

Russian-Armenian Relationships in South Caucasus in Early XX Century

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Abstract

Russian-Armenian relationships in the Caucasus have many-century history. These relations existed on the basis of their servants, Armenian nationalists' mutual interests with Russian colonizers. However, these relations have not always been even, it turned into the position of confrontation in early XX century. But after a while, on the eve of the years of World War I, overlapping of geo-political interests of both sides made the relations return to its previous position. And this resulted in terror, pogrom, deportation and the tragedy of millions of people in South Caucasus and neighboring territories.

Key words: South Caucasus, tsarist regime, Russian-Armenian relationship, the Armenians

Although Russian-Armenian relationships, playing an essential role in historical fate of South Caucasus have passed through different stages and developed in various courses, served the same strategic interests. The Russians were eager to implement their colonialism goals and to consolidate here by taking advantage of the Armenians who are not autochthonous. And the Armenians tried to oppress the local peoples, to gain territories on account of them, to establish their statehood which had never existed in the region by serving the powerful Russian Empire.

Major trends of geopolitics of tsarist Russia in South Caucasus were defined by Tsar Peter I in early XVIII which were promoted and shaped by other politicians later on. Those trends were mainly

benefiting from “Armenian factor” in Near East policy of empire, suppressing national-liberty movements in the region on the basis of the principle of “Destroy and dominate”, achieving the confrontation between immigrated ethnos Armenians and local peoples, utilizing the Armenians as a tool. Austrian historian Eric Fichel justifiably proved that the Armenians have become a basic tool of colonialism policy concerning South Caucasus and Near East in the hand of Russian Empire: “The Armenians have been the victims of political games and changeable pawns of chess game played in St. Petersburg and Moscow”. (14, p.32)

This policy was pursued in early XX century as well. By that time, as a result of national segregation and immigration policies pursued by Tsardom, ethnic Armenians who used to constitute the minority of the population in the region increased considerably thanks to auspices of empire nowadays and possessed crucial economic and political positions. Ethnic Armenians had ruling posts in state bodies, in different authority structures in army and at police stations, in municipal administration. As obvious from the documents pertaining to 1987 Caucasus viceroyalty, at that time “56 out of 79 members of the leading administrative Tbilisi city Duma of the Caucasus were ethnic Armenians. It constituted 70% of all deputies, however the Armenians comprised only 40% of the urban population in ratio to the rest part” (9, p28). Ethnic Armenians and their men took control of local authority structures in Baku, Ganja, Shusha and other cities.

In all provinces, the Armenians’ dominance was an irrefutable reality in the fields of industry and trade. Russian Caucasus-researcher V.Velichko wrote referring to the official sources: “They supervise trade in Tbilisi and in the whole Trans-Caucasus, accomplish any kinds of assignments, almost retain all commitments, accept all jobs, carry out the duties in trade and food commissions. They are translators, lecturers, mediators, in a word, they are the first where there is a job. There is definitely an Armenian where there is a profit” (5, p.62)

Along with the Armenians as Mantashev, Saturov, Ter-Qukasov in oil industry of Baku, other Armenians took possession in trade, bank-credit systems. As a result of this, even a number of Russian statesmen in higher governmental service posts were dependent on the Armenians.

Tsarist Russia relied on ethnic Armenians constituting the certain portion of the population both in the Caucasus and in the Ottoman Empire, in other words, “Armenian factor” in the traditional hostility policy with the Ottoman Empire. However, towards the beginning of XX century, there appeared some certain cracks in the relations between the ruling circles of tsarist Russia and the Armenian political-clerical circles. As a matter of fact, towards the end of XIX century, the same circles armed and financed directly by Russia and the West, as well as, terrorist Armenian thug unities committed a series of rebellions and armed revolts in order to establish a state of “Independent Armenia” in north-east territories of the Ottoman Empire. According to calculations “It is possible to deal with 38 revolts and incidents committed by Armenian terrorist organizations between the years of 1882 and 1904. Approximately, 31 out of them (first Sassoun resistance-1894, second Sassoun revolt-1897, Olive revolt-1895 and others) were the Armenian rebellions covering large-scale revolts” (6, p.151). However, towards the end of XIX century, as a result of drastic measures taken by the state of Turkey, Armenian insurgents and their numerous adherents who did not reach their goals and could not get expected overt support from their benefactors hid from the court of justice and fled to the lands of their protector, Russian empire – South Caucasus. In this sense, the Armenians were not satisfied with bodies of empire power which did not give the necessary aid to them when needed.

Herewith, the government was concerned about the Armenian clergymen’s dodgery and corruptive and illegal actions as transference of the big portion of funds to terrorist organizations in Turkey and in the Caucasus which was hidden from state organs and inherited. Therefore, the government took some measures about the complacent clergymen and church bodies not activating for their appointments and some certain steps were taken to weaken the domination of the Armenians in South Caucasus (1897-1904) when prince Q.S.Qolitsin was a Caucasus viceroy. For instance, the Armenian church schools were closed down in the years of 1885-1886, however the same schools were given to the administration of Ministry of Education in 1987.

On June 12, 1903 a decree by Majesty was issued about “Giving the administration of confiscated property of Armenian-Gregorian church in Russia to disposal of governmental offices and giving church property and funds providing the existence of

Armenian-Gregorian church schools to the subordination of the Ministry of People's Enlightenment" (5, p.105). Supreme decree went: "To take the real assets pertaining to Armenian-Gregorian church, monasteries, religious bodies and religious-educational institutions from Ecclesiastical offices and ecclesiastical bodies in defined form and in the frame of special rules and to give them to subordination of Ministry of Husbandry and State Property, but to give the capitals of bodies mentioned above to the administration of Ministry of Internal Affairs" (9, p.36) According to this decree, measures taken by tsar governmental bodies, especially confiscation issues and other affairs of this type resulted in anger of Armenian political-clerical circles and their followers, simultaneously their benefactors - Armenian terrorists, "The ones who made an attempt to oppress Armenian churches, even their supporters were all damned. Even Russian tsar dynasty was damned by the Armenians in 1903 as the result of an instruction" (3, p.26). With the incitement of Armenian Catholicos Mikirtich I, massive objection, terror and violation wave broke out covering the whole region. Explosions, street unrests, train crashes, assassinations, terrorist and thug Armenian group clashes with the police, incidents as killings of the government representatives who did not satisfy the Armenians, covered South Caucasus cities: "After the ritual worship taken in the Armenian church in Tbilisi on August 31, 1903, Gregorian clergymen called the people for civil disobedience. Priest Ter-Araratov "was distinguished" particularly. After his speech, Armenian terrorists shot at the people about 40 times. Four instigators, as well as, priest Ter-Araratov were arrested". A few days later, similar incidents occurred in the Armenian church in Baku. Authority organs hardly moved the Armenians away from the incidental place. "A great amount of weapons were found behind the icons and alter in the church" (3, p.27). "The Armenian agitators headed by clergymen spread lies through the statements and "preaches" issued in press as though the government is willing to confiscate the property of Gregorian church and to make the Armenians Orthodox forcibly" (5, p.124).

The Armenian terror thug unities armed, financed, as well as, controlled by Tsardom on the lands of Turkey so far, came out of obedience and turned the direction of blow to Russia with priests' call. As a result of the incidents happening in the period when the Armenian church was opposed to Tsarist government, a number of

high ranking government officials, a lot of policemen became the victims of Armenian terrorism. Dashnak terrorists conspired to prince Qolitsin, the chief ruler of Caucasus and wounded him. Dashnak court even sentenced tsar Nicolai II, the chairman of Council of Russian ministers Stolypin to death by default.

On the go of occasions, the facts as active support to their countrymen's terror by well-known millionaires in Baku as Ter-Qusakov, Balabek Lalayev, Artyom Babayants, Akop Muradyan, Karen Saakyants and others who were provoked by clergymen worried the government (3, p.42). Since the Armenians of this type were the persons who had ample financial opportunities.

As a result of serious defeat in Russian-Japanese war and revolutionary occasions happening in the country in early XX century, tsarist government whose positions were weakening was scared and had to make concessions and reconcile with Armenian political-clerical circles by bringing Armenian-lover Vorontsov-Dashkov to Caucasus viceroyalty, as well as, by fulfilling some requirements of the church. On August 1, 1905, with the decree signed by Nicolai II, the confiscated property of the Armenian churches was given back and the Armenian national schools were allowed to reopen.

Herewith, the Armenian terror machine which was put in motion did not stop. According to information given by Tbilisi Provincial Police office "In the aftermath of dashnak terror, general Alikhanov, Baku governor prince Nakashidze, Yelizavetapol vice-governor Andrew, colonel of Boundary Services, Bikov and many other statesmen died between 1905 and 1907" (10, p.11). First two of them were assassinated by the famous dashnak terrorist "Dro" (Drastamat Kanayan) (11, p.145).

Thousands of innocent people were killed and became refugees as a result of a real genocide and Armenian terror of deportation character on the basis of national unrests provoked by tsarist regime in order to distract the people's attention from revolution between the years of 1905-1907.

Armenian invaders inspired by the dream of establishment of "Great Armenia" implemented large-scale overt bloody shares against the Azerbaijanis between the years of 1905-1907. The Armenians' brutalities beginning from Baku spread the whole Azerbaijan, especially, Azerbaijan villages located in nowadays territory of

Armenia. Hundreds of housing areas were destroyed and ruined, thousands of Azerbaijanis were slain brutally” (1).

Austrian scholar Eric Fichel wrote: “Every time when Russia needed carnifexes, they used the Armenians’ service in order not to dirty their own hands...tsarist Russia took advantage of Armenian clergymen and professional Armenian revolutionists insolently” (14, p.34).

After the failure of first Russian Revolution and counter-attack of tsarist regime, Armenian political unities which called themselves “revolutionists” moved the burden center of their activities to neighboring countries. They strengthened from organizational point of view and got ready for further assaults. Officer cadre commenced to be prepared for the further Armenian army in military schools of some countries. For instance, there was the first graduation of students of Armenian military school founded in Bulgaria in 1907. 53 dashnak officers graduated from that school. Officers for “Dashnaksutun” army were prepared in the military schools of the USA, as well (10, p.20).

The Armenians took an active part in the movement “The young Turks” happening in the Ottoman Empire during the political occasions of 1908-1909. Yet before that they had entered into an agreement with the party of “Ittihad and Taraqqi” in 1907. “Ittihad and Taraqqi” government made a number of concessions to the Armenians that the most essential among them was their representation on Turkish parliament.

In 1910-1911 well-known dashnak terrorist Yefrem Davidsyan worked in Tehran police office and he was a direct executer to punish the participants of Iranian Revolution mercilessly. A weekly newspaper titled “Zank” (“Haray”) was published in Armenian in Tabriz in 1910-1912.

During the wars of Balkan and on the eve of the World War I, Armenian political-clerical circles, first of all, imperial circles of tsarist Russia set forth an idea of establishment of Armenian Autonomous province – Western Armenia in the regions in North-East Anatolia where the Armenians relatively lived densely including Arzurum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Harput and Sivas. However, implementation of this idea became unrealized which was not supported by the leading states of Europe which did not want tsarist Russia to strengthen in the region.

In this period, Armenian leaders, the chiefs of political-clerical organizations were observing the go of Balkan wars, as well as, preparations of Western countries and tsarist Russia for the approaching World War I and they had already made their choice on the eve of war. Standing by the tsarist Russia and Antanta, they set a goal to realize the plan to establish ‘Great Armenia’ in case the Ottoman Empire was defeated.

The party of “Dashnaksutun” in Tbilisi established a center called “Armenian national bureau” in order to get prepared for upcoming war in 1912 and to solve “Armenian issue”. One of the most chief leaders was archbishop Mesrop. (12, p.45).

In Juny, 1914 Dashnaksutun Arzurum congress made a decision to struggle against Ittihad and Taraggi authority. After a short period of time Armenian armed unities stated that they were solitary with the Dashnaks in Hchnak and Ramkavar, as well (An Armenian terrorist organization established in 1908).

In July, 1914 on the days when mobilization was declared in Turkey in relation with the World War I “Catholicos Gevork V, in his letter to Caucasus viceroy Vorontsov Dashkov, pledged that they would fight against the Turks together with tsarist Russia if the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire are protected by tsarist Russia. On the same day, Vorontsov-Dashkov met the members of Armenian National Bureau and municipality chief of the city, Hadisyan telling them he would recognize the Armenian autonomy there if six eastern provinces were captured with the assistance of the Armenians” (8, p.53). Following this, Catholicos accepted a statement for the Armenian people. In the statement whose text was published in 1914 August issue of “Ararat” journal that was the official body of the Armenian patriarchy, called the Armenians to stand by tsarist Russia at the beginning war and to be devoted to Russian tsar: “The Armenians should prove that as usual in history, Majesty will display fidelity to the throne of Russian state and will protect him with determination and frankly” (14, p.45). The answer did not delay long. Roughly 180 Armenian revolutionists who were exiled to Siberia were amnestied by the tsar. Armenian volunteers gathered in Tbilisi under the leadership of these revolutionists who returned from exile started to join Russian army troops, partisan groups and “revenge regiments” to fight against the Turks” (4, p.98).

Ruling circles of Antanta and Russia promised involving, enticing pledges to take advantage of them comprehensively by approaching warmly to the Armenians' ambitions, their territory claims, dreams of "Great Armenia" in the war broken out with Turkey. In this period, tsar Nicolai II, in his appeal to the Armenian population of Caucasus reminded their "services" in front of Russia and expressed new pledges about "the reaching of freedom hour": "The Armenians, you will, finally, realize the use of liberty and justice by consolidating under the emblem of tsar with your brothers (with the Russians) (14, p.47).

Taking advantage of tsar's coming to Tbilisi in November, 1914, decisions about support of Armenian National Bureau and other terrorist parties to tsarist Russia Catholic "Armenian issue" became an agenda again. In response to it, Tsar Nicolai I received Catholicos and told him that "Armenian issue" would be solved as the Armenians expected during the peace negotiations at the end of the war. Tsar added to the words "Bright future awaits the Armenians" that Armenian state would be established in Eastern Anatolia and the province of Erevan will be annexed to it" (2, p.27).

As soon as the military operations began, deputy Pastermajyan III from Arzurum on the parliament of Turkey passed to the side of Russian army together with all Armenian officers and soldiers of Turkish army. When the military operations commenced, tsarist government gave the Armenians 242.900 roubles in order to arm the traitors, namely the Armenian thug unities and to incite them in trainings and revolts (7, p.160). And this was not a small amount for that period. Thanks to weapons and ammunitions purchased on the account of the aids given by Antanta states including those funds, contributions of the church and Armenian communities, Armenian revolts spread the Eastern Anatolia beginning from February of 1915. Rebels get armed from confidential weapon barns which were established by dashnak committees and appealed to the Russian Headquarters for this purpose. Only 15000 thug unity consisting of the Armenians of Olive province emerged in that period. Caucasus viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov told the minister of Foreign Affairs, Sazanova about it, in his telegram dated February 20, 1915: " At the moment, the representative of Olive Armenians come to the Headquarters of Caucasus army shows that 15000 Armenians are

ready to attack the Turkish unities, but they don't have rifles and bullets" (13, p.305)

In the spring of 1915, approximately 6 months later from the beginning of the military operations, Armenian leaders on the Ottoman lands elucidated their strategic goals: they included the actions as rejection to mobilization, Armenian military men's going to the Russians' side together with their weapons and ammunitions on the whole who were in the Ottoman army, establishment of voluntary military unities by the Armenians, attacking to the state bodies, the police and soldiers , committing terrors and sabotages against the Turkish people in the Hinterland.

Actually, the Armenians' deserter groups from the Turkish army and local Armenian people's armed thug unities did these actions from the first days of the war.

During the war years, the vast majority of the personnel of Russian Caucasus army comprised of well-armed, trained, regular Armenian units. "There were 150 thousand Armenian soldiers of Russian army who attacked to capture the Eastern Anatolia" (15). On the other hand, thug and terrorist unities composed of deserter Armenian soldiers from the Turkish army and local armed Armenians destroyed communication stations of the Turkish army, and they were engaged in espionage and intelligence in favor of Antanta and wide terrorist activity against peaceful people. In history, they implemented hundred thousands of pacific and helpless Turkish people's massacre and slaughter with an unexampled brutality and constancy in the occupied territories even leaving the Medieval inquisitionists behind.

Consequently, plans of "Armenian issue" and "Great Armenia stretching from sea to sea" targeted by the Armenian nationalists were buried in history with the overthrow of tsarist regime and the treaty of Sevr, as well as, the Versailles peace conference. Nevertheless, the same nationalist circles found new benefactors for themselves in the face of communist authority of Russia substituting tsarist regime. Thus, a new stage began in the history of Russian-Armenian relations.

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