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Zangezur in U.S. State Department Documents (1919-1920)

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Abstract: *The documents of the U.S. State Department are a remarkable source for a comprehensive study of the history of Zangezur's struggle for survival. These documents reveal the internal situation of Zangezur, the Turkish-Azerbaijani aspirations towards the region, their danger and the policy of the Allied powers towards Armenia in 1919-1920. The historical realities of that period are more than understandable in the context of the claims about Zangezur, undisguisedly sounded from Ankara and Baku after the Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression against the Artsakh Republic in September-November 2020.*

Key words: U.S. State Department, Great Britain, Republic of Armenia, Zangezur, the Allies, Armenian-Azerbaijani Agreement, Caucasian Tartars

Introduction

The documents of the U.S. State Department are a remarkable source for a comprehensive study of the number of issues of Armenian history, 1919-1920, in particular of history of Zangezur's struggle for survival. The most important part of these documents preserved in the National Archives in Washington is included in the volumes officially published by the US government in 1931-1947, and copies of a part are preserved in the microtape collection of the National Archives of Armenia (NAA). Note that in 2011 and 2020 the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences, Republic of Armenia, published in Russian and then in English an extensive collection entitled *Armenia in Documents of the U.S. Department of State, 1917-1920* compiled by Dr. Gayane Makhmourian.¹ It includes 330 American diplomatic documents related to Armenia and the Armenian people found in various funds and microtape collections of the NAA, as well as extracted from volumes published by the U.S. government. This work aims to present 6 American official documents, including the period from the end of July, 1919 to the end of January, 1920 and

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¹ Makhmourian, 2020.

directly and indirectly shed light on the internal situation of Zangezur, the Turkish-Azerbaijani aspirations towards the region and their danger in 1919-1920.

The name Zangezur has traditionally been etymologically linked to the modification of the toponymic name “Dzagedzor” or “Dzagkadzor”: “Dzageri dzor” – the domain of the Armenian ancestor Dzagik or to the impression created by the strong sound of the huge bell of an ancient monastery. Zangezur was also considered a modified form of the name of the Scythians (sakers) who invaded here in the 7th century BC (sak – dzag – Dzagedzor – Zangezur). According to the *Aškarhatsoyts* [Ašxarhac’oyc’] (*Geography*) of the famous Armenian geographer Anania Shirakatsi (7th century), Zangezur was a part of the Syunyats province or Syunik of the Greater Armenia (7 of the 12 counties of Syunik: Tsghuk, Aghahechk, Haband, Baghk, Kapan (Dzork), Arevik (Meghri), Kavsakan were part of Zangezur). Syunik is not mentioned in Persian-Arabic sources. The Persians everywhere call Zangezur Sisakan, and the Arabs call it Sisajan. After the fall of the Armenian kingdom of the Arshakunis (428), Zangezur was joined to Persia and entered the province of Atrpatakan. At the end of the 7th century, Zangezur was taken over by the Arabs. From the beginning of the formation of the Bagratuni kingdom, the territory was the part of the state, but in the 80s of the 10th century, the prince Smbat Syunetsi separated Syunik from the kingdom of Bagratunis and created the independent kingdom of Syunik. Then Zangezur was successively conquered by the Seljuks (11th-12th centuries), Mongols (13th-14th centuries), Kara-Koyunlu and Ak-Koyunlu Turkmen tribes, and from the 16th century by the Persians. As a result of the Russo-Persian wars of 1804-1813, then 1826-1828, Zangezur passed to Russia.² From 1918 to July 1921, Zangezur was part of the (First) Republic of Armenia.³ Then in 1921-1991 the territory was part of the Soviet Republic of Armenia, and currently it is a part of the (Third) Republic of Armenia as a Syunik region.

The internal situation of Zangezur, the Turkish-Azerbaijani ambitions for the territory

After the departure of the Turkish army in the fall of 1918, British supremacy was established in Transcaucasia.⁴ The British government had the task of securing its geopolitical interests in the region under the guise of seeking to establish peace in Transcaucasia. According to historian Hamlet Harutyunyan, on the one hand, the dazzling shine of Baku’s “black gold” and on the other hand, the ambition to use Azerbaijan as a bulwark against Russia had made the British the ally of the Musavatists. Khosrov Bek Sultanov, on January 15, 1919 proclaimed governor general of

² On the discussion, see: Aslanyan, Avetisyan, & Bagdasaryan, 1977: 656.

³ Simonyan, 2017: 56-63.

⁴ Hovannisian, 2005: 169-178; 182-186; 206-213; Hovannisian, 2016: 105-148; Badalyan, 2010: 203-211.

Shushi, Zangezur, Jabrayil and Jivanshir regions of Eastern Armenia by the decision of the Azerbaijani government, was trying to extort an agreement from the Armenians to submit to Azerbaijan through diplomatic pressure, threats, and the use of force. General William Thomson, the commander of the British troops in Baku, and then Colonel Digby Shatelward, who replaced the latter, are supporting Khosrov Bek Sultanov in this. The reaction of the Armenian population of Zangezur and Artsakh was unchanged and clear: not to the government of Azerbaijan! The more the pressure and violence of the Azerbaijan's authorities intensified, the stronger became the will of the Armenians to live independently and freely, to make their own history.⁵ And this is when the Republic of Armenia was in an unspeakably difficult situation, and on July 1, 1919, the Zangezur-Karabakh regional council declared martial law in the region, concentrating all military forces under the command of the state commissar and supreme commander of the region, Arsen Shahmazyan.⁶ In an urgent telegram on July 23, 1919, from the U.S. vice-consul at Tiflis Hooker Doolittle, chief of American political and intelligence mission in Tiflis Benjamin Moore, U.S. military observer in Turkey headquartered in Tiflis, Major Hayk Shekerjian, chief of the American Committee for Near East Relief (ACRNE) Ernest Yarrow, Director of the American Relief Administration in Rumania and in the Near East, then head of ARA in Caucasus, resided at Tiflis, Major Joseph Green addressed to the Head of the American Delegation in Paris Frank Polk, chief of Military Intelligence of the American commission to negotiate Peace in Paris, Major Royall Tyler, U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing, Director General of Relief and head of the American Relief Administration Herbert Hoover, legal trustee and member of the Executive Committee of ACRNE Henry Morgenthau, the situation in Republic of Armenia was described as critical:

“Situation in Armenia, i.e. Armenian Republic is approaching crisis. Unless political and frontier questions are settled soundly and military and relief measures on large scale undertaken immediately Russian Armenian Republic which is now only a part of Armenians of the former Russian and Turkish Empires will succumb to starvation and aggressions of neighboring peoples and organization of Armenian State will become impossible,- American officials were noting and adding,- Armenia surrounded on the west by hostile Turks, on the south by hostile armed Tartar forces under Turkish direction, on the east by hostile Azerbaijan organization directing Tartar activities and cooperating with the Turks emulated north by the unfriendly Georgian Republic.”⁷

⁵ Harutyunyan, 2015: 50-51.

⁶ Badalyan, 2010: 206.

⁷ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 158, p. 165.

Then, referring to the increasingly brutal behavior of the Turks and Caucasian Tartars, the massacres of Armenians in various settlements, the authors of the telegram were stressing about armed conflicts of dangerous that had occurred and were ongoing in Armenian districts of Karabagh and Zangezur placed officially under Azerbaijan Government by the British and also in Nakhichevan, Kaghzvan and Sarikamish officially assigned by the British to Armenian administration but occupied by hostile Turks and Tartars although north of Turkish frontier.⁸ It was also mentioned that Turks and Caucasian Tartars had cut the railroad between Erivan and Nakhichevan, Erivan and Kars, hinder the work of the American Relief Committee, especially in the regions where Armenians were suffering from hunger. The Georgians, in their turn, were hindering the transportation of goods to Armenia. The need to immediately solve the listed problems as the only way to ensure comprehensive assistance to the Armenian population was emphasized in the document.⁹ It should be noted that the attacks of Azerbaijan against Zangezur were taking place both from the east and from the west. On July 24, through the director of the ARA Herbert Hoover, J. Green, who was closely following their progress, informed the Secretary of State R. Lansing and the head of the American military mission, General James Harbord that

“Turks and Tartars advancing. Believe the districts of Karabagh and Zangezur, they now occupy approximately reopened territory of Russian Armenia. Halil Bey, Turkish Colonel, now in command of Azerbaijan Tartars. Regular army depots and relief trains surrounded and probably seized. British State orders from above prevent their interfering. Armenian government and people almost in despair. General mobilization ordered yesterday, taking away men just as harvest begins. We shall not be able to carry on relief work much longer unless British receive orders to clear Russian Armenia including Karabagh and Zangezur of Turk and Tartar forces.”¹⁰

But the British government not only did not intend to take such a “burden”, but was also going to withdraw its troops from Transcaucasia. It should be noted that especially Goghtan province, bordering Zangezur, was under the attack of the enemy from Nakhichevan. Garegin Nzhdeh undertook the organization of the defense of that province at the suggestion of the Bureau ARF Dashnaktsutyun. On August 10, 1919, he issued an order to assume command of the Ghapan-Genvaz-Goghtan united forces.¹¹

A. Shahmazyan, realizing and taking into account that the decision of the 7th Congress of Karabakh Armenians, held on August 12-22, 1919, on temporarily recognition of the power of Azerbaijan, would further complicate the situation of Zangezur, on

⁸ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 158, p. 165.

⁹ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 158, pp. 165-166.

¹⁰ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 160, pp. 167-168.

¹¹ Badalyan, 2010: 206.

August 17, 1919 sends a report to RA Prime Minister Alexander Khatisyan, asking him to send munitions, otherwise he was considering his stay in Zangezur pointless.¹²

In the second half of August, 1919, the borders of Zangezur were relatively peaceful. The opinion that after Karabakh, Zangezur could be conquered without force, was increasingly strengthened in the ruling circles of Azerbaijan, especially since the back of Zangezur had “exposed” after the massacres of Armenians in Nakhichevan. In mid-September, rumors about a new attack being prepared by Azerbaijan began to circulate. In those days, the situation in Zangezur was in the center of attention of the J. Harbord delegation operating in RA. According to the decision of the Council of Four of the Paris International Peace Conference on March 20, 1919, that delegation was sent on an official journey to the region in August of the same year to comprehensively study the human and natural resources, interstate and interethnic relations, economic opportunities, military capabilities of Turkey, Western Armenia and Transcaucasian independent republics, as well as to prepare a report on the expediency of establishing a united American mandate over the vast area of Constantinople – Turkey – Western Armenia – Transcaucasia. The Armenian government was not opposed to handing over the mandate for Armenia to the USA, so it was providing necessary information to the J. Harbord military mission. Thus, on October 1, 1919, a list of 19 official documents was submitted by the Government of the Republic of Armenia to the chief of the military mission to Armenia, in which, among the issues of general nature and problems of Nakhichevan and Kars, the problem of Karabakh and Zangezur was presented in a separate section.¹³ That section of the list includes 8 documents, three of which refer to Zangezur with the following titles: “Last statistical values on size of Armenian population in Karabagh and Zangezur, including information on particular villages and towns”, “Formal order by the British Command, directed to the population of Karabagh, Zangezur, Jivanshir and Jibrail districts, dated April 3, 1919”, “Letter by General G. Cory of June 1, № 13/12, which indicates his proposal to Azerbaijan that the latter ought to restrain from attempts to extend its authority over Zangezur”.¹⁴ The latter were studied by the J. Harbord military mission to Armenia and taken into account when formulating its Report submitted to the State Department on October 16, 1919. That Report was of key importance in the rejection by the U.S. Senate on June 1, 1920, of Woodrow Wilson’s May 25 address on accepting the American mandate only for Armenia.

The next remarkable document of the American State Department is the telegram sent from Tiflis by Colonel of the U.S. Army, Allied High Commissioner in Armenia William Haskell to chairman of Paris Peace Conference, Prime Minister of France and

¹² HAA, F. 199, list 1, dossier 76, P. 239-240.

¹³ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 223, pp. 244-245.

¹⁴ From May 10 until September 6, 1919, George Cory replaced General W. Thomson as Commander of the 27th Division, as well as of all British forces in Transcaucasia up to their withdrawal.

its Minister for War Georges Clemenceau. First of all, the 5 points of the Armenian-Azerbaijani agreement signed on November 23, 1919 in Tiflis, are enumerated in it.¹⁵ According to them, having failed the attack against Zangezur from the sides of Shushi, Karyagino and Nakhichevan on November 5, Azerbaijan was obliging to stop military operations against the territory and open its roads without giving real guarantees not to resume military operations.¹⁶ Then hope was appearing that the guarantee of the implementation of that agreement, and therefore the maintenance of peace in the Transcaucasia, was the prevention of possible military operations of Anton Denikin's army against the region, in particular against Azerbaijan, because in case of their danger, Azerbaijan would be "forced" to receive Turkish support. W. Haskell was proposing to the Peace Conference

"to define the boundaries of A. Denikin's activities with reference to the Caucasus, at least until the final decision of the Caucasus question was reached. The limits recommended to such activities should follow those previously described by the British."¹⁷

This document is complemented by the December 4, 1919, telegram from U.S. High Commissioner Mark Bristol to Secretary of State R. Lansing, in which the massacre of 600 Armenians near Shushi and 5,000 in Nakhichevan in the middle of the same year was presented as the consequence of the latter's provoking the Caucasian Tartars. In particular, the Armenian attack on the Tartar shepherds near Goris and the expulsion of Tartars from Nakhichevan were mentioned as provocation acts of Armenians.¹⁸ According to M. Bristol, the withdrawal of British troops from Transcaucasia contributed to the destabilization of the situation in the region, and in parallel, not only did the anti-Armenian aspirations of the Caucasian Tartars gain new momentum, but also the attitude of the British towards the Armenians of Zangezur, "subjected to British policy", changed: the local Armenian council was permitted to govern Zangezur, but the question of Zangezur's belonging remained unresolved.¹⁹ The American diplomat was not wrong. Excited by the withdrawal of British troops from Transcaucasia, diplomatic representative of Azerbaijan in Republic of Armenia Mahomed Khan Tekinskiy, was sparing no effort to "blow up" Armenia from within. Thus, on August 3, 1919, he called on his government "to take advantage of the

¹⁵ The agreement has been signed between the Armenians and Tartars by Premiers Alexander Khatisian (Armenia) and Nasib Bek Usubbekov (Azerbaijan), as well as Colonel of the U.S. Army, Chief of Staff at Near East Relief in Tiflis, operated as Acting High Commissioner (between October 7 and December 5 of the same year) James Rhea, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, also interim president of the Georgian Republic Eugene Gegechkori, see Ghazakhetsyan & Galoyan, 2000: doc. № 130, pp. 140-141.

¹⁶ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 272, pp. 348-349.

¹⁷ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 272, p. 349.

¹⁸ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 273, p. 349.

¹⁹ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 273, p. 349.

moment” and “to put an end to Zangezur.”²⁰ But Bristol was wrong only about Zangezur’s legal status. His consideration of Zangezur as “subject to British policy” was a repetition of the wording given in the above-mentioned telegram of July 23, 1919, which did not correspond to reality. Diplomatic documents preserved in the archival funds of both Washington and Yerevan, in particular, the documents representing the visit of W. Thomson to Yerevan on March 28, 1919 and the events that followed, testify that the British did not succeed in subjugating Zangezur to the power of Baku.²¹ In his telegram of December 4, 1919, the U.S. High Commissioner also was stating that, in his opinion, the extortion of the consent of Armenia in question of signing an agreement on joint operations with Azerbaijan and Georgia against A. Denikin was the goal of Caucasian Tartars’ attacks on Armenian territories. And it was in the interests of the Allies. On that occasion, he was pointing to W. Haskell’s proposal to the Peace Conference “to define the boundaries of A. Denikin’s activities with reference to the Caucasus” adding that he, together with the latter, would do everything possible to organize a joint struggle of the Transcaucasian republics against Denikin’s troops.²²

In the documents of the US State Department, there is an obvious tendency to accuse the Armenians of Zangezur of violence against the Caucasian Tartars, to present them as murderers, robbers, without delving into the cause-and-effect relationships of the events or deliberately distorting the facts. As a justification for what has been said, let us present W. Haskell’s telegram to R. Lansing on January 22, 1920.²³ The telegram is based on the results of a survey conducted by an American officer among the Tartars of South Goris and their stories about Armenians of villages Voghji and Geghi. In them, unilaterally, from the point of view of the Caucasian Tartars, the steps taken by the military campaign squad created under the command of General Drastamat Kanayan (Dro) by the decision of the RA government on November 18, 1919, and the Zangezur armed forces under the command of Major-General Ghazaryan in the direction of subjugating the Tartars of the said settlements are described. The content of the document testifies that the Caucasian Tartars had convinced the American officer that they had attacked and looted that Armenian villages, which were “occupied” by the Armenians. After that, without resistance, the Armenians who had fled to the snow-covered mountains, receiving artillery reinforcements in Goris, had attacked the Tartars, surrounded them and drove them out. The surviving Tartars were fled to Ordubad and Nakhichevan, where they were interviewed by American officer. Tartars were claimed that “Armenia object drive all Tartars from Zangezur

²⁰ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 273, p. 354; HAA, F. 200, list 1, dossier 427, P. 210.

²¹ HAA, F. 200, list 1, dossier 244, P. 4.

²² Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 273, p. 354.

²³ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 293, pp. 379-380.

capturing Ordubad and Julfa, thereby forcing evacuation Nakhichevan.”²⁴ In his telegram, W. Haskell was drew the State Department’s attention to the fact that after the Armenian government disarmed the Caucasian Tartars, the geography and frequency of armed violence by Armenians against them had expanded. Therefore he was “insisting prompt measures Armenian Government prevent recurrence” of “outrages.”²⁵ According to the High Commissioner of the Allied Powers, “present government Armenia rapidly proving itself untrustworthy and incompetent apparently actuated by desire to increase territory and material for propaganda.”²⁶ As they say, comments are unnecessary.

Conclusion

Thus, the presented American archival documents complement each other. They complete the picture of the situation in Zangezur in 1919-1920, exposing the profit-seeking policy of the Allied states towards Armenia, the aggressive ambitions of Azerbaijan and Turkey towards Armenian territories, particularly Zangezur. The historical realities of that period are more than understandable in the context of the unconcealed ambitions of Ankara and Baku regarding Zangezur after the Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression against the Republic of Artsakh in September-November, 2020.

After the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in 2020, President Ilham Aliyev has consistently stated that his country will continue to pursue the implementation of the Zangezur corridor, regardless of Armenia’s wishes. He has emphasized that if Armenia is willing to cooperate, the issue can be resolved more easily, but if not, Azerbaijan will pursue its objectives through diplomatic or other means.²⁷

Azerbaijani historiography aims to substantiate the territorial claims of Turkey and Azerbaijan against Armenia.²⁸

²⁴ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 293, p. 379.

²⁵ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 293, p. 379.

²⁶ Makhmourian, 2020: doc. № 293, p. 379.

²⁷ Aliyev, 2023.

²⁸ Acicbe, 2020; Velihanly, 2022.

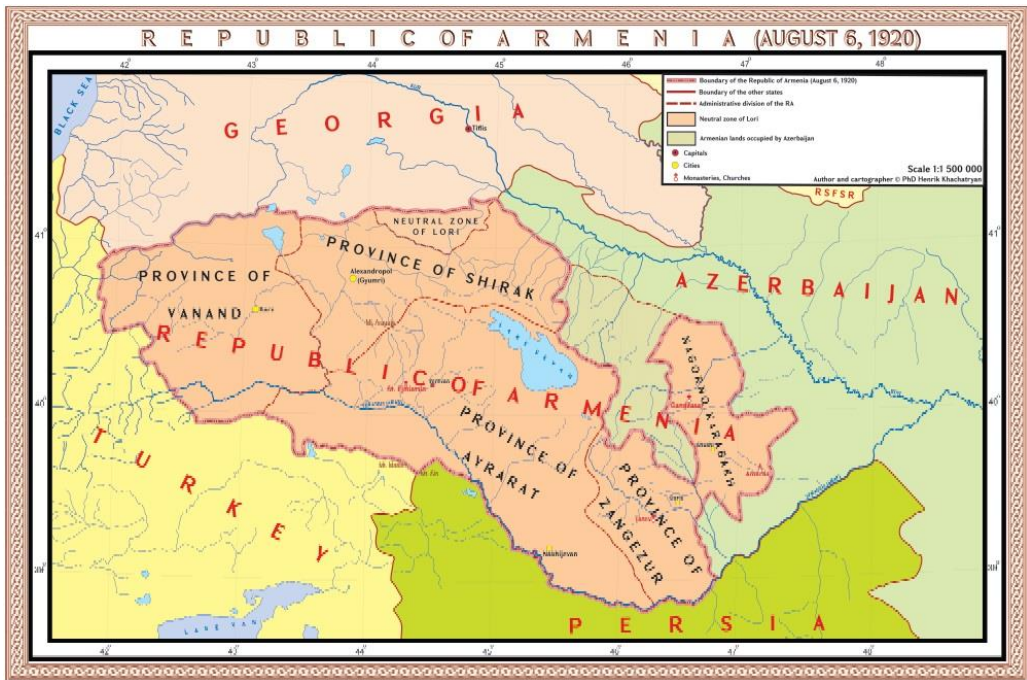


Fig. 1. The Republic of Armenia (August 6, 1920) by the National Atlas of Armenia. The State Committee of Real Property Cadastre of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, "Geodesy and cartography" SNCO; Ed. staff: M. Sargsyan and oth. Vol. II; Responsible Edit. of the volume: A. Nazaryan. Yerevan: "Haykarli" LLC printing house, 2017, pp. 106-107.

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