



# Pawns of Empire: Unraveling the Role of Dashnaktsutyun in British Geopolitical Strategy (1890-1922)

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## Abstract

This paper examines the instrumental role of Dashnaktsutyun, also known as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, in the geopolitical strategies of the British Empire during the early 20th century. Initially emerging as a nationalist movement within the Ottoman Empire, Dashnaktsutyun was co-opted by external powers, particularly Britain, to serve broader imperial interests in the Eurasian region. The study delves into the organization's activities in the Ottoman, Russian, and Iranian territories, highlighting how its operations, under the guise of Armenian nationalism, were significantly influenced by British geopolitical objectives. The paper also explores the complex interplay between nationalist movements and international power politics, particularly in the context of the Great Game between the British and Russian Empires. A critical analysis of Dashnaktsutyun's role during key historical events, such as the Soviet invasion of Armenia in 1920, reveals a prioritization of foreign directives over national resistance, impacting the trajectory of Armenian history and reflecting the broader dynamics of early 20th-century imperialism. This study serves as a cautionary tale of how nationalist movements can be redirected by external influences, often at the expense of their foundational principles and the welfare of their people.

**Keywords:** Dashnaktsutyun, Armenian Revolutionary Federation, British Geopolitical Strategy, Armenian Nationalism, Imperialism, Soviet Invasion of Armenia, Great Game, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turanism

## Introduction

In the complex geopolitical landscape of the early 20th century, Dashnaktsutyun, also known as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, emerged as a pivotal yet enigmatic player. Originally established in the late 19th century as a symbol of Armenian nationalism within the Ottoman Empire, its evolution and activities reveal a narrative deeply intertwined with the machinations of

global powers, notably the British Empire. This paper aims to dissect the multifaceted role of Dashnaktsutyun, particularly its function as a ‘fifth column’ – a covert group or faction that clandestinely undermines a larger group from within, often in favor of an enemy nation or organization<sup>1</sup>.

While Dashnaktsutyun ostensibly championed the cause of Armenian self-determination, its path was significantly swayed by external influences, primarily by Britain. Amidst the strategic rivalry of the Great Game between the British and Russian Empires, Dashnaktsutyun was co-opted as a tool in the broader imperial agenda. This study explores the organization’s operations across the Ottoman, Russian, and Iranian spheres, highlighting how its nationalist guise was effectively utilized to serve British geopolitical interests.

The paper also examines the broader impact of Dashnaktsutyun’s actions on the Armenian populace and the regional political milieu. A critical analysis of the organization’s involvement in key historical events, such as the Soviet invasion of Armenia in 1920, sheds light on the intricate relationship between nationalist movements and international power politics. This exploration offers insights into the challenges nationalist movements face in preserving their autonomy against overpowering external forces.

In summary, the narrative of Dashnaktsutyun transcends a mere chapter in Armenian history; it encapsulates the complex interplay of nationalism, imperialism, and regional politics during a tumultuous period in history. It exemplifies how nationalist aspirations can be manipulated on the grand chessboard of international relations, transforming a movement into a ‘fifth column’ for larger, often conflicting, imperial interests.

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<sup>1</sup> Fifth Column: It is the term given to local or seemingly local elements or groups within a country or region that engage in propaganda, espionage, sabotage, or terrorist activities at the behest of an external factor, with the intention of either taking over the country or region or directing and controlling a large community. Although first used by General Franco during the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939, historical examples of this method include the Trojan Horse and the practices of Carthaginian King Hannibal.

## **1) The Foundation and Purpose of Dashnaktsutyun**

Dashnaktsutyun, also known as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, was established in Tbilisi in 1890. Its founders were Kristapor Mikailiyan, Stefan Zoryan, and Simon Zavaryan. The initial purpose was to unite organizations like Young Armenia in Tbilisi, Armenakan in Van, and Hunchak. They adopted the slogan, “a dozen armed gangs are better than a dozen programs,” referencing Marx’s idea that “a real step forward is more important than a dozen programs.” Initially embracing socialist, national socialist, and Western ideas, they soon shifted towards a Western orientation<sup>2</sup>.

Their primary goal was to establish an “independent Armenia” in the region from Adana to the Caucasus. However, they did not include this aim in their party program until the 9th World Dashnak Congress in 1919. Armenian historians suggest this was ostensibly to avoid provoking Russia. However, the real reason was Britain’s lack of support for the idea of an Armenian state until that date<sup>3</sup>. For Britain, the concept of Armenian freedom was merely a tool to motivate Armenians during World War I<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, the purpose of establishing a Greater Armenia was, from Britain’s perspective, to sever the Ottoman, especially the “Caliphate’s,” ties with the “Turkish-Islamic world” and to secure British colonies and new acquisitions<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, it was too early to discuss the idea of an “Independent Greater Armenia” during the years Dashnaktsutyun was founded and active.

The methods adopted by Dashnak to achieve its goals included:

- a) Forming gangs and preparing them for action,

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<sup>2</sup> Hrach Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutyun 1890-1924*, Milan 1989, pp.28-32; Cezmi Eraslan, “Ermeni Komiteleri, Propagandaları ve Osmanlı Devleti’nin Aldığı Tedbirler”, *Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu*, 24-25 Mayıs 2001, Bildiriler, İstanbul 2001, pp.85; Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası, Remzi Kitabevi*, İstanbul 2008, pp.190-192; Jean-Louis Mattei, *Büyük Ermenistan Peşinde Ermeni Komiteleri*, Bilgi, Ankara 2008, pp.144-146.

<sup>3</sup> H. Dasnabedian, *ibid*, pp.33.

<sup>4</sup> **Public Record Office(PRO)/Foreign Office(FO)/629/3/113148, No.C/Middle East/15722**, (Top Secret), December 26, 1918, General Staff Intelligence, 2.nd ECHELON General Head Quarters to High Commissioner, Cairo.

<sup>5</sup> **TNA/E/30/30/12 East.1554**, (Secret), Colonel Scheffer Report on Pan-Islamizm and Pan-Turanizm Threat.

- b) Using all means to boost the morale and revolutionary activities of the people,
- c) Resorting to all methods to arm the people,
- d) Establishing revolutionary committees and ensuring close coordination among them,
- e) Encouraging conflict and intimidating government officials, informers, traitors, and robbers,
- f) Ensuring transportation for the movement of people and arms,
- g) Looting and destroying government institutions<sup>6</sup>.

Troshak (Flag) and Pro-Armenia were the primary publications of Dashnaktsutyun<sup>7</sup>.

Significant events undertaken by Dashnaktsutyun in the Ottoman Empire included the Ottoman Bank raid on August 26, 1896, the massacre against the Mazrik Kurdish Tribe on July 25, 1897, the Second Sasun Uprising on March 30, 1904, and the Yildiz Assassination attempt against Sultan Abdulhamid in 1905<sup>8</sup>.

Shortly after its establishment, Dashnaktsutyun expanded its activities to places like the United States, the Balkans, Cyprus, Syria, Cilicia, and cities under British influence or control, such as Izmir, Lausanne, Berlin, Geneva, Paris, London, and Alexandria<sup>9</sup>.

## **2) External Support Behind Dashnaktsutyun: The Relationship of Britain with Armenians and Dashnaktsutyun**

Britain's contact with Armenians, recognizing their significance in West Asia and South Asia, dates back to the 16th century and earlier. However, during these times, Britain did not possess the power or influence to assert global dominance. Britain's official relations with Armenians began in the second half of the 16th century in Iran and the Ottoman Empire<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> H. Dasnabedian, *ibid*, pp. 33; s. K. Gürün, *ibid*, pp.193.

<sup>7</sup> J.L. Mattei, *ibid*, pp.145, 153.

<sup>8</sup> C. Eraslan, *ibid*, pp.85.

<sup>9</sup> H. Dasnabedian, *ibid*, pp. 55.

<sup>10</sup> Halil Ersin Avcı, *İngiliz-Ermeni İttifakı*, Paraf Yayınları, İstanbul 2010, pp.30-90.

On June 22, 1688, to eliminate the Ottoman Empire, the biggest obstacle to its dominance in India and South Asia, Britain signed an alliance treaty with Armenians in Iran and India. Although this treaty was primarily commercial, aimed at weakening the Ottoman Empire's trade and diverting transit trade over Ottoman territories to Britain's advantage, it soon had political consequences for the Ottoman Empire. Initially signed with Armenians in Iran and India, it eventually included some Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire<sup>11</sup>.

Especially from the 18th century, Britain intensified educational efforts among Armenians in Iran and India. The education provided in these schools led to the conversion of Indian Armenians to Protestantism, creating a group that could be termed as British Armenians in British India. The British-Armenian alliance expanded its activities across a broad area from Iran to Japan throughout the 18th century<sup>12</sup>.

With Russia's advance into the Caucasus in the 18th century, attempting to Orthodoxize and influence local Georgian and Armenian Christian elements, and Napoleon's attacks on Ottoman Egypt and Syria at the end of the 18th century, Britain, having "vital" interests in the Persian Gulf and Ottoman Iraq, began taking measures. In 1798-1801, British consuls in Basra and Baghdad warned the British Government of the imminent threat of a sudden Russian attack leading to the premature disintegration of the Ottoman Empire or a French occupation of Syria threatening Iraq and Britain's interests in India. They proposed the invasion and annexation of Iraq by an "Armenian army" dispatched from British India and suggested measures to counterbalance Russia<sup>13</sup>.

Particularly from the early 19th century, Britain began initiatives to use Armenians, with whom it had a long-standing relationship and alliance, to establish a natural defensive umbrella in the northern regions of the Ottoman Empire and to balance the imminent Russian threat. Initially, numerous British consulates were opened in the region, followed by activities of British

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<sup>11</sup> **British Library(BL)/India Office Library and Records(IOR)/H/634 date 1688-1794**, No.40, pp.581-598.

<sup>12</sup> H.E. Avci, **ibid**, pp.104-110.

<sup>13</sup> M. E. Yapp, "The Establishment of the East India Company Residency at Baghdad, 1798-1806" **Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London**, Vol.30, No.2, Fiftieth Aniversasry Volume, Cmabridge University Press on behalf od School of Oriental and African Studies 1967, pp.323-330.

Missionaries. A few schools were established. However, Britain faced two major obstacles at this stage: avoiding the image of conducting missionary work in the “land of the caliph” among Muslims in its colonies and the necessity not to jeopardize its gains in a still significant power like the Ottoman Empire. To circumvent this, in 1849, Britain signed an alliance with Protestant churches in the United States, outsourcing all missionary activities among Armenians to the American Protestant church. Consequently, all American churches and schools opened in Ottoman territories began serving British interests, with their activities and graduates. As will be discussed later in relation to Dashnaksutyun’s activities, these schools produced many criminals, including American Euphrates College graduates Sogomon Tehlirian and Shahan Natalie, Dashnak terrorists, and instigators and agitators of Armenian incidents<sup>14</sup>.

To maintain a presence in Eastern Ottoman territories and balance Russia and the Ottoman Empire, Britain kept the Armenian Issue alive through British Armenians trained in these schools, while its consulates in the region provided refuge for terrorists. The course of events during this period is quite intriguing. As analyzed in another study of ours using geographical information systems and artificial intelligence, “Logical Analysis of Armenian Incidents,” it can be stated that Armenian incidents were instigated by students of British-American Armenian schools, with weapons stored in these schools, and the perpetrators often sought refuge in nearby British-American consulates. Similar practices were employed by Russia and France in their respective spheres of influence<sup>15</sup>.

This was a large-scale operation, requiring substantial financial, logistical, and administrative power. In 1890, when British intelligence was restructured, William Ewart Gladstone, who became Prime Minister in 1892, provided a fundamental solution to this issue. While directing British intelligence to establish British Armenian Societies, he also orchestrated a state operation to take over and empty Barclays, Britain’s largest locomotive and rail system company, turning it into the largest sponsor and front company for the Armenian Fund. From the second half of the 19th century, four distinct Armenian nations emerged in the Ottoman Empire: the predominantly Gregorian Ottoman Armenians, the Protestant-majority British Armenians, the Catholic French Armenians, and the predominantly Orthodox Russian Armenians. The establishment of

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<sup>14</sup> H.E. Avci, *ibid*, pp.142-160.

<sup>15</sup> In this regard, our comprehensive book project is currently in the publication stage in English.

Dashnaktsutyun in 1890, the same year British intelligence was restructured and MI2 (Military Intelligence 2) was assigned to focus on the Ottoman Empire, is noteworthy. Additionally, Dashnaktsutyun's initial activities following the establishment and operation of Britain's Armenian Fund and their first major public act during the debate over the transfer of Ereğli coal mine concessions to Britain is another interesting event. It's important to note that after these events, the financing and concession of the Ereğli Coal Mine were granted to the Ottoman Bank, a British-French bank. The Ottoman security forces were not allowed to intervene, and the culprits escaped on a British ship, evading consequences<sup>16</sup>.

### **3) International Activities of Dashnaktsutyun or Modes of Utilization from Britain's Perspective**

Initially, Dashnaktsutyun was used as part of Britain's policy to hold and balance Russia along the Erzurum-Trabzon-Van line, countering the Hunchak terrorist organization established in 1887 to facilitate Russia's advance into the interiors of Anatolia and to conduct fifth column activities in Eastern Anatolia on behalf of Russia<sup>17</sup>.

To understand Dashnaktsutyun's use as an international terrorist organization outside the Ottoman Empire, we need to look at the period after 1905. Between 1905 and 1907, Dashnaktsutyun was actively used in Russia, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire.

In 1904, Britain, having signed the "Entente Cordiale (Cordial Agreement)" with France, largely resolved its disagreements with France, Dashnaktsutyun's minor partner. In the subsequent period, Britain embarked on a series of actions using Dashnaktsutyun effectively for neutralizing the Ottoman Empire, keeping Russia away from the Middle East and forcing it into an agreement, and taking control in Iran. These events, while intertwined in terms of timing, can be categorized into three based on the countries where they occurred.

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<sup>16</sup> H. E. Avci, *ibid*, pp.183-201.

<sup>17</sup> H. E. Avci, *ibid*, pp. 179.

### **3. a) The Ottoman Empire Scene, The Yildiz Assassination Attempt Against Sultan Abdulhamid II**

The bomb attack on Sultan Abdulhamid II on July 21, 1905, can be considered as a primary example. Members of Dashnaksutyun, led by Kristofor Mikaelyan and Nişan Manasyan, organized an assassination attempt on Sultan Abdulhamid II using special equipment delivered by a Belgian named Jorris. The Dashnaks, having determined that the Sultan took 1 minute and 42 seconds to get into his car after leaving the Yildiz Mosque every Friday, placed 80 kilograms of explosives and 20 kilograms of metal shrapnel in a car specially made by the Gesellschaft company in Vienna. This vehicle, dubbed the “Machine Infernale” or “Hell Machine,” equipped with a timer, was used in the assassination attempt. This incident is also noted in history as the first suicide attack using a bomb-laden vehicle<sup>18</sup>.

However, many details of this event, from its planning to the procurement of necessary equipment, suggest that it was beyond the capabilities of Dashnatsutyun and indicate a joint British-French initiative against Sultan Abdulhamid, their eternal enemy. The calculation of Abdulhamid’s time from the Yildiz Mosque to his car, the creation of a unique French-made timer, the special manufacturing of the vehicle in Vienna, and most importantly, the ability to smuggle these into Turkey are initial indicators that this was not the work of a simple organization like Dashnaksutyun. Another significant detail is that Kristofor Mikaelyan, the mastermind, failed to escape from the vehicle after activating the timer, falling into his own trap, suggesting that the plan was not sufficiently rehearsed with the Armenians by Dashnaksutyun, who found the operation ready-made. Additionally, the timing of the attack to coincide with Sultan Abdulhamid’s meeting with European ambassadors suggests that the organizers wanted to witness the outcome immediately and firsthand. Lastly, it’s worth noting that at that time, only British and French intelligence had the technology to manufacture such bombs<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> **Sultan İkinci Abdülhamid Han’a Yapılan Suikastın Takikat Raporu**(Investigation Report on the Assassination Attempt on Sultan Abdulhamid II), Hazırlayan Raşit Gündoğdu, Çamlıca, İstanbul 2007, pp.7-10.

<sup>19</sup> For details of the event, see Investigation Report on the Assassination Attempt on Sultan Abdulhamid II, pp. 13-224



Although Sultan Abdulhamid II, consistently portrayed as the biggest obstacle to Britain's interests in the Ottoman territories in all British reports, survived the assassination attempt, which was seen as a failure from Britain's perspective, it nonetheless had a profound impact as a catalyst for subsequent events.

### **3. b) The Russian Scene, Armenian-Azeri Conflict, and Attack on Baku Oil Fields**

Another area where the British used Dashnaktsutyun was in the Caucasus. On June 12, 1903, the Russians nationalized all properties of the Armenian Church. During the revolutionary movements in Russia in 1905-1906, taking advantage of the political vacuum, Dashnaktsutyun members, including Drastamat Kanayan, exploited an Armenian-Azeri conflict. On May 11, 1905, Kanayan assassinated the Russian Governor of the Caucasus, Nakashidze. The unrest, which lasted until 1907, resulted in numerous Muslim casualties. The new Russian Governor-General of the Caucasus, Vorontsov-Dashkov, reported to St. Petersburg that the incidents were instigated by Armenians under the pretext of Armenian workers' rights and discrimination against them. However, interestingly, while the actual events were observed in Shusha, Tbilisi, and Yelizavetpol, Dashnaktsutyun, unrelated to the issue, managed to reach the Russian oil facilities in Baku and caused a massive fire. It took several years for Baku's oil production to return to its previous levels and contribute to the Russian economy as before. It's worth noting that at this time, Russia was ahead of Britain in the world oil market<sup>20</sup>.

Coincidentally, during this period, the main company transporting Russian oil to Europe was the Dutch Nobel family. The Nobels, who were also the original owners of Royal Dutch Shell and prevented British companies from partnering in Baku's oil fields, were a significant obstacle for Britain. The destruction of the Baku oil facilities put the Nobels in a difficult position, and shortly after these events, The Royal Dutch Shell partnership was established between Britain and the

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Abraham, **Alexander Kerensky: The First Love of the Revolution**, New York: Columbia University Press. 1990, pp.45-60; Gerard J. Libaridian, **Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State**, Transaction Publishers. 2004, pp. 17-20 ve pp. 100-110; Ronald Suny, **Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia**, 2nd edition, 1996, pp. 150-169; Tadeusz Swietochowski, **Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community**, Cambridge University Press. 1985, pp. 40-50.

Netherlands. Starting operations in Baku from February 1907, the British thus gained influence in the Baku oil fields<sup>21</sup>.

### **3. c) The Iranian Scene, Attacks on the Shah and the Iranian Parliament**

In Iran, with Shah Mohammed Ali Qajar (1907-1909) leaning towards Russia, Britain deployed Dashnaktsutyun to protect its interests in Iran. Contrary to the 1907 agreement between Russia and Britain on the division of Iran, Britain used Dashnaktsutyun to counter Russia's efforts to dominate all of Iran. During 1909-1910, Dashnaktsutyun supported the Russian-opposing and British-supporting constitutionalists in Iran, repeatedly attacking the Shah and his regime. Shah Qajar narrowly survived several assassination attempts during this period. The Russians responded harshly to these events, resulting in the loss of many constitutionalist lives. The turmoil in Iran continued until Russia reaffirmed the 1907 Agreement with Britain in 1911<sup>22</sup>.

### **3. d) The Adana Armenian Incidents**

The Adana Armenian incidents, which began on April 14, 1909, and lasted until April 27, 1909, resulted in the loss of over ten thousand lives, both Muslim and non-Muslim Ottoman citizens. These incidents in Adana started almost simultaneously with the events known as the 31 March Incident in Istanbul on April 13, 1909, and ended concurrently on April 27. In the events in Adana, the Dashnaktsutyun organization actively played a role in distributing weapons, initiating the bloody incidents, and provoking the Muslim population. These incidents represent a comprehensive and organized intelligence operation in the Ottoman territories, supported by press, propaganda, and coordinated actions of local elements with British naval and land intelligence. It was the first such operation in the Ottoman Empire and the second globally after the Boer Operation. While the primary purpose was to test the grounds for a potential large-scale Armenian uprising, secondary objectives included particularly undermining the Muslim population's trust in

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<sup>21</sup> Edwin Black, **Banking on Baghdad(Inside Iraq's 7000 Year History of War, Profit, Conflict)**, Wiley Publishing, New Jersey 2004, pp.100-125.

<sup>22</sup> Hourii Berberian, **Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911**, Westview Press. 2001, pp. 115–135.

the state and security forces and encouraging independent action in similar future incidents. In this operation, Dashnaksutyun was effectively used as a local element in provocation, terror, and the Armenian aspect of the organization<sup>23</sup>.

### **3. e) Operation Nemesis and the Assassination of Talat Pasha**

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation, also known as Dashnaksutyun, became the dominant and effective force in the Armenian Democratic Republic, established following the decision of the Armenian National Council convened in Tbilisi on May 28, 1918. It is said that during the 9th General Congress of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, held in the capital Yerevan from September 27 to October 31, a decision was made to assassinate certain Ottoman state officials responsible for the “1915 Relocation and Settlement” law and Armenians alleged to have assisted them. Named after Nemesis, the goddess of retribution in Greek mythology, Operation Nemesis was a series of assassinations carried out by a group of Armenian assassination squads against Ottoman state officials and Turkish citizens of Armenian origin. According to Armenian records, these “special operations,” discussed and planned at numerous conferences, were primarily executed by the American Central Committee, the Istanbul Central Committee, and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation<sup>24</sup>.

#### **3. e.1. Prominent Individuals Assassinated**

Hemayag Aramiantz was killed by Arshag Yezdanian. Alleged crime: Collaborating with Turks.

Mıgırdıç Haroutounian was assassinated in Istanbul in 1920 by Soghomon Tehlirian. Alleged crime: Assisting Turkish intelligence.

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<sup>23</sup> H. E. Avcı, *ibid*, pp.210-240.

<sup>24</sup> Hratch Dasnabedian, *History of The Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutiun 1890/1924*, Oemme Edizioni, Milan 1989, pp.140, 155.

Vahe Ihssan Yessayan was killed in Istanbul on March 27, 1920, by Arshavir Shiragian. Alleged crime: Reporting Armenian leaders to Turkish authorities in 1915, in collaboration with an Armenian convert named Hidayet, leading to their deportation.

Talat Pasha was assassinated in Berlin on March 15, 1920, by Soghomon Tehlirian.

Fathali Khan Khoiski, former Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, was killed in Tbilisi on June 19, 1920, by Misak Giragossian. Alleged crime: Orchestrating massacres against Armenians in Baku.

Bihbud Khan Jivanshir, former Azerbaijani Minister of Interior, was assassinated in Istanbul on July 18, 1921, by Misak Torlakian. Alleged crime: Orchestrating massacres against Armenians in Baku.

Said Halim Pasha was assassinated in Rome on December 5, 1921, by Arshavir Shiragian, with the assistance of Michael Varantian, former Armenian ambassador to Italy, and an agent codenamed “M.”<sup>25</sup>.

Cemal Azmi, former Governor of Trabzon, was killed in Berlin on April 17, 1922, by Arshavir Shiragian.

Dr. Bahaddin Şakir Bey was assassinated in Berlin on April 17, 1922, by Aram Yerganian.

Cemal Pasha was assassinated in Tbilisi on July 21, 1922, by Stepan Dzaghigian<sup>26</sup>.

### **3. e. 2. Talat Pasha Assassination**

Mehmet Talat Pasha, the Ottoman Grand Vizier who fled Istanbul on October 2, 1918, and escaped to Berlin after World War I with his companions, was assassinated by the Armenian assassin

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<sup>25</sup> Hratch Dasnabedian, *ibid*, pp.155-156. Note: Dasnabedian presents events here by compiling them from Armenian sources with extensive commentary. For additional information on the victims of the assassination and relevant newspaper articles, see <http://operationnemesi.com/condemned.html>

<sup>26</sup> Op.cit.

Soghomon Tehlirian. On March 15, 1921, in front of number 17 Hardenberg Strasse, he was shot in the head and killed. Tehlirian was immediately arrested but was released in early June 1921 after being acquitted, partly due to the defense made by Dr. Johannes Lepsius, a sympathizer of the Armenian cause<sup>27</sup>.

While the assassination appeared to be an act of patriotic vengeance by the Armenian Dashnaktsutyun, it was actually backed by British interests, with Dashnaktsutyun being used as a subcontractor.

The British intelligence had considered intercepting Talat Pasha en route to Berlin and then arresting him there, but both plans were abandoned due to potential complications in Germany. The British intelligence decided to investigate what Talat Pasha and the “Young Turks” were planning, considering their international contacts and the people they were meeting. There was information that Talat Pasha and the “Young Turks” were trying to garner support for Mustafa Kemal Pasha’s War of Independence from Muslim countries and were also intending to seek asylum from the Ankara Government<sup>28</sup>.

To verify this information, Aubrey Nigel Henry Molyneux Herbert, a British spy who had traveled and reported in the Balkans and Anatolia, causing “unseen contributions” to incidents wherever he went, requested an interview with Talat Pasha<sup>29</sup>.

Aubrey Herbert, who met with Talat Pasha just nine days before the assassination, confirmed these suspicions during their interview. Moreover, Talat Pasha’s threat to initiate both Pan-Turanist and Pan-Islamist movements against Britain if a fair treaty with Turkey was not reached, likely led to the British decision to execute him<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Hasan Babacan, **Mehmet Talat Paşa(1874-1921)**, TTK, Ankara 2005, pp.229-246; H. Dasnabedian, **ibid**, pp.156; Arshavir Shiragian, **The Legacy of The Martyrs**, Beirut, 1965, pp. 62-91; Additionally, for detailed information, see Vahan Minakhorian, *Memoirs of Soghomon Tehlirian*, Cairo, 1956; for Shahan Natalie's order, see <http://www.snff.org/shahan.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Mim Kemal Öke, **The Armenian Question**, TTK 2001, pp.262.

<sup>29</sup> Aubrey Nigel Henry Molyneux Herbert, **Ben Kendim: A Record of Eastern Travel**, editor: Desmond MacCarthy, Hutchinson, London 1924, pp.41.

<sup>30</sup> Aubrey Herbert, **ibid**, pp.303-351; M.K. Öke, **ibid**, pp.264.

#### **4) Britain's Greatest Fear and Fundamental Motivation**

Britain's greatest fear and perceived threat was the potential unification of Muslims against it or Turkey's alliance with the "Muslim Turks" of Central Asia. To prevent this, Britain intended to sever Turkey's connections with Central Asia. Colonel Schieffer's report, "The Source and Development of Pan-Islamism, Current Threat," emphasized that the establishment of Armenia would be the biggest barrier to Turkey forming a Turk-Islamic union. The report argued that the creation of Armenia would cut off Turkey's link with Central Asia and prevent the use of the Caliphate against Britain. Additionally, the report noted that although Arabs might currently side with the British against the Turks, the Pan-Islamism propagated by the "Young Turks" was gaining strength daily. It warned that Arabs could switch sides at any moment to join an "Islamic unity ideal" if nothing was done against the "Young Turks." The report also accused Talat Pasha and others assassinated in Operation Nemesis of pursuing a Pan-Islamism policy and noted that the "Young Turks" were active not only among Arabs but also in Afghanistan and India. The report concluded that a Pan-Islamism combined with Pan-Turanism posed a current and real threat to Britain. This report was presented in June 1920, amidst ongoing discussions on defining Armenia's borders and the Treaty of Sèvres negotiations<sup>31</sup>.

The preparation of this report was influenced by the resolutions of the 11th Congress of the All India Muslim League, held in Delhi in December 1918 and January 1919, regarding the protection of Turkey, the Caliphate, and the Holy Lands. These resolutions had a significant impact at the Paris Peace Conference and as a testament to the loyalty of Indian Muslims to Britain. The General Secretary of the All India Muslim League, Yakup Hasan, sent these resolutions to the British Prime Minister on August 7, 1919. Representing 72 million Indian Muslims, Yakup Hasan demanded that colonial policies against Turkey be abandoned for the continued loyalty of Indian Muslims. He insisted that the Ottoman Empire should not be dismantled, the Caliphate should remain untouched, the Turkish army should be freed, and the Ottoman Sultan's spiritual authority over the Holy Lands should be recognized. Yakup Hasan signed this as a member of the Madras Legislative

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<sup>31</sup> TNA/FO/30/30/12, E/1554, *Origins & Evolution of Panislamism*.

Assembly, delegate of the All India Muslim League, representative of the Bombay Khilafat Committee, and the South Indian Chamber of Commerce<sup>32</sup>.

The impact of this letter is not hard to imagine. Thus, for Britain, Pan-Islamism was recognized as a threat, the establishment of Armenia as a “barrier” to isolate Turkey from the eastern world was deemed necessary, and the threat posed by the “Young Turks” to Britain’s vital colony of India and other Muslim-majority regions had to be eliminated<sup>33</sup>.

Meanwhile, a rapprochement between Britain and its sworn enemy, Soviet Russia, had begun. Talat Pasha’s statements in an interview with Aubrey Herbert and general knowledge disturbed Soviet Russia, leading to closer ties between British and Soviet intelligence. Both agencies provided Talat Pasha’s physical description to their agents and sent them to Berlin. On March 15, 1921, Soghomon Tehlirian assassinated Talat Pasha<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> TNA/FO/375/2/1, 5543, August 7, 1919, Received August 15, 1919, Earl Curzon Kedleston and transmitted to Mr. Balfour; Also see Sean Oliver-Dee, *The British Government and Islamic Governance*, Lexington Books, 2009; it would be appropriate to provide a summary of some parts of the book here for a better understanding of the subject. The following sections, pp.41-43, "The British Government Files and The Approach to Pan-Islamic Governance"; pp.43-91, "The Cairo High Command and the 'Caliphate Question' 1914-1919"; pp.109-117, "Lloyd George and the Khilafat Delegation 1920"; pp.117-125, "House of Commons Meeting, March 21, 1921"; pp.209-213, Appendix F "Submission to The Lausanne Treaty Negotiators from Armenian Delegation" summarize the following: The "Caliphate" issue greatly preoccupied Britain during the period 1914-1923. The Cairo High Command prepared a report on the "Caliphate Issue" in 1919, and the Indian Khilafat Delegation, led by Muhammed Ali, met with Lloyd George in March 1920. During these meetings, Article 139 of the Treaty of Sèvres, which dictated the transfer of all Caliphal authority in Turkey to the administration of the countries administratively linked to Muslims, was heavily discussed. Lloyd George's proposal to Muhammed Ali for the Caliphate was unsuccessful, and Indian Muslims continued to insist on the Turkey issue. The second visit of the Indian Delegation coincided with the assassination of Talat Pasha, just 6 days after on March 21, 1921, which, not coincidentally, occurred as a result of the rapid movement of Indian Muslims who saw the intentions of the British. This meeting took place not with Lloyd George alone but in the House of Commons. The British government faced considerable difficulty due to these pressures. The Armenian Delegation also communicated their views on the "Caliphate issue" to Lord Curzon in a memorandum on January 21, 1920, but received no response. During the period 1920-1921, the Armenian Delegation conducted the most relentless struggle with the Indian Khilafat Delegation. In response to the British government and Armenians claiming that the so-called Armenian massacres had damaged the Turks' caliphal office, Indian Muslims pointed out the international need for the acknowledgment of the Amritsar massacre perpetrated by the British and argued that this incident violated Britain's neutrality on these matters. Ultimately, with changing world strategies, Indian Muslims played a more significant role for the British, especially during the Lausanne negotiations. In January 1923, during the Lausanne negotiations, Atatürk sent telegrams to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and Atatürk, on January 7, 1923, sent telegrams to the Indian Khilafat Delegation, thanking and congratulating them for their activities in favor of Turkey.

<sup>33</sup> TNA/FO/30/30/12, E/1554.

<sup>34</sup> M.K. Öke, *ibid*, pp.264.

Soviet Russia had also tried to use Pan-Islamism against Britain and its allies, attempting to incite Muslims in British colonies. However, as the British Consul and Special Agent in Tbilisi, Wardrop, reported to the British Foreign Secretary Curzon on January 6, 1920, the Bolsheviks, like the Germans before them, tried to use Pan-Islamism against Britain but ultimately failed<sup>35</sup>.

The signing of the British-Soviet Trade Agreement on March 16, 1921, one day after the assassination of Talat Pasha, a symbolic figure of the Committee of Union and Progress (Ittihat ve Terakki), by Dashnaktsutyun, was likely not a coincidence<sup>36</sup>.

The hunt for the “Young Turks” did not end with Talat Pasha. Said Halim Pasha, Bahattin Şakir, Cemal Pasha, and others listed previously were systematically assassinated by the same Armenian groups between 1921-1922. The Armenian assassins either evaded capture or, if caught, were handed over to British authorities and subsequently released on trivial grounds such as mental illness. Interestingly, some of these assassinations in Europe were facilitated by British spies codenamed “M” and “Q.” It is evident that British intelligence was behind these assassinations, with the Armenians used as a trained subcontractor group for such operations<sup>37</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

Dashnaktsutyun, or the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, has historically been a pivotal player in the geopolitical chess game of the early 20th century, primarily serving the interests of the British Empire within the Ottoman, Russian, and Iranian domains. This organization, ostensibly founded as a nationalist movement, was co-opted by external powers, particularly Britain, and transformed into a tool for executing foreign policy objectives under the guise of revolutionary fervor.

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<sup>35</sup> **TNA/FO/608/271/4, 168506/ME/58**, Mr Wardrop, Decypher- Russia, Political, Very Urgent.

<sup>36</sup> **Trade Agreement Between His Britanic Majesty’s Government and the Government of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, 16 March 1921**, for further information see. Richard H. Ullman, **The Anglo-Soviet Accord**, Princeton University Press, 1972, pp. 474-478.

<sup>37</sup> Donald M. Reid, “Political Assassination in Egypt, 1910-1954”, **The International Journal of African Historical Studies**, Volume 15, No. 4, 1982, pp. 625-651.



The activities of Dashnaktsutyun, while cloaked in the rhetoric of Armenian nationalism and self-determination, were significantly influenced by the strategic interests of its external patrons. This manipulation of nationalist sentiments for geopolitical ends is a recurring theme in the history of revolutionary movements, particularly in the context of the Great Game between the British and Russian Empires. Dashnaktsutyun's operations, often diverging from the genuine needs and aspirations of the Armenian people, underscore the complex interplay between nationalist movements and international power politics.

Moreover, the role of Dashnaktsutyun during critical historical junctures, such as the Soviet invasion of Armenia in 1920, reveals a stark prioritization of foreign directives over national resistance. This strategic choice not only impacted the trajectory of Armenian history but also reflected the broader dynamics of early 20th-century imperialism, where smaller nations and groups were often pawns in the larger designs of imperial powers.

The legacy of Dashnaktsutyun's actions during this period extends beyond the immediate political outcomes. It offers a poignant example of how nationalist movements can be co-opted and redirected, often at the expense of their foundational principles and the welfare of their people. This case study serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the need for vigilance against external manipulation in nationalist and revolutionary movements.

In conclusion, the story of Dashnaktsutyun is not just a narrative of a nationalist movement but a reflection of the complex interplay of imperialism, nationalism, and regional politics in the early 20th century. It underscores the challenges faced by nationalist movements in maintaining autonomy and integrity in the face of overwhelming external influences and interests.

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