

The Mudros Armistice. The Armenian Question and British Diplomacy*

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The Ottoman Empire came out of World War I defeated. The representative of Great Britain signed the armistice agreement with the Turks in the port of Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos. With that, the Turks were subject to capitulation. The terms of the Mudros armistice also had an impact on the Armenian Question. During the war, the Turks organized the Armenian Genocide and the Armenian territories under Ottoman rule (Cilicia and 7 provinces of Western Armenia) were completely ethnically cleansed. Out of 2.5 million Ottoman Armenians, 1.5 million were killed and 1 million became refugees. The task of this study is to demonstrate how Cilicia was immediately liberated from the Turks by the agreement of Mudros and the Armenians were able to return to their homeland, but Western Armenia was not liberated, which led to the emergence of the Kemalist nationalist movement and the failure of the Armenian Question. The article covers the negative consequences of the conditions of the Mudros armistice in the failure of the Armenian Question. The problem has never been considered from this point of view by historiography. Analyzing facts, the article shows that it was due to the intrigues of British imperialist diplomacy, which was directed primarily against France. However, it also aimed to block Russia's way from the Caucasus to the south. The British tried to achieve their far-reaching goals through another power – the United States. The work mostly refers to archival materials and documents, also drawing on some studies related to the topic. The article is built on comparative and critical analysis, observing the principles of objectivity and historicity. Many representatives of Western and Russian historiography have addressed the Franco-British contradictions over the Ottoman heritage. Armenian

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historians have also referred to some aspects of the issue in question. In the study, facts previously published for different purposes are presented in a new way. The problem was set to show the influence of the British far-reaching aims on the Armenian Question.

Keywords: Mudros Armistice, Armenian Question, British diplomacy, Western Armenia, Cilicia, Ottoman Empire

Османская империя вышла из Первой мировой войны побежденной. Соглашение о перемирии с турками подписали представители Великобритании в порту Мудрос на греческом острове Лемнос 30 октября 1918 г. Турки вынуждены были капитулировать, и условия Мудросского перемирия повлияли на решение армянского вопроса. В ходе мировой войны вследствие геноцида армянские территории (Киликия и семь провинций Западной Армении) были полностью этнически очищены. Из 2,5 млн армян империи 1,5 млн погибли, а 1 млн стали беженцами. Задача исследования – показать, что хотя Киликия была освобождена по соглашению Мудроса и армяне смогли вернуться на родину, но Западная Армения оставалась под властью турок, что привело к возникновению кемалистского националистического движения. Рассматриваются негативные последствия условий Мудросского перемирия, что и обусловило провал попыток решения армянского вопроса. Анализируя факты, исследователи пришли к заключению, что это было связано с происками британской империалистической дипломатии, направленной против интересов Франции. Также стояла задача преградить путь России с Кавказа на юг. Британцы пытались добиться своих целей, используя дипломатию США. Работа выполнена на основе архивных материалов и опубликованных документов. Новые аспекты исследования имеют цель показать влияние на армянский вопрос далеко идущих установок британцев в начале XX в.

Ключевые слова: Мудросское перемирие, армянский вопрос, британская дипломатия, Западная Армения, Киликия, Османская империя

The Armenian Question during the First World War

On the eve of the First World War, on January 26, 1914, a Russian-Turkish agreement was signed in Constantinople. It planned to divide Western Armenia into two regions (Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Kharberd and Erzurum, Sivas, Trabzon) and to carry out reforms [Сборник дипломатических документов, с. 158–165]. As a result of more than a year of diplomatic struggle and difficult negotiations, Russia was able to force the Turks to accept the project of Armenian reforms. It considerably raised Russia's reputation among the Armenian people. Armenians hoped that they could live and develop in their own homeland without the threat of repressions or massacres.

However, immediately after the outbreak of the First World War, the Turks refused to fulfill their international obligation to carry out reforms in Armenia. They decided to solve the Armenian Question through genocide [Akçam, p. 126–128].

The new international situation also changed the political aspirations of Armenians. In September 1914, Armenian political, public, and religious figures decided to reach a deeper solution of the Armenian Question in the event of Turkey's participation in the war and to demand from the Entente states that an autonomous Armenian state should be established by uniting Western Armenia and Cilicia [NAA. Stock 57. List 5. Dos. 72. P. 3–4].

It should be noted that the idea of creating an Armenian autonomy by uniting all the Armenian territories of the Ottoman Empire did not find a very positive reaction among the Russian elite in the beginning. However, they soon realized that it was also beneficial from the point of view of Russian interests. Most of the Russian statesmen understood that their allies – Britain and France, could hinder the Russian aspirations to reach the Mediterranean over Constantinople. Russia could implement serious economic and military-political plans over Armenia stretching from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. It was a reason to change the attitude of the Russian elite regarding the creation of an autonomous and united Armenia.

In the first half of 1915, the project of United Armenia was supported by many representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry and other departments when secret meetings with Armenian delegates took place in Petrograd [Ibid. Stock 1457. List 1. Dos. 91. P. 3–9]. In mid-March 1915, during a meeting with the French ambassador Maurice Paleologue, Emperor Nicholas II proposed two directions for the future of Armenia: a kingdom under the influence of Russia or creation of an autonomous state under the Turkish auspices [Les grandes puissances, p. 9]. As we can see, during the discussion with the French ambassador, the Russian emperor expressed his thoughts about Armenian autonomy or kingdom. However, these were only reflections and the Russian elite had not yet come to a final decision.

On April 26, 1915, Great Britain, Russia, France and Italy signed a secret agreement in London [Documents on British Foreign Policy, p. 84–85]. This somewhat clarified the ambitions of the four Entente powers regarding the division of the Ottoman heritage. According to it, Russia would get Constantinople, the Straits, a part of Western Armenia – Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, and Trabzon. France would get Syria and Cilicia. However, it should be noted that this agreement did not satisfy all the aspirations of the Allies. Therefore, later it was necessary to sign new agreements and clarify their goals. The appetite of great powers in the Middle East was gradually increasing.

Russia also did not completely abandon the idea of exiting to the Mediterranean through Western Armenia and Cilicia after the London agreement. Russian diplomacy put the task of finding that possibility on Armenian figures. Moreover, Russia expressed its willingness to give up the Armenian territories that would pass to it, if France and Great Britain

agreed to the creation of a united Armenia under the joint control of those three powers. The Russians were sure that in that case, they would be able to successfully influence Armenia and connect to the Mediterranean. The Russian authorities left the task of finding out the moods of the allies and convincing them based on the Armenian figures [NAA. Stock 430. List 1. Dos. 26. P. 9]. Soviet historian Yevgeny Adamov writes that at that time, the only way for the Petrograd government to spread its influence in the Mediterranean was “independent” Armenia, but in order to avoid the suspicions of Great Britain and France, that plan had to be supported by the Armenian delegates without the intervention of Russian diplomats [Раздел Азиатской Турции, с. 90–91].

In the summer of 1915, the chairman of the Armenian national delegation, Boghos Nubar, handed over memorandums on the creation of an autonomous Armenia to the French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé and the British Foreign Ministry [Boghos Nubar's Papers, p. 80–84, 170–177]. Nubar did his best to interest almost all influential statesmen and politicians, representatives of the press in France and Great Britain in creating an autonomous Armenia. Nubar tried to justify the interests of those countries in the case of creating a united Armenia. It should be noted that Nubar's meetings had mostly positive results.

Finally, during the European negotiations, it became clear that the powers associated the solution of the Armenian Question with the victorious end of the war and did not want to make promises in advance. British and French statesmen generally showed a positive attitude towards Armenian demands, but noted that the issue could be discussed only at the final stage of the war. During that period, it was already clear that the war would drag on and the warring parties no longer had hopes of a quick victory.

Starting in April 1915, the news began to come in about mass deportations and massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Finding ways to prevent the extermination of Western Armenians became a priority for the Armenian elite. In such conditions, the projects of autonomy were put aside and all efforts were directed to the rescue of the people who had been subjected to genocide [NAA. Stock 57. List 5. Dos. 19. P. 108]. The tsarist authorities finally abandoned the idea of Armenian autonomy in mid-1915, since as a result of the genocide organized by the Turks, the Ottoman Armenians were basically destroyed, Western Armenia and Cilicia were left without Armenians.

In fact, the projects of Armenian autonomy failed as a result of the Armenian Genocide. Deserted Western Armenia and Cilicia were no longer considered the territory of self-organization of the Armenian state. Although on May 24, 1915, the Entente powers declared the mass extermination of Armenians a crime “against humanity and civilization” [Schabas, p. 16], this did not prevent either the Turks or the Great Powers from trying to take advantage of the consequences of the genocide. In all subsequent negotiations, it was emphasized that there were no more Armenians in Western Armenia, or that they constituted a small percentage.

Until the mid-1915, the Russian authorities did not rule out, and in some cases even considered it in their interests, the creation of an Armenian autonomy through the unification of Western Armenia and Cilicia. However, secret agreements and contradictions between the powers and, especially, the almost complete cleansing of Western Armenian territories from Armenians as a result of the Armenian Genocide removed the idea of an autonomous Armenia from the agenda for a while.

By Sykes-Picot Secret Agreement (May 16, 1916) Britain, France, and Russia determined the territories and spheres of influence they would gain from the partition of the Ottoman inheritance. According to it, all the Armenian territories of the Ottoman Empire were to be divided between Russia and France. Russia would receive the four vilayets of Western Armenia: Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, and Trabzon. France would occupy Cilicia and the other three vilayets of Western Armenia: Sivas, Kharberd, and Diyarbekir. Thus, the powers refused the idea of creating a United Armenian state.

However, soon a new situation was created on the international stage. It raised new hopes for the solution of the Armenian Question. As a result of the Russian revolutions of 1917, the question of the formation of an Armenian state in Western Armenia arose again. By the Decree "On Turkish Armenia", adopted by the government of Soviet Russia on December 29, 1917, Western Armenians were given the right to determine their own future, up to gaining independence [Декреты Советской власти, с. 298–299]. It should be noted that at the same time, 4 of the 7 vilayets of Western Armenia (Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, and Trabzon) were under the control of Russian army. Thus, the new Russian authorities officially recognized the Western Armenia's right to independence. With that step, Russia became the first country that recognized the right to form an independent Armenian state.

Unfortunately, Soviet Russia withdrew from the Entente and on March 3, 1918, signed the infamous Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the countries of the Central Powers. With that, Russia handed over to the Turks not only the liberated territories of Western Armenia, but also Kars, Ardahan, and Batum [Hovannisian, p. 103–104], which were part of Eastern Armenia. Of course, this did not satisfy the Turks and they moved deep into the Transcaucasia. Under such conditions, on May 28, 1918, the Republic of Armenia was created in the part of territory of Eastern Armenia. The newly created state was able to stop the Turkish invasion with great difficulty and sacrifices. The liberation of the main part of the Armenian territories from the Turks could become a reality only in case of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the World War.

The Mudros Armistice

In September 1918, the Turkish army suffered a crushing defeat in Palestine. The British army, the French contingent, and the Armenian Legion liberated Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. Turkey was no longer able to continue the war. The Ottoman Empire had to ask the Entente states for peace.

On October 15, 1918, the Turks asked the British to offer armistice terms. On October 27, cease-fire negotiations began in the port of Mudros on the island of Lemnos, aboard the British cruiser "Agamemnon". Negotiations were led by Admiral Arthur Calthorpe from the British side and Husein Rauf Bey, Minister of Navy, from the Turkish side. French Vice-Admiral Jean-François-Charles Amet expressed his desire to participate in the negotiations, but both the British and the Turkish sides refused [Fromkin, p. 360–373]. The French representatives protested in vain. It was related to the Franco-British contradictions in the Middle East, which became more evident in the final phase of the war. Despite the Sykes-Picot agreement, the British tried to prevent France from strengthening in Syria and Armenia.

On October 30, 1918, an armistice was signed in Mudros, by which the Turks capitulated. Seven out of 25 articles of the Mudros agreement were directly related to the Armenian Question:

IV. All Allied prisoners of war and Armenian interned persons and prisoners to be collected in Constantinople and handed over unconditionally to the Allies.

V. Immediate demobilization of the Turkish army, except for such troops as are required for the surveillance of the frontiers and for the maintenance of internal order. (Number of effectives and their disposition to be determined later by the Allies after consultation with the Turkish Government.)

X. Allied occupation of the Taurus tunnel system.

XI. Immediate withdrawal of the Turkish troops from Northwest Persia to behind the pre-war frontier has already been ordered and will be carried out. Part of Trans-Caucasia has already been ordered to be evacuated by Turkish troops; the remainder is to be evacuated if required by the Allies after they have studied the situation there.

XV. Allied Control Officers to be placed on all railways, including such portions of the Trans-Caucasian Railways as are now under Turkish control, which must be placed at the free and complete disposal of the Allied authorities, due consideration being given to the needs of the population. This clause to include Allied occupation of Batoum. Turkey will raise no objection to the occupation of Baku by the Allies.

XVI. Surrender of all garrisons in Hedjaz, Assir, Yemen, Syria, and Mesopotamia to the nearest Allied Commander; and the withdrawal of troops from Cilicia, except those necessary to maintain order, as will be determined under Clause V.

XXIV. In case of disorder in the six Armenian vilayets, the Allies reserve to themselves the right to occupy any part of them [Maurice, p. 85–87].

The armistice agreement concluded by the British military authorities at Mudros, which was signed without regard to the interests of the Allies, was largely contrary to the aspirations of both France and the Armenians. By the end of the war, Franco-British tensions had already escalated in the Middle East. Despite the previously signed secret agreements and arrangements,

the British tried to prevent France from gaining a foothold in the Middle East, especially since there were almost no French forces there, except for the Armenian Legion, which consisted mainly of Armenian volunteers.

The Mudros Armistice had both positive and negative consequences for the Armenian Question.

According to Article 4 of the agreement, all Armenians in prisons and concentration camps were to be released. It had positive consequences for several hundreds of thousands of Armenians who survived the genocide. They managed to escape the final destruction.

Article 5 envisaged demobilization of the Turkish army, but not completely. This later allowed Mustafa Kemal Pasha to consolidate the military units of the Turkish army and start a fight against the Entente powers and their small allies – Armenia and Greece. In fact, with this article, the Turkish nationalists were given the opportunity to stand up and fight against the international agreements signed by the Ottoman government.

According to articles 10 and 16, the Turkish troops were to be immediately withdrawn from Cilicia, but under the pretext of maintaining order, a certain number of combat units remained there as gendarmerie. The withdrawal of Turkish troops from Cilicia was positive. As a result, the Armenian refugees were able to return to their homes under the protection of the Armenian Legion and British troops. Even after the genocide, Armenians again constituted the relative majority of the population of Cilicia in 1919–1921. According to the calculations of the French administration, in March 1920, 185,000 Muslims and 215,000 Christians lived in Cilicia, of which 150,000 were Armenians, 78,000 – Turks [Bibliothèque Nubar. List 2. Dos. 1. P. 1].

However, there was a negative section in Article 16, according to which, 3,000 Turkish gendarmes would remain in Cilicia under the pretense of maintaining order. Soldiers with combat experience were included in it. It later played an important role when the Kemalists began to attack the Armenian settlements and the French troops in Cilicia. The Turkish gendarmes always hit the Armenians and the French from behind [Ibid. Dos. 10. P. 7].

Articles 11 and 15 provided for the withdrawal of the Turkish army from Transcaucasia. However, the Turks would stay in some areas to maintain order and would leave after the demands of the allies. Of course, the withdrawal of the Turks from Transcaucasia was extremely positive. However, their final withdrawal was delayed for several months. This gave the Turks the opportunity to arm and train the local Muslim population, many Turkish officers remained in place. This made it possible for them to organize many uprisings against the Republic of Armenia and destabilize the situation.

According to Article 24, Western Armenia was left under Turkish control, and in the event of disorder there, the Allies could occupy any part of it. It did not give the Armenian refugees the opportunity to return to their homes. Starting in May 1919, Mustafa Kemal was able to initiate a nationalist movement against the Entente, Armenians, and Greeks relying on the

support of the Turkish troops remaining in Western Armenia. Therefore, if the liberation of Western Armenia had been carried out immediately after the war, the Kemalist nationalist movement would not have started.

The Consequences of the Armistice of Mudros for the Armenian Question

As the facts show, some conditions of the Mudros Armistice were the main reason for the failure of the Armenian Question. And why did British diplomacy allow such “omissions”? Was it done on purpose? We think that leaving Western Armenia under Turkish control with the Mudros armistice could have been due to the desire of the British to prevent France from taking the mandate of a united Armenia, which would stretch from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean. This would allow France to strengthen itself in Syria and Mosul as well.

According to the Sykes-Picot agreement, Syria, Mosul, Cilicia, and part of Armenia were to pass to France. After abandoning the previous agreements and the departure of Soviet Russia from the region, France could also receive the rest of Western Armenia. It could take the mandate of United Armenia, which would include Cilicia, Western Armenia, and Eastern Armenia. This would naturally allow France to seriously strengthen itself in the Middle East. However, Britain tried to cancel the previous agreements and limit the territories in the Middle East passed to France. Especially since France had only a limited number of troops in that region.

During that period, Britain had already taken steps to take Mosul under its influence, and in Syria it supported Emir Faisal's pan-Arab ambitions [Фомин, с. 70, 74]. Britain wanted to form a united Arab state under its auspices. The serious French-British contradictions and sharp debates over Syria later harmed Armenian interests as well.

However, Armenian politicians were still extremely enthusiastic, and it seemed to them that after the loss of independence that lasted for several centuries, the possibility of having a free, independent, united homeland was already close.

It should be noted that the idea of United Armenia had no opponents among the great powers immediately after the armistice. The latter were still positive about solving the issue. However, there were disagreements about the patronage of the united Armenian state. France sought to take over the Armenian Mandate, but Britain opposed increasing French influence in the region and tried to interest the USA in taking it over. President Woodrow Wilson, for his part, was not against ensuring the American presence in the Middle East, especially in Armenia.

On November 21, 1918, the Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office produced a memorandum entitled “Settlement in Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula.” It envisaged the formation of a large Armenian state, which would be under the auspices of a third power friendly to the British. It was planned to allow France to take the mandate of Armenia only if it was not taken by the USA [Там же, с. 95–96].

Thus, we can state that the full liberation of Armenia through the Mudros armistice was prevented due to far-reaching British interests. Britain did not want to take the mandate of Armenia, because it would become a border with Russia. In case of further negative developments of the Russian-British contradictions, it could be a reason for a conflict. Britain did not want a direct military confrontation with the huge Russian continental army.

Therefore, Britain wanted to prevent Russia's advance into the Middle East and Mediterranean through another state. In the past, that role had been assumed by the Ottoman Empire. Now the British were trying to do it through the USA or France. Priority was given to the USA, because the latter had a greater potential to stop Russia. On the other hand, France was Britain's main competitor in Europe and the colonies, so it was not beneficial to make it stronger.

Thus, Great Britain tried to protect the roads leading to the Arab oil-bearing regions or the Suez Canal through the Mediterranean from the Russians with American troops. British diplomacy often found brilliant solutions to secure its own interests without serious costs. In the event that the USA takes over the mandate of Armenia, it would not be difficult for that power to liberate the Armenian territories from the Turks and invest funds for the development of the united Armenian state.

Woodrow Wilson's administration took serious steps in the first half of 1919 to convince France to give up the Armenian mandate. However, after receiving France's approval, he did not want to take quick steps to take Armenia's mandate. Wilson refused to send American troops and liberate Western Armenia. And after the start of the Kemalist movement, he actually gave up the idea of a mandate [Фомин, с. 159]. That was the main reason for the failure of the Armenian Question.

The Kemalists did everything to keep Western Armenian provinces and to take part of independent Armenia. Mustafa Kemal began tentative communications with the Bolsheviks. They had the same enemy, i. e. Britain. Soviet Russia, as friendless as Kemal, sent arms and gold to Turkish nationalists.

In September 1920, Turkish forces attacked the Republic of Armenia. The latter remained alone against the enemy, as the Allied countries of the Entente did not provide any assistance. Armenia lost the war against Turkey, and at the beginning of December it was Sovietized. Not only did Western Armenia fail to be joined to the Republic of Armenia, but also a significant part of Eastern Armenia was occupied by Kemalist Turkey.

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Thus, the Mudros armistice agreement was one of the traps set by British diplomacy against France and Russia. The Armenians were particularly affected by this, as the largest part of Armenia was left under Turkish occupation. The American government prevented France from taking the mandate of Armenia, but after that, it also did not take any serious steps to

establish itself in Armenia. Thanks to the «gaps» of the Mudros agreement, the Kemalist nationalist movement began, which was able to prevent the liberation of the Armenian and Greek territories, and pushed the French out of Cilicia as well. The British once again entrusted the Turks with the role of a barrier blocking the Russian advance to the south. A more or less strong and nationalist Turkey could also be used as an important tool to incite rebellions and destabilize the Caucasus, Crimea, Central Asia, and other areas of Russia. The Turkish factor is still used by Western countries as a tool to collapse Russia.

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