, Leahy believed, would eliminate 'from Eurasia the last bulwark of resistance between the US and Soviet expansion'. Militarily, America's present position as a world power was of necessity closely interwoven with that of Britain. He concluded his letter with the conviction that under these conditions, American acquiescence in whole or in part to these Soviet demands would definitely impair American national security by weakening Britain's position as a world power and reducing the effectiveness of the UN.<sup>31</sup>

In the end, not only the Soviets used the Armenian for their own cause but also Armenian communities around the world threw their support to the Soviet cause. Under the Cold War diplomacy the Washington authorities come to believe that any Soviet domination over Turkey would jeopardise the American interests in the Middle East as well as the western interests. Therefore, the support was given Turkey by Washington under the Truman Doctrine and this probably prevented the enlargement of Soviet Armenia at the expense of Turkey.

During the Cold War Turkey was a member of NATO, that alliance guaranteed the existing border. Therefore any Soviet attempt to encroach on it had to be more subtle. In early 1970's Armenian terrorist campaign against Turkey began by ASALA who

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<sup>29</sup> State Department Archives, RG 59, 761.67/1-2546, Schoenrich to Byrnes, no. A-22, 25 January 1946.

<sup>30</sup> RG 59, Decimal File 1945-49, 867.80/3-1346, William D. Leahy to Byrnes, 13 March 1946.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

**The objective of Soviet policy was to acquire a 'new springboard for further Soviet expansion' in order to 'access the extensive oil resources in the Middle East.**

repeated the same territorial demands with those made by the Soviets in the years of 1945 and 1946. Since then it was felt that the Armenian assassination of Turkish diplomats and their attack to the Turkish institution and foundation were carried out with Soviet support. Because each Armenian assassination of a Turkish diplomat generated strain in Turkish relations with the country where it had occurred. This was what the Armenians and the Soviets wanted. As Fred Ikle, the American Undersecretary of Defence for Policy, stated that 'if ASALA were to be successful in its aim it would lead directly to the expansion of the Soviet Union'. Paul Henze, a member of the National Security Council during the Carter administration, also saw the Soviets as playing a major role, arguing that the Soviet Union invested more in destabilizing Turkey through terrorism and subversion than it had spent on any single country since Vietnam.<sup>32</sup> Dismantling the Southern flank of NATO was not only a benefit the Soviet Union would receive if ASALA's territorial aim were satisfied, but also a truncated Turkey would eliminate it as an attractive model for the Turkic and Islamic populations of the Soviet Union. From this point of view, it is possible to urge that the activities of ASALA were a Soviet sponsored one. However, a tangible proof is difficult to achieve. What is most likely is that the Soviets had simply played their usual game of trying to destabilise their potential foes.

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<sup>32</sup> Michael M. Gunter, The Armenian Terrorist Campaign Against Turkey, *Orbis*, Summer 1983, Vol. 27, no:2, s.473-74.