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The Present Political Situation in the Near East.

In view of the unfortunate historic and geographic situation of Armenia, the immediate chances of the successful establishment of this state may fairly be open to question. It lies wedged in between hostile Moslem populations and is internally permeated with strong and inassimilable Moslem elements. The great western Powers have all expressed, or passively acknowledged, their unwillingness or their inability to aid the Armenians in their present crisis. It is quite evident that the fiat of the Supreme Council will not exorcise the Turkish Nationalists out of Erzerum. The problem is a military-political one, in the solution of which the Armenians stand alone.

RUSSIA

The two great external political factors which, immediately and in the future, will determine the fate of Armenia are Russia and the British Empire. The imperialistic advance of Russia over Transcaucasia during the nineteenth century was continued in her policy during the World War. The result of the Russian campaigns of 1915 and 1916 brought under Russian occupation almost the entire area of the four Turkish vilayets assignable to Armenia

by the Turkish Treaty. It was partially the apprehension aroused in the foreign offices of France and Great Britain by this Russian advance which gave rise to an agreement between Russia, France, and Great Britain in the spring of 1916 by which the territorial acquisitions or spheres of influence to be acquired by these Powers in Asiatic Turkey, in case of a victorious conclusion of the war, were fixed. The areas of special interest of France and Italy in Anatolia were definitely assigned on August 10th at Sèvres in the "Tripartite Convention between the British Empire, France and Italy relative to Anatolia." The Russian Revolution was the opportunity out of which the independence of Armenia arose. The geographic proximity of Russia, the economic interdependence of Russia and western Asia, and the force of Russian political tradition, all make it impossible to conceive an Armenian state free from Russian influence and interest, whatever the form of the Russian government may be. This Russian influence may in the end be decidedly favorable to the maintenance of Armenian independence.

GREAT BRITAIN

Freely granting the humanitarian sympathy of the British public and government for Armenia, it is necessary also to evaluate British policy in relation to Armenia from the standpoint of statecraft. Before the World War the diplomacy of the British Foreign Office with relation to the Middle East (Persia, Afghanistan, Baluchistan and

India) and the Near East had as its dominating purpose the defense of the strategic frontier of the British Empire in its two soft spots, toward India against attack by land from the west, toward the Suez canal against attack by land from the east. Essentially these purposes may be regarded as one, namely the defense of the Empire of India. As a result of the war Mesopotamia has been added to the defensive liabilities of the British Empire under the mandate granted by the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers. The Moslem population under British tutelage has been considerably increased. The frontier on land has been greatly extended and greatly weakened. The acquiescence of Great Britain in the acknowledgment, on January 10, 1920, by the Powers then represented upon the Supreme Council, of the independence of Georgia and Azerbaijan is, similarly, a part of her broad Middle Eastern defensive policy. In line with this policy an independent state of Armenia will be regarded by Great Britain as one of the buffer states for the long and weak Mesopotamian line of defense. The interests of Great Britain, therefore, combine with the general sympathy of the British public caused by the Armenian horrors of the past thirty years in forecasting continued British support of Armenia. For the present the effectiveness of this support is not great because of the tremendous strain put upon the British Empire by the heavy responsibilities it has incurred as a result of the war

and the peace terms with the several enemy states.

AZERBAIJAN

The immediate neighbors of Armenia, under the dominating shadow of the two great powers, Russia and Great Britain, affect the Armenian situation more directly. These are, upon the north, the Georgian Democratic Republic and the Azerbaijan Socialist Republic; upon the east, Persia; upon the south and west, Kurdistan, a region which, according to Article 62 ff. of the Treaty of Sèvres, will be for the space of a year an autonomous part of Turkey, thereafter perhaps independent; upon the west, Turkey.

The government of Azerbaijan which was recognized by the Allied Powers upon January 10, 1920, was the anti-Bolshevik "Independent Republic of Azerbaijan." It had proclaimed its independence of Russia on May 28, 1918. On April 28, 1920, this government was overthrown and the present Azerbaijan Socialist Soviet Republic took its place. The Republic of Azerbaijan may be regarded at present as a dependency of Soviet Russia, although vaguely treated by the Bolshevist regime as an independent Communist state. A position of advantage was thus gained by Soviet Russia for the projected Bolshevist-Tartar-Turkish attack upon the British line of defense in Persia and Mesopotamia and for the stiffening of the Nationalist Turkish forces of Mustapha Kemal in

Anatolia with Bolshevist reinforcements. The latter movement, if it carried through will be extremely dangerous to the Armenian state if the Bolshevist leaders are in a position to enter upon and pursue the plan with any vigor.

There is reason to doubt this ability. The Bolshevist control of Azerbaijan since May of this year has been signalized by a massacre of several thousand Tartars (estimates from 5,000 to 12,000) in Elisavetpol. This has had a sobering effect upon Georgia and Armenia and stifened their opposition to Bolshevist propaganda. It has created a hatred of the Bolshevist regime in Azerbaijan itself and weakened Bolshevist influence. This weakening has been accentuated by the defeat upon the Polish front and the probability that the internal situation will force the Bolshevist regime to attempt to recoup its reputation against the Poles or to deal with General Wrangel in the Crimea, before beginning serious operations so far afield as in Transcaucasia and Turkey*.

GEORGIA

The Georgian Democratic Republic concluded a treaty with Soviet Russia on May 7. An attempt at a coup d'état

* The New York Times of September 4, 1920, prints a communiqué from Trotzky that the Bolshevist forces have been forced to evacuate Baku. This report has not been officially verified. The general trend of recent reports from the Near East is to minimize the danger of actual Bolshevist military aid to the Turkish Nationalists.

in Georgia by local Bolsheviks assisted by the forces of the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic was defeated. The common danger from Bolshevism has helped to compose the border disputes between Armenia and Georgia and the relations between their respective governments are now more friendly than at any other time since the spring of 1918.

PERSIA

The Persian government, which is under strong British influence, will certainly not be hostile to the Armenian state. But the control of the Persian government over the Tartars of northwest Persia is minimal and the local chieftains may always be expected to aid rather than hinder Bolshevik-Tartar-Turkish opposition to or attacks upon Armenia. Movements of Bolshevik-Azerbaijanese troops into the Vilayet of Erzerum may at any time be effected through the district of Maku lying just east of Mt. Ararat; and the Armenian forces, until their occupation of Turkish Armenian territory shall have taken place, will be utterly powerless to prevent it.

KURDISTAN

In regard to Kurdistan, the terms of the Turkish Treaty provide that a Commission of Three is to prepare a scheme for the autonomy of the Kurdish regions of Turkey, lying to the south and southwest of the four

vilayets. If the Kurdish populations shall, within a year after the treaty goes into force, address the Council of the League of Nations with proof that the majority of the Kurds desire to be independent of Turkey, the Council of the League has the power to grant this independence. The details are to be determined by a special convention between the Principal Allied Powers and Turkey.

Whatever may be the principal objects of these provisions regarding Kurdistan, they have a direct bearing upon the immediate chances of the successful establishment of the Armenian state. The possibility of independence thus presented to the Kurds, who have always been restive under Turkish domination, must certainly alienate them from the Turkish nationalist movement led by Mustapha Kemal, which has as its avowed purpose the maintenance of Turkish control over as great a part of the old Turkish Empire as possible. The aims of the Kurds are now allied to those of the Armenians by the fact that the Kurdish desire for independence has been changed into a definite plan for attainment of that end. This will probably not mean active support of the Armenian attempt at occupation of the four vilayets. It should mean, however, that the Armenians will not have to meet active hostility upon the part of the 300,000 or 400,000 Kurds resident in the area of the four vilayets, or the possibility of attack from the Kurds living south of the Armenian border.

For the present the existing Arab outbreaks against the British forces of occupation in Mesopotamia have nullified the chances of immediate active help to the Armenians from British influence to the south. The Treaty of Sèvres provides that Mesopotamia is to be independent under a mandatory to be chosen by the Principal Allied Powers. This mandatory will be Great Britain. In that case we may confidently expect a liberal enforcement and development of the mandatory obligations which the British government will assume, and that this will gradually result in the pacification and prosperity of Mesopotamia. For the future welfare of Armenia the British influence toward the south will be decidedly favorable.

TURKEY

The Sultan's government at Constantinople has signed the treaty and is in a position where it must acquiesce in the treaty's provisions. The actual control over inner Anatolia lies, however, in the hands of the Nationalist Turkish party headed by Mustapha Kemal Pasha. The leaders of this party are honestly and unalterably opposed to the separation of the Vilayets of Van, Bitlis, Erzerum and Trebizond from the Turkish Empire. They will probably put up what fight they can against its enforcement. They are, however, much more interested in combating the Greek occupation of the Smyrna district than against the pros-

pective Armenian occupation and their troops are massed chiefly against the Greek, French and British forces who are aligned in western Asia Minor and along the zone of the Straits. The poor showing of the Nationalist forces before the Greek troops in northwestern Asia Minor in June has no doubt lowered the morale of the nationalist irregulars to the extent that this becomes a favorable factor in the solution of the Armenian problem of occupation.

SUMMARY

The Armenians have a small but well-trained force ready to advance from Russian Armenia into the four vilayets when the decision of President Wilson is given out. They have recently been supplied with arms and ammunition. Despite the Bolshevik coup d'état in Azerbaijan the political situation is favorable to their success. They themselves have confidence in their ability to carry out the occupation against the weak Nationalist forces in the four Eastern vilayets of former Turkey. A disturbing and unappraisable factor in the situation is what the Bolshevik leaders can and will do to assist the Turkish Nationalists in their resistance.

In the absence of mandatory supervision and protection by one of the great Powers, the continued maintenance of Armenian independence is precarious. Without such protection the play of the persistent historic forces,

which have always operated in this unhappy region, may be expected to continue. The chances are that the mountainous plateau of Armenia will again, as so often in the past, be the point of contact of great historic movements in the Near and Middle East. If the traditional motives and methods of our international relations should undergo some great change, Armenia may more happily come within the protective orbit of some great power, probably Russia, and thereby maintain a great measure of its individuality and independence.