

British Foreign Policy in Azerbaijan, 1918-1920

Afgan Akhmedov

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Abstract

This thesis examines Anglo-Russian rivalry in Transcaucasia in general - and Azerbaijan in particular - focusing on the years 1918-1920. The first part of the thesis provides a general review of the history of the Great Game - the geopolitical rivalry between the British and Russian Empires fought in the remote areas of central Asia - before going on to examine the growing investment by British firms in the oil industry of Baku. It also discusses how the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907 changed the texture of Anglo-Russian relations without resolving the tensions altogether, which lasted until the February Revolution of 1917, despite the wartime alliance between Britain and Russia. The thesis then goes on to examine British policy towards Transcaucasia after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The thesis argues that the political turmoil in Russia provided the British government with an opportunity to exert greater political control over the south of the country, securing its access to oil and control of the Caspian Sea region, thereby reducing any potential threat to India. The allied victory in the First World War, and the weakening of Turkey in particular, meant that British policy in central Asia after November 1918 increasingly focused on advancing British economic and strategic interests in the area. Although the British government did not seek to exert direct long-term political control over Azerbaijan, its policy in 1919 was designed both to support the local government in Baku against possible Bolshevik attack, whilst simultaneously exerting control over Baku oil. The thesis shows that the British military authorities who controlled Azerbaijan in the first part of 1919 typically acted as an occupying force, manipulating the local government, and behaving in ways that alienated large sections of the local population. This pattern of quasi-imperial rule, which was designed to secure the economic benefits of controlling Baku oil while avoiding the costs of large-scale military occupation, eventually proved fruitless. The final part of the thesis then examines how the British sought to defend their economic interests in Azerbaijan even as they removed their military forces. The government in London supported the local Musavat government in its attempt to gain international recognition, hoping that this would bolster its position both abroad and at home. Yet this policy failed to recognise the radical mood on the 'streets' of Baku and the appeal of Bolshevism to the many of the local population. When the Bolsheviks finally took control of Azerbaijan in 1920 they did so with the support of significant sections of the population.

This thesis suggests that developments in Azerbaijan during this period can be analysed by using a Marxist framework that emphasises how imperialism creates divisions between imperial powers - divisions that endure over time even as they take new forms. It also examines how British policy towards Azerbaijan can be seen as an attempt to establish a form of colonial control that promoted the economic and political interests of key economic and political groups in Britain at the cost of the local Azeri population. In order to develop this argument and avoid the dangers of over-simplification, the thesis draws on a massive array of archive and published sources in English, Russian, Azeri and Turkish. In doing this it offers perspectives and arguments that are absent from the existing scholarly literature whilst introducing the reader to new material unfamiliar to most English-language readers.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APR	Azerbaijani People's Republic (also known as Azerbaijan Democratic Republic - ADR)
AzCP	Azerbaijan Communist Party
BMM	British Military Mission
CAB	Cabinet Office Papers
FO	Foreign Office
GAAR	Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki (The State Archive of Azerbaijan Republic)
GAPPODAR	Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Politicheskikh Partiy i Obshchestvennykh Dvizheniy Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki (State Archive of Political Parties and Social Movements of the Republic of Azerbaijan)
GARF	Gosudarstvenniy Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Moscow, (The State Archive of the Russian Federation)
Musavat Party	Party of equality
Pood	Unit of mass equal approximately 16.3807 kilograms (36.121 pounds)
PPC	Paris Peace Conference
RGASPI:	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'Po-politicheskoi Istorii, Moscow, Russia
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic
Sovnarkom:	Soviet of People's Commissars
TSGAOR	Tsentrал'nyy Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Oktyabr'skoy Revolyutsii [Azerb SSR] (Central State Archive of the October Revolution of Azerbaijan)
TSFSR	Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republics
WO	War Office

INTRODUCTION

1. Research Questions

A huge amount has been written by historians about British policy in the Middle East during the period following the end of the First World War. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire created a vacuum which was only filled as part of a complex political process, driven in large part by interaction between British and French imperial power with fragmented local societies, which possessed their own aspirations for greater autonomy and self-rule. The collapse of Tsarist Russia after February 1917 effectively extended this arc of uncertainty into Transcaucasia, which as part of the former Russian Empire had not constituted a site of direct contestation for the great powers in the years before 1914, at least since Batumi (Batum) was ceded to St Petersburg in 1878.¹ The future of the region had been opened up after the start of the First World War, as Ottoman forces sought to extend their presence in the area, while Russian forces for their part periodically advanced into the territories to the south-east of the Black Sea. The disintegration of Tsarist rule opened up the possibility of both Ottoman and German forces advancing into Transcaucasia in order to gain both territory and access to the area's oil resources. Policy-makers back in London responded both defensively - debating how to secure the region against enemy forces - as well as considering whether Britain might itself seek to advance its own influence and interests in the region. The October Revolution provided an added layer of complexity to an already muddled situation. The Bolshevik government was committed to maintaining control over Transcaucasia. Local non-Bolshevik movements in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan saw the turmoil in Russia as a chance to push for independence. By 1918 Transcaucasia had become a site in which local tensions intersected with imperial ambitions, whilst conflicts of ideology gave added spice to great power confrontations, turning the region into a site of contestation in the first Cold War and an outlying theatre of the Russian civil war.

1. Batumi is the city in Georgia, and was officially known as Batum until 1936; then was renamed Batumi.

British policy had long sought to establish control of the areas around the Caspian Sea in order to help secure the Indian frontier. The Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907, which gave Russia predominance in the north of Persia, made it harder for the British to secure this objective.² The turmoil of 1917-18, and the apparent weakening of Russian power, opened up the future of a whole swathe of central Asia. It also raised the question of control over the oilfields of Baku, where considerable British investment was concentrated, at a time when access to oil reserves was becoming increasingly important both for economic and military reasons. Britain possessed considerable military and naval forces in the Middle East, as part of its struggle with the Ottoman Empire, whilst by the spring of 1918 the country was also becoming an active participant in the Russian civil war. The British government's policy towards Azerbaijan in 1918 and early 1919 - although often uncertain and confused - was rooted in the belief that British control of the Caspian Sea would cut off Baku from Russia, help to protect British interests in Mesopotamia, and provide an important foundation for asserting control over Transcaucasia, Persia, Central Asia. It would also help advance British financial economic interests in the region.

The main focus of this thesis is on the issues which shaped British - Azerbaijani relations in Transcaucasia during the period 1918 - 1920 along with the methods used by the two parties to solve them (which necessarily requires taking a broad perspective even though this means covering a great deal of ground). More specifically, the thesis aims:

1. To identify the various points of view among the members of the British government in relation to the October Revolution and Soviet Russia, and the responses they deemed necessary;
2. To examine British - Soviet Russia relations in the context of the military, political and territorial changes that occurred in the Caucasus region after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty of March 1918 and the Armistice of Mudros of October 1918, focusing in particular on the reasons why the British government chose to support the White Army against the Bolsheviks, particularly in south Russia;
3. To identify and compare the interests of Azerbaijan Republic and Great Britain in the Caucasus region, and to follow their evolution during the period, showing how both sides shared certain interests but also found that their interests frequently came into conflict;

2. B. J. Williams, 'The Strategic Background to the Anglo-Russian Entente of August 1907', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1966, pp. 360-73.

4. To explore the process of establishing diplomatic relations between Great Britain and the Azerbaijan Republic from the declaration of its independence until its de-facto recognition at the Paris Peace Conference;
5. To investigate the role of the British troops in military operations in Transcaucasia during 1919, including their morale and the degree of their reliability, as well as examining the relationship between the British command and the local authorities;
6. To find out the reasons for the end of the British military intervention in the region;
7. To analyze the principal results of the intervention.

These research questions can only be answered by means of a detailed historical study, and given the complexity of the period examined by this thesis, it is necessary here to provide a short introduction to some of the key events and themes discussed in later chapters. It is perhaps worth starting by pointing out the contemporary resonance of the research. Transcaucasia, which until recently formed part of the single political space of the USSR, has since 1991 become a focus of interaction between different geopolitical and economic interests. It is hardly a new experience for this region. The geopolitical importance of Transcaucasia reflects many factors, among which are its strategically important geographical location between Asia and Europe, and its significant economic potential.

The pattern of competition for the Transcaucasian territories in the second decade of the twentieth century was inevitably shaped by developments over the previous fifty years or so. The rivalry for spheres of influence in this region was above all one between the Russian and British empires. Their struggle in Central Asia has traditionally been referred to as the ‘Great Game’ (or ‘Tournaments of Shadows’ in Russian) and is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Although Central Asia was the main area of territorial dispute between the empires, the Russian government also closely watched British activities in other regions (most notably the Far East of Asia). After many years of rivalry, Russia and Great Britain in the first decade of twentieth century began to pursue a policy of rapprochement, most notably through the 1907 Anglo-Russian entente, which was designed to resolve tensions over Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet (not least to allow both countries to focus on the emerging German threat).³ Although the relationship was often uneasy, the subsequent eruption of the First World

3. M. Hughes, ‘Searching for the Soul of Russia: British Perceptions of Russia during the First World War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2009, p. 198.

War, in which Great Britain and Russia acted as allies, represented a new stage in development of the Anglo-Russian relations in general and British policy in Transcaucasia in particular. Russia joined the Anglo-French 'Entente Cordiale' until the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd in October 1917. By the end of the First World War, many other countries across Europe, America and Asia had joined in the fight against the German coalition. The historical significance of the Entente indeed rests in part on the fact that it represented an alliance between countries that had for a protracted period been enemies in the international arena.

It is hardly cynical to suggest that each country that participated in the First World War did so with the purpose of changing the map of the world in its own favour. In the context of the Middle East, these plans found their most important expression in the secret Sykes-Picot agreement. According to the agreement concluded between Great Britain and France in May 1916, Russia would not only keep its possessions in the Caucasus, but also gain new territory from the partition of the Ottoman Empire. Under this agreement, Russia would annex Constantinople, Erzurum, Trabzon, Van and outskirts of Lake Urmia; Britain would occupy rest of the Ottoman empire and much of the oil rich regions of Mesopotamia; and, finally, France would possess Kilicue, Sivas, Harpur and Diyarbakir.⁴

From the moment of the beginning of military operations in 1914, Transcaucasia had a special place in the plans of both sides (that is the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance), who were both attracted by two major factors: the richness of the Caucasus in natural resources and its strategic position. Control over the Batumi-Baku region was of particular importance given its role in cementing control over the basins of the Black and Caspian seas. The political leaders of both the Triple Entente and Triple Alliance were well-aware that Baku was one of the world's leading oil industry centres.⁵ The British Prime Minister David Lloyd George later noted that despite the military advantage of the Entente at the end of the war, if the German army had succeeded in breaking through to take control of Baku oil, then military action would have continued much longer and with unpredictable results.⁶

4. Britain and France conclude Sykes-Picot agreement, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/britain-and-france-conclude-sykes-picot-agreement> accessed on 22 April 2015.

5. V.N. Kotornichenko, 'K Voprosu o Vliyaniy Otechestvennoy Neftyanoy Promyshlennosti na 1918', *Ekonomicheskaya Istoriya*, No. 10, 2005, p. 49.

6. C.A. Sultanov, *Istoriya ne Lyubit Soslagatel'nogo Nakloneniya, i Vse Zhe*, Baku, Elm, 2011, p. 48.

However, after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in October 1917, the situation became more complex as the former entente partners began a struggle for the possession of the Caucasus and Asian Turkey. An agreement reached in the winter of 1917 between Britain and France assumed not only the right of intervention in the internal affairs of Russia, but also the potential division of the country into distinct spheres of influence.⁷ In this situation, control of Baku and the Caspian Sea represented a major goal for British diplomacy. Without control over the Caspian Sea, it would be impossible for Britain to conduct effective military operations in Transcaucasia and Trans-Caspia, or maintain communication between groups of troops operating on both sides of the Caspian Sea. For this reason, when planning military intervention, the government in London paid great attention to the development of its military forces in the region.

The members of the Triple Alliance - and above all Germany - also had designs on the Caucasus during the final year of the war. Berlin, too, sought control of Transcaucasian oil.⁸ And, equally important, the shortest way to the colonies of Great Britain (and above all India) was through the Caucasus. The German government was particularly concerned to establish control over the railway lines Batumi-Tiflis-Baku, Tiflis-Julfa-Tabriz that were capable of delivering German troops to the Middle East and India.

The interest of both Germany and Britain in the Caucasus became still stronger after the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty of March 1918, along with the subsequent civil war in Russia, which effectively lost the Red Army its position in the Caucasus. The collapse of Bolshevik power also created new opportunities for Turkey. The Istanbul government planned to exact revenge for the earlier defeat it suffered in the Caucasus and began efforts to implement its Pan-Turkism ambitions. Having lost territories in the west (the Arab provinces), the Ottoman Empire sought compensation in Transcaucasia.⁹ By the early months of 1918, the government in Istanbul planned to move deep into the Caucasus in order to obtain significant strategic, political and economic benefits. It hoped to do this not only by using the main Turkish army but also by making use of local Caucasian forces drawn mainly from the Turkish and Muslim people.

7. L. Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs: A History of Relations between the Soviet Union and the Rest of the World 1917-1929*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1960, p. 106; see also, chapter 2 of thesis.

8. B. Gokay, The Battle for Baku (May-September 1918): A Peculiar Episode in the History of the Caucasus, *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1998, p. 37.

9. W. E. D. Allen, P. Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828 -1921*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1953, p. 459.

The new Bolshevik government in Moscow had very different aims. Although Moscow was aware that during a time of civil war it could not re-establish control over the Caucasus, at least in the short term, it wanted to prevent the emergence of puppet republics in the region which would effectively transfer resources in the hands of other governments. The Bolshevik government recognised that the transformation of the Caucasus into a foreign zone of influence would pose a fundamental threat to its control over the whole of south Russia. Moscow therefore also paid special attention to Caucasian affairs.¹⁰

The complex situation in the Caucasus therefore both shaped and was shaped by the wider context of international politics. Countries who were ‘allies’ in the wider conflict often found their interests in conflict at a local level. For example, from the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty through till the end of the First World War, Germany occupied a significant position in the region. Unlike Turkey, though, Germany was primarily interested in the resources of the region rather than its territories (above all Georgian mines and Baku oil along with control of vital transport nodes such as Batumi). Yet Germany did not want to provoke an open conflict with its ally Turkey. Nor, of course, did it have deep cultural and historical ties with the Caucasus region. Although Germany sought to advance its interests in the Caucasus throughout 1918 from its base in Tbilisi (Tiflis),¹¹ the government in Berlin ultimately recognised that it did not have the forces to exert effective control, while such a policy would in any case create enormous tension with Istanbul. As a result, as 1918 wore on Germany began to give up its ‘Caucasian ambitions’ (especially by the summer when the collapsing German position on the Western Front dominated its attention).¹²

British policy towards the Caucasus was perhaps more elaborated than German policy during the final months of 1918. Much of this thesis rests indeed on the assumption that British policy towards the Caucasus throughout the period 1918-1920 represented a mixture of ambition and caution. The region - as noted earlier - was of potential strategic importance in exerting control over large swathes of central Asia. The collapse of the Tsarist government opened up the prospect of Britain exerting greater direct and indirect control over an area that was of vital interest in ensuring the defence of India.

10. A. Göl, *Turkey Facing East: Islam, Modernity and Foreign Policy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013, p. 81.

11. Tbilisi is the capital of Georgia, was known as Tiflis until 1936; then was renamed Tbilisi.

12. G. V. Pippiya, *Germanskiy Imperializm v Zakavkaze v 1910-1918*, Moscow, Izdatelstvo Nauka, 1978, pp. 128-29.

Establishing control over the Caucasian oil industry was also clearly of both economic and strategic value to London (not least given the amount of British capital invested there since 1900).¹³ In short, both economic and strategic factors meant that the British government sought to fill the power vacuum that had opened up in the Caucasus. And, after the end of the First World War, control over the Caucasus also opened up the possibility of using the area to exert greater influence over south Russia and undermine Bolshevism. Yet perhaps even more important for Britain was stopping any other power having control over the Caucasus in order to prevent a challenge to British interests in India, Mesopotamia and Persia.¹⁴ The Caucasus was at best an area of secondary concern for Britain - a place where it was worth while trying to extend British influence - but ultimately not one worth expending great resources on. It will be seen later in this thesis that in 1919 Britain attempted to control much of the Caucasus - and above all Azerbaijan - 'on the cheap'. By supporting the creation of independent states in the region, and seeking to exert control over them, the British government sought to turn the area into part of its 'informal Empire' (that is territories that were open to British capital and subject to British influence but not areas that required expensive direct rule). Cynics might also suggest that Britain often used the tried and tested method of 'divide and rule' to assert its control over the Caucasus in the year following the end of the First World War.

It is worth saying a little more here about the history of Anglo-Azerbaijani relations which goes back to the eighteenth century and was intensified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Much of the ethnic Azerbaijani population lived in northern Persia (most in the area effectively ceded to Russia as part of its zone of influence in the 1907 Anglo-Russian entente). Many more Azerbaijanis lived in Northern Azerbaijan, which was part of the Russian empire, and had from the late nineteenth century become an important area for the investment of British capital (above all in the oil industry). The next chapter will see how the British government was happy to see the investment of capital into the Baku region, periodically providing British firms investing there with information and advice. It was also

13. G. Jones, *The State and the Emergence of the British Oil Industry*, London, Macmillan, 1981, pp. 60-1.

14. D. J. Rose, 'Batumi as Domino, 1919-1920: The Defence of India in Transcaucasia', *The International History Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1980, pp. 270-72.

intensely concerned about developments in northern Persia. Azerbaijan was, in short, a critical region for Britain given both its strategic and economic importance - a kind of microcosm of the Caucasus as whole - and was always likely to form a major focus of British diplomacy. In the final months of the First World War, the collapse of the Russian Empire strengthened the centrifugal forces and gave a new impetus to the national-democratic movements, and reinforced the struggle of political parties that came forward with the programs of solving the national issues in Transcaucasia. The most complex political situation developed in Azerbaijan where, with the support of the new Soviet regime in Moscow, Soviet power was established in Baku (Baku Commune) in the spring of 1918.¹⁵ In parallel with that, there was a process of formation of Azerbaijan's sovereign government, the initial residence of which was Ganja (the second largest city of Azerbaijan).

The strengthening of the position of the Bolsheviks in Baku intensified the intervention of Western Powers in the Transcaucasian region, as part of the wider allied intervention in Russia, which began to develop from the late spring of 1918. The movement of British troops into the Caucasus was designed to achieve a particular ambition of British diplomacy: the creation of a 'buffer zone' that was supposed to block access to Bolshevism in the British colonies and semi-colonies (including Persia). Great Britain, along with the allied countries, supported the formation of the Transcaucasian Federation (the Seim),¹⁶ designed to strengthen the political and military weight of Transcaucasia in its confrontation to Soviet Russia, as well as to strengthen British influence in the region. The greatest interest of Great Britain was concentrated in Azerbaijan.

As for Azerbaijan, with the victory of the February Revolution of 1917, there was qualitatively a new situation in the country, characterised by a radical change in the socio-political situation and the mobilisation of the masses, which immediately affected the evolution of character of the Azerbaijani national movement led by the local national intelligentsia. All sections of the population united around the idea of national statehood. After the overthrow of Tsarism, the political parties of

15. R. G. Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1972, p. 231.

16. R.H. Dekmejian, H. H. Simonian, *Troubled Waters: The Geopolitics of the Caspian Region*, London, I B Tauris and Co.Ltd, 2003, p. 12.

Azerbaijan previously operating underground were legalized.¹⁷ Along with the political parties, the Muslim National Councils were also created in Azerbaijan. The Baku Muslim National Council was the most authoritative among them. During this period, the national movement gained political strength, its ideological platform and basic political program were formed, and the process of creating sustainable and effective organizational structures was completed in the hope of achieving state independence.

17. A. Balayev, *Azerbaydzhanskoye Natsional'noye Dvizheniye v 1917-1918*, Baku, Elm, 1998, p. 31.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The previous section has given a first insight into the sheer complexity of developments in the Caucasus during the years 1917-20. The region served as a focus of international rivalry between the major powers at a time when the First World War was recreating the international order. Yet not all developments in the region - including Azerbaijan - were determined by outside forces. There were also important internal developments, ranging from the growth of a new working class political consciousness among the Baku proletariat, through to the rise of local elites determined to defend their economic interests. The growth of a local 'nationalism' - often in response to resentment at the role played by outside forces - was also of significance. This thesis seeks to fill some of the gaps in existing studies on the British-Russian relations interactions in Transcaucasia and the British government's foreign policy in Transcaucasia in 1917-1920 more generally. As noted earlier, it is based on a vast range of primary and secondary sources in Russian, Azerbaijani, Turkish and English. This allows a more effective evaluation of developments in Transcaucasia, not only in terms of bilateral Russian-British relations, but also in a wider context that takes fully account of internal developments (particularly in Azerbaijan).

The author has many new archival materials and analysed them through a social-political framework that draws firmly on a Marxist approach. The aim of the author is to use this perspective to understand both how international rivalry and domestic class tensions shaped developments within Azerbaijan and Transcaucasia, so providing new insights into the interaction of domestic and international policy in the period of 1917-1920. The practical significance of the research lies in the fact that it can be used to prompt further study of the history of the relations between the Azerbaijan Republic and Britain as well as Anglo-Soviet relations in the critical period following the end of the First World War. The research can also assist in forming a new view of many modern problems of the Caucasian region.

1.3 Primary Sources and Secondary Literature review

There is a large scholarly literature examining the broad topic of the role of the Caucasus in international politics in the early part of the twentieth century. Much of this literature has been weakened by issues relating to language expertise and ideological bias. Many British and American authors who have written about the policy of the major powers towards the Near East have relied on English language sources alone (sometimes along with Russian material, too). The most obvious problem flowing from this is that they have tended to misunderstand the complexity of developments ‘on the ground’, often seeing them as shaped simply by international developments, rather than having their own momentum. A great deal of useful work was carried out by Soviet historians, although the ideological constraints shaping their research inevitably meant that they discussed developments in the Caucasus through a particular prism. One of the arguments of this thesis is, though, that a Marxist framework of analysis can help to explain many aspects of British policy towards Azerbaijan in 1918-20. Although western historians have been inclined to emphasise British strategic concerns - not unreasonably - they have not always emphasised sufficiently how these typically represented particular economic interests. British capital was heavily invested in Baku while securing India was vital because the country was a key market for British products. The age of imperialism was, in short, as much about economics as ‘prestige’.

Some similar cautions can also be made about work by Azerbaijani and Turkish historians. Azerbaijani historians writing since 1991 have typically done so from a perspective that sees the collapse of the Russian Empire as a period in which Azeri nationalism flourished only to be destroyed by the dead weight of Soviet military intervention. In other words, the Soviet period is seen as a time of coercion and control.¹⁸ In actual fact, as this thesis will make clear, there was very real ‘grass-roots’ support for Bolshevism throughout 1918-20 (something which made British ‘rule’ more complex). Moreover, the nationalism of the local Azerbaijani elites was often tied up with their desire to achieve independence and shape an economy that would promote their own interests.

18. For further information see; I.S. Bagirova, *Politicheskiye Partii i Organizatsii Azerbaydzhana v Nachale XX veka: 1900-1917*, Baku, Elm, 1997; C. Hasanli, *Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyətinin Xarici Siyasəti (1918-1920)*, Baku, Garisma MMC, 2009; S. Dilara, *Azerbaijan in the Beginning of XX century: Roads Leading to Independence*, Baku, OKA Offset, 2010; A. Balayev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya Natsiya: Osnovnyye Etapy Stanovleniya na Rubezhe XIX-XX vv.*, Moscow, TiRu, 2012.; R.A. Vekilov, *Istoriya Vozniknoveniya Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki*, Baku, Elm, 1998.

Turkish historians writing about this period have, by contrast, often seen developments through a kind of pan-Turkish prism that distorts as much as it reveals. The notion of Pan-Turkism always appealed more in Istanbul than it did in the periphery. Nor was Islam a binding factor between Turks and Azerbaijanis as some historians have assumed (Azerbaijanis were in any case predominantly Shia unlike the Ottoman Turks).¹⁹

The primary sources used in this thesis can be divided into four broad groups. The first consists of unpublished archival documents and materials drawn from the Azerbaijani archives. This includes materials from the Central State Archive of Contemporary History of Azerbaijan and the Central State Archive of Social and Political Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Some of these archival materials are introduced into scientific circulation for the first time and have not been used before (at least by historians writing in English). The thesis has also made extensive use of archival sources held in the UK including those at the National Archives (Cabinet Papers, War Office papers, Foreign Office papers, and Treasury papers) and the India Office (Curzon Papers).

The second group of primary sources consists of published documents and materials about the history of Azerbaijan which were published at various times in the twentieth century, particularly collections by Soviet historians relating to the history of international relations and foreign policy of Azerbaijan and other republics of Transcaucasia, as well as to the establishment of Soviet power in Transcaucasia. The thesis has also made use of the various published collections of official documents published in Britain. It is of course a truism that all such collections are carefully selected and edited. Such a process necessarily shapes decisions about which documents should be considered 'significant'. And yet, despite such a caveat, published collections of documents necessarily remain a key source for any historian.

A third group of primary sources that have been used extensively in this thesis consists of newspapers, and above all newspapers in the Azeri and Russian languages. Many of these were comparatively ephemeral. All of them had a particular political-ideological position. Yet newspapers are of particular value for obtaining an insight into the attitudes of the local Musavat government in 1919 or - in the case of radical publications - the working class opposition. The thesis in particular benefits from using the materials

19. For a general discussion of the Turkish intervention in the South Caucasus see; C. Gökçe, *Kafkasya ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Kafkasya Siyaseti*, İstanbul, Has Kutulmuş Matbaası, 1979; K. Erol, *1918-1920 Türkiye-Azerbaycan İlişkileri*, PhD thesis, Erzurum, 1994; G. Bulent, *Bolşevizm ile Emperyalizm Arasında Türkiye, (1918-1923)*, İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınlar, 1997; A.N. Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, Ankara, Kültür Bakanlığı, 1990.

of local newspapers that were published in Azerbaijan such as *Azerbaijan*, *Kavkazskoe Slova*, *Iskra*, *Nabat*, *Znamya Truda*, *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, *Azerbayjanskaya Bednota*, *Hummat*, *Proletariy*, *Molot*, *Kommunist* and etc.

The fourth main group of primary sources used in this thesis are the memoirs of those who played some part in the events discussed here, such as those of Major-General L.C. Dunsterville and the British Consul in Baku Ranald MacDonell, along with others by soldiers and civilians like Colonel A. Rawlinson, Reginald Teague-Jones, General Wilfrid Malleon, etc.²⁰ The views expressed in these memoirs often run counter to those found in the memoirs of some better known political figures such as Lloyd George and Churchill (providing helpful alternative perspectives). In spite of the inevitable problems with memoirs as an historical source, ranging from the forgetfulness of authors through to their desire to defend their actions or a particular political and ideological position, they can still provide useful source material not least in providing insight to the motivation of some key participants. Some memoirs also themselves contain vital documentary materials. It is important to realise that some memoirs were published for an audience in a definite attempt to shape opinion, whilst others were written by individuals largely for their own interest. In general the more prominent figures were naturally most concerned with the judgement of their readers.

It is also worth discussing at some length here some of the main secondary literature, along with published collections of documents with commentary, both to give a sense of how historians have in the past viewed British policy towards the Caucasus, as well as to identify the ‘gaps’ which this thesis fills.

The pre-revolutionary Russian historiography of the Caucasus had a certain unity, which was provided by an ideological basis that can be called ‘the imperial tradition’. At the heart of this tradition was the assertion that geopolitical necessity and increased attention to the civilizing mission of the empire had brought Russia to the Caucasus. The conquest of the Caucasus was characterized as Europe's cultural struggle against Asian barbarism. One of the characteristic symptoms of such approach was the

20. L.C. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, London, Edward Arnold, 1920; A. Rawlinson., *Adventures in the Near East: 1918-1922*, London, Andrew Melrose, 1923; R. MacDonell, *And Nothing Long*, London, Constable & Co 1938; R. Teague-Jones, *The Spy Who Disappeared: Diary of a Secret Mission to Russian Central Asia in 1918*, London, ed. P. Hopkirk, Gollancz, 1990; W. Malleon, ‘The Twenty-Six Commissars’, *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1933, pp. 418-26.

denial of local peoples' culture and the description of the local tribes as 'wild people'. One of the most prominent representatives of this trend was the R.A. Fadeev, who published in 1860 in Tiflis (Tbilisi) a journalistic monograph '*Shestdesyat Let Kavkazskoy Voyny*'.²¹ Describing Russia's policy in the Caucasus as a colonial one, the author also emphasised the progressive consequences of the annexation of Transcaucasia to Russia. Military historians including N.F. Dubrovin, V.A. Potto, A.P. Berzhe were other prominent representatives of this trend.

The six volumes of N.F. Dubrovin's '*Istoriya Voyny i Vladychestva Russkikh na Kavkaze*' highlights the military and political history of the Caucasus. In particular, the book examines the system of the administrative structure of Transcaucasia in eighteenth - nineteenth centuries, and it also touches upon the process of incorporating certain regions of Transcaucasia in the Russian Empire, along with changes in the administrative structure of local kingdoms and khanates.²² In 1866, the first of 12 volumes of publication of the documents collected by the Caucasian Archaeographic Commission under the direction of A.P. Berzhev was published. As a military historian, the author argued for the necessity of annexation of the whole Caucasus to Russia on military-strategic and geographical grounds. The rich factual material used by the author is a valuable source for studying the introduction of Russian legislation among peoples with a traditional lifestyle and patterns of local loyalties.²³

Soviet historians naturally took a different view. Soviet historiography does need to be taken seriously, not least because many works of real value appeared, even though much research took a dogmatic and uncritical attitude towards the classics of Marxism-Leninism. The present thesis has made considerable use of the work of Soviet historians for whom the cornerstone of Marxist-Leninist methodology was the class approach. This methodology emphasised the class struggle as the key to understanding history. Soviet historiography of world politics generally, and the Great Game in particular, was shaped by the ideological conflict between East and West which lasted from 1917 down to 1991. For nearly 70 years, Soviet and Western historians accused each other of taking a biased

21. F. R. Andreyevich, *Shestdesyat Let Kavkazskoy Voyny*, Tiflis, Voenno-Pokhodnaya Tipologiya, 1860.

22. N.F. Dubrovin, *Istoriya Voyny i Vladychestva Russkikh na Kavkaze*, Saint Petersburg, Tipologiya Departamenta Udelov, Vols. 1-6, 1876-1881.

23. *Akty, Sobrannyye Kavkazskoy Arkheograficheskoy Komissiyey*, pod redaktsiyey A. P. Berzhe v 12 Vols, Tiflis, Izdaniye Namestnika Kavkazskogo, 1866-1904.

and one-sided approach to the problem of the ‘Great Game’. This partly reflected the fact that the main research focus of the Soviet and British historiography differed significantly. In Soviet historical science emphasis was placed on studying the economic and commercial aspects of the Anglo-Russian confrontation in Central Asia. Western (and above all British) authors preferred to study the political and human aspects of the ‘Great Game’. Although Soviet historians dismissed historical perspectives that were different from their own, much of their work on developments in Transcaucasia has (as noted earlier) real value, and can still be studied with profit by the modern historian. Of particular value are the many collections of documents on the subject published by Soviet historians.

The first Soviet works relevant to the subject of this thesis were published in the early 1920s. They covered the overall process of revolutionary struggle in Azerbaijan in the years of 1918-1920, with a main focus on the revolutionary movement of the Baku proletariat in that period. The work of Ratgauzer (1927) examined the labour policy of the Musavat government and provides valuable information about the plight of the working masses in 1918-1920 (along with their militancy).²⁴ The paper of Sarkis (1928) focuses mainly on the activities of the Bolsheviks in leading the revolutionary actions of the workers.²⁵ The monograph of A. Dubner (1931) can be considered the first attempt to directly examine the economic and legal status of workers in Azerbaijan during the same period.²⁶

A. Raevskiy was the first Soviet historian of the 1920s to write about the foreign policy of the Musavat government and the activities of its diplomats. In spite of their somewhat limited nature, his works ‘*Angliyskaya Interventsiya i Musavatskoye Pravitelstv*’ (1927) and ‘*Musavatskoye Pravitelstvo na Versalskoy Konferentsii*’ (1930) were the first real study of the history of the Musavat Government.²⁷ Raevskiy’s greatest service should be considered his publication of information about the delegation of the Azerbaijan Republic at the Versailles Conference. His work focuses in particular on the arrival of the British in Baku, the attempts of the Azerbaijan Republic to find a way into the international arena, the economic policies of Allies in Azerbaijan, the role of the British in arbitrating between Denikin and the government of Azerbaijan, along with many other issues.

24. A. Ratgauzer, *Revolyutsiya i Grazhdanskaya Voyna v Baku, Part 1: 1917-1918*, Baku, Elm, 1927.

25. S. Sarkis, *Borba za Vlast, 1918-1920*, Baku, Elm, 1928.

26. A. Dubner, *Bakinskiy Proletariat v Gody Revolyutsii, 1917-1920*, Baku, Elm, 1931.

27. A. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya i Musavatskoye Pravitelstvo*, Baku, Elm, 1927; *Musavatskoye Pravitelstvo na Versalskoy Konferentsii*, Baku, Izdatelstvo AzGNII, 1930.

The works of I.I. Mints (1931) made huge contributions to the historiography. His '*Angliyskaya Interventsiya i Severnaya Kontrrevolyutsiya*' work was the first attempt by a Soviet historian to provide a comprehensive study of Anglo-American intervention in Russia after 1918.²⁸ Based on a large amount of archival materials, Mints covered in detail Anglo-American differences on questions of intervention, paying attention to the concern of some political circles in the United States over Franco-British plans to finance the counter-revolution in Russia. Britain was shown, in Mints's work, as the main initiator of the intervention in Russia and the most consistent supporter of financing internal counterrevolution. Mints's works on the theme of Anglo-American intervention can be considered as valuable for its detail, not least in providing for the first time a sense of the material damage caused by the intervention.

In the second half of 1930s and most of the 1940s surprisingly few studies were carried out by Soviet historians of direct relevance to the themes of this research, but from the beginning of 1950s there was a growing interest in the events of 1917-1920 in south Russia in the Soviet historiography. For the first time in the history of the Azerbaijani historiography, Tokarzhevsky (1956) examined Turkish-German problems in the light of their relevance towards Transcaucasia.²⁹ Although such work meant that new documents and materials entered into scientific use, the ideological stereotypes that shaped research at that time did not allow the creation of an objective scientific picture. One of the most active historians exploring the questions of concern to this thesis was the Azerbaijani historian A. Sumbatzade, who devoted all his attention to the development of Russian-Azerbaijani relations in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries. In his 1972 work '*Sotsialno-Ekonomicheskiye Predposylki Pobedy Sovetskoy Vlasti v Azerbaydzhanе*', the author talks about the significance of the October Revolution for the socio-cultural and scientific development of Azerbaijan. According to him, 'the October Revolution brought freedom and independence to the people of Azerbaijan in April 1920; the people of Azerbaijan under the leadership of the Communist Party, with the fraternal assistance of other peoples of Russia, overthrew the hated bourgeois-landlord system and hoisted the Red Flag of Soviet power in Azerbaijan'.³⁰

28. I.I. Mints, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya i Severnaya Kontrrevolyutsiya*, Moscow, Gos.Sots.Ekon. Izdatelstvo, 1931.

29. E.A. Tokarzhevsky, *Bakinskiye Bol'sheviki - Organizatory Bor'by Protiv Germano-Turetskikh Interventov v Azerbaydzhanе v 1918*, Baku, Elm, 1956.

30. A.Sumbatzade, *Sotsialno-Ekonomicheskiye Predposylki Pobedy Sovetskoy Vlasti v Azerbaydzhanе*, Moscow, Nauka, 1972, pp. 45-6.

This perspective - expressed in more cautious terms - informs the sections of this thesis that explore the growing radicalism of the population in Baku and beyond in 1919 and 1920.

Among other works by Azerbaijani Soviet historians, it is necessary to mention the book of academician of Azerbaijan SSR J.B. Guliev (1970) '*Borba Kommunisticheskoy Partii za Osushchestvleniye Leninskoy Natsionalnoy Politiki v Azerbaydzhanе*'. The book is a key work which reveals the significance of the revolutionary actions of the Azerbaijani workers in the period of the Musavat counter-revolution and foreign occupation in Azerbaijan.³¹

The monograph written by Z.I. Ibragimov (1970) contains a large amount of material about the role of the Baku proletariat in the struggle for Soviet power in Azerbaijan against internal counter-revolution and foreign intervention, along with material about the establishment of Azerbaijan SSR in April 1920. The scholarly value of such works to contemporary historians lies in their focus on the social struggle within Azerbaijan and its impact on international politics.³²

It is worth turning now to a discussion of some of the English-language historiography, beginning with some works from the early twentieth century, written at a time when the kind of 'imperial' conflicts described in this thesis were still very much current. John A. Hobson was the first serious researcher of the new forms of imperialism that appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, exploring the importance of financial capital in their emergence and development. His main work was of course '*Imperialism*' (1902), in which, according to Lenin's words, 'Hobson gave a very good and comprehensive description of the principal specific economic and political features of imperialism'.³³ Despite rejecting many of Hobson's ideas, Lenin still used factual material and individual conclusions from his work when writing '*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*'. Criticizing imperialism, Hobson urged in a rather utopian fashion a 'return to the conditions of pre-monopoly capitalism' (which he thought could be achieved by various parliamentary reforms).³⁴ His work was nevertheless vital in

31. J.B.Guliyev, *Borba Kommunisticheskoy Partii za Osushchestvleniye Leninskoy Natsionalnoy Politiki v Azerbaydzhanе*, Baku, Azerneshr, 1970.

32. Z.I. Ibragimov, *V. I. Lenin i Pobeda Sotsialisticheskoy Revolyutsii v Azerbaydzhanе*, Baku, Elm, 1970.

33. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 5th ed., Moscow, Progress Publishers, Vol. 27, 1977, p. 309.

34. J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, New York, James Pott & Co., 1902.

fostering the idea that international politics could and should be seen through the prism of economic interest and financial advantage. Hobson's ground-breaking work has exerted an influence on generations of historians too numerous to mention here. Among these was Bernard Porter who has published widely on the role of Great Britain in international relations from the middle of the nineteenth century through to the late twentieth century. He claims that at the beginning of twentieth century, when there was a general atmosphere of fear in Europe, Britain was facing an increasingly critical situation. The author argues that the system of the Entente was intended only to maintain the position of the global empires.³⁵ Porter differed from many British historians writing in the 1960s and 1970s in the way he examined imperialism and militarism. In his main work '*Critics of Empire*' (1968), Porter noted that almost all historians who had studied the epoch of imperialism considered Great Britain the most striking example of an imperialist country. His work shows the influence of liberal historians, though he often disputed their findings.³⁶

A good deal has been published in English about British policy towards Russia during the period 1917-1920. In the first quarter of twentieth century - and indeed right down to the 1980s - Britain and Russia were sharply divided by ideology and were (from 1945) on opposite sides in the Cold War. The problem of the historical relationship between the two countries was often examined from this perspective even among scholars. Although there was a strong tradition of archival research in Britain, British authors typically examined Anglo-Soviet relations through the broad framework of 'ideological conflict'. An anti-communist orientation can be clearly seen in many works discussing the international policy of the Soviet government.³⁷ There were, though, also English-language works that took a much more critical approach to British policy, including many by E.H. Carr and Richard Warth (who wrote openly about how the British had supported General Kornilov in 1917 in the hope that a military dictatorship would keep Russia in the war).³⁸

35. B. Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1983*, London, Longman, 1984.

36. B. Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa 1895-1914*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1968.

37. J. Long, 'Civil War and Intervention in North Russia, 1918-1920', Columbia University, PhD Thesis, 1972.

38. R.D. Warth, *The Allies and the Russian Revolution*, Durham NC, Duke University Press, 1954.

Among more recent English-language work, special attention should be paid to the work of Keith Neilson, who has argued that the Anglo-Russian relationship was pivotal to the development of world politics both before and after the First World War.³⁹ The three books written by Michael Kettle under the broad title '*Russia and the Allies, 1917-1920*' gives extensive coverage to British policy towards Russia during the period covered by this thesis. Using Churchill's previously unpublished papers and recently accessible French documents, the author argued that Britain had little chance to succeed in the intervention (though Kettle's book is itself marked by his strong anti-communism).⁴⁰ George Brinkley's book (1966) '*The Volunteer Army and the Allied Intervention in South Russia, 1917-1921*', which was devoted to the history of Russian Civil War, was unlike Kettle's work striking for using few British sources, preferring to rely on White Army materials including diaries and memories of some White Army well known figures.⁴¹

In his book '*The 'Russian' Civil Wars 1916-1926: Ten Years that Shook the World*', the British historian Jonathan Smele (2016) describes events that took place on the territory of the former Russian Empire as a complex set of wars that inter-twined with one another. The book represents an attempt to reassess the most complicated problems of the Civil War in Russia, largely within the context of world history beginning with the First World War and ending with the establishment of a new system of international relations in the 1920s. The fourth chapter of the book, Battles in the Marchlands, is of great interest for this thesis as it covers the events developed in Transcaucasia in the period of 1920-21.⁴²

Perhaps the most interesting and important research in recent years examining Anglo-Russian relations in south Russia is the book published in the UK by Bulent Gokay (1997) '*The Clash of Empires: Turkey between Russian Bolshevism and British Imperialism 1918-1923*'. The book analyzes a series of key events in 1918-21 which decided the fate of the Caucasus. Gokay, by using new material, attempts to demonstrate how an Ottoman advance into Transcaucasia caused serious concerns

39. K. Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005; K. Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995.

40. M. Kettle, *Russia and the Allies, 1917-1920*, 3 Vols, (*The Allies and the Russian Collapse; The Road to Intervention; Churchill and the Archangel Fiasco*), London and New York, Routledge, 1981-1992.

41. G. Brinkley, *The Volunteer Army and Allied Intervention in South Russia, 1917-1921*, South Bend IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1966.

42. J. D. Smele, *The 'Russian' Civil Wars 1916-1926: Ten Years that Shook the World*, London, C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2016.

among British political circles which in turn took all necessary measures to prevent such an advance (including Major General Dunsterville's mission discussed in the following chapter). This research is analytically acute, and draws on a wide range of sources, both published and archival - though it should be noted that even though the author used some Turkish archival materials, his book drew heavily on the existing scholarly literature in Western languages and therefore tends to reflect a 'Western' view of the key issues.⁴³

Although some American historians benefited from the works of Soviet historians, few of them working on the history of south Russia and Transcaucasia in the revolutionary period have had significant access to Soviet archives. Yet a number of historians based in the USA have written works of importance, including Richard Ullman, Ronald Suny, F. Kazimzadeh, and Tadeusz Swietochowski.

Richard Ullman's (1961-1972) three volumes '*Anglo-Soviet Relations 1917-1921*' can be considered a pioneer in studying of the relationship between two countries. In his work, Ullman examined one main aspect of Anglo - Soviet relations in the period 1918 - 1921 years: Britain's participation in the Russian Civil War, most notably its role in fostering allied intervention, and the impact of its policy on the development of bilateral relations between Britain and Russia.⁴⁴ The author took a critical view of the Lloyd George government's policy, arguing that efforts to keep Russia in the war were a tactical mistake made by all the main Allied governments (including Britain). Although the book provides excellent information about British-Russian relations, and still serves as a standard work of reference, it has some weak points as well. The author mainly relied on War Cabinet papers, as he only had limited access to official British papers (not then released), along with private papers of Lord Milner (a prominent member of the War Cabinet). And, of equal importance here, Ullman's work tended to focus more on events in north Russia rather than in South Russia or Transcaucasia.

The Polish-American historian Tadeusz Swietochowski's book '*Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*' was published in 1995 and includes a chapter which contains significant

43. B. Gokay, *A Clash of Empires: Turkey between Russian Bolshevism and British Imperialism 1918-1923*, London, I.B.Tauris, 1997.

44. R.H. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921*, 3 Vols, (*Intervention and the War; Britain and the Russian Civil War; The Anglo-Soviet Accord*), New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1961-1972.

information about the events of 1918-1920.⁴⁵ A number of arguments put forward by the author contribute to the clarification of some dark episodes in the history of the Musavat government. It is impossible to disagree with the author's claim that 'democratic reforms' carried out by Musavat leaders were a consequence of circumstances rather than part of a liberal political program deliberately implemented by the Musavat government. According to Swietochowski, it was largely due to the presence of British forces in the country that Azerbaijani leaders were forced to exchange their initial 'Turkic unity' idea for the idea of national independence. Even so, not all Swietochowski's claims can be accepted, as will be seen later in this thesis. This is largely due to the fact that in Soviet times it was difficult for foreigners to get access to archival materials, something that weakens Swietochowski's work, even though it remains of value for the study of Azerbaijan history and provides perhaps the most complete account in English of the history of the national movements in Transcaucasia from 1905 to 1920.⁴⁶

The book of the well-known Iranian born, American historian Firuz Kazemzadeh (1968) '*Russia and Britain in Persia: 1864-1914*' is devoted to the Anglo-Russian struggle for dominance in Persia in 1864-1914.⁴⁷ The book is perhaps the most complete and well-documented study of the history of successive struggles for spheres of influence between Russia and Britain in what Kazemzadeh calls the 'wild Trans-Caspian space'. The author presents and reflects a distinctively American rather than Iranian perspective. However, his excellent knowledge of oriental languages and his wide use of documents make '*Russia and Britain in Persia*' important for understanding the 'Great Game' in Central Asia. Kazemzadeh's earlier book '*The Struggle for Transcaucasia: 1917-1921*' also provides a useful discussion of the clash of world powers' strategic interests in the Caucasus, along with the formation of independent states (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia) and their subsequent loss of sovereignty.⁴⁸ Kazemzadeh acutely assesses the role and place of the Azerbaijan National Movement in shaping political developments in the region whilst ascribing the collapse of the Transcaucasian Federation to a conspiracy between the Azerbaijani leaders and the Turkish government.

45. T. Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995.

46. T. Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

47. F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia: 1864-1914*, New Haven NJ, Yale University Press, 1968.

48. F. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia: 1917-1921*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1951.

The American historian Ronald Suny has provided an important western study of the history of the Baku Commune. Having a good knowledge of local languages (Russian, Armenian and Georgian), he was able to make extensive use of a wide range of materials (such as local newspapers, memoirs, and some archival materials). In his book *'The Baku Commune'* (1972) Suny analyzes social and political factors in the Baku Commune's desperate effort to survive-national antagonisms during its short time in power in 1918. Suny's book takes a definite pro-Armenian stance, not least in his claim that Russians and Armenians were the best-educated ethnic groups in Baku, for although there is some truth in this claim it does not describe whole situation correctly. Most Muslim (Tatar) labourers in Baku actually came from neighbouring Persia or Dagestan and were not necessarily representative of local people. Suny also is unconvincing in advancing the view that British intervention in Baku was above all merely an aspect of the military struggle of the First World War rather than a key part of the policy of an intervention motivated in part by ideological factors. It will be seen in this thesis that British intervention in Baku in 1918-19 was both a response to the immediate military situation but also formed part of a broader effort to rein in Soviet power and advance British interests on the southern periphery of Russia.⁴⁹

The historian Richard G. Hovannisian's work (1969) is fundamental for understanding Transcaucasia in the period 1917-21. His book *'Armenia on the Road to Independence 1918'* provides the first comprehensive analysis of the events in Transcaucasia (in particular Armenia) during the period covered by this thesis, as well as fostering an understanding of the complex social, political and economic situation in Transcaucasia at this time.⁵⁰ The author made wide use of vast collections of documents including archival materials in different languages, scientific researches and memoirs. Unfortunately, due to political circumstances, until the last years of the Soviet Union's existence, he was unable to get access to the Central State Historical Archive of the Armenian SSR or the repository of the Armenian branch of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. But he was able to use the thousands of documents sent by the government of the First Armenian Republic (1918-20) to the Armenian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in order to keep delegates up to date about developments in the

49. R. G. Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918, Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1972.

50. R. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969.

Caucasus. The documents dealt with key issues including: the relationship between the three Transcaucasian republics; Armenia's relations with the Entente, Soviet Russia and Turkey; brief emergence of first independent state and its subjugation by the Bolsheviks; the ongoing armed conflict in Nagorny Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhichevan, as well as military actions within the Republic itself.

There is also of course a large English-language historiography on other specific questions covered in this thesis, such as the Paris Peace Conference that is discussed at some length in Chapter 4 (and more specifically on the way that the politicians and diplomats who met at Versailles sought to deal with the question of Russia). John Thompson's book on *'Russia, Bolshevism and the Versailles Peace'* is now fifty years old but still contains material of value.⁵¹ Keith Neilson has written a useful chapter arguing - in a way that reflects the theme of much of his work - that British policy at Versailles was shaped by enduring concern about Russia as much as Germany.⁵² Erik Goldstein has written in detail about the ways in which Britain prepared for the Conference.⁵³ Borislav Chernev has shown how the new 'states' of Eastern and central Europe used the concept of national self-determination to justify their efforts to break away from Russia.⁵⁴ Eriz Menzela has shown how over time the ideal of self-determination created new international tensions.⁵⁵ While the English-language literature on the Versailles Peace Conference can certainly help to illuminate the broader international context, it has little to say about the position of the Azerbaijan government, nor the response the British and the other great powers to its claim for independence. It does however help to cast light on the way in which the ignorance of the great powers about the complex ethnic composition of areas like the Caucasus meant that efforts to build a peace based on self-determination were never likely to succeed. The whole subject has attracted great interest in recent Azeri historiography - fuelled by the wish of some scholars to emphasis the historical and contemporary value of Azerbaijan statehood -

51. J.M. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism and the Versailles Peace*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1966.

52. K. Neilson, 'That Elusive Entity British Policy in Russia': The Impact of Russia on British Policy at the Paris Peace Conference, in Michael Dockrill and John Fisher (eds), *The Paris Peace Conference, 1919: Peace without Victory?* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp. 67-102.

53. E. Goldstein, *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916-1920*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

54. B. Chernev, *Twilight of Empire: The Brest-Litovsk Conference and the Remaking of East-Central Europe, 1917-1918*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2017.

55. E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

but with some notable exceptions such as the work of Vilayet Guliyev, this has been of limited value.⁵⁶

It is worth ending this literature review with a brief discussion of how the disintegration of the USSR fostered a process of rethinking of historical events within Azerbaijan in a way that had previously been banned or at least subject to strong ideological prejudice. Access to previously unknown documents opened up the possibility for researchers to approach and evaluate a number of issues in a different way than before. Since the late 1980s, the history of the formation and activities of the Azerbaijan People Republic (APR) has occupied one of the central places in Azerbaijani historical science, becoming a spur for the creation of a number of monographs and collective works by the historians and researchers. It should however be noted that many of these monographs and articles are not based on archival documents but instead reflect the opinion of individual 'experts' anxious to advance a particular political and ideological agenda. Most modern Azeri historians interpret the events of 1917-1921 through the prism of nationalism rather than class struggle - in the process creating new distortions and confusion.

From the works of post-soviet Azerbaijani historians that have been published in recent years, the monographs of Jamil Hasanli, Parvin Darabadi and Nasib Nasibzade are particularly notable for introducing into Azerbaijani historiography the study of the activity of the Musavat government in international relations. The book of Hasanli (2016), *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 1918-1920: The Difficult Road to Western Integration* has been published recently in New York.⁵⁷ The book contains some interesting documents and unused materials casting light on British foreign policy in the region. The author adopts a strong pro-Azerbaijani stance, though his work is still a useful contribution to the history of the British-Azerbaijani relationship. His earlier book published in 1993, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Beynəlxalq Münasibətlər Sistemində, 1918-1920*, had indeed shown the beginning of a new stage in the study of the issue. The author, working with archival materials and the existing scholarly literature, produced a valuable research work about the struggle of the local Azerbaijani government in the international system.⁵⁸ He examines a number of key issues,

56. V. Guliyev, *Azerbaijan in the Paris Peace Conference (1918-1920)*, Baku, Elm, 2008.

57. J. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 1918-1920: The Difficult Road to Western Integration*, New York, Routledge, 2016.

58. C. Hasanli, *Azərbaycan Respublikası Beynəlxalq Münasibətlər Sistemində, 1918-1920*, Baku, BDU Neshriyyatı, 1993.

including the diplomatic wrangling that took place on the eve of the declaration of independence and the participation of Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference (including the ‘de facto’ recognition of the independence of Azerbaijan by the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference).

Another well known post-Soviet Azerbaijani historian Parvin Darabadi (2013) has studied the geopolitical competition in the Caspian region in his monograph ‘*Voennye Problemy Politicheskoy Istorii Azerbaidzhana Nachala XX Veka*’ focusing in particular on the struggle of the great powers for access to the region’s oil. It should though be noted that Darabadi relies heavily on the work of other historians rather than a close examination of primary sources.⁵⁹

The same criticism cannot be leveled at the Armenian historian Asoyan Mushegovich’s PhD dissertation ‘*Territorial'nyye Problemy Respubliki Armenii i Britanskoy Politiki: 1918-1920*’ published in 2005, which is devoted to the history of the two countries’ relationship.⁶⁰ Using mainly Russian and Armenian archive materials, the author tries to provide a detailed analysis of one of the most crucial periods of British policy towards Armenia. He argues that the British government effectively pursued a ‘pan-Turkism policy’ by defending the Azerbaijan Republic’s position against Armenia in territorial dispute - evidence once more of how contemporary nationalism shapes the way historians understand the history of the Caucasus. It is perhaps worth noting that some Azeri historians have accused the British of being unduly pro-Armenian in 1918-1920!

This literature review should finish by noting that in recent years there has been a growing interest among modern Russian historians in the history of the Musavat government. Among the many books published in Russia, Rahman Mustafazade’s work (2006) ‘*Dve Respubliki. Azerbaydzhano - Rossiyskiye Otnosheniya v 1918-1922*’ stands out for its reliability and depth of research.⁶¹ The same can be said about some of the other books, such as the jointly published book of Mikhail Volkhonsky and Vadim Mukhanov (2007) ‘*Po Sledam Azerbaydjanskoy Demokraticeskoy Respubliki*’.⁶² It should

59. P. Darabadi, *Voennye Problemy Politicheskoy Istorii Azerbaidzhana Nachala XX Veka*, Baku, Izdatel'skoy Dom Kavkaz, 2013.

60. A. Mushegovich, ‘*Territorial'nyye Problemy Respubliki Armenii i Britanskoy Politiki: 1918-1920*’, Moscow, PhD thesis, Moskovskiy Gosudarstvennyy Universitet, 2005.

61. R. Mustafazade, *Dve Respubliki. Azerbaydzhano - Rossiyskiye Otnosheniya v 1918-1922*, Moscow, Izdatel'stvo MIK, 2006.

62. M. Volkhonsky and B. Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydjanskoy Demokraticeskoy Respubliki*, Moscow, Yevropa, 2007.

be added - perhaps rather sadly - that the bitter conflicts in the north Caucasus in the years since the collapse of the USSR has also seen the emergence of some works that take a more narrowly nationalist view of Russia's past relations with the peoples of the Caucasus region.

This lengthy literature review has hopefully made clear both the strengths and the weaknesses of the existing historiography concerned with the questions addressed by this thesis. Many historians have been hampered both by a lack of access to archival material and by the conscious or unconscious need to work within a particular ideological framework. Most have been hampered by lack of all the languages needed to gain access to the wide range of material of potential value to their work. This thesis seeks to fill some of these gaps, using archival and other material to understand Anglo-Russian rivalry in Transcaucasia in terms of the changing pattern of imperialism, which both shaped and was shaped by developments 'on the ground'. The focus on detail in the chapters that follow is designed both to support a particular argument and illustrate the sheer complexity of the topic.

Structure of the thesis

The research consists of an introduction, five chapters, conclusion, abbreviations, a list of sources and a list of used literature.

Chapter 1: The Great Game and its consequences

This chapter concentrates on the period between the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, focusing on various aspects of the British-Russian geopolitical confrontation in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, and arguing that one of the main reasons for confrontation was Russia's threat to India. The essence of British policy was the forward defence of India, which resulted in tension between the Russian and British Empires on the borders of the Middle East (Afghanistan and Persia) and the Central Asian territories gradually conquered by Russia throughout the nineteenth century. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the situation changed significantly. A number of political and diplomatic steps taken by both empires led to the conclusion of the Russian-British entente of 1907, according to which both empires recognized each other's interests in Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. Thus, one of the main challenges facing the British Empire - 'the threat to India' - was greatly reduced though not eliminated. The final section of the chapter then provides information about penetration of the British capital into the Baku oil-producing area in the beginning of twentieth century. It also examines the role of the British oil companies in the development of the oil industry of Baku region.

Chapter 2: The fall of the Russian Monarchy and Britain's foreign policy

This chapter analyzes the way in which the British authorities viewed the 1917 Revolutions in Russia and the events that followed, particularly in relation to its impact on the defence of India. Both the British and Indian governments feared that after collapse of the Caucasus front, enemy troops would be able to cross the Caspian, using the Trans-Caspian Railway to reach the Afghan border, simultaneously releasing tens of thousands of prisoners held in the camps of Turkestan. Therefore, the main factor of the British intervention into Transcaucasia was the desire of the British government to protect the borders of

India from a possible Turkish-German encroachment through the Caucasus, Turkestan and Afghanistan, as well as neutralising Bolshevik propaganda in India. British policy-makers initially did not aim to occupy any part of the territory of Transcaucasia or to create a colony or a protectorate there. The chapter also examines in some detail the role of the military force headed by General Lionel Dunsterville that was sent to Baku in the summer of 1918, seeing how its failure reflected a lack of understanding of the challenges in the region. It examines how the intervention by ‘Dunsterforce’ would not have been possible without ‘a revolt’ of local parties against the Baku Commune (Baku People's Commissars), which erupted at the end of July in 1918. As soon as the power passed to the anti-Bolshevist forces (a block of right-wing SR, Mensheviks and Dashnaks), they formed the government so called ‘Central Caspian Dictatorship’, which appealed to Dunsterville with a request for help. The invitation was accepted, and on 4 August the first British unit under command of Colonel Stokes landed in the Baku port, followed by the arrival of main force led by General Dunsterville. However, despite six weeks fierce defence, General Dunsterville eventually left Baku and on 15 September 1918, Ottoman army occupied the city.

Chapter 3: Military-political and financial-economic aspects of intervention

The chapter discusses the reasons that paved the way for the British army under General Thomson’s command to land in Baku in mid November of 1918. It describes how British troops were the backbone of the Allied forces that provided stability and security in the whole of Transcaucasia particularly in Azerbaijan. The chapter also argues that, contrary to the claims of many modern Azeri historians, local authorities in the region were not independent, and in most cases acted as the British government’s puppet on various issues. The presence of British troops in Transcaucasia made it impossible for the local government to confront British control with the result that the British command became the de facto ‘manager’ of the situation.

The chapter looks also at the reasons that forced the British troops to leave the region in the summer of 1919. It shows how during the entire period of presence of the British troops in Baku there were tense discussions both among British politicians and among the allies about the need to withdraw

the troops as soon as possible. The withdrawal of the British troops was caused by the changing international situation, and the domestic situation in Great Britain, as well as the changing situation on the main fronts of the Civil War in Russia.

Chapter 4: The Azerbaijan question before the Paris Peace Conference

The chapter looks at the political developments during the Peace Conference and examines the activities of Azerbaijani representatives in the conference. It shows that in spite of fact that the Peace Conference opened in January 1919, it was only a year later, in January 1920, that the Anglo-French-American imperial powers began to discuss a formal recognition of the independence of the Transcaucasian republics. During this time, foreign powers were focused only on uniting all the Russian counter-revolutionary forces in the struggle against Soviet power. The chapter also claims that the political recognition of Azerbaijan government in Paris in January of 1920 cannot be considered the result of successful diplomatic activities of the Azerbaijani delegates but rather the changing priorities of the great powers.

Chapter 5: Anglo-Azerbaijani relations in the socio-economic sphere

This chapter stands separate from the previous broadly chronological structure and examines how the presence of British armed forces in Azerbaijan was a destabilizing factor in the economic situation of the republic and in the implementation of the government' socio-economic program. The British Command established strict control over the export of oil products from Azerbaijan, and even prevented the Musavat government from selling oil products to Italy and France. Unfortunately, the negative impact of British interference in the economic life of the republic was not limited only to the oil industry but also to other sectors of industry not linked to oil production. There was a sharp reduction of works in mining area of Gedabek, at cotton mills, filature, and even the fishing industry.

Conclusion

In the conclusion, the results of the research are summarized and the main conclusions formulated. The conclusion shows how both the origins and development if British intervention in Azerbaijan and

Transcaucasia more broadly was shaped by complex and interrelated factors (fears over Indian security; developments in Russia; the role played by local commanders, etc). It argues that when the British troops left Azerbaijan in August 1919, the economy of the republic was on the verge of collapse, and that the Musavat government in Baku had lost any popular support especially among the urban working class and the peasantry. There was as a result support for the Red Army troops who moved into Azerbaijan at the end of April 1920.

Chapter 1: The Great Game and its consequences

1.1. The reasons of British-Russian geopolitical confrontation in Central Asia in 1860-1907

When everyone is dead, the Great Game is finished. Not before.

Rudyard Kipling - *Kim*¹

It was noted in the previous chapter that any consideration of British foreign policy in Transcaucasia between 1917 and 1921 is impossible without a sustained analysis of the main features of the geopolitical rivalry that developed between the British and Russian Empires in the Middle East and Central Asia. The next few pages analyse some of the key developments in this relationship, before going to focus in more detail on the important role played by Baku oil in international politics in the years before 1917, which made Azerbaijan an important site of investment for British companies in the years before the Russian Revolution.

As is generally known, one of the most dramatic events on the international scene in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the development of an intense British-Russian geopolitical rivalry in the Middle East and Central Asia in general, and the Caucasus and the Caspian region in particular. The struggle in Central Asia is traditionally referred to in English as ‘The Great Game’ (in Russian the phrase used is the ‘Tournament of Shadows’ - a phrase coined by the Foreign Minister Count Nesselrode in 1837). The term ‘Great Game’ was supposedly first used by Captain Arthur Conolly who, not long before his execution by the Emir of Bokhara, wrote to a fellow (Rugby) player in the Great Game: ‘You have a great game, a noble one, before you’.² It was however Rudyard Kipling who made the term famous in the novel ‘*Kim*’, which told the story of how an ‘Anglo-Indian boy and his Afghan mentor foiled Russian intrigues along the highways to Hindustan. These activities of the rival intelligence services are what some writers mean by the Great Game: others use the phrase to describe the whole of the Anglo-Russian quarrel about the fate of Asia’.³

The British Empire from the mid-eighteenth century increasingly expanded its colonial power on the Indian subcontinent, incorporating one principality after other, as well as beginning its effort to exert influence over China. These developments made Asia a central focus of British imperialism.

1. R. Kipling, *Kim*, London, Macmillan, 1949.

2. P. Hopkirk, *Quest for Kim: In Search of Kipling's Great Game*, London, John Murray, 1996, pp. 6-7.

3. D. Fromkin, ‘The Great Game in Asia’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 1980, p. 936.

As a result of the Anglo-Chinese War in 1840-1842, and the Anglo-French-Chinese 'Opium War' of 1856-1860, the first unequal treaties were imposed on China forcibly opening a number of Chinese ports to British trade. The British also sought to establish their power in Afghanistan.⁴

The Russian Empire similarly focused attention on the Far East and Central Asia following the final subjugation of the Caucasus in the 1860s. As a result of all these developments, Anglo-Russian geopolitical confrontation increasingly focused on Central Asia, where both countries sought to promote their strategic goals by strengthening their power over local populations, and by establishing control over important trade communication line. The centre of the confrontation in the period was Afghanistan.

From the 1820s the emir of Afghanistan Dost Muhammad had sought to unite a country that had disintegrated into several independent feudal principalities. In order to prevent this, the British government launched an unsuccessful war against Afghanistan (1838-1842) that ended in defeat. The second war in Afghanistan was unleashed by Great Britain at the end of 1870, which was prompted by the Russian conquest of Central Asia (1854-1880) and the pro-Russian sympathies of the Afghan Emir Abdur Rahman Khan. In the period that followed, the British government effectively gave the emir autonomy in the internal administration of the state, whilst securing his agreement to British control of the external affairs of the country. Although British troops left the territory of the country, the southern lands of Afghanistan were largely subject to British control, and in 1893 the British government through the threat of war was able to include border territory of Pashtu tribes within the British colonial possessions in India.⁵

Russia's interest in Central Asia was in part prompted by political and economic rivalry with Great Britain over the search for markets and sources of raw materials. British manufactured goods appeared in Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand in the second half of the nineteenth century, ousting goods of Russian merchants. The British government in this economic struggle with Russia sought the help of Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan. Turkish agents in Central Asia worked hard to foment anti-Russian sentiment, and in the years of the Crimean War, Turkish emissaries openly called for the rulers of the Central Asian khanates in

4. Dr. M. Yetişgin, 'The Anglo-Russian Rivalry, Russia's Annexation of Merv and the Consequences of the Annexation on Turkmens', *Ahmet Yesevi University Board of Trustees*, No. 40, 2007, p. 144.

5. J. Ferris, 'Counterinsurgency and Empire: The British Experience with Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier, 1838-1947' in S. Gates and K. Roy (eds.), *War and State-Building in Afghanistan: Historical and Modern Perspective*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015, pp. 79-112.

the attack on Russia.⁶ After Russian troops broke the resistance of Bukhara in 1868, and Khiva in 1873, these states of south Turkestan were not formally incorporated into the Russian Empire, but instead became effective protectorates of Russia. The emirs of Bukhara and Khiva Khan were by these agreements deprived of any right to independent foreign policy activity. In addition, Russian merchants were able to trade freely in southern Turkestan.

Persia was another focus of confrontation between Russian and the British Empire. This large Middle East country had strategic importance for Great Britain as a potential staging area for possible military action against Russia in the South Caucasus and for subversive activities in Turkestan. The governments in London and Delhi also wanted to keep Russian influence out of the Persian Gulf. ‘After the incorporation of Turkmenistan into the Russian Empire, in 1881, the convention on Delimitation of the Eastern Caspian between Russia and Persia was signed in Tehran to define the boundaries of their ‘mutual possessions’.⁷ The Russian authorities nevertheless soon afterwards began expansion in Khorasan, recruiting khans and tribal chiefs, and received a concession for the construction of a highway from Ashgabat to Kuchan. Russian trade began to force out the British from Khorasan and constrained it in other areas of Persia. The Persian state quickly became an important market for Russian textiles, sugar and oils.

Such developments naturally concerned London and Delhi. British interests in Persia, in the opinion of the Viceroy of India Lord Curzon, were divided into three categories: commercial, political and strategic. The latter two were of particular significance. According to Curzon, ‘geography and history gave Russia a dominant position in northern Persia. Britain would do best to concentrate her efforts in the centre and south’.⁸ When talking about the role of Persia in the events that unfolded in this region of the world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Persian-American historian Kazemzadeh noted that an ‘unkind fate placed Persia between the Russian hammer and the British anvil’. ‘The struggles of the two giant empires’, he noted, ‘whether for Constantinople, Central Asia, or the Far East

6. N.A. Khalfin, *Politika Rossii v Sredney Azii (1847-1868)*, Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoy Literatury, 1960, pp. 127-28.

7. *Turkmenistan Mineral, Mining Sector Investment and Business*, Washington, International Business Publications, Vol. 1, 2013, p. 108.

8. F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia: Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran*, New Haven NJ, Yale University Press, 1968, p. 341.

were instantly reflected and echoed at Tehran. Through the two decades of Russia's uninterrupted advance in Turkestan and Transcaspia, Persia felt the pressure from both St. Petersburg and London'.⁹

The further weakening of Persia, which by the beginning of the twentieth century was experiencing a sharp socio-political crisis, intensified still further the Anglo-Russian rivalry in the country. The threat of a Russian invasion of Persia became a possibility which the British government could not ignore. This fear became stronger in the spring and summer of 1900, when Russians troops began to concentrate on the Persian and Afghanistan borders, and the country sent its warships to the Persian Gulf. However, Russia was at this point still more focused on the Far East, following the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway, and had no desire to engage in military conflict with Britain in Persia. The rivalry of the two countries was therefore conducted primarily at the diplomatic level, and by the intrigue of their secret services, as both sides sought to strengthen their influence on the ruling Shah's regime in Persia. A united but weak Persia was acceptable to both powers as long as the other was not able to establish full control.

Of growing importance in Anglo-Russian tension at this time was the so-called 'oil factor'. There was as early as 1884 a Russian project to build an oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf, something which Nicholas II considered as 'a matter of huge value', not least because it was likely to increase Russian influence in Persia and strengthen Russian influence on the coast of the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ The British predictably did everything possible to ensure the failure of such a project. In May 1901, the British businessman William Knox D'Arcy was granted by Shah Muzaffar ed-Din (for 50 thousand pounds sterling and 16 per cent of the oil company's annual profits) a monopoly on the development and exploitation of oil, gas, asphalt and bitumen deposits on Persian territory for 60 years.¹¹

The concession was not however extended to five northern regions and provinces: Iranian Azerbaijan, Gilan, Mazandaran, Astarabad and Khorasan. These lands were excluded from the concession agreement at the request of the Russian envoy. After several years of fruitless exploration, in 1908

9. Ibid., p. 148.

10. Ibid., p. 295.

11. M. Kuhn, *Enabling the Iranian Gas Export Options: The Destiny of Iranian Energy*, Berlin, Springer VS, 2014, p. 275.

the British found a large oil field in the south-western part of Persia in the region of Masjed-Soleiman. This discovery launched large-scale industrial production of oil in Persia. In 1908 the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (effectively the ancestor of today's British Petroleum) was founded in London. The Anglo-Persian oil company bought up all the shares of British firms operating in Persia and became the monopolistic owner of the concession rights that D'Arcy had received.¹² Persian oil became a real source of wealth for the owners of private companies and banks, and a matter of great concern to the British government, which viewed control of the oil as key for both economic and strategic purposes.

British control of southern Persia had by this time been strengthened by the 1907 Anglo-Russian entente - which delimited the spheres of influence of the two Empires in Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet - which the Russian government signed partly as a result of the country's military weakness made visible by the military defeats in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5. The agreement gave Britain control of the southern parts of Persia whilst Russia had control of the north (a neutral zone in the middle was notionally left in the hands of the Persian government).¹³ The agreement did not end Anglo-Russian rivalry in Persia altogether, and the British were nervous of any evidence that Russia sought to extend its influence southwards, a fear that was by no means groundless. Lord Curzon once famously remarked that:

Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia - to many these names breathe only a sense of utter remoteness or a memory of strange vicissitudes and of moribund romance. To me I confess, they are the pieces of a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominion of the world.¹⁴

The outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 partly shifted the British government's attention from East to West. The participation of Russia on the side of the Entente set down a new stage in development of the Russian-British relations in general and over the south Caucasus and the territories beyond in particular. Imperial rivalries were partly - but only partly - eased by alliance against a common enemy. The whole question of oil became still more important in war-time given its importance in fuelling the world's military establishments. Transcaucasia (and Azerbaijan particularly),

12. F. Bostock, G. Jones, *Planning and Power in Iran: Ebtahaj and Economic Development under the Shah*, London, Routledge, 1989, p. 20.

13. W. E. D. Allen, P. Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828-1921*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1953, pp. 230-31; see also, J. Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2002, pp. 18-21.

14. George Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, Vol. 1, London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1892, p. 3.

with its oil and its key geostrategic position, became an important factor in the relationship between Russia and Great Britain in the East. The nature of this ambiguous relationship will be explored later in the thesis.

1.2 The penetration of British capital in the Baku oil-producing area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

The previous few paragraphs emphasised the importance of the 'oil factor' in shaping British policy towards Transcaucasia and central Asia more generally. This section examines in more detail the extent and significance of British investment in the region in the years before the Russian Revolution.

Great Britain was the world's first industrial power which enabled it to surpass the development of the productive forces of other countries and exploit its monopolistic power in order to gain a vast colonial system which itself then became vital in sustaining the British economy. The power of the British Empire was heavily based on its Asian colonies whose population made up more than 75 per cent of the total population of the Empire. The bastion of British colonial empire was undoubtedly India, in the territory of which lived nearly four-fifths of British Overseas Territories' population. The 'jewel of Empire' was a vital element in the culture and economy of Empire.

But at the end of the nineteenth century Britain was losing its industrial superiority, especially in the face of the challenge of the USA and Germany. The decline of Britain's industrial hegemony increased the proportion of the bourgeoisie directly concerned with colonial enterprise - since colonial exploitation offered new markets and sources of cheap raw materials. In this regard, John Hobson - the well known English economist and critic of imperialism - claimed that only investors and financiers benefited from the expansion of the British Empire. He also argued that 'what is true of Great Britain is true likewise of France, Germany, the United States, and of all countries in which modern capitalism had placed large surplus savings in the hands of a plutocracy or of a thrifty middle class'.¹⁵

15. Hobson, *Imperialism*, pp. 60-1.

The focus of British imperial interests in the Middle East and Central Asia repeatedly clashed with the interests of the foreign policy of Tsarist Russia and, as seen in the previous section, Anglo - Russian relations throughout the nineteenth century were marked by hostility and rivalry. The signing of the 1907 Anglo-Russian entente partly resolved the competing interests of Great Britain and Russia in these countries, and thus completed the period of open confrontation characteristic of the Great Game, although as was seen earlier a high level of tension remained. The geopolitical situation was made more complex by Germany's search to extend its imperial power for both economic and strategic advantage, most notably in Mesopotamia, via the construction of the Baghdad Railway. The contribution made by imperial tensions to the outbreak of the First World War has of course been much discussed by historians. It certainly helped to fuel the antagonism between Britain and Germany. Yet there were also tensions within each of the blocks that finally went to war in 1914.¹⁶

The outbreak of the First World War had significant consequences for the alignment of the Anglo-Russian forces in the Middle East. In March 1915, negotiations began between the Triple Entente about the post-war fate of the Black Sea Straits, following Turkey's entry into the war in October 1914. The plans for a future peace agreement provided for the acquisition of Constantinople and the Straits by Russia should the entente powers prove victorious.¹⁷ The idea of giving Constantinople to the Russians was actually proposed by Sir Edward Grey (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs), who took the initiative in November 1914 to inform Count Benckendorff (the Russian ambassador in London) 'that if Germany were defeated, the fate of Constantinople and the Straits could not be decided at that time otherwise than in conformity with Russia's interest'.¹⁸ The British ambassador in Russia, George Buchanan, similarly noted in a Memorandum dated 12 March 1915 that 'the question of the Straits and Constantinople would [only] be solved in agreement with Russia'.¹⁹ The British saw such a promise both as a way of keeping Russia in the war and as a means of gaining her consent to

16. E. Galevi, *Istoriya Anglii v Epokhu Imperializma*, Moscow, Gos.Sots.Ekon. Izdatelstvo, 1937, p. 9.

17. J. N. Cathal, *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of International Relations*, Westport, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002, p. 350.

18. Benckendorff to Sazonov, 9 November 1914, No. 649, cited in R. J. Kerner, 'Russia, the Straits, and Constantinople, 1914-15', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1929, p. 407.

19. British Memorandum to Sazonov, 14 November 1914; *ibid.*, 407.

their own plans in Asiatic Turkey, Egypt, and Persia. Buchanan also noted in his memorandum that England should ask Russia to agree that 'the neutral zone in Persia be added to the British sphere of influence'.²⁰ The hope was that such an agreement would secure Great Britain's unimpeded possession of Persian oil.

By the end of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, oil had acquired a huge importance as a strategic raw material, as well as playing an increasingly important role in large parts of the economy. The construction and conversion of many oil-fired warships for the Royal Navy stimulated a search for new secure sources of oil, which greatly increased the interest of the British government in the Middle East and Transcaucasian oil fields. The same was true of Russia given that many new Russian ships were also oil-powered. The oilfields of Baku, in Russian Azerbaijan, were of vital importance to Russia and - potentially at least - to Britain as well. The later words of a correspondent of *The Times* writing in 1918 captured this nicely when he noted that:

The Caspian Sea is a node through which all the major trade routes pass, and if we are now only paying immediate attention to the inland sea, it does not mean that we did not know anything before about its commercial and political values. We knew this a long time ago. The Caspian Sea is one of the oldest British interests.²¹

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Northern Azerbaijan (as well as the southern areas) remained an agrarian region, in the life of which the vestiges of pre-capitalist economic relations were still preserved. Nevertheless, the desire of Russian and foreign capital to increase their profits by the exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources promoted the development of new communication routes and the emergence of factory production.

Along with large-scale capitalist industry, there were also numerous small and medium-sized enterprises, producing a range of products. However, the main factor that determined the economic importance of Azerbaijan was the extraction and processing of oil. The Baku oil region in terms of oil reserves and production was the largest not only in the Russian Empire but also in the whole world. In 1901, 'Azerbaijan produced 11.4 million tons of oil, which accounted for more than half of world

20. British Memorandum, March 12, 1915; *ibid.*, p. 414.

21. *The Times*, 29 September 1918, cited in Darabadi, *Voyennyye Problemy Politicheskoy Istorii*, p. 54.

production' at that time.²² Peter Hopkirk, the British historian and journalist who has written extensively about the Great Game, wrote that:

At the end of the last century Baku had been one of the wealthiest cities on earth. The discovery of vast oilfields in this remote corner of the Tsar's empire had brought entrepreneurs and adventurers of every nationality rushing to the spot. Experts calculated that Baku had enough oil to heat and illuminate the entire world.²³

After an economic crisis in 1903, which was followed by the political upheavals of 1905-6, the production of Baku oil significantly decreased (by 1913 it amounted to 7.6 million tons). Yet this did not reduce the national or indeed global significance of the Baku oil region. It should be mentioned that there were also oil reserves in some regions of the north Caucasus in Russia (Grozny, Maikop and Embinsky) which at the beginning of the First World War began to be developed intensively. Yet statistical data shows that the Baku region retained a dominant position in the oil industry of Russia. In 1900, Baku accounted for the production of 600 million poods of oil out of a Russian total of 631 million. In 1913 it still accounted for 466 million poods out of a total of 561 million poods.²⁴

It is not surprising that the growth of British interest and penetration in the South Caucasus was closely associated with the activities of British entrepreneurship in the oil industry of Azerbaijan. The influx of foreign capital into the Baku oil industry became possible after the Russian government abolished the monopoly of tax farming in 1872 which gave impetus to the rapid growth of production. According to the 'New Rules for the Production of the Oilfield' of 1872, a right to search and extract oil on state lands was granted to both Russian and foreign nationals on equal terms. This allowed wealthy foreigners and foreign firms to participate in the investment and technical support of the Russian oil industry.²⁵ The inflow of foreign capital into the oil industry of Baku coincided with the development of other areas of the country's industrial production, which provided demand for oil products, while a further increase of capital investment was assisted by state tax policy.

22. Z. Lerman, D. Sedik, *Rural Transition in Azerbaijan*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010, p. 52.

23. P. Hopkirk, *Like Hidden Fire: The Plot to Bring Down the British Empire*, New York, Kodansha International Ltd, 1994, p. 330.

24. P. I. Lyashenko, *Istoriya Narodnogo Khozyaystva*, Vol. 2, Moscow, Gospolitizdat, 1948, p. 397.

25. F. H. Columbus, *Asian Economic and Political Issues*, Vol. 11, New York, Nova Science Publishers, 1998, p. 193.

In 1877, the tsarist government abolished the excise tax on the most profitable oil product in those years, kerosene - a measure that encouraged additional investment in the tax-exempt sectors of the industry.²⁶

The growing profitability of the Russian petroleum business in the 1880s led to a growth of foreign capital in the Baku petroleum industry. British participation in this sphere was until the end of nineteenth century mainly of an indirect character. When the French banking house 'Brothers Rothschild' bought the shares of the Caspian-Black Sea Oil Industrial and Trade Society, in 1886, it drew on extensive British capital - in this case, the Rothschild Bank cooperated closely with British firms including 'Lain and McAndrew' and 'Samuel and Company'. (On the whole, French capital found a very favourable ground in the Russian Empire in the second half of 1880s, which was largely due to the deterioration of Russia's foreign economic relations with Britain).²⁷ The economic potential of developing Baku oil was obvious. Under the pressure of 'Samuel and Company', the administration of the Suez Canal in January 1892 passed a resolution allowing oil tankers to pass through the canal, and in the same year a tanker named 'Murex' accomplished a maiden voyage carrying four thousand tons of Baku kerosene to Singapore. Thus Baku oil exported via the Black Sea gained profitable access to the markets of East.²⁸

British capital at the start of the twentieth century began to play a still bigger role in the expansion of the oil industry of the Caucasus. The British firms 'Lane & McAndrew' and 'Samuel & Co' continued to be very active in Baku, while in 1897 a foreign trade company 'Shell Transport & Trading Company' was created, which also became a key presence in Baku in the years that followed.²⁹ From 1898 to 1903, British companies invested in the Russian oil industry some 68.8 million roubles, including 47 million roubles in the enterprises of the Baku region.³⁰ As early as 1893, the Englishman Alfred Stewart sought to establish a monopoly over the export of oil from Baku,

26. V.A. Nardova, *Nachalo Monopolizatsii Neftyanoy Promyshlennosti Rossii*, Leningrad, Nauka, 1974, pp. 97-99.

27. In 1885 due to the complication of Russian-British political relations, the London financial market was closed for Russia. The resumption of full-fledged financial relations with Great Britain began in 1907. See, N. Spulber, *Russia's Economic Transitions: From Late Tsarism to the New Millennium*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 122.

28. V.N. Kostornichenko, 'Inostranny Kapital v Neftyanoy Promyshlennosti Dorevolutsionnoy Rossii: k Razrabotke Periodizatsii Protsessa', *Ekonomicheskaya Istoriya*, No.10, 2005, p. 50.

29. A. Fursenko, *Neftnyye Trety i Mirovaya Politik'a*, Moscow, Nauka, 1965, p. 114.

30. I. A. Guseynov, *Istoriya Azerbaydzhana*, Vol. 2, Baku, Akademii Nauk Azerbaydzhansko SSR, 1960, p. 439.

signing an agreement with the wealthy Tagiyev, Mantashev and Budagov families, by which the transportation of almost all 'Baku standard' oil was passed to his shipping company. In 1896, Stewart founded the first British company in Baku, the European Petroleum Company, with a total capital of 5 million roubles. A year later, in 1897, the Englishman G. Gladstone acquired the oil fields and enterprises of the Baku oil magnate Tagiyev. In place of Tagiyev's enterprises, the British oil company 'Russian Petroleum and Liquid Fuel Ltd' was established, which subsequently became better known under the name of 'Oleum'.³¹

By 1901, 11% of operating oil wells in Baku region were owned by British companies which together yielded up to 1/6 of gross oil production. In 1903, in the Baku region alone, there were twelve British companies with a share capital of 60 million roubles. But British capital was not for the most part invested in the creation or updating of production capacity of the oil industry. On the contrary, it sought to acquire existing enterprises (many bankrupt firms) owned by members of the local population.³² This inflow of British capital into the Baku oilfield inevitably slowed after the economic crisis of 1900-1903, and the ethnic conflicts that followed in 1905, which together put an end to the first stage of British expansion in the Baku oil industry.

A new wave of British investment in the Russian oil industry began in 1907, when new deposits were discovered in the Maikop area. In the years 1909-1912, 37 joint-stock English societies with 62.2 million roubles of capital were established in this region.³³ Simultaneously, British oil companies increased their activities in Baku, and the total amount of investments made by them during this period exceeded by several times the sum of British investments in the late of nineteenth century.³⁴ During the years 1909-1914, British companies managed to obtain control of many oil fields in Grozny and Maikop, while an English Petroleum tycoon, the chairman of the oil trust 'Royal Dutch Shell', Sir Henri Deterding, was able to take first place in Baku, surpassing even the financially powerful Baron Rothschild.³⁵ The growth of British capital in the Baku oil industry caused considerable alarm to other

31. M. Dzh. Ibragimov, *Neftyanaya Promyshlennost' Azerbaydzhana v Period Imperializma*, Baku, Elm, 1984, p. 79.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

33. Kostornichenko, *Inostranny Kapital*, p. 56.

34. A.B. Shirokorad, *Rossiya - Angliya: Neizvestnaya Voina, 1857-1907*, Moscow, Izdatel'stvo AST, 2003, p. 95.

35. Fursenko, *Neftyanyye*, pp. 115-16.

powers. The American Consul Smith wrote that:

Baku will soon turn into an English city. The conditions for investment are considered good and ... no one will be surprised if in the near future all oil trade passes into the hands of the British.³⁶

American anxieties were not groundless. By the outbreak of the First World War, 108 British companies were involved with the Russian oil industry with a total capital placed of 134.6 million roubles.³⁷ The British journal *Near East* noted in 1918, ‘Baku has no equal in terms of oil in the world. Baku is the biggest oil centre the world over. If oil is a kingdom, then Baku is its crown’.³⁸

It is worth ending this section by emphasising that British capital was not actually ‘in the lead’ in investing in Baku, for in the last quarter of the nineteenth century much of the investment had come from French, Swedish, and Belgian capital. The level of investment grew in the 1890s as the tsarist government created favourable conditions for the further inflow of capitals of foreign firms into oil production as part of a broader policy of attracting foreign capital to stimulate economic growth.³⁹ In 1879, the Nobel brothers, the Swedish capitalists, had already formed their company in Baku which was destined to grow into a major monopoly. Soon the Nobel Corporation gained enormous strength, and by the end of the 1870s, its production exceeded the production of five largest kerosene enterprises combined in Baku.⁴⁰

In the 1880s, the influx of French capital in Baku began led by the Parisian branch of the Rothschild banking family (see above).⁴¹ And yet, as the previous pages have noted, once British firms realised the potential profitability of investing in Russian oil, they quickly began to overhaul their international rivals. The process made British politicians and officials more conscious than ever of the strategic importance of Transcaucasia for British interests.

It is difficult to separate the economic and political factors shaping the development of Anglo-Russian relations given how closely the two were linked (reflecting, indeed, one of the key

36. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

37. Kostornichenko, *Inostranny Kapital*, pp. 65-6.

38. Prof. M. Qasimly, ‘Britain’s Azerbaijan Policy (November 1917 - September 1918)’, pp. 38-43, <http://www.visions.az/history,151/cf8230fa> (The Visions of Azerbaijan Magazine), accessed on 15 June 2015.

39. T.R. Bekhbudov, *Politsiya v Azerbaydzhanе vo Vtoroy Polovine XIX - Nachale XX vv*, Baku, Nafta-Press, 1999, p. 21.

40. Fursenko, *Neftyanyye*, p. 22.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

characteristics of imperialism). Azerbaijan with its economic importance and strategic location was one of the key places illustrating this phenomenon. It was for this reason that the British placed so much emphasis on covert operations and information gathering - something that was characteristic of the Great Game in all its stages - and which was not brought to an end by the Anglo-Russian entente of 1907. This is illustrated by a number of once highly classified documents access to which has become possible only recently, including one by a British intelligence officer noting that 'the path passes through Transcaucasia which [has] to be followed by those who want to get in the internal districts of Asia for commercial or military reasons'.⁴² Major-General L.C. Dunsterville, whose role in Baku in 1918 will be discussed later, noted in his memoirs that the skill of British intelligence agents in the region 'was fully recognized by our opponents, one of whom wrote in a letter had been intercepted by us where it was talked that the English hear even our whispers'.⁴³

Azerbaijan was a key area of strategic importance for both the Russians and the British both because of its economic and its geostrategic location. Although the outbreak of the First World War moved the attention of British policy-makers from the East to the West, senior politicians and diplomats and soldiers in both London and Delhi realised that Transcaucasia remained a region of great importance for British interests. Russia's participation in the conflict on the side Entente predetermined a new stage in the development of Russian-British relations and British policy in Transcaucasia.

42. S.Z. Yusifzade, *Pervaya Azerbaydzhanskaya Respublika: Istoriya, Sobytiya, Fakty Anglo-Azerbaydzhanskikh Otmosheniy*, Baku, Maarif, 1998, p. 22.

43. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, p. 60.

Chapter 2

2.1. The fall of the Russian Monarchy and Britain's foreign policy

The February Revolution, and the subsequent revolution in October 1917, overthrew the Tsarist autocracy in Russia and led to the creation of a new kind of social development. None of the governments that fought in the First World War expected such a rapid arrival of the revolution in Russia. Although the leading powers had information about the scope of crisis facing Russian society, it was not generally assumed that the collapse of the Russian monarchy was so close. Foreign diplomats in St Petersburg, and their political masters 'back home', hoped that reshuffles in the government apparatus and concessions by the Tsar to liberal opinion would stave off revolution. After the overthrow of the Tsar in February, British diplomacy - reflecting the general mood of the Entente - operated on the hope and belief that the new Provisional Government would be able to govern the country and would not conclude a separate peace with Germany. Indeed, the Provisional Government headed by Prince Lvov initially endorsed all the war aims of the tsarist government, a move that was perceived with relief by the governments of Britain and France.

Immediately, following the February Revolution, the statement of the Provisional Government about the birth of the new free Russia was broadly welcomed in the Allied camp, which approved the democratic reforms sought by the Provisional Government. But Great Britain's policy was determined primarily by her own interests. And soon, when there was a threat to Russia's further participation in the World War, 'some British military officials in Russia supported military measures to restore order in Russia'.¹ As the war continued, the weakening of the authority of the Provisional Government created growing anxiety among the ruling circles of Britain and all the countries of the Entente block, given the important role played by Russia in tying up German forces on the Eastern Front. The concern of the British government about Russia's future was also caused in part by the internal situation in Britain itself where economic conditions had deteriorated sharply. Demonstrations held in the cities of Britain, welcoming the overthrow of Tsar in Russia and the onset of revolution, alarmed

1. M. Hughes, *Inside the Enigma: British Officials in Russia, 1900-39*, London, Hambledon Continuum, 1997, p. 112.

the British government. (Lloyd George later wrote in his memoirs that ‘when Russia suddenly flung away her ancient Tsarist regime, and embarked on a great Socialist experiment, numbers in this country were eager to emulate her example’).²

The collapse of the tsarist regime at first sight weakened the British Empire’s main imperial rival. However, despite the Entente, ambivalence about Russia remained common among British policy-makers. As A. Raevskiy rightly noted, ‘many in Britain believed that the restoration of imperial Russia was not in British interests’.³

But, at the same time, the British diplomatic effort operated on the assumption that Britain’s main interest lay in bringing the war to a victorious end and that this required keeping Russia in the conflict despite its manifest exhaustion. In this sense, then, British diplomacy effectively contributed to the deepening of the revolutionary crisis in Russia and eventual downfall of the Provisional Government. Despite allied material assistance to the Provisional Government, it was not able to function effectively. The Russian army had lost its capacity to fight. Revolutionary views were increasingly prevalent among the working classes of the major cities and among many of the soldiers. National liberation movements were growing on the periphery of Russia. The economy was in ruins. The historian David Bullock rightly notes that:

Understanding that the Central Powers could now transfer troops from the east to the west, the Allies sought to reconstitute the broken Eastern Front to tie down as many of the enemy as possible.... They considered it imperative that the Central Powers should not have full access to the munitions stocks and the agricultural and industrial assets still remaining inside the former Russian Empire.⁴

It was this fear that prompted holding of a conference in the December of 1917 between the British, American and French governments on the delimitation of their activities in providing ‘assistance’ to Russia. As a matter of fact, the Anglo-French Conference which was held in Paris on 9-10 December (December 22-23 o.s.) 1917, a few weeks after the Bolshevik Revolution, was an important step in the development of the Entente's interventionist plans against Russia. On the British side, the Deputy

2. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, Vol. 4, London, Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1934, p. 1881.

3. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 15.

4. D. Bullock, *The Russian Civil War 1918–22 (Essential Histories)*, Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2008, p. 90.

Foreign Minister Lord Cecil and the Minister of War Lord Milner took part in the conference. France was represented by the Prime Minister Clemenceau and Minister of Foreign Affairs Pichon.⁵ The conference considered a new memorandum on the ‘Russian question’ produced by the British side. In accordance with the memorandum of 10 (23) December, a secret agreement was concluded between Great Britain and France (signed by Clemenceau and Cecil) on the division of Russia into ‘zones of influence’ (it was promulgated by president of the USA Woodrow Wilson on the eve of 1918). ‘The agreement was entitled *L’Accord Francais-Anglais du 23 Decembre, 1917, definissant les zones d’action francaises et anglaises*’. According to its terms, the English zone included the Don Basin, the Kuban, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the northern part of the European territory of Russia. The French zone included Ukraine, Crimea and Bessarabia.⁶ According to the memorandum, Britain and France set themselves the task of ‘persuading the southern Russian army to resume the war’, and for this purpose they decided to give subsidies to Kaledin and other counter-revolutionary generals and atamans. It was considered necessary that the United States should take part in the planned expenditures. (Later, it was agreed that Siberia and the Far East were primarily zones of action of the United States and Japan).⁷

As for Russia, until the summer of 1917, its troops stayed quite firmly on the borders of Persia and Mesopotamia, although the disintegration of forces had already begun. Although Persia was considered a neutral state throughout the war, its territory was the battleground between Russian and Turkish troops from the Caucasus to Kermanshah. The presence of British forces around Baghdad acted to restrain the Turkish army. Even so, the revolutionary events in Russia, along with the collapse of the Russian army and the mass return of Russian troops to their homeland, created favourable conditions for the advance of Turkish-German forces in North Persia. Taking advantage of the situation, Britain devoted significant manpower and resources towards the full occupation of Persia, with a view to possibly entering Azerbaijan. The prospect of possible Turkish-Germans domination

5. V. M. Fic, *Revolutionary War for Independence and the Russian Question: Czechoslovak Army in Russia 1914-1918*, New Delhi, Abhinav Publications, 1977, p. 165.

6. E.K. Albert and M. Sayers, *The Great Conspiracy: The Secret War against Soviet Russia*, New York, Boni & Gaer, 1946, p. 7.

7. For further information see, Bullock, *The Russian Civil War*, pp. 91-2.

over the railway line between Batumi and Baku from the Black Sea to the Caspian frightened policy – makers in London. As General Dunsterville noted:

Tiflis, the capital of the Southern Caucasus, was likely to fall without serious resistance into hands of the enemy, and the capture of this town would give the Turko-German armies control of the railway line between Batumi on the Black Sea and Baku on the Caspian, the enormously valuable oilfields of Baku, the indispensable minerals of the Caucasus Mountains, and the vast supplies of grain and cotton from the shores of the Caspian Sea; and the object of my mission was to prevent German and Turkish penetration in this area.⁸

The situation was more complex to the north, where following the February Revolution a system of 'dual power' emerged in the three Caucasus provinces, including Azerbaijan. The population of Transcaucasia greeted the February bourgeois-democratic revolution enthusiastically. There were rallies and meetings everywhere that welcomed the overthrow of the autocracy. In an effort to preserve the old state apparatus and prevent possible mass actions, the Viceroy of the tsar in the Caucasus, H.N. Romanov hastened to recognize the Provisional Committee of the State Duma. Through representatives of propertied classes and leaders of conciliation parties, which he officially accepted, the Viceroy appealed to the population of the region to observe peace and order.⁹

The leadership of the various Transcaucasian Soviets also did not make any attempts to seize power, assuming that the principal goal of the Revolution was the creation of bourgeois-democratic republics. They were therefore willing to leave power at least formally in the hands of the bourgeoisie, with the Soviets assigned the role of authorities for 'controlling' the activities of bourgeois power. At the same time, the Command of the Caucasian army took all measures to prevent the formation of Soviets or other elected soldiers' bodies in front-line units. And where such bodies were created, the command sought to turn them into its obedient tool with the help of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, allegedly in the interests of maintaining the 'military discipline' so necessary for the continuation of the war 'to the victorious end'.¹⁰

On 9 March 1917, Prince Lvov signed the order creating the Special Transcaucasia Committee (Ozakom) which was given special instructions for implementing orders sanctioned by the Provisional

8. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, p. 2.

9. *Kavkazskoye Slovo*, 5 March 1917, p. 2.

10. I. I. Mints, *Pobeda Sovetskoy Vlasti v Zakavkaz'ye*, Tbilisi, Izdatel'stvo Mecniereba, 1971, p. 86.

Government, strengthening its position in the region and ensuring effective civil administration of areas occupied by the Russian army on the Caucasus front. A representative of the Mensheviks, Akaki Chkhenkeli, became its chairman. Ozakom was authorized to conduct all the civil affairs of Transcaucasia but did not have legislative force. In fact, the Ozakom never obtained much power in Transcaucasia; in Tiflis the local Soviet, controlled by the Mensheviks, wielded the only effective power. But the Ozakom did provide a kind of court of appeal for Baku when local disagreements between governmental bodies could not be locally resolved.¹¹

Ozakom as an organ of state power represented the interest of the bourgeoisie and the landlords. In its practical activities, the Committee like its predecessor pursued the same policy of suppressing the revolutionary and national liberation movement in the region. Being representative of the Provisional Government, Ozakom openly demanded the continuation of the imperialist war.¹² At the end of March 1917, Ozakom issued an appeal to the people of Transcaucasia, declaring the establishment of a 'new order' in the region in accordance with local conditions, and announcing that war was to continue and - under the threat of strict punishment - any formation of political organization in the Caucasian Army was forbidden.¹³ The content of the appeal reflected the interests of Britain - since it was designed to keep Russia in the war - and explained London's waiting position in Transcaucasia during the period between the two revolutions of 1917. But although the February bourgeois-democratic revolution shattered the Tsarist government, the overthrow of autocracy did not solve the wide range of vital issues faced Russia (including Transcaucasia).

The situation of workers in Azerbaijan did not change after the February Revolution. The Provisional Government refused to issue a law on an eight-hour working day, and openly supported capital in the fight against the labour movement. Although officially a working day in the oil industry of Azerbaijan was 9 hours, in fact it was considerably extended by mandatory war-time overtime, which

11. Suny, *The Baku Commune*, p. 74.

12. *Bor'ba za Pobedu Sovetskoy Vlasti v Gruzii*, Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov, Tbilisi, Sabchot Sakartvelo, 1958, p. 8.

13. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence*, pp. 76-7.

was extremely exhausting for the workers. In other Baku enterprises, for example, at the textile factory of Tagiyev, the average working day was 10-11 hours on average.¹⁴

By the end of 1917, economic devastation in Transcaucasia had assumed alarming proportions. Production of oil, manganese, copper ore and coal were sharply reduced. The manufacturing industry fell into decay. A number of light and food industry enterprises, especially those that processed industrial crops of agriculture, were closed. Due to the reduction of sowing areas in the province and the deterioration of field cultivation in 1917, an extremely low yield of maize and wheat was harvested. The production of cotton and tobacco had dropped noticeably. There was a lack of bread and other products in the towns and villages. Prices of manufactured goods and food products grew steadily. Speculation everywhere reached monstrous proportions. All this caused discontent among the people and aggravated the political situation in the Transcaucasia, especially in Baku.¹⁵

As for local national bourgeois parties, at the end of November 1917 with the support of the United States, Britain and France, they succeeded in seizing power in the most important military and political centre of Transcaucasia, Tiflis. On 28 November, on the direct directive of the Entente imperialists and with the direct participation of the Anglo-French and American representatives, a counter-revolutionary organ of state power - the Transcaucasian Commissariat (Sejm) was created which replaced Ozakom. The Transcaucasian Commissariat consisted of only the representatives of bourgeois nationalist parties, and Menshevik Gegechkori was elected its chairman; the members of the Socialist-Revolutionaries D. Donskoy and A. Neruchev, Dashnaks G. Ter-Ghazarian, H. Karjikian and A. Ohandjanian, Musavatists Khan-Khoyski, M. Jafarov, X. Melik-Aslanov and X. Khasmamedov, Socialist Federalist Sh. Alekseev-Meskhiev became its most prominent members.¹⁶

Fearing the unification of the revolutionary workers and peasants with the soldiers, the Commissariat decided to disarm and demobilize the Caucasian army, replacing it with national formations.¹⁷ This circumstance caused an immediate deterioration of the foreign policy position of

14. A. S. Sumbatzade, *Istoriya Azerbaydzhana v Trekh Tomakh*, Baku, Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Azerbaydzhanskoj SSR, 1963, pp. 60-5.

15. Suny, *The Baku Commune*, p. 110.

16. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road*, p. 108.

17. A. Mnatsakanyan, *Ob Istorii Kavkazskoy Krasnoy Armii*, Erevan, Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Armyanskoy SSR, 1968, p. 3.

Transcaucasia. The massive unauthorized withdrawal of soldiers from the front, which began after this decision of the Transcaucasian Commissariat, did not only threaten the collapse of the Caucasian Front, but also the existence of the only real force capable of resisting the German-Turkish troops. Thus already at the end of 1917 Transcaucasia became a springboard for the struggle of the counter-revolution and international imperialist forces that supported it against the young Soviet Republic. One of the most difficult, gloomy periods came in the life of peoples of Transcaucasia. The region was on the verge of new political battles.

2.2 The international situation and the new orientation of British policy

After the October Revolution of 1917, there was a change in Britain's foreign policy with regard to Russia. The policies of the new Bolshevik government - including withdrawal from the First World War and the conclusion of a separate peace and the nationalization of foreign property - inevitably evoked a sharp response in London. The British government's position was clearly expressed in a report of a British Foreign Office official who wrote that:

It is still too soon to speculate on immediate future of Russia, though it may be taken for granted that the Bolshevik Government is probably already on its last legs.¹⁸

The idea of the admissibility of a direct military intervention within the borders of the former Russian Empire received official recognition from the Entente states at the London Conference in 1918. As previously mentioned, the Entente states also agreed about the division of Russia into spheres of influence. In this agreement, France was granted the right to develop its actions in territory lying north of the Black Sea, directing operations against the Germans and hostile Soviet troops. The British were to occupy territory to the east of the Black Sea where Turkey was the obvious enemy. The third paragraph of the agreement concretized the division of Russian territory into the French zone consisting of Bessarabia, Ukraine and Crimea and a British zone which included the territory of the Don Cossacks and the Caucasus. Thus the sphere of the British guardianship included south-eastern Russia, where Great Britain, acting as a guarantor of 'stability and countering Bolshevism', had to carry out a set of measures to secure its position

18. Intelligence Bureau, Foreign Office, 'Weekly Report on Russia xxIx', CRW/29, 12 November 1917, cited in Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921*, Vol. 1, p. 3.

in the region. In accordance with the signed agreement, Azerbaijan fell into the British zone of control. The value of Transcaucasia, and especially Azerbaijan, was increased for Britain by the prospect of gaining control of the region's sources of wealth (most obviously oil).

Supporting the internal counter-revolution conducted by the White Guard movements, the government in London also opposed the full restoration of the territorial integrity of Tsarist Russia, echoing the long-standing belief that Russia was Britain's main rival in Asia. Developments in Russia provided the prospect of ousting Russia from its Asian possessions and strengthening Britain's own presence in these regions. This aspect of British foreign policy had a significant impact on its position in the Caucasus. In order to penetrate into Azerbaijan, it was necessary for Britain to capture the Turkish Straits and the creation of appropriate political conditions in Transcaucasia, which together were needed to ensure Britain's dominance in the region.

The official statements of London were broadly consistent with the developments in the Caucasus where new states had already begun to emerge in 1917. The British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour noted that in some regions of Russia, including in the South Caucasus, '...new anti-Bolshevik administrations have grown up under the shelter of Allied forces. We are responsible for their existence and we must endeavour to support them'.¹⁹ In this regard, British politicians tried to take full advantage of the contradictions and tensions thrown up by the growth of nationalism among the minorities within the former Russian Empire.

The first documents to be issued by the Soviet government 'The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia' and the 'Appeal to all Working Muslims of Russia and the East' set down new principles to define relations between the Russian people and the oppressed minorities on the periphery of the old Empire.²⁰ The recognition of their equal rights and the right to self-determination, including the right to secession, the abolition of all national and religious privileges and restrictions, the promise of free development of all national minorities groups - all these were promises which gave impetus

19. W. Churchill, *The World Crisis 1918-1928: The Aftermath* (Vol. 4), New York, Rosetta Books, 2013, p. 151.

20. Kluchnikov & Sabanin, 'Appeal of the Council of People's Commissars to the Moslems of Russia and the East', <https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/foreign-relations/1917/December/3.htm>, accessed on 1 January 2016.

to the various national liberation movements that had developed over the previous year. These principles at first contributed to a significant growth in support for nationalist movements among ethnic minorities. The development of various nationalist political parties over the previous few months had provided the national liberation movement with political content. The embodiment of the 'national liberation movement' in Azerbaijan became the Musavat Party, headed by M.E. Rasolzade, which played an increasingly important political role in the country in 1917 and early 1918.

In the industrial city of Baku, representatives of the Bolshevik Party became the ruling party in the country after the October revolution, which led to an active struggle for power both in the city and across the whole of Azerbaijan. On 2 November 1917, the Baku Soviet accepted the proposal of the Bolsheviks for the immediate and unconditional transfer of full power in the city to their hands.²¹ Baku thereby became the first city in Transcaucasia where Soviet power was proclaimed - although this was not at first real power. Expressing the will and aspirations of all the working people of Transcaucasia, the Baku Soviet on 17 November declared Baku an integral part of Soviet Russia and recognized the Soviet government headed by V. I. Lenin as the only legitimate government of the country.²²

On 12 December 1917, the Military Revolutionary Committee was established under the executive committee of the Baku Soviet. The complex pattern of class, party and inter-ethnic relations in Baku, along with the lack of adequate military support for the new government and the presence of anti-Soviet forces supported by foreign powers, created an impossible challenge for the Bolsheviks. Although the Baku proletariat did not at that time have enough armed force to completely crush the counter-revolution, the local Bolshevik government at first succeeded in eliminating some of the opposition. But in late 1917 and early 1918, other political organizations in Baku remained strong and determined to claim power.²³

Among these organisations were the Muslim National Council, headed by Musavat, and the Armenian National Council, led by the Armenian Nationalist Dashnaktsutyun party. Among the Moslem

21. Suny, *The Baku Commune*, pp. 162-63.

22. *Bol'sheviki v Bor'be za Pobedu Sotsialisticheskoy Revolyutsii v Azerbaydzhanе*, Dokumenty i Materialy, 1917-1918, Baku, Izd-vo Akademiy Nauk Az.SSR, 1967, pp. 203-4.

23. G. Xachapuridze, *Bor'ba Gruzinskogo Naroda za Ustanovleniye Sovetskoy Vlasti*, Tbilisi, Gos. Izdvo Polit. Lit-ru, 1956, p. 87.

Azerbaijanis the first loyalty was to religion and among the Armenians it was typically to nationality rather than class.²⁴ Both the National Councils had armed groups that posed a threat to local Bolshevik power. The situation was made more complex by the extremely volatile political situation in other parts of the Caucasus, where the majority of political parties were opposed to the October Revolution and refused to recognize the authority of the government of Soviet Russia. Such a line was followed by the Georgian Mensheviks, Musavat (Azerbaijan), Dashnaks (Armenia) and the Socialist-Revolutionaries. It was on the initiative of these parties that a Committee of Public Security was organized in Tiflis in November 1917. Besides representatives of 'national-democratic forces' of Transcaucasia, the conference was attended by the American consul and English and French military representatives, reflecting the interest of Western countries in developments in the Caucasus. The conference refused to recognize the authority of the Council of People's Commissars and passed a resolution creating an 'Independent government of Transcaucasia'. Four days later, on 15 November, the Transcaucasian Commissariat was formed which declared that it had been organized 'to combat against an anarchy in the Caucasus and Bolshevik Russia'.²⁵

The activities of the Transcaucasian Commissariat coincided with the beginning of foreign intervention by the main allied powers including the United States. The governments of Britain, France and the United States paid particular attention to supporting the anti-Bolshevik forces in the South Caucasus. In his letters to Washington, the U.S. Consul at Tiflis F.W. Smith asked permission to recognize the Transcaucasian Commissariat de facto and to transfer to Tiflis 10 million dollars for financial aid to anti-Bolshevik forces.²⁶ The developments in the Caucasus were closely bound up with the policies of the Western powers, and the formation of the Transcaucasian Commissariat was the first step toward separating the region from Soviet Russia. On 28 November 1917, the US Secretary of State Lansing, having read the reports from his consul at Tiflis, made a request to Paris to find out the views of the countries of the Entente on 'de facto recognition of the government of the

24. Suny, *The Baku Commune*, p. 21.

25. Kazimzadeh, *The Struggle For Transcaucasia*, pp. 57-8.

26. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS), Russia, 1918, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932, Vol. 2, Document 698, pp. 580-81.

Transcaucasus'.²⁷ The responses showed that the governments of Britain, France and Italy had already decided to fully support the 'movement' in the South Caucasus.

The activities of the American consul were part of a kind of 'hidden activism' of Western diplomacy that was designed to influence the course of political events in Transcaucasia. Even a few days prior to the conference of Committee of Public Security, Felix Smith had notified his Government that:

On Saturday, I will be present at the meeting where the Transcaucasian government is going to be formed, which in turn will be united with the south-east Federation...and will refuse a truce or a separate peace.²⁸

Such awareness about the program of a government that was not yet formally established reflects how political life in the Caucasus was an object of great concern to the main Western powers. Yet it should be recognised that the position of the Western politicians and diplomats was not unambiguous - doubts were expressed about the appropriateness of intervention in Russian affairs during the revolutionary period quite widely in governmental circles of the USA, Great Britain, France and Italy. The U.S. Consul at Tiflis F.W. Smith was advised by the Secretary of State, Lansing

[he] will not be given authority to recognize *de facto* [the Transcaucasian] government until it is evident that such action will not tend to foster sectionalism or disruption of Russia or civil war.²⁹

The Transcaucasian Commissariat - not least due to separatist tendencies and tensions between the various national groups - failed to become a stable government capable of solving the acute problems facing the region and its population. It was forced to agree to the creation of a Parliament - the Transcaucasian Sejm, which opened on 23 February 1918, in Tiflis. The Sejm was assigned the task of serving as a single governing body 'having legislation functions'.³⁰

Transcaucasia had long experienced the need for a body which could resolve the whole range of issues arising from the new and difficult situation of the country. The representatives of the leading parties of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia played the major role in the Sejm. The Azerbaijani faction of the Sejm

27. Ibid., Document 703, p. 583.

28. Ibid., Document 700, p. 582.

29. Ibid., Document 702, p. 583.

30. R. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954, p. 103.

consisted of 44 deputies, together representing the parties Musavat, Ittihad, Hummet and the Muslim Socialist Bloc. The leader of the faction was M.E. Rasulzade.³¹ The Bolsheviks opposed the creation of the Sejm, considering that its existence would only serve to bring about the final separation of the Caucasus from Soviet Russia. The Caucasus Regional Committee of the Bolshevik Party was determined to take all possible measures to prevent the operation of the Transcaucasian Sejm.³²

In the absence of solid foundations for a unified political, economic, social and ethnic authority in Transcaucasia, the Sejm quickly became a stillborn authority. The most serious obstacle to its activities was ethnic conflict in the region, which was exacerbated by changes in the international situation, most notably the increase of activity of German-Turkish forces in the South Caucasus.

Penetration into Transcaucasia was one of the most important of Germany's goals in World War I. Favourable opportunities for the realization of German plans arose after the 'de facto' separation of Transcaucasia from Russia, and the government in Berlin quickly sought to take Transcaucasia under its direct control. Decisive action by Germany was encouraged by the offense launched by its Turkish ally in January 1918. And yet, while Turkey's growing presence in Transcaucasia in some ways strengthened the influence of its ally Germany's influence in the region, it quickly became clear that the interests of the two countries were in conflict.

Germany's plans were clearly set forth by General Ludendorff, who noted in a memorandum that [we have to] 'exercise our influence in persuading Turkey not to take Baku', reminding his government that 'we could only expect to get oil from Baku if we helped ourselves'.³³ But, despite the fact that the Ottoman Empire was in many ways highly dependent on Germany for material support, the government of Turkey had its own plans which it was loathe to sacrifice in favour of the interests of its ally. In March 1918, the Trebizond conference was convened by the Turkish government at which negotiations began between the Transcaucasian delegation headed by Akaki Chkhenkeli and the Turkish delegation led by Minister of the Turkish Naval Fleet Rauf Bey.³⁴ While conducting diplomatic negotiations, the Turkish

31. A. Balayev, *Azerbaydzhanskoye Natsionalno-Demokraticheskoye Dvizheniye 1917-1920*, Baku, Elm, 1998, p. 16.

32. *Borba za Pobedu Sovetskoy Vlasti v Gruzii*, pp. 186-87.

33. E. Ludendorff, *My War Memories, 1914-1918*, Vol. 2, London, Hutchinson & Co, 1919, pp. 658-59.

34. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle For Transcaucasia*, pp. 93-4.

government at the same time ordered its troops to advance into the Caucasus. The reason for the advance of Turkish troops into Transcaucasia was the refusal of the Transcaucasian Sejm to recognize the terms of Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty which had set down that the districts of Ardahan, Kars, and Batumi be returned to the Ottoman Empire (which had lost them to Russia in the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878). Lacking military force to resist, the Sejm entered into peaceful negotiations with Turkey, which took place at first in Trabzon and then in Batumi. During these negotiations, deep contradictions showed up between national factions within the Transcaucasian Sejm. Under pressure from representatives of the German-Turkish bloc, the Sejm declared Transcaucasia ‘an independent federal republic’ on 22 April, 1918.³⁵ However, the Transcaucasian Federative Republic did not last long. As Richard Pipes notes:

It was neither Transcaucasian, nor Federative, nor a Republic. Inasmuch as the Turks had occupied portions of the southwest and the Bolsheviks soon seized Baku and the entire eastern half of Transcaucasia, the government controlled no more than the central regions adjoining Tiflis. During its brief existence neither the federal relations nor the republican state institutions had been worked out, and the administration was largely in the hands of the Georgian Menshevik party.³⁶

Meanwhile, after the tragic March events in Baku, when thousands of Azerbaijanis were killed by Armenian nationalists, the Bolsheviks strengthened their power in Baku and in some districts of Baku province: Lankaran, Guba, Salyan and others.³⁷ In order to strengthen their domination in region, in the last week of April 1918, the Bolsheviks established a new government in Baku: the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), chaired by S. Shaumyan.³⁸ Sovnarkom ‘faced numerous difficulties: notably, food shortages, isolation from Soviet Russia, inter-ethnic (especially Armenian-Azeri) tensions and massacres, and [later] the advance on Baku of the Army of Islam and its Azeri allies’.³⁹

35. A. Mikaberidze, *Historical Dictionary of Georgia*, London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2015, p. 653.

36. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, p. 193.

37. For three days between March 30 and 2 April, Armenian Dashnaks organized ethnic massacres in Baku and surrounding areas by killing thousands of Tatars (Azerbaijanis). Official Bolsheviks figures at the time put the death toll at 3,000 civilian, but a year later newspaper the New York Times put death tolls up to 12,000, presumably citing Azerbaijani officials. Modern Azeri historians usually use this figure in their researches. For more information see Suny, *The Baku Commune*, pp. 218-26.

38. Suny, *The Baku Commune*, p. 231.

39. Smele, *The ‘Russian’ Civil Wars*, p. 64.

The declaration of the Baku People's Commissars, which was issued on 1 May 1918, talked about the practical tasks to be carried out by Soviet power in Azerbaijan, as well as noting that the People's Commissars would be closely linked with the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. This strengthening of the position of the Bolsheviks in Baku became a kind a catalyst in intensifying the intervention of the Western powers, especially Britain, in Transcaucasia. The Government in London was determined to outpace the Germans and the Turks in capturing Baku and establishing its power on the western shore of the Caspian Sea. This was done under the banner of organizing the struggle against the Bolsheviks in the Caucasus. By this time, British troops stationed in Persia and Mesopotamia were close to Azerbaijan, and the conduct of military operations to capture Baku was assigned to the detachment of General Dunsterville and centred on the Iranian port of Anzali. The ground for this intervention was prepared in Baku systematically by the British intelligence service. Under the cover of diplomatic missions, or as employees of industrial firms, experienced operatives of various British intelligence services (such as MacDonnell, Stokes, Noel, Pike, Clutterbuck, Wayne and many others) specializing in the East, performed special missions in Baku, 'whose activities had an obvious political and subversive character'.⁴⁰ The most colourful figure among them was the official British Vice-Council in Baku, Ronald MacDonnell, who actually was a member of British intelligence. He appeared in Baku as early as 1905 as a humble employee of British company. This work enabled him while remaining in the shadows to expand a circle of acquaintances, to establish contacts, to visit factories and plants, to travel around the country, and at the same time to go and see Persia under the pretext that 'he was interested in certain forest concession ...'.⁴¹

In Baku, Vice-Consul MacDonnell searched and found people who could provide him with access to various important strata of society (social, ethnic and political) - access which he hoped to use to promote long-term British interests in the region. 'About the time'- he wrote, 'there floated into our ken others who were subsequently to figure in local affairs: Djevanshire the engineer, Shaumyan the Armenian, and Serge Arsen the lawyer'.⁴² In his memoirs, MacDonnell described how he again and

40. Yusifzade, *Pervaya Azerbaydzhanskaya Respublika*, p. 41.

41. MacDonell, *And Nothing Long*, p. 95.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

again visited the apartment of Shaumyan, calling him ‘my friend’, and noting that ‘we met as friends; he knew we were political enemies, yet he liked me and I felt he considered me of little consequence as an opponent’. During the period of the Baku Commune - the time when the Bolsheviks controlled Baku - these meetings did not cease. ‘I was able to see Shaumyan and his assistant Dzhaparidze almost every day’, recalled MacDonnell, ‘sometimes in the commissariat, sometimes in their apartments’.⁴³

MacDonnell’s thirteen year stay in Baku gave him the experience to become an active promoter of British foreign policy in the region. He established particularly strong and confidential relations with the leaders of the Dashnak Party, and relying on local Dashnaks he organized meeting between Dunsterville and Ter-Gazarov, a representative of the Armenian National Council. During the meeting Ter-Gazarov asked for British aid and stressed the need ‘to act immediately’ in the Caucasus. This British orientation towards the Dashnaks was not accidental. British politicians believed that it was the only political party in the South Caucasus that favoured policies that were in harmony with the interests of Great Britain. Although the Dashnaks like other parties feared the approach of the Ottoman Army towards Baku, they were perhaps the only party ready to accept uncritically the separation of Transcaucasia from Russia and its transition into the British sphere of influence. The attraction of the Dashnaks to British policy-makers was increased by the fact that, following the formation of the Baku Council of People’s Commissars, the elimination of the Armenian National Council had not been brought to an end and its supporters continued to control significant military forces.

British officials in the region also sought to establish strong relations with Right Socialist-Revolutionaries in Baku. In this regard, Dunsterville wrote:

I was now in touch with Baku by almost daily messengers and our friends the Social Revolutionaries seemed likely to be able to bring off shortly the coup-d’etat which was to throw out the Bolsheviks, establish a new form of government and invite British assistance.⁴⁴

The work among the Social Revolutionaries brought expected results, and secret-service information confirmed that ‘Baku socialists (SR) agreed on the arrival of the British Mission to the Caucasus’.⁴⁵ Thus in the spring of 1918, ‘the British Lion’ (Dunsterville) was preparing to jump from Anzeli to Baku.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

44. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, p. 182.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

2.3 The first period of relations between Azerbaijan Republic and Britain

The military-political events that took place in Transcaucasia and neighbouring regions at the end of 1917 and early 1918 created the internal conditions under which the formation of sovereign national states became inevitable. Torn by internal contradictions, the Transcaucasian Sejm announced its dissolution on 26 May 1918. The resolution stated that ‘owing to the differences which had developed between the peoples of Transcaucasia regarding the questions of war and peace, it was impossible for them to continue under one government’. Therefore, ‘...the Sejm recognizes the dissolution of Transcaucasia and lays down its powers’.⁴⁶ On the same day, at a meeting of the National Council of Georgia, the formation of an independent Georgian Republic was announced. The next day the independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan was proclaimed.

On 4 June 1918, in Batumi, a peace treaty was signed between the Ottoman Empire with each of the three Transcaucasia Republics (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia). According to Article IV of the treaty, Turkey was obliged to provide military assistance to the Musavat government of Azerbaijan.⁴⁷ Using the Article as a pretext, Turkish forces soon arrived in Ganja - the second biggest city of Azerbaijan - where local forces loyal to Musavat government joined the Turkish troops led by General Nuri Pasha.

The formation of a new Azerbaijan government dominated by the Musavat party marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of the Anglo-Azerbaijani relations by bringing them to a more formal state level. However, the peculiarity of this relationship and the complex international situation meant that it was always somewhat irregular and at least at first adversarial. The Musavat government, by concluding an alliance treaty with the Ottoman Empire, effectively determined its position in the armed confrontation between countries of the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. It thereby objectively entered into the ranks of hostile states to Great Britain. This situation lasted till the end of the First World War. Both governments actually had a common enemy in the Bolshevik government in Baku, although they had different goals in their struggle against it.

46. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle For Transcaucasia*, p. 120.

47. Gokay, *The Battle for Baku*, pp. 31-2.

The Musavat government fought for the capture of the largest city of Azerbaijan, Baku, thereby ensuring the 'territorial integrity' of the country. Britain sought regime change in Baku in order to obtain control over the oil producing areas.

At a time when Musavat forces conducted military operations with the Turkish army in order to capture territory under the control of the Baku Bolshevik government, British agents carried out subversive activities inside Baku in an attempt to control the city. In the early summer of 1918, a number of forces interested in overthrowing of the Soviet power began to consolidate in Baku. The chain of plots and revolts organized in Baku by SR forces, Alliance soldiers, Caspian officers, commanders of the aviation school and others were linked to a greater or lesser degree to MacDonnell. Without hiding this truth, MacDonnell frankly tells in the pages of his memoirs that 'the new policy of the British and French Government was to support the anti-Bolshevik forces which were rallying at various points on the outposts of the Russian Empire'.⁴⁸ MacDonnell attracted all counter-revolutionary elements, in particular the former tsar's officers, who numbered about 1,500 men in Baku by that time.⁴⁹

Despite his claim that 'the British Government had no intention of intervening in Russian domestic politics', a number of Russian officers and civilians became direct agents of the British Vice-Consul. A certain Marie Nicholaievna on MacDonnell's behalf 'organized a permanent communication service, which later acquired vital importance to me and my work'.⁵⁰ The Consul's visitors offered their own plans for fighting against the Bolsheviks, many of them expressing a wish to serve in British Army. MacDonnell sought to maintain the myth that he was politically neutral by encouraging his visitors to join other local militias and apply there their knowledge and experience. 'I explained that this was what Dunsterville had hoped to do. One and all treated the idea with contempt, and even one old Tsarist Colonel threatened to thrash me for the insult.'⁵¹

By the summer of 1918, there was in Baku a diverse but reasonably coherent anti-Soviet block that was closely associated with the British. A coup was planned for 12 June, and former tsarist

48. MacDonnell, *And Nothing Long*, p. 223.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 217-19.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

officers including General Y. Djunkovsky, Colonel Oryel, SR Kirichenko and others were involved in its organisation. The plot failed, and the Head of the Baku Soviet Shaumyan accused the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the Union of Front-Line Soldiers of organizing the plot. The Union of Front-Line Soldiers was dissolved and its members arrested. Vice Council MacDonnell was brought before the revolutionary tribunal, on which Shaumyan and Dzhaparidze sat, but denied knowing anything about the conspiracy.⁵² Many years later, MacDonnell wrote: ‘My role was only to subsidize this event’, and noted with regret that he had handed a large sum of money to Djunkovsky ‘in his favourite, nearly new and brown leather (pigskin) suitcase, which also disappeared, as did Mr. Djunkovsky’.⁵³

The archival documents reveal in more detail the fate of the vanished General, from which it appears that, after the failure of the coup in Baku, Djunkovsky arrived in Mashhad, where he secretly met Colonel Redl and passed him intelligence about the situation in Baku, Tashkent and Petrovsky (Mashhad had long been a major centre of British intelligence operations). Colonel Redl reported to the Chief of the General Staff that Djunkovsky had received 20 thousand roubles from Pike and 200 thousand roubles from MacDonnell in Baku. A telegram from the War Minister of Great Britain, on 12 June 1918, confirmed that the funds received by Djunkovsky in Baku had been allocated by the British War Cabinet.⁵⁴ The above mentioned archival documents not only confirm the fact of British involvement in the plot in Baku but also trace the path of Djunkovsky and his connection with military secret service of Great Britain.

The failure of the coup attempt on 12 June did not discourage continued covert British intervention in Baku. By using local agents, efforts were made to shape public opinion and prepare for the eventual entry of British troops into Baku. Considerable attention was paid to the Armenian nationalist Dashnaktsutyun party, whose position constantly changed from supporting armed uprising to expressing loyalty to the Soviet government.⁵⁵ MacDonnell, by expanding his contacts with various representatives of Armenian nationalist circles, aimed to gain access to important political figures, too.

52. Suny, *The Baku Commune*, p. 306.

53. MacDonnell, *And Nothing Long*, p. 236.

54. M. S. Khalafov, *Istoriya Gosudarstva i Prava Azerbaydzhanskoy SSR*, Baku, Izd-vo Akademii Nauk, 1964, pp. 143-44.

55. MacDonnell, *And Nothing Long*, pp. 112-13.

There was the Committee, - he writes, - calling itself the Armenian National Council, with which I could easily get in touch; but the only member I knew personally told me that the Council itself was against any direct intercourse with me. This would worsen their relationship with Bolsheviks, if Shaumyan learned that the Council was in direct touch with a British agent.⁵⁶

MacDonnell went on to note that his contact assured him that ‘they knew all that was going on and were using their influence in our cause’.⁵⁷

The British were in addition preparing to play yet another trump card at this time: the Cossack detachment of Colonel L. Bicherakhov, which was based in the north of Persia among other remnants of the tsarist army. His detachment consisted of 1,500 men. British commanders recruited Bicherakhov who agreed to follow its orders in return for a large sum of money. At a two-day meeting in Anzali, towards the end of June (27-28), Dunsterville and Bicherakhov discussed a program of action where they reached complete agreement on their plans for further joint action.⁵⁸ According to these plans, Bicherakhov was instructed to approach the Baku People's Commissars with a proposal to include his detachment with other Soviet troops protecting Baku from the Turks, so that his forces could at the appropriate time inflict a blow to the Bolsheviks from the rear. ‘Bicherakhov had decided to turn Bolshevik, as he saw no other way to getting a footing in the Caucasus’⁵⁹ - wrote Dunsterville.

At the session of the Baku Soviet on 15 June, Shaumyan assured deputies that after long consideration ‘we have received the impression that Bicherakhov makes his declarations honestly and sincerely’.⁶⁰ Agreeing to include Bicherakhov’s detachment in the Caucasian Red Army, the Bolsheviks planned to deploy his well-armed detachment on the outskirts to Baku. The logical explanation for the Bolsheviks’ decision is that the Red Army was very weak in Baku, and there were few armed forces in the North Caucasus to reinforce them, and prevent the occupation of Baku by the Turks. The Soviet government’s viewpoint was, however, expressed quite categorically in terms of economic interest: Baku must remain within the Russian Soviet Republic, as its oil fields were

56. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, p. 167.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Suny, *The Baku Commune*, pp. 290-91.

absolutely necessary for the economy of Russia. The Bolshevik government in Baku was ready to mount armed resistance to Turkish occupation, but due to military weakness it was forced to cooperate with unreliable allies such as Armenian national militia and the Cossacks of Colonel Bicherakhov, in spite of the fact that the latter's detachment was maintained and supported by the British command.⁶¹

The Soviet historiography maintains that the Bolsheviks knew about the relationship of Bicherakhov with the British, and for that reason the Baku Sovnarkom treated the statement of the tsarist colonel with great suspicion, and only accepted his proposal due to the 'difficult situation at the front'.⁶² By acknowledging this, Soviet historians avoided acknowledging the short-sightedness and recklessness of the Baku People's Commissars, which in spite of mistrust and fear let Bicherakhov take charge of the defence of the city. The cost of such frivolity was brutal. British sources quite frankly admit the role played by their relationship with Bicherakhov and in the implementation of British plans. 'Bicherakhov makes rather large financial demands, and the War Office asks' - wrote Dunsterville, 'if he is worth it. He certainly is. I do not consider his demands exorbitant, when you realize the task he is accomplishing and the fact that he alone can do it. We have no alternative'.⁶³

When analyzing sources on this whole subject, there is a clear discrepancy on the following fact. When accepting the support of Bicherakhov, Soviet historians maintain that the Baku Sovnarkom imposed a number of conditions, including that his place of arrival in Azerbaijan should not be Baku but Alyat some fifty kilometres to the south. But Dunsterville puts forward a different and more convincing version of events in his memoirs. The arrival of Bicherakhov's forces in Alyat was, Dunsterville wrote:

The product of negotiations with the British, who agreed that disembarking at Baku would put his force rather too much in the hands of the Bolsheviks, who might turn round on him at any moment; for these reasons, he decided to land at Alyat, a small port 30 miles south of Baku ... By this way, he thought to keep his force separate from the Bolsheviks⁶⁴

The discrepancy is significant, not least because it raises the question of whether Bicherakhov was simply a British 'puppet', or was perhaps trying to play off the two sides to advance his own interests.

61. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, pp. 167-68.

62. Mints, *Borba za Pobedu*, p. 77.

63. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, p. 122.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

Whatever the answer, what is known is that in July 1918, Bicherakhov sailed to Alyat with twelve hundred men, a few British officers, and four armoured cars. Shaumyan and Korganov were there to greet him.⁶⁵ The arrival of Bicherakhov in Azerbaijan undoubtedly created the conditions for the British to invade and overthrow the Baku Sovnarkom. The five British officers who arrived with the detachment were without doubt active in the days and weeks that followed in a range of covert operations in Azerbaijan.

‘Late that night’ - MacDonnell writes,

There was a tap at my bedroom window and an unknown hand thrust a piece of paper into my hand... It was the cipher message from Baghdad ... The message was hurriedly written, ... informed me that Colonel Clutterbuck and a force under Bicherakhov hoped to land in Aliat ... Further, that I was fully authorized to take all measures to prevent oilfields from falling into enemy hands and, if necessary, to associate myself and the funds at my disposal with certain schemes for destroying oilfields and evicting the Bolsheviks.⁶⁶

The British Consul had high hopes with the arrival of Bicherakhov of implementing the plans to establish British control over Baku. He believed that the presence of the Russian colonel ‘... would do more in our favour, than any number of the tsar's officers who are underground’.⁶⁷ The use of published archival documents from the ‘Central State Archive of the October Revolution of the Azerbaijan SSR’, provides new evidence about the relationship of the British with Bicherakhov. The study of the documents reveals that negotiations between the British command and Bicherakhov in Persia began early in 1918 and not in April as previously claimed in most accounts by Western historians.⁶⁸ This brings into doubt claims that British policy was inspired by fears over the threat posed by Turkish troops to Britain’s colonial possessions in the East and, more specifically, that the main task of Bicherakhov’ detachment was to defend Baku from advancing Turkish troops. A report of Dunsterville to the War Office on 23 March 1918 also supports this interpretation. The report says that Bicherakhov would move on 30 March from Qazvin to Anzali, and then on to Baku and Petrovsk. Dunsterville planned to accompany Bicherakhov, reporting that ‘my assistance to him would be as valuable as his to me’.⁶⁹

65. Suny, *The Baku Commune*, p. 291.

66. MacDonell, *And Nothing Long*, pp. 231-32.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-37.

68. *Tsentrāl'nyy Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Oktyabr'skoy Revolyutsii AzerbSSR*, Vol. 13, Baku, Azerneshr, 1949, pp. 210-11.

69. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, p. 78.

There was another reason behind these efforts to establish control in Baku as soon as possible.

‘Assessing the general situation’ - a telegram to the Minister of War on 9 June 1918, reports:

It would be desirable to permit Bicherakhov to head to Baku, taking a British mission with a suitable escort under the command of Dunsterville himself or a specially dedicated officer for this purpose who will agree with Armenians in Baku, and through them with the Bolsheviks to organise support in the case of Turkish offensive against Baku, and will do everything possible *for the preparation of control over oil fields and the purchase of the Caspian Fleet* (italics added).⁷⁰

Dunsterville discussed his objectives with Bicherakhov over the preparations for forcing the government in Baku to issue an invitation to Britain to send forces to the town. ‘Bicherakhov sailed for Alyat’, - reported the General – ‘I went to see him off at Enzeli and we mutually agreed on plans which give hope of success...., and once he is established it will be a case of the tail wagging the dog’.⁷¹

By mid-July the situation at the Baku front was becoming more threatening, as the Caucasian Islamic Army approached the outskirts of the town. There was also a further consolidation of forces in Baku that sought to overthrow the Soviet government. The Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and Dashnaks led agitation among the masses demanding that the British be invited in, assuring the city's population that they would protect the city from the Caucasian Islamic Army and provide food for its inhabitants. This agitation was successful among some strata of the city's population who feared the arrival of the Turks. The Baku Sovnarkom by contrast appealed to the working people of the city to stand under the banner of the Soviets and ‘with a weapon in hands’ defend the socialist revolution. New units of Soviet troops were created in Baku. The Bolsheviks could count on the help of Soviet Russia, and the government in Moscow agreed to strengthen the Caspian flotilla by sending new vessels. In June, 4 armoured cars, 13 airplanes, weapons and live ammunition were also delivered from Moscow.⁷²

While providing financial and military assistance to the Baku Council of People's Commissars, the Soviet government also took diplomatic steps, dispatching notes of protest to the governments of Germany and Turkey. Soviet protests about the offense of Turkish troops on Baku, and reference to

70. Cited in Yusifzade, *Pervaya Azerbaydzhanskaya Respublika*, p. 60.

71. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, p. 186.

72. Mints, *Borba za Pobedu*, p. 301.

violation of the terms of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, forced the German government to once again falsely assert its non-involvement. Yet the German government was itself worried that a Turkish assault on Baku would lead to the destruction of the oil-fields. This fear was confirmed in a letter sent from Istanbul by the Musavat Party leader Rasulzade who wrote:

The Germans are against the advancement of the Turkish troops into the heart of the Caucasus; they especially demand that the Turkish government stop the march to Baku and are afraid that the Bolsheviks while retreating will ... destroy the oil reserves.⁷³

Germany's interests in developments in Baku in some ways coincided with the interests of Soviet Russia, since both countries aimed to prevent the Turks' entry into the city. In exchange for German assistance in preserving Bolshevik rule in Baku, the Soviet government in Moscow was ready to make concessions over the question of Georgia's independence, and ensure the supply of Baku oil to Germany. German officials in Berlin entered into negotiations with the Russian ambassador there promising to keep the Turks out of Baku as long as the oil continued to flow. Yet the diplomatic, military, and material interventions of Soviet Russia were no longer able to make significant changes to the position of the Soviet Baku. With each passing day the situation grew tenser in the city. On 17 July 1918, at a meeting of the Baku Soviet, the question was raised loudly about inviting in the British to defend the city. The Bolsheviks resisted. Appealing to the population of Baku, the newspaper *Izvestiya Bakinskogo Soveta* wrote:

We have information that the British capitalists concluded a close alliance with local counter-revolutionaries. They want to overthrow our government and replace it with the power of the British and the bourgeoisie. Mass meetings, organized by the Bolsheviks, were held across the city. The Baku Sovnarkom called for 'an end to treacherous propaganda for the British'.⁷⁴

The Resolution calling for the invitation of the British to defend Baku did not pass at the Soviet meeting, and the local Bolshevik leadership continued to defend their position of leading a struggle against the Turks with the help of Soviet Russia. The news from Baku alarmed London. According to documents from Baghdad, after consultations and discussions of MacDonnell's reports about the situation in Baku, Major-General H.D. Fanshawe agreed to allow Dunsterville to send one battalion to Anzali for subsequent dispatch to Baku. A field battery and all the armoured vehicles were to follow the

73. Ibid., p. 308.

74. *Izvestiya Bakinskogo Soveta*, No. 145, 24 July 1918, p.1.

battalion at the first opportunity.⁷⁵ The British military command in the region showed considerable anxiety and was ready should the Bolsheviks in Baku become more secure to abandon diplomacy and start direct intervention. On 23 July, the British War Office in a telegram sent to Baghdad, once again expressed dissatisfaction with the slowness of Dunsterville, fearing that the situation could slip out of the hands of the British. In this regard, it ordered British forces to send a mission to Krasnovodsk. In order to inform the British command about the situation in Baku MacDonnell secretly travelled to Anzali.

Meanwhile, the retreat of the Bolsheviks troops, the worsening situation at the front, and the acute food shortage in the city weakened the position of the Bolsheviks in Baku. Confusion gripped many deputies in the Soviet, and a significant part of the left SRs grouped with the Mensheviks and the Dashnaks. There was no unanimity in the ranks of Baku workers and soldiers either. Individual committees of the Caspian Flotilla, for example, were in favour of inviting the British to Baku. In such a difficult situation, on 25 July an emergency meeting of the Baku Soviet was held together with the district councils and the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Caucasus Army. The Bolsheviks insisted on the removal from the agenda of the question of inviting in British forces to defend Baku.⁷⁶ Following a heated debate a proposal by the Socialist-Revolutionaries was passed calling both for the establishment of a coalition government and for the invitation to be extended to Britain to send forces to defend Baku against the Turks.

The Bolshevik faction refused to participate in the new government but remained in the Soviet to continue the fight. They also took other measures to hold on to power. By now, according to the scenario sketched out by the British command it had become necessary to inflict a decisive blow. The first blow came from Bicherakhov. After the retreat of Soviet troops to Bilajari on 30 July, he withdrew his troops from their positions leaving a large gap in the front line. After that, troops numbering 3,000 men headed by Armenian Dashnaks refused to return to the front. The martial law imposed by the Bolsheviks became hopeless. On 31 July, the Baku Sovnarkom at an extraordinary meeting resigned.⁷⁷

75. F.J. Moberly, *History of the Great War: The Campaign in Mesopotamia 1918-18*, London, H.M. Stationary Office, Vol. 4, 1927, p. 198.

76. Suny, *The Baku Commune*, pp. 310-12.

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 318-19.

After the fall of the Baku Commune, authority in Baku passed to the block of the SRs, Mensheviks and Dashnaks who together formed a new government known as the ‘Central Caspian Dictatorship’. As soon as the new government took the reins of government into their own hands, ‘according to the above mentioned plan’ they appealed to the British for help. The invitation was accepted, and on 4 August, a British detachment numbering 600 men, under the command of Colonel Stokes landed in Baku port.⁷⁸ Two days later, Dunsterville issued a declaration stating that British troops had come to Azerbaijan ‘by agreement with the Allied powers and at the request of the people of Baku’.⁷⁹ adding that the aim of the arriving troops was to fight against the Turks and the Germans. On 17 August, in the afternoon, the steamer ‘President Kruger’ with General Dunsterville on board arrived in Baku, where he was met by representatives of the Central Caspian Dictatorship. Welcoming the arrival of the British, the representative of Central Caspian Dictatorship, declared: ‘We and you have common goals and we have also a common enemy ...’. The British captain Teague Jones responded to him by saying that ‘we are pleased to meet you in Baku’.⁸⁰

On 18 August, accompanied by Colonels Duncan and Hosking, Dunsterville went to the district of Bibi-Heybet to inspect positions taken by the units of North Staffordshire Regiment. He carried out inspections of military positions and met with the commanders of the local troops and the members of the Armenian National Council. He later wrote that the representatives of Central Caspian Dictatorship ‘expressed to me their deep disappointment at the small number of troops we had sent, to which I replied that I had stated from the first that I could not pledge myself to numbers’.⁸¹ The arrival of a small number of British detachment disappointed many, although the expectations of local people were unrealistic, as Firuz Kazemzadeh notes:

They had given free play of their imaginations and hopes, and they had dreamt of hundreds of ships, bringing in whole armies of well disciplined Englishmen, ready to chase the Turks and maybe even the Bolsheviks, right out of Transcaucasia.⁸²

78. C. H. Ellis, *The Transcaspian Episode, 1918-1919*, London, Hutchison, 1963, pp. 34-6.

79. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 104.

80. *Trudy Azerbaydzhanskogo Filiala IML*, Vol. 13, Baku, Azerneshr, 1949, p. 61.

81. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, p. 231.

82. F. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle For Transcaucasia*, p. 140.

The British, in turn, were surprised by the situation which they found in Baku. Instead of fighting, Russian and Armenian soldiers carried out endless political rallies and the troops were completely disorganized.

Dunsterville's relationships with the Central Caspian Dictatorship did not develop. He believed that he should be entrusted with the command of the entire defence, but some members of the Central Caspian Dictatorship did not trust 'the British imperialists', while others sought to command themselves. Under such circumstances, Dunsterville expressed his intention to leave, which further worsened relations with the Dictatorship. The Turks, meanwhile, had occupied much of the Absheron peninsula and surrounded the city of Baku. At this time, the Soviet government in Moscow made another attempt to exert diplomatic influence on the course of events around Baku. As a result of lengthy negotiations, a secret agreement, additional to the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, was signed between Russia and Germany on 27 August, 1918. According to the agreement, Soviet Russia agreed to pay six billion German marks of reparations; to recognize Georgia's independence, and also to supply Germany with one quarter of all Baku's oil production.⁸³ Germany's attempt to hide the additional agreement from its allies caused considerable anger in Turkey. When news leaked out about the conclusion of a German-Soviet agreement over Baku there was uproar in the Turkish press. On 26 August 1918, the Caucasian Islamic Army launched an attack on an area north of Bilajari which was occupied by the British, and captured it. On 31 August, the British had to leave Binagadi.

On 1 September, convinced of the impossibility of holding Baku, General Dunsterville informed members of the Central Caspian Dictatorship about his intention to evacuate his troops. His statement - 'the further defence of Baku is a waste of time and life'⁸⁴ - provoked protests. On 12 September, a defector informed the British that the Turks were preparing for a general offensive and two days later, after prolonged shelling, Turkish troops attacked the most fortified part of the defensive line. Dunsterville ordered his troops to withdraw. On 14 September, after nightfall, British forces boarded

83. V. Vourkoutiotis, *Making Common Cause: German-Soviet Secret Relations, 1919-22*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 14.

84. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, p. 275.

waiting ships to sail from Baku back to Anzali which they had left a few weeks earlier. Soon the members of the Central Caspian Dictatorship followed them. The first stage of the British intervention in Azerbaijan ended with the withdrawal of Dunsterville's detachment from Baku.

In western literature, the withdrawal of the British troops from Baku in September 1918 is often ascribed to military-economic reasons: a severe food crisis in Baku; the problems involved in financing a small number of British troops; the incompetence of the Central Caspian Dictatorship's troops, etc. Yet the previous pages have shown that political and diplomatic factors were as important. With the fall of Soviet power and the short-lived occupation of Baku by British troops, the city of oil became the object of a more open struggle between the forces of the two main imperialistic groups: the allies and the German-Turkish block. And at this critical moment the balance of power did not seem to be in Britain's favour given the debacle of Dunsterville's rapid retreat from Baku. The British had underestimated the speed with which Turkish troops could advance towards Baku. The main task intended for Dunsterville had always been to organise local forces to defend the city from the Turks and establish it as a basis for the fight against Soviet Russia. But the chaotic character of the local anti-Bolshevik coalition and the shortage of time meant that Dunsterville's mission was overtaken by events.

Chapter 3

The military-political and financial-economic aspects of British intervention in Azerbaijan

This chapter examines British intervention in Azerbaijan during the critical period before and after the Mudros Armistice of October 1918, focusing in particular on how developments took place ‘on the ground’ (a subject which has received little attention in the historiography). This requires a detailed look at interactions between British forces in the region and local politicians in Baku, as well as an understanding of the broad thrust of British policy developed in London. The chapter will also examine how and why the British military authorities in Baku essentially became the rulers of Azerbaijan within two months of arriving in the city, following the defeat of the Turks, unlike the situation a few months earlier when Dunsterville and other British commanders tried to keep their distance from local politics. The British forces led by General Thomson, who returned to Baku in November 1918, by contrast effectively controlled military, economic, political, administrative power in the region.

This lengthy chapter is divided into a number of sections, each of which examines a particular theme, rather than providing a purely chronological account of developments. The first section looks at Baku under Turkish occupation between September and November 1918 and is followed by a discussion of the arrival of the British in the city following the Mudros Armistice. The next section then reviews the relationship between local British commanders and the local Azerbaijani government in the first few weeks of the occupation. There then follows a discussion of the position of the urban workers in Baku during the first few weeks of British occupation (including the growth of working class militancy), which is followed by a discussion of how the British attitude towards the Azerbaijani government began to change as time went by. The next section then reviews more broadly how developments in Azerbaijan related to the broader British policy of intervention in Russia (including the problems local commanders faced in supporting Denikin’s Volunteer Army) which was seen by the Azerbaijani government as a threat to any thought of Azerbaijani independence. The chapter continues with a discussion of how local British commanders tried to use tension between Armenians and Azerbaijanis to weaken the

independence ambitions of both republics while at the same time seeking to ensure that public order was maintained. The final section then examines how and why British forces were withdrawn from Azerbaijan in the late summer of 1919.

The chapter shows that although British policy in Azerbaijan was driven by two main ambitions - to control Baku oil and ensure the Bolsheviks did not seize control - policy was often confused and uncertain. This made life very difficult for British military commanders in Azerbaijan, who behaved very much like colonial administrators, but never really expected to remain long in the country. They were reluctant to allow any moves that might confirm Azerbaijan as an independent state, believing that such decisions should be left to the Paris Peace Conference, but they had to respond to changing policy in London which increasingly viewed an independent Transcaucasia as a potential buffer zone against Soviet Russia. The local Azerbaijani government for its part resented the presence of the British but also realised that British soldiers provided the best guarantee of their own survival.

3.1 Baku under Turkish occupation

On 15 September 1918 following the retreat of Dunsterforce, Baku was occupied by the Turkish led Caucasus Islamic army. In the next three days the troops engaged in massive looting, and massacred many of the local mostly non-Muslim population. Nobody knows exactly how many people died in Baku (according to various sources the figure was probably around 30 thousand people out of which some 9,000 were Armenians).¹ It is significant to note that the 'democratic leaders of the republic', as members of the new government later described themselves, did not conceal these horrors but even justified its perpetrators. They declared the capture of Baku by Turkish invaders as a *conditio sine qua non* - in effect saying there was no alternative - while their representatives in Istanbul stated that from now on 'their country Azerbaijan would flourish under the protection of the Turkish sultan'.²

1. M.A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908-1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 255.

2. A.B. Kadishev, *Interventsiya i Grazhdanskaya Voina v Zakavkaz'ye*, Moscow, Voenizdat SSSR, 1960, p. 153.

Government ministers headed by Fatali Khan Khoyski first arrived in Baku on 17 September, to find a half-burnt city as a gift from their Turkish allies. The creation of the Azerbaijani government in Baku nevertheless marked an important victory for the young republic which had in effect triumphed over its old enemy: the Baku Soviet. Yet while the power nominally passed into the hands of Khoyski's government, the real governor was Nuri Pasha, commander of the Turkish troops in the Caucasus. Since the Turkish government did not recognize the Republic of Azerbaijan as a sovereign state, it did not even appoint its diplomatic representative there, unlike in neighbouring Armenia and Georgia.³

The goals pursued by the Turkish command in the South Caucasus at this time were both clear and logical. The first was to seize control over the huge territories on the Caucasus and effectively restore the borders of the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century. The second was to open direct access to the Muslim provinces of the former Russian empire (including cities such as Baku and Elizavetpol) and with it access to the North Caucasus. The third objective was to reach the Caspian Sea and thereby threaten the positions of its main enemy in the Middle East - Great Britain - from several sides. And the final objective was to gain control over Baku oil, along with the communication network of the region, including the main strategic road connecting the Black and Caspian Seas (that is between Baku and Batumi). Turkey's short-term tactical success actually paved the way for a serious strategic failure: defeat in the World War. The campaign of the Turkish units under the command of Nuri Pasha was a gamble. The deployment of forces towards Baku meant that troops were moved from other critical fronts, including Syria and Mesopotamia, which proved to be one of the reasons for the rapid collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the autumn of 1918 and the subsequent conclusion of the Mudros truce with the Entente countries.

After moving to Baku, the Musavat government headed by Khoyski declared the abolition of all the previous measures of Baku Soviet of People's Commissars: the eight-hour working day, workers' control of production, the decree of on land, etc. Musavatists also restored the old City Duma along with many other pre-revolutionary administrative institutions.⁴ The establishment of the authority of

3. T. Swietochowski, 'National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920', in R. G. Suny, (ed.), *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1983), pp. 209-38.

4. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 54.

the Azerbaijani government across all territory of republic did not though yet mean the achievement of its full sovereignty. A large presence of Turkish troops remained in Baku. Relations between the Musavat government and the Turkish military command were complex. Nuri Pasha sought to establish his control over the region, and heads of Turkish garrisons in various localities often ignored Azerbaijani officials and acted on their own. Such actions by the Turkish military authorities provoked a protest from the government of the republic. Khoyski subsequently complained to Nuri Pasha that dual power had emerged in many districts of Azerbaijan. 'In recent days, there have been an increasing number of cases of interference by Ottoman military officials in the internal affairs of Azerbaijan and even complete disregard for the Azerbaijani authorities'.⁵

During the First World War, Turkey's economy was in a poor state, not least because of the lack of oil, with the result that the Turkish government sought to control the Baku oil fields. One of the first orders of the Turkish command after the 'liberation of Baku' was to order the return to work of all industrial workers including in the oil fields.⁶ The financial adviser of the Turkish government, Hamid Bey, proposed a law forbidding the sale and lease of industries (which would in turn allow more effective control of the oil industry).⁷ Under these circumstances, the Azerbaijani government concluded a number of agreements with Turkey. According to an agreement of 16 September 1918, Azerbaijan was obliged to provide Turkey with oil, cotton, wool and other products (to the amount of 1 million lira).⁸ The Turkish command took measures to repair the Baku-Batumi oil pipeline in order to resume pumping oil products. At the same time, at least 23 tanker trains went every day from Baku via Batumi bound for Turkey and Germany. The delivery of oil from Azerbaijan helped to ease the crisis of the Turkish economy. As the Turkish historian Ahmed Rafik notes:

In those days oil-tankers were sent one after the other from Batumi to Istanbul. As a result of the massive import of Baku oil and kerosene, the price for them in Istanbul fell 10 times.⁹

5. Khoyski to Rasulzade, 31.7.1918, GAPPODAR, f. 277, op. 2, d. 7, l. 23.

6. F. Maksudov, I. Aliyev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya Demokraticheskaya Respublika*, Baku, Elm, 1998, p. 47.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

8. N. Maxwell, 'The Oil Issue in the Policy of Azerbaijan's Government in 1918-1920', *Caspian Crossroads*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1997; see also: <https://adr90.wordpress.com/2008/05/26/the-oil-issue-in-the-policy-of-azerbajians-government-in-1918-1920/#more-51>.

9. Maksudov, Aliyev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya*, p. 48.

The Republic of Azerbaijan had to ensure supplies for allied Turkish troops, which required considerable material resources. For this purpose, from 26 September to 5 November 1918, the government allocated 11 million roubles to the Turkish command.¹⁰ In total, after occupying Baku, the Ottomans acquired 30 million pood of crude oil, 40 million pood of crude petroleum, 9 million pood of machine oil, 11 million pood of oil, 1 million pood of half-product raw material, and 800 thousand pood of fuel products resources.¹¹ The Soviet historian A. Ratgauzer in assessing the presence of the Turks in Baku wrote:

The Turks did not make themselves popular. At first they were well received and the masses of the Moslem population, urban as well as rural, greeted them with certain affection. But the enthusiasm waned when the Ottoman command called a halt to the land reform, closed labour unions, suppressed socialist organizations, and in general enforced a policy which deprived the population of the social and political gains which it had made since 1917.¹²

3.2 The British arrival in Azerbaijan

Although the Turks were successful in invading Baku in September 1918, Turkish rule did not last long. Territorial loss, economic collapse and human suffering soon forced the collapse of the Turkish government in Constantinople with the resignation of the Grand Vizier (Prime Minister) Talaat Pasha, the Military Vizier (War Minister) Enver Pasha and the Minister of the Marine Jamal. On 19 October the new Turkish government appealed to the Entente with a request for a truce. On 27 October peace talks began with representatives of the Entente at the port of Mudros on the Greek island of Lemnos. The commander of the royal Mediterranean fleet, Vice-Admiral G. Calthorpe, led the negotiations on the British side. On 30 October, on board the battleship 'Agamemnon', the capitulation of Turkey was agreed. According to the Mudros Armistice, Turkey would 'raise no objection to the occupation of Baku by the Allies'.¹³

The Turkish War Minister, in a communication with the chairman of the Azerbaijani Council of Ministers (Prime Minister) Khoyski, was forced to admit that 'under an agreement with Britain, which

10. Ibid.

11. J. Pomiankowski, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Çöküşü: 1914-1918 I Dünya Savaşı*, İstanbul, Kayhan, 1990, p. 335.

12. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, p. 205; see also, Ratgauzer, *Revolutsiya i Grazhdanskaya Voyna*, p. 205.

13. C. Price, *The Rebirth of Turkey*, New York, Thomas Seltzer, 1923, p. 106.

is one of the Entente powers ... we undertook not to prevent the British from occupying Baku, which is why we have given the withdrawal order to the commanders of our troops in the Caucasus'.¹⁴

The Chairman of the Azerbaijan government tried to protest against the transfer of Baku to Great Britain from the Turks but received an answer that any resistance was pointless. In this way, the defeat of Germany and Turkey paved the way for the deployment of Allied troops on the territory of the former Russian Empire. The prospects opened under this agreement for the countries of the Entente also alarmed the government of Soviet Russia. Speaking at the Sixth All-Russian Extraordinary Congress of Soviets, Lenin declared that 'now Britain has a treaty with the Turks which give her Baku so that she may strangle us by depriving us of raw materials'.¹⁵

On the day after the signing of the Mudros Armistice, the War Office of the British Government sent orders to the British command in Mesopotamia about the occupation of Baku. The mission was entrusted to General Thomson, 'the commander of the British expeditionary force in North Persia, [who] ordered the last Ottoman contingents out of Baku on 14 November 1918'.¹⁶ The interest of Great Britain in the Transcaucasia region was not only due to a desire to establish British influence in the region for strategic and economic reasons, but also to support the struggle against Soviet Russia, as part of the wider allied intervention that had begun in 1918. The British withdrawal from Baku in September 1918 had only been a tactical step. Lord Curzon was right when noting that 'His Majesty's Government attach more importance to securing temporary control of Baku and permanent control of the Caspian.....'.¹⁷

Once the departure of the Turkish army was confirmed, at the start of November 1918, the National Council of Azerbaijan made an appeal to all citizens of the country noting that:

Turkish troops came to our country to save our region from the destructive forces and anarchy; they have fulfilled their obligations, and now, according to the terms of the armistice with the Allies, they will be replaced by Allied forces.¹⁸

14. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 31.

15. *Lenin's Collected Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 135-64.

16. S. Kedourie, *Turkey: Identity, Democracy, Politics*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 46.

17. Extract from Teague-Jones' privately published *Adventures with Turkmen, Tatars and Bolsheviks* (mid-1920s) in the Sinclair papers, cited in S. Kelly 'How Far West?: Lord Curzon's Transcaucasian (Mis) Adventure and the Defence of British India, 1918-23', *The International History Review*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2013, pp. 274-93.

18. Yusifzade, *Pervaya Azerbaydzhanskaya Respublika*, p. 78.

With the departure of the Turkish army, the hidden protectorate of Turkey over the Republic of Azerbaijan came to an end. The government of Azerbaijan led by Fatali Khan Khoyski again faced the problem of finding a new patron to defend its status while also seeking independence. Azerbaijani leaders pointed to the US President Woodrow Wilson's 'fourteen points' on the self-determination of peoples. 'Before addressing themselves to the mighty Powers of Europe', - wrote members of Azerbaijani government in a telegram to the president of the USA on November 10, - 'the people and the Government of Azerbaijan turn to your humane person, as the defender of small oppressed peoples, and hope that you will help them with your words and deeds in regard to the recognition of the Azerbaijan Republic as an independent state'.¹⁹

However, the negotiations about the future fate of the Republic, described by Mammad Amin Rasulzade (leader of the First Azerbaijan Republic) as 'a newborn child of the Turkish policy', had to be conducted not with the Americans but with the British (who were well-aware about the ties of Azerbaijan government's leaders with the defeated Turks). No one knew how the British command would react to the idea of the independence of the Azerbaijan Republic. While still in Anzali, the commander of the British forces Major-General Thomson tried to assure Russian's allies that 'he stood for the re-establishment of Russia within its borders of 1914 and did not recognize the newly established states'. The task of the Allies was, as he stated, 'on behalf of the Russian government to restore the former viceregency in the Caucasus'.²⁰ It was clear that the British interventionists did not intend to protect the 'independence' of Azerbaijan but rather use it in the struggle against Bolshevism. General Thomson himself spoke openly about this: 'Bolshevism was invented by the Germans for the destruction of Russia. Our duty is to help local peoples in the elimination of Bolshevism'.²¹

Before the arrival of Thomson's forces in Azerbaijan, British troops at the end of October moved first into the Lankaran district near the Persian border, where in the words of the newspaper *Kaspiy* they studied in detail 'not only the geography of an unfamiliar area but also the morals of the local population'.²²

19. F. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 163.

20. GAAR, f. 894, op. 10, d. 98, l. 8.

21. *Azerbaijan*, 18 December 1918, p. 2.

22. *Kaspiy*, 29 October 1918, p. 2.

In mid-November 1918, there was an exchange of telegrams between Khoyski and Thomson which set 17 November as the date for allied troops to enter Baku. In the telegram, Khoyski expressed the confidence of the Azerbaijani government that ‘this entry will not serve as a violation of the independence of Azerbaijan and its territorial integrity’. But Thomson made it clear that although British troops would cooperate with the local authorities, they would not officially recognize the Azerbaijani government.²³ For this reason, when members of the Azerbaijani delegation went to the Anzali and asked Thomson to recognize the independence of Azerbaijan before entering its territory, they were not surprised to hear from his lips the following rebuke:

According to our sources, there is no republic formed in accordance with the wishes of Azerbaijani people, but only a government formed by intrigues of Turkish commanders which has no support among the people. If you say the opposite is the case, we will verify everything locally and take an appropriate decision.²⁴

The Azerbaijani government, recognised by nobody and being internally divided and weak, had to accept Thomson’s position while maintaining its ‘independence’ and hoping for eventual recognition by the world powers. Thomson’s position was in accord with the views of many political leaders both in Britain and Europe, as well as both Bolshevik and White Russians, who regarded the separation of Azerbaijan from Russia as temporary.²⁵

In the meantime, the Azerbaijani government sought to persuade the public that the arrival of the British was agreed to by the Azerbaijani government. The official government newspaper *Azerbaijan* printed the telegrams between Khoyski and General Thomson. One of these telegrams sent by Khoyski read:

To His Excellency, the commander of British forces in Anzali, General Thomson. The Azerbaijani government does not object to the entry of Allied forces into Baku on 17 November under Your Excellency's command. The Government is quite confident that it will not serve to violate Azerbaijan's independence and its territorial integrity. The Government believes that the details of mutual relations with the commander of Allied forces ... will be established through personal negotiations. The Government is taking necessary measures to receive and accommodate the incoming detachment.²⁶

23. *Azerbaijan*, 18 November 1918, p. 1.

24. J. Hasanli, ‘Azerbaijan at the Crossroads of Epochs: The First Attempt to Join the Free World (1917-1920)’, *Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2009, p. 130.

25. A. L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1992, p. 93.

26. Maksudov, Aliyev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya*, p. 111.

In response General Thomson wired: ‘To the President of Azerbaijan Republic. I am grateful for your warm telegram and quite sure that by collaborating in this way our mutual relations will remain quite satisfactory’. He also demanded the immediate withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from Baku and stated that he ‘himself would be the Governor-General of Baku’.²⁷ The Musavat government hid from the people the truth about Thomson's demand for the withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from Baku, noting only that ‘the Military Minister will move to Ganja in order to begin the formation of the army peacefully and methodically’.²⁸

Before leaving for Baku, General Thomson expressing the common position of the Allied powers declared that ‘Baku with its oil fields will be occupied while the rest of the country remains under the control of the Azerbaijani government and its troops’. He noted that Bicherakhov’s Cossack detachment would enter Baku but that Armenian troops would not be allowed to enter the capital. Thomson also noted that ‘Azerbaijan would not be excluded from a discussion on the principle of national self-determination at the Paris Peace Conference’.²⁹ By inviting Bicherakhov to arrive in Baku together with him, Thomson aimed to relieve the anxiety of city’s Christian population, who did not support the local Musavat government. It was for this reason that the General personally wrote a letter to Bicherakhov on 2 November 1918 stating that:

British troops will land in Baku under my command with allied representatives and will carry out the terms of the proclamation which has been issued to Russia. That is, we step on to Russian soil to restore order and support the Government now forming in Ufa. When our work is done we will withdraw and no inch of territory will remain in our hands....I therefore ask you to come and join me in reoccupying Baku and restoring order..³⁰

3.3 British troops in Azerbaijan and mutual relations between the military command and the local government

The defeat of Germany in the imperialist war had a major impact on the political situation in Baku. Turkish hegemony over the Musavat government was replaced by the hegemony of the British. Instead of

27. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 142.

28. Guliyev, *Borba Kommunisticheskoy Partii*, p. 83.

29. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 33.

30. Thomson to Bicherikov, Anzali, 2 November 1918, FO 371/3667.

a military-feudal dictator, Nuri Pasha, a military representative of the British Empire, General Thomson, became the dominant political figure. On the day of the arrival of the British troops, the government of the Republic appealed to the population of Baku:

As a result of negotiations an agreement reached between the Azerbaijani Government and General Thomson who is the commander of the Allied forces in Anzali... on the morning of 17 November (namely today), a detachment of Allied forces led by General Thomson will march into the capital of Azerbaijan. This entry of the Allied troops is not a hostile act violating the independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. All state and public institutions will function normally as before. The Government has taken all measures to maintain law and order in the city. The government calls on all citizens to preserve peace and order, as well as to receive the Allied forces in a friendly manner.³¹

The original date for the re-occupation of Baku of 10 November was in fact postponed for a week as Turkish troops withdrew from Azerbaijan and final negotiations took place with the so-called Azerbaijan Government.³² On 17 November 1918, part of the 39th Infantry Brigade, consisting of one thousand British and eight hundred Indian troops headed by Thomson, landed in Baku. He was accompanied by representatives of the French and American military missions. Thomson was met by the Azerbaijan Government's Interior Minister Behbud Khan Javanshir and the acting Foreign Minister Adil Khan Ziatkhanov. Representatives from the city's municipal self-government, owners of oil facilities and the Russian National Council also attended the meeting. Thomson was greeted by Ziatkhanov with the words that:

The government of the Republic of Azerbaijan has authorized me as a Minister of Foreign Affairs to welcome in your person the representative of friendly European Powers..... The young Azerbaijan nation which endured such shocks in the First World War has only just become independent on a way to legal state life. Our people is full of real hope that its elder brothers, the people of Europe, who possess a centuries-old civilization, will not refuse... to admit it into their own cultural family.³³

In his speech, General Thomson said:

As the commander of the British, French and American Allied forces, I inform you that Baku is being occupied by British troops on behalf of the Allies. I am accompanied by representatives of France and the United States, and we are here with the full knowledge and acquiescence of the New Russian Government. Turkey has agreed to this occupation in the Armistice signed by them.³⁴

31. M.A. Rasulzadə, *Azerbaijan Cumhuriyyəti*, Baku, Elm, 1990, p. 45.

32. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 29.

33. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 165.

34. T. Behbudov, 'British Police in Baku', *Vision of Azerbaijan*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2006, pp. 49-50.

His words symbolised the occupation of Azerbaijan as part of a ‘common allied’ effort. The acting mayor T.H. Mehdiyev then welcomed Thomson on behalf of the municipal government, and expressed his confidence that:

The city’s population will be very pleased by your arrival in our long-suffering city. Baku, a place of global importance, has been torn apart by disorder and only recently due to the efforts of the Azerbaijani government have things have become calm ... I believe that with the arrival of the army under the command of your Excellency Baku will develop further. Once again I welcome you on behalf of whole population of Baku city.³⁵

Two broad themes emerge in the documents describing the ceremonial meeting. The representatives of the Azerbaijan government emphasised their country’s statehood, sovereignty and independence. And Thomson’s words reflected the mentality and position of the allied powers in omitting any definite commitment to support for Azerbaijani statehood (something which inevitably alarmed the Azerbaijan government). Thomson was indeed so concerned by the words ‘the independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan’ contained in the appeal of the Azerbaijani government to the Baku population on the day of the arrival of Allied Forces, that he demanded publication of a statement noting that the allies did not recognise the independence of Azerbaijan. The editor of newspaper *Azerbaijan* which had published the appeal subsequently printed a statement that: ‘In yesterday's issue of our newspaper a report appeared ... that the allied governments had conceded the independence of Azerbaijan Republic. This report was incorrect as such recognition did not take place’.³⁶

The behaviour of General Thomson was at first both arrogant and aggressive. In his stringent regulations, Thomson declared that ‘every Bolshevik or any individual inciting strikes or agitation is subject to immediate severe punishment’. Thomson's order also set down that ‘the assembly of more than 10 persons in any kind of meetings for whatever purposes is prohibited without written permission issued by me’. On 17 November he signed a declaration announcing that Baku city together with its industrial areas would be occupied by British troops.³⁷ It is clear that the prime goal of Thomson,

35. *Azerbaijan*, 18 November 1918, p. 1.

36. *Azerbaijan*, 19 November 1918, p. 1.

37. Behbudov, ‘British Police in Baku’, pp. 50-2.

as representative of Britain, was to maintain order and ensure production in the oil fields of Baku. Over the following days, the British military administration behaved in Baku as was customary in any of its colonies or semi-colonies. On 19 November, on the order of General Thomson, martial law was imposed in Baku until the time when ‘the civilian authorities are strong enough to release troops from responsibility for maintaining public order’.³⁸ The authorities tried to assert their control by demanding the surrender of all firearms and live ammunition. They also banned public meetings and strikes by the local population.

The introduction of martial law in Baku meant that the British command effectively took into its own hands all administrative power in the province. All judicial and executive power was concentrated in the hands of General Thomson. In order to ensure the implementation of all of these policies, a British police force was established under the command of Colonel F. Cockerel, who also exercised command over the local police.³⁹

On the day following his appointment, Cockerel gave an order dismissing several police officers appointed by the Musavat government. The British had their own police and there were ‘English Bobbi’ at all crossroads of Baku. Thomson even ordered the opening of courses for teaching the Russian language to British policemen.⁴⁰ Several days later, Thomson announced that corporal punishment and in some cases the death penalty would be imposed on any member of the local population ‘who commits or attempts to commit a hostile or harmful act against British or Allied forces’. Two gallows were hastily erected in one of the squares in the centre of Baku. The population reacted with such anger that in two weeks the order was cancelled.⁴¹ Although the British authorities imposed rules that would not have been tolerated back in Britain, British forces behaved in a comparatively civilised manner in contrast to their Turkish predecessors.

It is significant that in his early proclamations Thomson stated that the Allied forces were ‘on the territory of Russia’ and had come to the Caucasus for ‘the establishment of security on this Russian

38. Maksudov, Aliyev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya*, p.57.

39. Ye. A. Tokarzhevsky, *Iz Istorii Inostrannoy Interventsii i Grazhdanskoy Voyny*, Baku, Izdatel'stvo Akad. Nauk AzSSR, 1957, p. 232.

40. *Zhizn Natsional'nostey*, 6 April 1919, p. 1.

41. *Borba za Pobedu Sovetskoyvlasti v Azerbaydzhane 1918–1920: Dokumenty i Materialy*, Baku, Izdatel'stvo Akad. Nauk AzSSR 1967. pp. 27-8.

territory between the Black and Caspian seas'. Indeed when Thomson first arrived in Baku he ordered the removal of the flag of the Azerbaijan Republic which hung on the pier with the flags of Britain, the USA, France, and Italy.⁴² Two days later, Thomson issued another proclamation which infuriated a section of the Muslim population of the city:

The victorious army of the Entente, before returning home, will fulfil its duty to the selfless Russian people who have sacrificed so much for general victory. In pursuance of this duty, it will cleanse the enemy from the Russian Caucasus and has to that end come here in agreement with the [White] Russian government in Ufa.⁴³

British intervention forces in Azerbaijan also behaved in typically imperialist fashion as representatives of a 'higher race'. The Musavat official newspaper, *Azerbaijan*, noted that 'the Muslim population was considered by the British to be forest dwellers'. Members of the Musavat party in parliament gave speeches comparing the situation in Transcaucasia with the situation in British colonies. One deputy noted that 'Having been freed from the yoke of tsarism, now we risk becoming the fortress of European imperialism'.⁴⁴

It is also striking that, as noted earlier, Bicherakhov's detachment entered Baku with Thomson. Upon arrival in Baku, he was met by representatives of the Russian National Committee who declared that the city formed part of the territory of Russia. Thomson himself presumably authorised the dropping of leaflets from the air stating that:

By Command of the Chief of Russian naval and land forces in the Caucasus [Bicherakhov] ... 'our great Russia' is being restored with the help of its Allies to its old borders ... During the return of Russian and Allied troops to Baku I call on all honest citizens to forget all party and political hostility, and unite together all the forces to bring benefit and blessing to our dear Russia.⁴⁵

Thomson in his speeches avoided using the word 'Azerbaijan', preferring to replace it with the word 'Caucasus'. Persistent assertions by the British commander that the main concern of the Allies was the preservation of the Russian Empire as 'one and indivisible' were unlikely to have been sincere, but rather reflected a tactical manoeuvre by Britain to keep the governments of the Transcaucasian republics in a state

42. Tokarzhevsky, *Iz Istorii Inostrannoy*, p. 232.

43. Rasulzade, *Azerbaijan Cumhuriyyeti*, p. 45.

44. S. Sarkis. *Bor'ba za Vlast, Opyt Istorii Bakinskoy Organizatsii AKP(b) za 1918-1920*, Baku, Istpart. Otdel TSK i BK AKP (b) 1930, p. 19.

45. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 34.

of tension. Although there were divisions among politicians in London, most notably between Curzon at the Foreign Office and Churchill at the War Office, British policy was in the main fuelled by a desire both to prevent the restoration of the Russian Empire and to destroy the Bolsheviks' power on Russian territory.

It was for this reason that the attitude of British officials towards Bicherakhov was complex. In the first stage of the British occupation of Baku, Thomson and other British commanders were keen to make use of Cossack troops, although the real power remained in the hands of the British command. In the months that followed, though, Thomson increasingly began to change his tone. The British authorities in Baku were not unduly worried about the aggressively nationalistic ideology of Musavat. The Party's anti-Russian and anti-Bolshevik nationalist policy in some ways dovetailed neatly with the objectives of British foreign policy in Transcaucasia which - despite opposition from Churchill in London - increasingly aimed at a complete separation of Transcaucasia from Bolshevik Russia.

3.4 The position of the urban workers in Baku

The situation of the workers following the departure of the Turks and the arrival of the British did not change for the better. It was very beneficial for both the British military authorities and the Musavat government to preserve many features established under quasi-feudal Turkish rule. But while that rule had only lasted for two months, it helped to create the conditions for the rise of a new labour movement in Baku: hunger; the complete disenfranchisement of the workers; brutal economic exploitation. All these had grown worse in the weeks before allied troops returned to Baku under Thomson's command. The British military authorities could not ignore these problems. During the first two months of British rule in Baku, it registered the losses suffered by the entire population of Baku during the two months of Turkish rule, offering hope that the allies might provide some form of compensation. It was a policy designed to raise the authority of the allies in general, and Britain in particular, among the population of Baku. Thomson also held out the promise of a general improvement in economic conditions, declaring in December 1918 that he would seek to 'to secure the financial situation of the workers' and 'take measures to deliver cheap boots to the workers of Baku which cannot produce enough shoes now'.⁴⁶

46. Sarkis, *Bor'ba za Vlast*, p. 25.

Thomson's words were a response to a wave of strikes among Baku workers which were in part a protest against British rule. In the two months of Turkish rule, from September to November, the Musavat government annulled all the labour laws that had been introduced under the Baku Commune. General Thomson soon after his arrival banned all kinds of meetings and strikes of workers under the threat of 'immediate severe punishment'. Yet despite this, strikes took place at the end of November and throughout December 1918 (at the start of December, for example, strikes broke out at the tobacco factory of Mirza-Bekyants, the mechanical workshop of the Caspian-Black Sea Society, and at a number of other enterprises).⁴⁷ In the course of December 1918, a political centre of Baku workers – the Central Working Conference (CWC) - was recreated. The British military authorities did not dare to close the conference, fearing conflict, but on the night of 21 December it arrested the CWC's leaders. In response, the Central Working Conference declared a strike and issued a number of demands, including the immediate release of arrested comrades, complete freedom of assembly and speech, and the inviolability of the individual and organizations.⁴⁸

At 10am on 24 December 1918, whistles of factories and ships broke the silence of Baku, announcing the beginning of a general strike. Water transport workers - along with workers in almost all oil facilities, post offices, telegraph offices, railways, banks, and power stations - stopped work. The scale and coherence of the strike reflected the hostile attitude of the population not only toward the British command but also to the very idea of a foreign presence in Baku. Thomson himself acknowledged the scale and impact of the strike, later writing that:

Fourteen ringleaders were arrested in one night ... The next day came a demand for the instant release of these leaders or the alternative of a General Strike. The strike began punctually at 10 a.m. and was most impressive in its efficiency. Everything stopped. Shops closed. Telegraphs, telephone, trams, railways, police, oil fields, electric light, all became dead.⁴⁹

Although the strike ended without leading to any direct political results it certainly influenced the subsequent policy and behaviour of the British command. The strike convinced the British command of the potential value of creating a strong Azerbaijani government that could help to curb

47. 'Bulletins of Labour Statistics (March 1919)' indicates six strikes for economic reasons in which about 850 workers participated.

48. *Izvestiya Bak. Statkomiteta*, No. 1, 25 December 1918.

49. B. Pearce & W.M. Thomson, 'Introduction to Transcaucasia 1918-19', *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1997, p. 89.

working class militancy. Therefore, at the end of December 1918, Thomson proclaimed a new coalition government headed by Khoyski 'as the only local legitimate authority'.⁵⁰ On 28 December, the government newspaper published a proclamation of Thomson declaring that:

In view of the formation of a coalition Azerbaijani Government under the presidency of F. Kh. Khoyski, I hereby declare that Allied Command shall accord full support to the said Government as the only legal local power within the limits of Azerbaijan.⁵¹

A month later, when the Commander of the Allied Forces in Transcaucasia General Milne visited Baku, he confirmed Thomson's words by announcing that:

The British government recognizes the Azerbaijani government as the only legitimate authority in this country, and consequently this government will receive the full support of the Allied Command.⁵²

And, in spite of the fact that it was just a 'proclamation' of the British general, and not of the British government, it had a large positive resonance in Azerbaijani political and social circles. Undoubtedly, the publication of this statement increased greatly the authority of the Musavat government.

Meanwhile, at the end of 1918, the situation in Baku was complicated by the presence of Bicherakhov's detachment, which had effectively submitted to the command of Denikin's White Volunteer Army that controlled large swathes of territory in south Russia. Since the Volunteer Army could not operate in Baku, given the presence of allied forces, it sought instead to turn the city into a recruiting centre. Whole units were formed there and transported north to join the battle with the Bolsheviks, although some men stayed on in the city. The underground presence of White troops in Baku was no secret either to the Azerbaijani government or the British military command, creating fears that Bicherakhov himself might seek to mount a coup to take control of the city. In January 1919, White forces created a so-called 'Caucasian-Caspian government', headed by Bicherakhov, which had the objective of overthrowing the legitimate government. This development was known both to the Azerbaijani government and the British military authorities, who managed to persuade Bicherakhov to leave Baku for London, under the pretext that he was to be given an award by the monarch.⁵³

50. Dz. Gasanli, *Russkaya Revolyutsiya i Azerbaydzhan: Trudnyy Put' k Nezavisimosti (1917-1920)*, Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Flinta, 2011, p. 292.

51. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 167.

52. Ibid.

53. R.G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918-1919*, Vol. 1, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, p. 369.

Bicherakhov was replaced by General Przhevalsky, who received an ultimatum to withdraw his troops within 24 hours.⁵⁴ Denikin himself recognised that British interest in Baku and its oil fields meant that any attempt by White forces to secure control of the city would lead to conflict with London, with the result that the expulsion of the White Guard officers and emissaries of the Volunteer Army eventually took place without undue incident.

The command of the Volunteer Army was forced at least for a time to give up the dream of a 'Russian Baku'. An intelligence report by a secret agent of the Volunteer Army noted ruefully that 'the maintenance and promotion of separatism by Britain among ethnic groups of Transcaucasia is at present an undoubted fact'.⁵⁵ It is difficult to assume that the expulsion of Russian Whites was dictated by the exceptional attention of the British command to the demands and concerns of the Azerbaijani government. It was, rather, that on this issue the interests of the Azerbaijani government and the British command coincided. By possessing Baku, Britain aimed to establish its dominance in the Caspian Sea, which was a key strategic objective for the British government. The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of Soviet Russia, Georgy Chicherin, rightly noted that the 'occupation of Baku gave the British the chance to make use of the benefits of this port, and they did not need any more their original base of Anzali'.⁵⁶

On 29 November 1918, the British military command in Baku declared that all merchant ships of the Caspian fleet and their crews would temporarily be placed at the disposal of its military command (a new company the 'British Maritime Transport' company was founded to manage the fleet).⁵⁷ This development in theory made it possible for the British to provide military assistance more effectively to Denikin's army, as well as extending their control over the Caspian Sea, but the reality was more complex. The crews of the ships consisted mainly of Russians who viewed the British command with mistrust and suspicion. British commanders in turn did not trust the Russian crews, not least because of fear that working class militancy in Baku might spread to the sailors, a reasonable fear given

54. Ibid.

55. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 95.

56. *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, 14 May 1924, p. 2.

57. *Azerbaijan*, 25 December 1918, p. 2.

the level of industrial unrest. The growing influence of the Bolsheviks in Baku added to their anxiety (see below). It was partly for this reason that on 1 March 1919, the ships of the Caspian flotilla were disarmed.

3.5 The Opening of Parliament and changing of British policy in the region

It is worth now moving back a little in time to review more closely the attitude of the British military command to the local Azerbaijani government. In one of his early telegrams to the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, General Thomson hinted that he was sceptical about the legitimacy of Khoyski's government that had been created in June in Ganja by direct order of Nuri Pasha. Azerbaijani politicians recognised that they needed to drape 'a new-born Turkish political child' in democratic clothing in order to ease allied fears about the possible threat of Turkish nationalism. On 5 November 1918, before the British arrived in Baku, a proposal was made by a special government commission to convene a temporary republican parliament. But since there was no time to hold national elections, the only other real option was to convene the old National Council that had been disbanded in June 1918 by the Turks. On 16 November 1918, the Presidium of the Azerbaijani National Council gathered to work out the rules for establishing a new parliament.⁵⁸ Yet in reality no political changes would be allowed that were not approved by the British military authorities (something that the Musavatists were reluctant to say publicly for fear of popular reaction).

General Thomson wanted to see the establishment of an Azerbaijani government that would be obedient to his will and pursue policies beneficial to the interests of British imperialism. He therefore initially sought to organize in Baku a government that would represent all the national groups of the population. He hoped to find some kind of platform on which representatives of the three most important nationalities of Baku - the Tatars, Armenians and Russians - would at least temporarily work together. His goal in doing so was both to raise the prestige of the British command and to establish a more peaceful local environment that would allow for the consolidation of British influence. He put

58. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 147.

forward on behalf of the Allies a proposal for a coalition government which would make the detailed interference of the Allies in the internal affairs of Azerbaijan unnecessary. Thomson explained his intervention in local politics as an attempt to create an 'Azerbaijani Democratic Republic' in which hostile relations between the various nationalities would be eased (even if, as noted, his real concern was to create a more peaceful environment that would be more conducive to British imperial and strategic interests).⁵⁹

In order to achieve his goals, Thomson negotiated with representatives of the bourgeoisie, meeting with representatives of the Musavat party led by Khoyski, oil industrialists, members of the Armenian Dashnak party headed by Amaspyur, so-called 'socialists' and others. He also met with members of the Russian National Council, including M. Podshebyakin and E. Smirnov, who tried to present themselves as the true governors of the city.⁶⁰ Most Russian representatives refused from the very beginning to cooperate in the proposed coalition government. Kazemzadeh rightly noted that 'to the Russians Transcaucasia was a Russian province and they had no intention of recognizing the right of the Azerbaijanis to national self-determination'.⁶¹

Despite such difficulties, General Thomson eventually managed to hold a meeting attended by representatives from each of the main national groups. Representatives of the Russian National Council suggested that there should be recognition of Azerbaijan's future federal connection with Russia. Speaking on behalf of the Azerbaijanis (Tatars), Ahmed Agayev agreed that the focus of relations should be on Russia given the recent defeat of Turkey. His proposal predictably caused a huge dissatisfaction among the ruling class of the Musavat government, which immediately changed the composition of its delegation. The new delegation removed from the agenda any discussion of relations with Russia, and instead suggested that Russians in Azerbaijan should enter the new parliament which were planned to open in early December. The negotiations lasted about two weeks and ended in failure, as the Russian National Council refused to participate in the government and parliament, believing that to do so would authorize the separation of Azerbaijan from Russia.

59. Guliyev, *Borba Kommunisticheskoy Partii*, p. 92.

60. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 144.

61. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 166.

Meanwhile, on 19 November 1918, the National Council adopted the law ‘on the formation of the Azerbaijani Parliament’, which included a preamble stating that ‘Azerbaijan is not populated only by Turks. Therefore, the Azerbaijan National Parliament should be represented by all nationalities living in it’.⁶² The Council appealed to the Armenian and Russian National Councils to support the election of national representatives to Parliament. The Armenians refused citing the fact that they were not authorized to represent the interests of all Armenian people. The Russian Council declared that it could neither recognize the independence of Azerbaijan nor the sovereignty of its parliament. The Azerbaijan Council then compromised by saying that it did not require immediate recognition of the sovereignty of Azerbaijan, and that the question of Azerbaijani statehood should be resolved at the forthcoming international peace conference (that is the conference which eventually convened in Paris).⁶³ In an effort to ensure that Parliament included representatives of all social and political spectrums, the National Council invited all the main political parties to work within it. However, the Cadets and the Mensheviks still refused, given their commitment to a ‘one and indivisible Russia’. The Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRs) favoured the self-determination of Azerbaijan within the framework of single federated Russia but continued to cooperate with the new authorities asking for five seats in the new parliament.

Parliament was due to convene on 3 December 1918, but its opening was delayed. Many contemporary Azerbaijani historians claim that this was for technical reasons, but it was in fact the British authorities who prevented the opening of Parliament as planned. The Chief of Staff of the British troops, Colonel S. Stokes, sent an urgent letter to Major Rowlandson on 3 December stating that the opening of Parliament should not take place until the formal recognition of the coalition government by the Allied command. The letter stated:

I ask you to pass the following to chairman of the Council of Ministers Khan Khoyski: According to the order of Commander of the Allied Forces opening of Parliament in Baku should not take place before the coalition government is recognised publicly by the Allied Command.⁶⁴

When this formal recognition was given, Parliament opened on 7 December under the protection of

62. *Adres-Kalendar Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki*, 1920, cited in Yusifzade, *Pervaya Azerbaydzhanskaya Respublika*, p. 91.

63. Maksudov, Aliyev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya*, pp. 55-6.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

British armoured cars and policemen.⁶⁵ While the opening of Parliament was taking place, at the request of the British command, the Azerbaijani state flag was removed from the parliament building.

When Rasulzade was asked why the Musavatists agreed to remove the flag, he replied:

Well, what is the matter with the flag that has been removed from the parliament? It hangs nevertheless; only in the hall but in the street it is not visible.⁶⁶

The parliament was not in any sense an elected democratic institution. Its members were effectively appointed by the Musavat government from representatives of the ruling classes. The parliament included 43 landlords, 15 petroleum industrialists, 12 leading merchants, 8 ministers of various religious cults and a number of representatives from the bourgeois-landlord and petty-bourgeois intelligentsia.⁶⁷ The chairman of the parliament was Ali Merdan bey Topchubashov, the spokesperson for the interests of the bourgeoisie, and Hasan Bey Agayev, the deputy chairman, who represented the Ganja khans and landowners. The composition of the parliament was set at 120 people, but in practice all the members were seldom present, while some did not appear at all at any sessions. It was indeed eventually decided to impose a fine of 200 roubles on any deputy who was absent for a day. The fine was soon increased to 600 roubles.⁶⁸

On 22 January 1919, a delegation of the Azerbaijan government met General G.F. Milne who had arrived in Baku as the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in Transcaucasia. On this occasion, the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan prepared a special statement declaring that:

Statesmanship, political tact and respect for people's rights on the part of Great Britain ... [provide] a positive safeguard of the people's rights of Azerbaijan at international peace conference.⁶⁹

The words were little more than an example of oriental flattery. It is true that later that day Milne met with Prime Minister Khoyski and confirmed that 'the British government recognizes the Azerbaijan government and would continue to offer help and support'.⁷⁰ Yet the British continued in

65. Guliyev, *Borba Kommunisticheskoy Partii*, p. 93.

66. *Zarya Vostoka*, 6 July 1923, p. 3.

67. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, Vol. 1, p. 161.

68. *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, 18 July 1938, p. 2.

69. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 84.

70. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 167.

the following weeks to interfere in the internal affairs of the Azerbaijan Republic. So for example, on 28 January 1919, the Commissioner of the British military police Colonel G. Cockerel demanded that the Minister of Internal Affairs should consult with him about the appointment of police officers and that 'all sorts of changes in the composition or designation of police officers should be passed through his office'.⁷¹ In response, the Minister of Internal Affairs sent a letter to the Chairman of the Ministers Council noting that '... The Police Commissioner of the Allied powers has been appointed as a head of all Baku district police'. Before long, the deployment of police officials was effectively carried out by the office of the allied Police Commissioner. Complaints about the situation to members of the Azerbaijani government did not produced any real changes.⁷²

By the middle of April 1919, all the oil and fishing industries, along with most factories and the railway network, were at the disposal of the British command. The newspaper *Zhizn Natsional'nostey* noted on 6 April 1919 that:

Azerbaijan is governed uncontrolled by the British. This is what the anti-popular treacherous step of the Musavat government led to. Even the Minister of Foreign Affairs of this government was forced to acknowledge in February 1919 that the presence of the British Governor-General in Baku 'creates a dual power and undermines the sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan'.⁷³

The Musavatian minister was in fact deeply mistaken when he spoke about dual power, since the real power in Azerbaijan was held by the British. The Musavat government was a formal presence that shielded British colonial policy behind a screen, effectively a puppet that concealed from the population the real distribution of power. But this situation largely suited propertied interests among the Azerbaijani elite, who recognised that any popular revolution would be still more threatening to their interests.

71. Guliyev, *Borba Kommunisticheskoy Partii*, p. 90.

72. GAAR, f. 894, op. 10, d. 98, l. 10.

73. *Zhizn Natsional'nostey*, 6 April 1919, p. 1.

3.6 British attitudes towards relations between the Azerbaijani government, Soviet Russia and White Guards

3.6.1 White Guards

The position of the British government in the Caucasus could never be secure without the overthrow of Soviet power in Russia. Following the end of First World War, Britain relied on the White counter-revolutionary forces to achieve this objective, including General Denikin's Volunteer Army in south Russia. The British government sent ammunition, weapons and various military equipments to Denikin through Baku. In order to help him, British military commanders also formed a Muslim corps in Ganja, to fight against Soviet power in the North Caucasus. There were also proposals to create air bases on the territory of Azerbaijan. To this end, British aviation officers were dispatched to inspect potential aeronautical fields.⁷⁴

But Denikin was not ready to countenance the separation of Transcaucasia from Russia. The British government in London and British officials and soldiers in the region therefore had to play a kind of double game. They had to avoid making too clear their reluctance to countenance the reintegration of Azerbaijan into a greater Russia, and prevent White incursions into the Transcaucasia, while at the same time supporting Denikin in the struggle against the Bolsheviks. By simultaneously helping both Denikin and the national governments in Transcaucasia, British policy sought to make use of the antagonism between them, a policy that the Government in London freely acknowledged.

Lloyd George later declared that:

There is no use in concealing the fact that we are helping the anti-Bolshevik forces of Russia against the Bolsheviks ... This makes it all the more necessary at the present time to secure from these anti-Bolshevik governments.... definite guarantees that their victory will not be used to re-establish a reactionary Czarist regime in Russia.⁷⁵

British policy, in short, wanted to see the defeat of Bolshevism in Russia but did not want it to lead to the recreation of the Old Russian Empire.

74. Sarkis, *Bor'ba za Vlast*, p. 22.

75. Lloyd George, *The Truth About The Peace Treaties*, Vol. 1, p. 380.

Azerbaijani leaders obviously looked askance at White leaders like Denikin who refused to recognise the creation of any new state formations on the territory of the former empire. Indeed, relations with the Volunteer Army, which had numerous detachments on the northern borders of Azerbaijan, were often close to confrontation. But the difficult military position at the front meant that the leadership of the Volunteer Army had to be cautious in dealing with the Musavat government in Azerbaijan in order to have a secure rear. This was clearly stated at the personal meeting of Denikin with the diplomatic representative of Azerbaijan in the Kuban, Shafi Rustambekov, which was organized by the British military mission at Yekaterinodar on 1 June 1919. ‘You can assure your government that I have no aggressive intentions against Azerbaijan. I am only interested in the struggle against the Bolsheviks’ said the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of South Russia.⁷⁶

The British General Briggs who organized this meeting proposed to establish diplomatic missions to help eliminate any differences. He assured Rustambekov that:

General Denikin did not, does not and will not take any aggressive steps against Azerbaijan ... that Azerbaijan should establish more friendly relations with the Volunteer Army, which fights against the Bolsheviks [who are] the common enemy of the whole culture. At the same time, Azerbaijan should be grateful to General Denikin because ... he protects Azerbaijan from the invasion of the Bolsheviks.⁷⁷

Yet in spite of the above mentioned facts, Denikin was still an ardent supporter of the restoration of ‘one and indivisible Russia’, and sought to extend his authority in Transcaucasia. In the spring of 1919, his troops had already approached the northern borders of Azerbaijan, causing deep resentment and alarm among the members of Azerbaijani government. In June, Nasib bey Usubbeyov sent a telegram to Denikin in which he demanded Denikin’s forces leave Dagestan within five days.⁷⁸ The Georgian government similarly expressed its objections to the British Command about the actions of Volunteer Army. Yet even the intervention of the British achieved nothing as the leadership of the Volunteer Army refused to leave Dagestan.⁷⁹

76. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 66.

77. GAAR, f.970, op. 1, d. 89, l. 9-10.

78. Balayev, *Azerbaydzhanskoye Natsional'no-Osvoboditel'noye Dvizheniye*, p. 45.

79. GAAR, f. 970, op. 1, d. 166, l. 2.

At the beginning of July, the head of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, Topchubashov, met the head of the British delegation Sir Louis Mallet. He told Mallet that the Volunteer Army instead of fighting against Bolsheviks was using the weapons they had received from Britain against the local population in the north Caucasus, and that they would soon encroach into the territory of Azerbaijan. Mallet responded that 'Denikin would not dare to violate an order prescribed to him; therefore there is no real danger for Georgia and Azerbaijan'.⁸⁰ Such words did not reassure the Azerbaijani government. In order to combat Denikin's threat, the government took a range of measures, including the formation of a Committee of National Defence and a public appeal to the Azerbaijani people to fight against White forces should it become necessary. There was a wave of protests in the country expressing support for the actions of the government. The Azerbaijani government also came forward with the idea of uniting the joint forces of the three Transcaucasian republics to protect them against invasion by White forces. The Dashnak government in Armenia rejected the proposal in favour of an alliance with Denikin.⁸¹ The Georgian government supported the initiative of Azerbaijan. On 16 June 1919, an agreement was signed between the Georgia and Azerbaijan in the presence of the representatives of Georgia and the entire Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan.⁸²

The British government responded with some ambivalence to the whole issue. It supported Denikin's White Army in their struggle with the Bolsheviks, but when it seemed that White forces might be planning an invasion of Azerbaijan, British attitudes changed dramatically (reports of corruption and inefficiency in the Volunteer Army also damaged Denikin's reputation in London). Denikin was forced to stop preparations for any invasion of Azerbaijan. Careful analysis of British policy in Transcaucasia, and particularly in Azerbaijan, reveals a certain duality and confusion. This was partly a response to the changing situation on the ground. Yet it should also be noted that the direction of Britain's policy in Transcaucasia was subject to some division. One group of British political leaders - above all Winston Churchill at the War Office - was focused on the task of destroying Bolshevism in Russia at any cost

80. GAAR, f. 970, op. 1, d. 142. l. 19, cited in A. Isgenderli, *Realities of Azerbaijan: 1917-1920*, USA, Xlibris Corporation, 2011, p. 184.

81. A. Marshall, *The Caucasus Under Soviet Rule*, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 120.

82. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, Vol. 1, pp. 381-82.

(even at the cost of making concessions to Denikin over Transcaucasia). Another group of political and military leaders, including most members of the Eastern Committee, saw the revival of the Russian Empire even in a non-Soviet form as a deeply unattractive prospect given its potential impact on the security of the British Empire. The dilemma was neatly expressed by the *Daily Herald* which noted that ‘our rulers are facing a dilemma now: as capitalists they want to destroy the Soviets, but as imperialists they do not want to recover the Russian empire in her former strength and scale’.⁸³

Given the hatred of Bolshevism among policy-makers in London, there was a certain readiness to accept the rise of nationalism and the demand for nation states in Transcaucasia, even though it could eventually limit British influence in the region. Lord Curzon at the Foreign Office strongly supported the creation of ‘buffer states’ in Transcaucasia, which he believed could help to prevent the spread of Bolshevism southwards towards Persia, though he was also confident that Britain would be well-placed to dominate these new regimes. The Prime Minister Lloyd George agreed that ‘there can be no dispute about our duty to help those little or new states...’.⁸⁴ Both men believed that supporting emerging nation states in the region was necessary to prevent invasion by the Bolshevik armies.⁸⁵ The facts suggest that senior figures in the British government who supported the creation of independent states in Transcaucasia did so above all because they thought such a policy was in Britain’s interest (rather than through any commitment to self-determination). There was therefore in the relationship between Azerbaijan and Britain a certain mutual interest and interdependence.

It is also worth pointing out that the government of Azerbaijan, under British pressure, was forced to negotiate with Denikin and to sign a preliminary agreement with him in September 1919 (presumably in an attempt to regulate relations between the two sides). The agreement provided for the opening of a regular mail, telegraph and radio message between Rostov and Baku, including the restoration of railway and water communications.⁸⁶ The Volunteer Army undertook to withdraw its troops from Dagestan, which was to become a neutral zone, while the Azerbaijani government began

83. *Daily Herald*, 17 February 1920, cited in Yusifzade, *Pervaya Azerbaydzhanskaya Respublika*, p. 96.

84. Lloyd George, *The Truth About The Peace Treaties*, Vol. 1, pp. 381-82.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

86. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 66.

to prepare trade and financial agreements with the Armed Forces of South Russia designed to provide material assistance from Baku. The threat of the invasion of the Volunteer Army nevertheless existed throughout 1919.

The elimination of the Mountain Republic in Dagestan, which had been the main buffer between Russia and Azerbaijan, along with the British decision to go on providing Denikin with material support, could not but alarm the leaders of Azerbaijan. The situation only began to change in late 1919 and early 1920 when the Red Army inflicted a series of serious defeats on Denikin, and the Azerbaijani government considered abandoning its neutrality in order to support the White forces with the assistance of military detachments.⁸⁷ The country's leadership in the event avoided such action, not least at a time when its forces were needed in the growing armed conflict with Armenia (see below).

3.6.2 Soviet Russia

The relationship between the Azerbaijani government and the new Soviet government, which had originally come to power in October 1917, before fighting a three-year civil war to secure its position, was largely shaped by British policy which opposed any links between the Baku government and the government in Moscow. A good example of the latter can be seen in the letter by a senior British military commander in Transcaucasia (Major-General Q.N. Cory), addressed to the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Nasib bey Usubbeyov (who became Prime Minister in April 1919, replacing F. Khoyski) in June 1919:

The Caucasian states must refrain from supplying the Bolshevik forces. Failure to comply with these terms will entail the end of the benevolent attitude of Great Britain and make it impossible for the Government of His Majesty to insist on stopping the advancement of General Denikin's armed forces in the north....⁸⁸

The Musavat government had in fact always taken a negative attitude towards Soviet Russia, reflecting both its nationalist and bourgeois composition. Soviet foreign policy for its part rejected the idea of recognising the governments of any new Transcaucasian states. It was not until the end of 1919 that the situation began to change, following the collapse of Denikin's forces. This time the initiative

87. *Bor'ba za Ustanovleniye i Uprochneniye Sovetskoy Vlasti v Dagestane 1917-1921: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov*, Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Akad. Nauk SSSR, 1958, pp. 362-64.

88. Tokarzhevsky, *Iz Istorii Inostrannoy*, p. 118.

came from the Soviet government. The Soviet government was afraid that the remnants of the Volunteer Army in Crimea would be able to retreat through Georgia and Azerbaijan, and sent a note to the various Transcaucasian republics proposing joint action. The note stated that:

The Soviet government considers it necessary to point out that the southern counterrevolution is a deadly enemy not only of the Russian Soviet Republic, but of all the small nations that were part of the former Russian Empire....., we appeal, before it is too late, to Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani people to start a fight against Denikin....⁸⁹

Before formulating its response, the government of Azerbaijan held a number of consultative meetings and negotiations. On 6 January 1920, the State Defence Committee, hearing the report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the proposal of the Soviet Government, adopted a resolution seeking 'to clarify the attitude of the British Command to the political situation of the last days and to use the influence of Britain in the interests of the republic'.⁹⁰ In adopting such a resolution, the Musavat government acknowledged that its decision would depend on the position of the British, even though, as will be seen later, British troops had by now been almost entirely withdrawn from Azerbaijan.

It is not difficult to guess the nature of the British consultations, even in the absence of documentary evidence, and it clearly informed the response of the Musavat government sent on 14 January 1920:

The struggle of the Soviet government against Denikin was an internal affair of the Russian people, and the government of Azerbaijan had no intention to interfere in domestic issues of Russia.⁹¹

This tactical refusal of the Azerbaijani government to cooperate in any way with the Soviet government was accompanied by an assurance of its readiness 'via negotiations to establish good-neighbourly relations between the Russian and Azerbaijani peoples based on the principle of sovereignty of both states'. The correspondence lasted until 7 March, but without having any real impact on the mutual relations between the two states, and from that time onwards the Soviet leadership increasingly focused on a policy of securing the incorporation of Azerbaijan into the Soviet state. Despite losing control over the area in 1918, the Soviet government had always continued to regard

89. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 180.

90. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-82.

91. Isgenderli, *Realities of Azerbaijan*, p. 197.

Transcaucasia as an integral part of Russia (echoing ironically the views of the White leaders). Yet unlike Denikin, the Bolsheviks were able to show some political flexibility, which when combined with their victory in the civil war meant that by 1921 all Transcaucasia was under Moscow's tight control.

3.7 Britain's position in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict

One of the biggest problems in Azerbaijan and all Transcaucasia during the period covered by this thesis was the issue of inter-ethnic tension. The problem became an important one for the British forces that arrived in Baku in November 1918 under the command of General Thomson. The government of Azerbaijan, responding to the formal claim that the presence of the British troops was intended to provide security to the peoples of the Caucasus, constantly informed the commanders of British forces about the actions of Armenian 'gangs'. British commanders did indeed make considerable effort to manage ethnic tensions, recognising that it was necessary to ensure order, but they did so largely through the trusted imperial principle of 'divide and rule'. In November 1918, Armenian Dashnak forces under leadership of Andranik captured the towns of Shusha and Zangezur. General Thomson in Baku was opposed to such a development on the grounds that all territorial differences 'between Armenia and Azerbaijan should be resolved at the future Peace Conference'.⁹² Following a statement issued by the Azerbaijani government on the atrocities of Andranik's gangs, Thomson sent a mixed English-Armenian-Muslim delegation to Karabakh, and authorised the sending of telegrams to Armenian leaders warning them against aggressive actions towards the Muslim population. On 1 December, in response to a letter from Prime Minister Khoiski about the atrocities committed by Andranik in the Jabrayil district, Thomson demanded from Andranik the suspension of military operations against the local Tatar population.⁹³ The Dashnaks undoubtedly sought to coordinate their actions with British, and on 19 December Andranik issued an appeal to all commanders and the whole Armenian population:

92. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, Vol. 1, p. 89.

93. *Ibid.*

Upon receipt of this order immediately suspend hostilities against the Tatars and Turks. The Allies require us immediately to cease all military action. The representatives of Allies came to me and reported that they had already decided to stop the war in Transcaucasia. ... All issues should be resolved at the peace congress. In a letter delivered to me by allied representatives, commander-in-chief of Allied forces General Thomson warns that from now on every act of hostility may badly affect decisions on the Armenian issue.⁹⁴

Early in December 1918, Thomson recognised the control of the Azerbaijan government over the Karabakh and Zangezur districts, and despite the objections of the Armenians, Khosrov Bey Sultanov was appointed governor of both districts.⁹⁵ The Armenian government and representatives of the so-called 'Armenian National Council of Karabakh and Zangezur' responded by sending letters and telegrams to British commanders protesting against the situation. At the same time, the Armenian government called Karabakh and Zangezur 'integral parts' of its territory, and proposed that the Armenian part of 'Zangezur and Karabakh' should be placed in a separate Governor-Generalship headed by a British officer who was not subordinate to the Azerbaijani government.⁹⁶ In response, Thomson declared:

The fact is that in Azerbaijan some Armenians are much disappointed that the British occupation is not an opportunity for revenge. They are reluctant to accept it that [the] peace conference is going to decide and not military forces.⁹⁷

The Armenians continued to seek to influence developments. During meetings with representatives of the Karabakh Armenians and the Armenian government, General Thomson and other senior British military representatives stated that:

The presence of the Azerbaijani administration and troops in Karabakh and Zangezur does not mean that in the future these territories should belong to Azerbaijan, since their final fate will be decided at the peace conference.⁹⁸

Such statements only intensified the intrigues of the Armenian separatists. In March 1919, letters were sent by the representatives of the Armenian National Council to the government of Armenia, and its commissioner in Karabakh and Zangezur, calling for the elimination of the Azerbaijani general-governorship and the creation of a single command for the whole region.⁹⁹ The British authorities

94. *Azerbaijan*, 20 December 1918, p. 2.

95. Hovannisian. *The Republic of Armenia*, Vol. 1, p. 162.

96. Y. Ratgauzer, *Borba za Sovetskiy Azerbaydzhan. K Istorii Aprelskogo Perevorota*, Baku, Istpart Otd, 1928, p. 56.

97. FO 371/3658, March 18, 1919, cited in Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920*, p. 143.

98. V. Mikaleyan, *Nagornyy Karabakh v 1918-1923, Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov*, Yerevan, Izdatel'stvo Akad. Nauk Armenii, 1992, pp. 62-3.

99. Darabadi, *Voyennyye Problemy Politicheskoy Istorii*, p. 189.

responded by emphasising that Sultanov was the sole supreme authority in Karabakh and Zangezur.¹⁰⁰

The measures taken by the British command were nevertheless of limited effectiveness in easing tensions. The documents in any case suggest that British policy was always ambiguous and perhaps duplicitous when dealing with the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Simultaneously with the active involvement of General Thomson in promoting a peaceful settlement of the conflict, reports were coming from the Governor General in Ganja to Baku claiming that although the British had become involved in seeking to resolve the Tatar-Armenian conflict, ‘Armenians continue to mobilize and obviously are supported by the British representatives’.¹⁰¹ The inconsistency of British policy towards Karabakh and Zangezur also showed itself later on when, contrary to previous assurances, the control of these regions was transferred to the Armenian National Council. The British also eventually tried to remove Sultanov from his post in an effort to strengthen the position of Armenians in Karabakh, Nakhchivan and Zangezur provinces. Such a policy by British commanders contributed not only to the numerous violent acts of Armenians in the region, but also to their unwillingness to accept the authority of the Musavat government. Some Armenians, hoping for the patronage and assistance of the British, sought to create ‘Armenian governance’ in the Nakhchivan province. From April 1919, numerous reports began to spread about the possible transition of the province to Armenian control. The representation of the Musavat government in Erevan (Armenia) raised the need for adopting decisive measures to suppress such illegal actions by Armenians, but after a number of joint Anglo-Armenian preparations, in mid May 1919, the Armenian Dashnak government appeared in the region apparently with British support.¹⁰²

Just two months later, more favourable conditions had emerged for the Musavat government to expel the Dashnaks from the region: the withdrawal of the British mission (at the end of June 1919); the organization of local self-defence troops by officers of the Azerbaijan army; the regrouping of the Armenian troops to the west of Armenia in response to the concentration of Turkish troops at its

100. Mikaleyan, *Nagornyy Karabakh*, p. 63.

101. A.A. Makovskiy, B.M. Radchenko, *Kaspiyskaya Krasnoznamennaya*, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1982, p. 84.

102. Peregiska Sekretariata TSK RKP (b), Vol. 8, Moscow, Politizdat, 1974, p. 657.

borders, etc. As a result of the successful military-financial and political steps taken by the Azerbaijani government, by August in 1919 law and order had largely been restored in the disputed regions. The decisive actions taken by the Musavat government helped to shape the political mood of the Armenian population of Karabakh and Zangezur and their leaders. This was reflected in the decisions taken by the Seventh Congress of Armenians of Karabakh and Zangezur, held on 15 August 1919, in Shusha. The congress adopted a resolution that:

The mountainous part of Karabakh, inhabited by Armenians, considers itself temporarily, until this issue is resolved at the Peace Conference, within the Republic of Azerbaijan.¹⁰³

The previous paragraphs have shown how British responses towards the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan reflected the core principle shaping its policy towards Transcaucasia during this time: that ‘not a single area should be independent enough to form a strong state’.¹⁰⁴ Making use of both military means and diplomatic methods, Great Britain aimed to foster tensions between the ‘independent republics’ while assuring them of its commitment to the principle of self-determination. The whole question was however complicated by its broader international implications. The strengthening position of Britain in Transcaucasia increasingly alarmed the United States government. Since Transcaucasia was occupied only by British troops, any formal recognition of the Transcaucasian republics would in effect mean sanctioning British authority over them, something that concerned elements in the US government. The American press mounted a campaign against the recognition of Transcaucasia republics, on the grounds that it would create new zone of British possessions from the Caucasus to Turkestan, and make it difficult for the USA to establish its influence in a region where American oil companies were already active. It was partly for this reason that the US government seized the opportunity to intervene in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.¹⁰⁵ (American public opinion had been greatly exercised by Turkish treatment of the Armenians during the war and there was a widespread belief that the US government should act to protect them following the end of the conflict).

103. Mikaleyan, *Nagornyy Karabakh*, pp. 323-27.

104. V.I. Aleksandrova, *Voyennyye Moryaki v Borbe za Vlast Sovetov v Azerbaydzhane i Prikaspii*, 1918-1920, Baku, Elm, 1971, p. 153.

105. Gasanli, *Russkaya Revolyutsiya i Azerbaydzhane*, pp. 446-48.

After the withdrawal of British troops from Azerbaijan (see below), the Chief of Staff of the US Army Colonel William Haskell arrived in the region in late August 1919. Prior to his arrival, in July 1919, he had been appointed ‘as the Allied High Commissioner for Armenia by the Council of Delegation Heads in Paris’.¹⁰⁶ Armenia once again assumed the role of a ‘launch pad’ for the penetration of a foreign state in Transcaucasia, as the Americans tried to oust the British. After visiting Erevan and Tiflis, on 28 August Haskell arrived in Baku.¹⁰⁷ His visit in the region was prompted by the start of active negotiations between the Allied powers and representatives of national states of Transcaucasia on the procedure for recognizing their independence at the peace conference in Paris (see Chapter 4).

After returning from Transcaucasia, Haskell outlined the challenges of the situation in the Caucasus, and declared that ‘no change can be achieved while all three republics are not combined in one administration’.¹⁰⁸ There is no doubt that the area of greatest interest to the United States was Azerbaijan and that Baku oil was at the epicentre of American interests in Transcaucasia. This also explains the first steps taken by the Americans in determining the fate of Nakhchivan province. Arguing that the creation of a ‘Modus Vivendi’ was one of the main tasks of his South Caucasian mission,¹⁰⁹ Colonel Haskell when still in Baku in September 1919 called for the establishment of a neutral zone including the Nakhchivan, Sharur and Daralageza regions to come under the authority of an American General Governorship (the areas were formally under the control of Azerbaijan).¹¹⁰ At a conference held on 29 August in Baku, all sides agreed on the establishment of the ‘neutral zone’, and the project was submitted on 27 September to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan. But in the face of opposition by local Azerbaijani self-defence forces, the US failed to gain a foothold in the Nakhchivan province, showing the limits even of the great powers to resolve the long-standing ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus.¹¹¹

106. G.S. Harris, N.B. Criss, *Studies in Atatürk's Turkey: The American Dimension*, Boston, Brill, 2009, p. 55.

107. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 277.

108. Situation in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, No. 22, 14 November, 1919 from Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939 (hereafter DBFP), First Series, Vol. 2, London: HMSO, 1948, pp. 321-22.

109. ‘Modus Vivendi’ - a Latin phrase that means "mode of living" or “way of life”. It is an agreement that allows conflicting parties to coexist in peace, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modus_vivendi

110. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p. 105.

111. Maksudov, Aliyev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya*, p. 80.

3.8 The British withdrawal from Baku

It was noted in the previous section that most British forces withdrew from Azerbaijan in the summer of 1919. This section examines the circumstances that led up to the decision to end the British occupation of a region where the Government in London believed that it had vital strategic interests.

The position of Britain in Transcaucasia seemed very strong at the end of hostilities in November 1918. Turkish forces had surrendered leaving a power vacuum that could be filled by the British. Control over the region also eased supply problems since material could be shipped to Batumi on the Black Sea and transported by road and rail across the region. British control of the two key ports on the western and eastern coasts of the Caspian Sea - Baku and Krasnovodsk - helped to secure Britain's strategic position in the region. Yet less than nine months later, the British military contingent hastily left Azerbaijan. Soviet historians usually interpret the withdrawal of British troops as a result of victories of the Red Army detachments further to the north, but the previous chapters have shown that following the arrival of the British in Transcaucasia, the Bolsheviks were unable to achieve any real military successes. So, what were the reasons for this unexpected retreat?

At the end of December 1918, the question of maintaining military forces in Middle East and Persia (including Transcaucasia) was discussed in London at various meetings of the Eastern Committee. During the discussions, a proposal was made for the withdrawal of troops from the region. The general opinion of the Committee was that these isolated detachments should immediately be withdrawn.¹¹² Lord Curzon disagreed, insisting on the need to preserve and strengthen the British presence in the region, expressing the view that such a policy of unrestrained evacuation would be 'immoral, feeble and disastrous'.¹¹³ Curzon's arguments were based on the principles that British influence in the region was in the interest of India and our Empire, that withdrawal would create dangers for India, and that British troops were needed in Persia and Transcaucasia to make sure the region remained well-disposed to Great Britain and to British policy. However, the Treasury was

112. H. Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase, 1919-1925: A Study in Post-War Diplomacy*, London, Constable & Co Ltd, 1934, pp. 131-32.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

opposed to allocating money for a large military mission with unclear objectives, while the Indian government also opposed the mission. As a result, an interim plan was adopted that provided for preservation of the British presence in the form of advisors and managers.¹¹⁴

On 7 January 1919, an interdepartmental meeting was held attended by heads of various government departments to review British policy in the areas round the Caspian Sea. During the meeting, Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, resolutely demanded the withdrawal of British troops from Azerbaijan and Persia (he was concerned about the impact of British military control in the area on Muslim opinion in India). Military representatives from the War Office took the opposite view. General Thwaites maintained that British forces in Transcaspia headed by General Malleson were needed to stop Bolshevik penetration into Persia, to protect Krasnovodsk, and to occupy the attention of the estimated 14,000 Bolsheviks who opposed him. But how long', asked Curzon, 'was this to continue?' 'That depended', replied Thwaites, 'on how long it would be necessary to hold Baku and the Caspian'. The circular arguments continued. The positions of the parties were clearly defined at the meeting: Montagu strongly supported the withdrawal of troops from Transcaucasia; Curzon strongly opposed such a move. As a result, the final decision was postponed pending a final report of General Milne, who was appointed commander of the newly formed Black Sea Army.¹¹⁵

It was for this reason that General Milne was dispatched to assess the situation on the ground. On 15 January 1919, Milne arrived and assumed command of all British forces in Transcaucasia and in the Trans-Caspian region. He was instructed to get acquainted with the current state of affairs and submit a full report, and only then would a decision be made about what actions were to be taken in the future. Milne arrived in Baku on 21 January, and two days later headed on to Ashgabat on the far side of the Caspian Sea. A few days later he submitted his report to London. At a meeting on 8 February, Curzon announced that the report did not contain any formal recommendations, but the Prime Minister David Lloyd-George had already decided to limit allocating further military resources to the Russian civil war.

114. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

115. B.C. Busch, *Mudros to Lausanne: Britain's Frontier in Western Asia, 1918-1923*, Albany NY, State University of New York Press, 1976, p. 128.

He therefore wired Thomson that he and his forces would be removed.¹¹⁶ Thomson responded angrily, pointing out that “such a decision awoke widespread fears among the local population and that it was called an ‘act of perfidy’”.¹¹⁷ The issue continued to rumble on over the next few months, reflecting the fact that policy in London was uncertain, and that ministers could not agree on how best to ensure the defence of British interests in Transcaucasia while keeping down the costs of maintaining a military presence there.

The British military command in Baku had meanwhile to face problems relating to the behaviour of its troops. The gradual decline of discipline in British units stationed in Baku led to endless clashes with local residents. According to a report compiled by an agent of Denikin's secret service in March 1919 ‘The discipline of British troops in Baku is declining significantly; [there are] frequent fights in the streets; the British soldiers had beaten up a Hindu officer in the street on 25 March’.¹¹⁸ A report compiled by Bolshevik agents a few weeks later noted that ‘promiscuity, drunkenness and mass disobedience [are] widespread among the British troops’ in Transcaucasia and Transcaspia.¹¹⁹ Complaints about the hooliganism of British troops in Baku was sent by a group of residents in April 1919 to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.¹²⁰

The Ministry was already receiving other complaints from residents. One complainant noted in despair that:

Nobody takes any notice of our complaints and the police do not want to interfere in businesses with the British. Soldiers behave so rudely ... and improperly that it is quite impossible to go out with woman when there is a British soldier. They walk drunk, stagger, do not stand aside on the sidewalk, grab women, make ambiguous gestures... are these really a cultured people?¹²¹

On 13 May 1919, the Ministry of Interior was forced to appeal to British military headquarters with a request to take measures to stop the violent and improper actions of some British officers ‘that make most painful impression on the population’.¹²² Eventually the dissatisfaction of local population with the British

116. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p. 96.

117. Swietochowski, *National Consciousness*, p. 156.

118. *Bor'ba za Pobedu*, p. 95.

119. *Perepiska Sekretariata TSK RKP (b) s Mestnymi Partijnymi Organizatsiyami, Sbornik Dokumentov*. Vol. 7, Moscow, Politizdat, 1972, p. 387.

120. *Bor'ba za Pobedu*, p. 97.

121. *Dokumenty ob Angliyskoy Interventsii*, Vol. 12, pp. 269-70.

122. Darabadi, *Voyennyye Problemy Politicheskoy Istorii*, p. 117.

soldiers' behaviour resulted in a mass demonstration demanding their withdrawal from Baku on 13 June 1919.

The problems with British troops were made more complex by the intensification of the workers' movement in the city at the end of 1918. Strikes and organized demonstrations erupted periodically in the city. Ordinary soldiers in the British army, especially Hindus who accounted for almost one-third of personnel, repeatedly refused to disperse demonstrations and rallies of the Baku workers.¹²³ One of the biggest protests against British rule, organised by the Baku Workers Committee, began on 24 December 1918. A special session of the BWC was held under the chairmanship of the Menshevik Churaev, which demanded that the British convene a conciliation committee from the representatives of industrialists and the Worker Conference (the chairman of the Musavat Party, who was present at the meeting, expressed a strong protest against such acts of BWC's leaders).¹²⁴ The three-day strike of December 1918 ended with the victory of the Baku workers. Apart from strengthening the Bolsheviks' sympathies among the working masses, the strike also forced the British command to recognise the strength of the Baku proletariat's power, and they quickly released those who were arrested. The Azerbaijani Parliament also called for the immediate release of all persons deprived of their liberty in the administrative order.¹²⁵

During this same period agitation-propagandist work by local Bolsheviks intensified (a temporary Bolshevik bureau had been set up in Baku in November 1918). The bureau began to conduct agitation not only among the workers but also in the army, among sailors in the Caspian flotilla and (strikingly) among British soldiers. The Bolsheviks printed leaflets in English and Hindi and distributed them among British military units.¹²⁶ The leaflets exposed the essence of the imperialist policy of the Entente governments in an attempt to show how soldiers were put at risk of death for the sake of selfish interests of the rich. Some Bolshevik agitators even managed to penetrate the barracks of the British troops to spread leaflets among the soldiers and conduct verbal agitation. The *Azerbaijan* newspaper reported that one leaflet was circulating in which a 'group of English speaking Baku residents' asked why soldiers were

123. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

124. Maksudov, Aliyev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya*, pp. 57-58.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

126. *Molot*, 9 August 1919, p. 1.

not being sent home now that ‘the war is over’.¹²⁷ Even the confiscation of Latin fonts by the British authorities from all the printing houses in Baku did not solve the challenge.

In order to strengthen agitation work among British soldiers, a special cadre of experienced Comintern personnel were transported by boat from Moscow through Astrakhan to Baku. One of these men named O.H. German (‘Jack’, ‘Yasha’), a translator at the Baku seaport, tried to create a communist cell inside the British garrison.¹²⁸ Another Communist called Bloomfield obtained the identity papers of a British journalist and managed to mislead a British military intelligence investigation about the illegal transport of crude oil products from Baku to Soviet-held Astrakhan.¹²⁹ In the summer of 1919, Baku Communists reported to Moscow that:

Thanks to the literature which we reprint here and visiting agitators, a group of British Communists has already been organized in Baku. We hope to destabilise the British eventually so that they will be sent home.¹³⁰

During the 1919 May Day demonstration in Baku, which attracted about 50,000 railway workers and proletarians from other industries, the mood of the rally quickly became openly pro-Bolshevik. Anti-British slogans were chanted by the crowd while demonstrators carried banners in English and distributed leaflets entitled ‘Comrade British soldiers!’ in English and Hindi.¹³¹ British commanders, fearful of ‘corrupting Bolshevik propaganda’, locked the soldiers in barracks and moved tanks and armoured cars on to the streets.

The route of demonstration was in fact chosen in such a way that it went by the buildings which housed the headquarters and barracks of the British troops. Passing by the barracks, the demonstrators used interpreters to voice their sympathy and friendliness to the British soldiers who were peeking out of the windows. During the demonstration leaflets were distributed among British soldiers. One of the leaflets proclaimed:

127. *Azerbaijan*, 24 July 1919, p. 2.

128. *Nezabyvayemyye Gody, Alyy Styag nad Zakavkaz'yem, Vospominaniya Veteranov Partii*, Baku, Azerneshr, 1980, pp. 262-63.

129. *Ibid*; p. 264.

130. Ratgauzer, *Bor'ba za Sovetskiy Azerbaydzhán*, p.56.

131. A. I. Mikoyan, *Dorogoy Bor'by*, Vol. 1, Moscow, Politizdat, 1971, p. 367.

Comrade British soldiers! The gigantic imperialist war has ended, and now the peoples of all countries are fighting against their own governments and classes of rich people. The working class and the peasantry of Russia were the first to destroy the power of their government and the class of the rich. They are now calling upon the workers of the whole world to go against all classes of the rich.¹³²

On 13 June 1919, another demonstration was organized by local communists in Baku at which leaflets in English were scattered towards the headquarters of the troops.¹³³ The Bolshevik newspaper *Nabat* wrote that ‘there has never been such a unity between the Russian and Muslim workers as on this day’. It went on to add that:

13 June 1919 will forever remain memorable in the history not only of Baku and Azerbaijan but of the whole of Transcaucasia. On this day the Baku proletariat on the one hand once again clearly and definitely expressed its uncompromising opposition to Denikin's counter-revolution and allied imperialism [and] on the other ... this demonstration turned into a demonstration against the Musavat Party and against the Musavat government.¹³⁴

The propaganda activity among British soldiers seemed to have an effect. In a letter of the Political Department of the 11th Red Army of Caspian-Caucasian Front, sent in the middle of 1919, the author reported a very remarkable episode in the life of Baku during this period. In response to a question of a passer-by ‘Bolshevik kharasho?’ (is a Bolshevik good?) a British soldier with a good-natured smile, replied, ‘Kharasho, ya Bolshevik (good, I am a Bolshevik)’.¹³⁵ By the summer of 1919, British soldiers and sailors in Azerbaijan repeatedly demanded to be sent home. Describing the conditions of the British soldiers, *Nabat* wrote:

In Baku, there are mainly Scots and Englishmen; Irishmen are few. The latter are more revolutionary than all the others. The majority willingly talk about political topics, speaking briefly and clearly. In particular, on a question relating to the War Secretary Winston Churchill's supposed wish to establish a standing army of 2.5 million persons, the British soldiers responded unequivocally: ‘Let him fight; it's enough. If he comes here, we would kill him’.¹³⁶

In the early summer of 1919, a wave of protests swept Royal Navy vessels in the Caspian Sea. On 16 June, the crews of three vessels openly declared their unwillingness to fight against Soviet Russia and demanded to be returned home. The military authorities dealt severely with the sailors who were

132. G. Polita, ‘Oktyabr'skaya Revolyutsiya i Angliykoye Rabocheye Dvizheniye’, *Voprosy Istorii KPSS*, No. 1, 1967, p. 60.

133. Darabadi, *Voyennyye Problemy Politicheskoy Istorii*, p. 120.

134. *Nabat*, 14 June 1919, p. 3.

135. *Perepiska Sekretariata TSK RKP(b)*, Vol. 8, p. 658.

136. *Nabat*, 3 June 1919, p. 1.

sent to Anzali in shackles (four were initially sentenced to death). Two weeks later a group of eight ships rebelled.¹³⁷ Bolshevik publications in Soviet Russia naturally made the most of such incidents (and may have exaggerated them).¹³⁸ The report of the Central Committee of the RCP on 24 June 1919, stated (probably falsely) that ‘recently 500 British soldiers have been deported from Baku for Bolshevik propaganda’.¹³⁹

In the summer of 1919, the British Cabinet formally decided on the withdrawal of British troops from Transcaucasia, causing great concern among the members of the Azerbaijani government, who knew their position would be difficult given their lack of popular support and the chaotic conditions both in Baku and beyond. On 4 August 1919, the Foreign Minister appealed to General Shuttleworth requesting that British troops stay in Azerbaijan.¹⁴⁰ He did not get his way. The British had many reasons to evacuate most of their military forces from Transcaucasia. The decision was related, in part, to the changed military-political situation in Russia, where in the summer of 1919 Denikin's White Army was advancing northwards, forcing the Red Army to retreat. Although this advance was soon to come to a halt, it seemed for a time that the Bolshevik threat to the Transcaucasus was shrinking. In addition, the growth of the national liberation movement in the colonial and dependent countries of the East - Egypt, India, Turkey and Persia - required the deployment of considerable military and material resources elsewhere. And, thirdly, the British government was also forced to recognise the growing momentum of the ‘Hands off Soviet Russia!’ movement and the general fatigue created by four years of total war. Although there was some concern about the possible impact of Bolshevik propaganda on British troops in Baku, as described earlier, it does not seem to have figured large in the British Cabinet’s decision to recall its troops from the region.

As the gradual process of the British troops’ withdrawal from Azerbaijan began, much of their military equipment was passed to Denikin’s army. At the beginning of August 1919, British naval forces in the Caspian Sea were liquidated, and 11 auxiliary cruisers, 12 speedboats with ‘Whitehead’ torpedoes,

137. Makovskiy, Radchenko, *Kaspiyskaya Krasnoznamennaya*, p. 84.

138. *Zhizn' Natsional'nostey*, 15 June 1919, p. 2.

139. *Perepiska Sekretariata TSK RKP(b)*, p. 657.

140. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 264.

54 guns, and a large amount of ammunition and equipment were transferred to Denikin's Caspian Flotilla.¹⁴¹ This process provoked a sharp protest from the Azerbaijani government, which dispatched a note claiming that 'the transfer of the Caspian military flotilla to Denikin's army is a direct threat to the independence and integrity of Azerbaijan and causes a quite natural anxiety among the population'.

It went on to state that:

In the future, undoubtedly, when the operation against the Bolsheviks is completed, the continued existence of the navy in the Caspian Sea would be a violation of the political balance on its shores. The Azerbaijani government hopes that the sea will be neutralized and only a commercial fleet will continue to exist in the Caspian waters.

The note also suggested that:

Such neutralization would be in the interests of Britain ... as the Caspian Sea in the future will be a great water route from the West to the East, and an international guarantee of [freedom of navigation] will be a political necessity for all countries interested in its inviolability.¹⁴²

In response to the protest of the government, the British command announced that only ships belonging to the Caspian Flotilla would be transferred to Denikin.

Although, the British government was committed to supporting Denikin, it was not going to assist him in the capture of Baku. Back in January 1919, General Thomson had set down a line of demarcation passing through the Caucasus Mountains and the northern part of Dagestan. And, as was seen earlier, in March the British issued a decree to disarm the so-called Russian Caspian Fleet, while the previous month detachments of the so-called 'Caucasus-Caspian government' headed by Bicherakhov were given twenty-four hours to withdraw from Baku. When Denikin's representative in Transcaucasia, General Erdeli, asked General Thomson for an explanation, he was told that the deported troops were totally demoralized and posed a threat to peace and order in the country.¹⁴³

The British therefore demonstrated their determination to prevent Denikin's advance to the south, but the Azerbaijani government remained concerned that Baku oil was still an attractive target for the Whites, something that seemed more likely once the British began to contemplate withdrawal. The Azerbaijan government coordinated action to provide assistance to Dagestan's people, which included the sending of armed volunteers and financial subsidies to help in the struggle against Denikin. The

141. *Voyennyye Moryaki*, p. 153.

142. GAAR, f.897, op.1, d.118, l.13.

143. A.B. Shirokorad, *Velikaya Rechnaya Voyna, 1918-1920*, Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Veche, 2006, p. 161.

British command did not approve of such actions. On 5 May 1919, a member of Azerbaijan parliament, former Prime Minister Khoyski visited General Thomson to discuss various issues, at which the General drew Khoyski's attention to a recent article in the official *Azerbaijan* newspaper which contained appeals from political parties to organize detachments in order to aid to the Mountain Republic government in the fight against the troops of Denikin. Thomson told Khoyski that:

The appearance of such appeals in the government's newspaper indicated the government's sympathy with the idea of organizing such detachments, which created an unfavourable impression in the eyes of the British command. He added that the organization of such detachments was likely to strengthen Bolshevism.¹⁴⁴

Khoyski agreed with the General that the printing of the appeals was inappropriate, but pointed out that:

Our government is completely ignorant of Denikin's plans.... He is currently seeking to deprive the Mountaineers of independence and, perhaps, will strive, after the conquest of the Mountaineers, to advance his troops further threatening our state.¹⁴⁵

The situation was aggravated by the fact that Great Britain was ready to make concessions to Denikin in the hope that this would encourage him to continue the fight more effectively against Bolshevik Russia. On 11 June 1919, the British set a new demarcation line to the south of Petrovsky, which in principle meant recognition of Denikin's conquests in Dagestan, and brought the Volunteer Army close to the borders of Azerbaijan. The socialist bloc in the Azerbaijani Parliament declared that the government was not reacting with sufficient firmness to the British support for the Whites. Resentment about Britain's supposedly pro-Denikin policy caused resentment among much of the Azerbaijani population. On 8 June 1919, a big rally took place of workers in the Balakhani, Zabrat, and Ramana districts of Baku calling on the government to take urgent measures to defend Baku and Azerbaijan's northern borders. The resolution adopted by the workers stated that '... from Baku port shells are being shipped to Denikin by order of the British command, which is pursuing in the South Caucasus, particularly in Baku, a vile duplicitous policy'.¹⁴⁶ The protests were then in effect directed not only against Denikin but also against the hypocritical policy of British commanders.

144. GAAR, f. 894, op. 10, d. 135, l. 27-28.

145. *Ibid.*, l. 28.

146. *Zarya*, 12 June 1919, p. 1.

The Azerbaijani government had from the start of 1919 sought to bring to an end the governor-general system in Baku which effectively ceded most power to British military commanders. In a telegram sent by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to a senior diplomat in Istanbul, the Minister ‘... stressed the need to make all diplomatic efforts to secure the elimination of the governor-general’s post, which resulted in unique dual power in Azerbaijan’.¹⁴⁷ And yet ministers in the Azerbaijani government knew that the presence of British troops was necessary to defend their country both against Denikin’s Volunteer Army and the forces of Soviet Russia. And, given the level of working-class militancy discussed earlier, British troops also helped to maintain domestic order, and with it protected the interests of wealthy elite groups with close ties to the Government. It was for this reason that, despite the desire of Azerbaijani ministers for independent statehood, they were reluctant to see the withdrawal of British forces which they feared might make their country vulnerable to attack from other quarters.

On 23 August 1919, almost all British troops left the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, but before leaving British commanders did not forget to apologize for the inconvenience caused to the population. The farewell speech of General Shuttleworth sounded almost mocking:

I take this opportunity on behalf of the British troops who are leaving Baku now to apologize to the Azerbaijani population, especially in the city of Baku. We deeply regret saying goodbye to many of our friends and acquaintances, and heartily wish them peace and happiness. All military personnel of the British Army will keep with them the best memories of the days they spent here.¹⁴⁸

On the occasion of the British withdrawal, the chairman of the Azerbaijani Council of Ministers gave a dinner at the hotel ‘Metropol’ in honour of General Cory and other senior soldiers and officials. In his speech at the dinner, General Cory stated how impressed he was by the Azerbaijani government and especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He added that in leaving Baku, the British gave to Azerbaijani government control of the port, the radio station of the military units, ammunition and some naval ships.¹⁴⁹

147. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 202.

148. *Ibid.*, pp. 264-65.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

Despite the withdrawal of troops, the British government had no desire to lose completely its position in Transcaucasia, given that the region's strategic importance remained undiminished. It was Lord Curzon who still believed that 'Great Britain should continue to take responsibility for the defence of Batum'. Even in spite of 'the Cabinet's decision to withdraw the two British divisions stationed along the railway and oil pipeline between Baku and Batum, he had succeeded in persuading them to leave a garrison temporarily at Batum'.¹⁵⁰ He hoped that a British presence at Batum would strengthen the governments of three Transcaucasian republics in their resistance to Soviet power. General Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who opposed unsuccessfully against Curzon, insisted that 'leaving a two battalion garrison force in so vulnerable a position was intolerable'.¹⁵¹ It was agreed to retain a base on the Black Sea. Batumi was of course at the end of the oil pipeline from Baku, and its control meant that the British still could fully control the export of Azerbaijani oil, at least as long as it went on flowing.

In summary, then, the withdrawal of British troops from Azerbaijan was a response to the changing global situation and to domestic politics back in Britain. The Turko-German threat to India had disappeared, while the conflict between Red and White forces in the area north of the Black Sea seemed to have swung in favour of the latter, even though Denikin's advance was to prove short-lived. The political mood at home meant that it was increasingly hard to keep troops in the field, while there is some evidence that soldiers and sailors in Baku were themselves becoming increasingly angry with their situation. The cost of keeping a large force in Azerbaijan was also prohibitive at a time when the First World War had created a huge British war debt.

3.9 Epilogue

For more than 70 years, Soviet historians claimed that the primary purpose of the British in occupying Transcaucasia (as well as Turkistan) was to establish some form of protectorate there. British historians, with no less persistence, denied these accusations.¹⁵² The archival record does not suggest

150. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921*, Vol. 3, *The Anglo-Soviet Accord*, pp. 333-34.

151. *Ibid.*, p. 334.

152. J. Silverlight, *The Victor's Dilemma: Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War*, London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1970, pp. 210-11.

that the British government had any well-defined plans to establish control over the region (certainly no trace of them has been found in the correspondence between London and Delhi). This raises the question of what interests the British did have in Transcaucasia? The answer is that while Imperial Russia remained intact it had none (or rather none that it could realistically pursue beyond using its diplomats to defend the interests of British investors in the region). But when Imperial Russia collapsed, a vacuum was created that could potentially be filled by the Germans or the Turks or the Bolsheviks, all of which would seriously threaten the interests of the British Empire. The defeat of Germany and Turkey removed one set of threats - the threat to which the dispatch of Dunsterforce in the summer of 1918 had been a response - but after the conclusion of the First World War in November 1918 the Bolsheviks became the main threat. If the Bolsheviks took control of the main land and sea roads to Persia, and controlled Baku oil, their position would be much strengthened. British intervention in Transcaucasia - as in other parts of Russia - began as part of a strategy to win the First World War but continued as part of an effort to defeat Bolshevism.

The British therefore believed they had to intervene. General Thomson was right when he wrote a few years later that:

The British went into Southern Russia with a very definite ambition to help their stricken ally in the catastrophe.... and the British acting for the Allies intended to remove the Turks and Germans from Transcaucasia. No part of the Russian Empire was going to be annexed; the internal government was not our affair'.¹⁵³

The work of the historian John Rose confirms Thomson's claim, and shows 'how intervention was not the result of a clearly formulated policy'. The author rightly points out that:

British policy towards Transcaucasia in late 1918 and early 1919 was influenced less by the politicians in London than by the military personnel on the spot, who often acted independently owing to a dearth of instructions regarding future policy....By the spring of 1919, what had been meant as a temporary occupation had turned into a British protectorate over Transcaucasia.¹⁵⁴

The very idea that Britain might be able to achieve control over Transcaucasia seems rather unrealistic. This was in the first place hampered by purely military considerations: the security of Transcaucasia could

153. Pearce & Thomson, 'Introduction to Transcaucasia 1918-19', p. 75.

154. Rose, 'Batum as Domino', pp. 266-67.

only be ensured by absolute control over the Caspian Sea and the maintenance of large forces in Transcaucasia itself. Although for a short period of time the British managed at least partially to solve these problems, it happened when the largest player in the region, Russia, was in state of civil war. It is clear that this situation could not last for a long time and that after the end of the civil war any new government, be it white or red, would inevitably make claim on the former possessions. Their protection would have demanded colossal resources from the British. Any permanent control over Transcaucasia would simply not have been economically profitable.

The arrival of Anglo-Indian troops in Baku in November 1918 had a very direct impact on the development of the situation in Azerbaijan. The Musavat government was unpopular, not least because representatives of the party had previously promised the distribution of land among the peasants, promises they did not keep once they came to power. By the middle of 1919, uprisings in rural areas had become widespread, while in Baku itself radical working class opinion turned against the government.¹⁵⁵ British military commanders wanted to preserve peace in Azerbaijan, to ensure that the oil industry worked effectively, and as the Musavat government proved ineffective they increasingly had to take decisions into their own hands. The Musavat government for its part strongly favoured the independence of Azerbaijan but recognised that they relied on British support to preserve their place in power. British interference in the internal affairs of foreign 'semi-colonial' countries was hardly new. Yet it is interesting to see how in the first half of 1919 Thomson and his fellow British officers increasingly had to intervene to ensure effective rule and with it the survival of the Musavat government.

Between November 1918 and July 1919, the Musavat government had little credibility or power. There was growing dissatisfaction among workers and peasants who demanded a rise in wages (for the former) and land (for the latter). Bolshevik agents were adept at fanning the flames of discontent into something more far-reaching. The presence of Anglo-Indian troops therefore provided a degree of stability which preserved the Musavat government from immediate collapse. During this time, ministers

155. Sumbatzade, *Istorii Azerbaydzhana*, pp. 176-99.

in the Musavat led government tried to preserve their independence from the British while at the same time recognising that their survival depended on British support. Explaining the situation in Transcaucasia during this period, the well-known American historian Richard Pipes notes that:

As long as Baku was occupied by British troops - that is, until August 1919 - political authority in Eastern Transcaucasia was divided between the English command and the Azerbaijani government. The division of authority was apparently never precisely defined, but there can be little doubt that the political power rested ultimately in the hands of the British. The Azerbaijani government concerned itself mostly with internal affairs and administrative matters and the approval of the British command was required for all measures before they could become effective.¹⁵⁶

As for General Thomson, his motives are not altogether clear, though he seems above all to have seen his role as preserving stability in the region for which he was responsible. Although some ministers in London believed that he did not always follow orders, he does not in fact seem to have deliberately violated commands, although in a complex and changing situation he often had to rely on his own initiative. Thomson - like ministers in London - struggled to make sense of the huge changes taking place in Europe and Asia following the end of the First World War. He behaved as Governor-General in true imperial fashion, treating local politicians with little respect, but he does not seem to have had a clear sense of his mission. He was able to restore a degree of order to the streets of Baku, but never really had a sense of what his role was, which was perhaps unsurprising given that the same was largely true of his political masters back in London. British intervention in Azerbaijan - like British intervention elsewhere across Russia - was made ineffective both by a failure to articulate clear objectives and reluctance to acknowledge that the Russian Revolution had unleashed a genuinely radical mood among large sections of the population.

156. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, pp. 206-7.

Chapter 4

The fate of the Transcaucasian Republics at the Paris Peace Treaty

This chapter examines the Paris Peace Conference at which the governments of the Transcaucasian republics hoped to settle crucial issues relating to their survival. It also analyzes the evolution of British politicians' decisions at the Conference relating to the new Transcaucasian governments, and examines how international developments influenced those decisions. The chapter suggests that it was only at the end of 1919, when the situation in the Caucasus had changed in favour of the Bolsheviks that the imperial powers decided to recognise *de facto* the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia in the hope of maintaining their independence. The chapter then goes on to examine in detail the nature of British policy after the *de facto* recognition of Azerbaijan government at the Paris Peace Conference. It shows that despite international recognition of the Musavat government, the move did not defuse the threat to Azerbaijan, nor prevent its government's slow decay. The fate of the Transcaucasian republics was ultimately not important enough to the main western powers to engage in military struggle to protect their independence from the Bolsheviks.

4.1 The Establishment of the Paris Peace Conference

After defeating Germany and its allies in the First World War, 'the victors of the First World war had come to Paris to shape the postwar order'¹ and began to formalize their plans for a post-war settlement. Among these plans were the effective distribution of large swathes of 'the undeveloped world' among the imperialist powers, the crushing of revolutionary and national liberation movements, and the effective subordination of millions of people to the interests of large-scale financial monopolies. The Paris Peace Conference was therefore not only designed to settle the fate of Germany and other defeated powers. It was also intended to lay the foundations for a new international order. The Conference itself first met in January 1919, although the opening ceremony was delayed several times. As late as 6 January, the British Ambassador Lord Derby told the Foreign Office that 'neither he nor Colonel House had any idea when the Conference would begin, or indeed whether it would be formally opened at all'.² Only after David Lloyd George arrived in Paris on 11 January did the first informal talks begin. As a consequence, the Conference decided to convene officially on 18 January.

1. E. Goldstein, *The First World War Peace Settlements, 1919-1925*, New York, Longmans, 2002, p. 1.

2. S. Marks, 'Behind the Scenes at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1970, p. 156.

The opening ceremony of the Paris Peace Conference took place in the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay. Twenty seven countries were represented at the Paris Conference, including the great powers: the USA, Britain, France, Italy and Japan. In addition, 'thousands of delegates, diplomats, and academic experts poured into Paris to redraw the map of the world and to settle its problems, supposedly forevermore'.³ The government of Soviet Russia was not invited to the Conference, hardly surprising given that many countries represented in Paris had for some time been engaged in open struggle against the Bolshevik regime.

A huge number of journalists were also accredited to report on the Conference. The French President Raymond Poincaré opened the Conference with a short speech of welcome, while the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau was elected President of the Conference. It was agreed that Lansing (United States), Lloyd George (United Kingdom), Orlando (Italy) and Saionji (Japan) should be elected Vice-Presidents (though in practice proceedings were dominated throughout the Conference by the 'Big Three' of France, Britain and the United States). The celebrated 'Fourteen Points' issued by President Woodrow Wilson early in 1918 were taken as a basis for discussing many of the complex range of problems facing the Conference.⁴

The interests and aspirations of the various countries represented at the Paris Conference did not always match and were indeed often in direct conflict. Each of the main governments aimed to strengthen the power of their own country at the expense of others. Each had its own territorial, political, financial, and economic claims that were directly contrary to the interests of their 'allies'. The contradiction was most obvious in the case of the great powers, and much of the discussion that took place at Paris was designed to find solutions to these conflicts, on issues relating from imperial influence in the Near East through to patterns of influence among the new states that were established in central Europe. The alliance that had brought together countries like Britain and France in a common front to defeat Germany could not easily survive the economic rivalries that took on new energy once the war was over.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

4. P. S. Tillman, *Anglo-American Relations at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 53.

France emerged from the First World War as the strongest military power in Europe (albeit with its economy and national finances in ruin). The French government headed by Clemenceau was determined to push for a settlement that would preserve France's military superiority against a possibly rejuvenated Europe. But the French government was also determined to strengthen its colonial position both by claiming German colonies in Africa and some part of the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. Such ambitions were bound to bring the French into conflict with the British who had their own ambitions in these areas and were concerned about any potential threat to their existing spheres of influence. The war of 1914-1918 had only brought victory to France because it fought against the German bloc in coalition with Russia, Britain and the United States. French political leaders were well aware that such a coalition was exceptional, and could not be relied on again, which meant they were determined to use the favourable situation to weaken Germany. French proposals therefore sought to develop a defensive alliance with Britain and the United States, as a guarantee against the revival of Germany and potential German aggression.⁵ 'In the French view any progress Germany made towards restoring its economy was a step down the road to war'.⁶

Yet France could not be confident of securing either its imperial ambitions or its security ambitions within Europe. As a result of the war, France faced serious economic difficulties, including inflation and the need to replay war loans to Britain and (especially) the United States.⁷ The decrease in population - especially of economically-active males - made the situation worse. France lost in the war nearly 18,5 per cent of her mobilized men - the total casualties, including missing and prisoners, amounted to 11.88 per cent of the total population.⁸ France's negotiating position was therefore not particularly strong as it sought to shape the final form of the peace settlement.

Focusing more narrowly on the Transcaucasian issue, the French government was well-aware of the strategic significance of British dominance in the Persian Gulf, and was perturbed by the attempts of

5. W. M. Jordan, *Great Britain, France, and the German Problem, 1918-1939: A Study of Anglo-French Relations in the Making and Maintenance of the Versailles Settlement*, London, Oxford University Press, 1943, pp. 1-3.

6. A. Barros, 'Disarmament as a Weapon: Anglo-French Relations and the Problems of Enforcing German Disarmament, 1919-28', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2006, p. 305.

7. H. E. Fisk, *French Public Finance in the Great War and Today*, New York-Paris, Bankers Trust Company, 1922, p. 10.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

the government in London to control the oil wealth of the Baku region and create a dominant position in the field of oil production. But the issue was not central in shaping French policy on the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan and its Musavat-dominated government were not in practice the subject of intense and committed attention from French diplomacy. An eloquent reflection of the French position in relation to 'Azerbaijan's independence' was the fact that the Azerbaijani delegation that left Baku for the Paris Peace Conference in early January 1919 was forced to wait for more than three months before obtaining an entry visa from the French Foreign Ministry. Only on 22 April was the Azerbaijani delegation able to leave Constantinople on an Italian steamship headed from Rome from where they went on to Paris.⁹

The Great War shattered the balance of power in Europe. That is why 'the pre-war balance of power no longer functioned meaning that British strategic foreign policy had to be formulated on a different, as yet undetermined basis'.¹⁰ Therefore, British policy at Paris had to deal with a number of issues. One of the main goals of the policy was to eliminate the sea power of Germany and dismantle its colonial empire. Yet the British government also sought to maintain Germany as a sufficiently strong power so that its position in the centre of Europe could be used as a buffer zone against the spread of the Soviet revolution to the countries of Western Europe. On the other hand, 'from London's perspective, French policy seemed only to create instability on the continent (in particular, places like Turkey and the Near East)'.¹¹ That is why the British also believed that Germany should continue to act as a counterbalance to France. The British delegation headed by Prime Minister Lloyd George therefore following the traditional 'politics of equilibrium', or balance of power, seeking to avoid the excessive weakening of Germany or allowing France to dominate the continent.¹² The British as ever sought to rely above all on its naval superiority to secure its position both in Europe and (especially) beyond. The British fleet, despite the heavy losses suffered by it during the First World War, remained the largest in the world. However, Britain, like France, was facing great economic difficulties. In many

9. Gasanli, *Russkaya Revolyutsiya i Azerbaydzhan*, p. 357.

10. Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse*, p. 9.

11. E. Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher, 'Power and Stability in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1965', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2003, p. 4.

12. Barros, 'Disarmament as a Weapon', p. 307.

major markets where it once dominated, the position of its rivals, especially the United States and Japan, had increased considerably. British industry generally lagged behind American industry in terms of modern technical equipment. The raw materials it relied on were also typically more expensive. And, even more importantly, Britain had during the war become a major debtor as it borrowed money from the United States to pay for its war machine.¹³ These economic and financial weaknesses drained British strength and weakened the country's negotiation position, making it difficult for the British government to implement its post-war imperialistic program. Summarizing British policy at the Paris Peace Conference, the historian Keith Neilson rightly noted that:

The British [at Paris] wanted to have a just and lasting peace, but they were not necessarily willing to abandon their own interests in pursuing it. This was especially so with respect to Imperial policy, particularly to Imperial defence.¹⁴

Many American politicians - though not President Wilson - believed that the USA should not be involved in European affairs. The tradition of isolation remained strong even though the crisis in Europe had eventually drawn the country into war in April 1917.¹⁵ 'Nevertheless, Wilson's talk about the right to self determination and his advocacy of the League of Nations implied a new and more equitable model of international relations'.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the USA emerged from the war as a global economic power with global economic interests meaning that a policy of complete isolation was impossible and damaging to the economic interests of large-scale capital. The American political elite when considering the post-war settlement was determined to sustain and advance the economic and financial hegemony of the United States in the capitalist world. During the war, the European countries had depended on American supplies of arms and raw materials as well as food and money. The prices for these goods were effectively dictated by American monopoly capital given the absence of other sources of supply. Lenin was correct when he noted that 'the United States, the only full

13. Fisk, *French Public*, p. 10.

14. Neilson, 'That Elusive Entity British Policy in Russia', p. 68.

15. E. B. Setzekorn, *Joining the Great War, April 1917-April 1918*, Washington, Centre of Military History United States Army, 2017, p. 7.

16. E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 10.

beneficiary from the war [was] a country which, from being a heavy debtor, has become a general creditor'.¹⁷

President Wilson was himself convinced that the United States could help shape a new Europe in which many of the conflicts of the past would be erased. Therefore, "Wilson continued to develop his plans for the peace, most famously in the address he gave before Congress on January 8, 1918, which became known around the world as the 'Fourteen Points'".¹⁸

One of the central activities of the Peace Conference was the creation of the League of Nations, which each great power hoped to use for strengthening its influence in international affairs. In March 1919, a new executive body was formed - the Council of Four - consisting of the President of the United States, Wilson, the head of the British government Lloyd George, the French Prime Minister Clemenceau and the Prime Minister of Italy, Orlando. As Lenin wrote:

A small group of the richest countries, the 'Big Four' in the persons of Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Orlando and Wilson had been put on the job of creating new relations!¹⁹

In putting forward proposals for the creation of an international organization supposedly designed to ensure universal peace, the governments of the victorious countries paid tribute to the popular anti-war mood that had developed in all countries. Public opinion demanded an end to a system of imperialism that had led to war in favour of a new system of international relations designed to guarantee peace. In this situation, the leaders of the victorious powers sought to portray themselves as champions of peace and democracy. In this kind of demagoguery, the American imperialists were particularly sophisticated. Lenin wrote that:

I do not think any communist manifesto could compare in forcefulness with those pages in Keynes's book which depict Wilson and 'Wilsonism' in action. Wilson was the idol of philistines and pacifists like Keynes and a number of heroes of the Second International...the 'roots' of Wilson's policy lay in sanctimonious piffle, petty-bourgeois phrase-mongering, and an utter inability to understand the class struggle.²⁰

As previously mentioned, Russia was not invited to the Paris Peace Conference. The October Revolution had led all the Western powers to break relations with the Soviet government and seek to

17. *Lenin's Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 216.

18. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, p. 17.

19. *Lenin's Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 225.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

overthrow it, and by the time of the opening of the Paris Conference, the civil war and foreign intervention were in full swing. There was little prospect of inviting Soviet Russia to Paris to participate in negotiations under such conditions. 'Being most consistent and vigorous foes of Bolshevism', the French government took a particularly firm stand on this issue, and 'resolutely opposed any negotiation with Soviet Russia'.²¹

From the first day of the Conference, insisting that 'Germany should only be made liable for damages that were beyond those traditionally allowed by the laws of war',²² Wilson 'firmly maintained that no disposition of Russian land or of Russian rights could be made without her participation'.²³ The British in turn, opposed any possibility of restoring Russian Empire's pre-war territories. 'A weak and divided Russia would be no threat to British hegemony in the Asiatic borderlands'.²⁴

However, the absence of Russia at a conference designed to set the fate of Europe for many years ahead worried many participants at the Conference. The indisputable fact remained that the 'Russian question' was a serious problem that needed to be addressed and this issue needed to be discussed by world leaders at a general conference. 'Yet there was no one representative authority in Russia with whom the Allies were prepared to deal'.²⁵ 'On the very first day of the Conference (12 January), Marshal Foch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies, suggested that an Allied force, composed mainly of American troops, be sent into Poland to crush the Red Army'.²⁶ Opposing strongly any military action, President Wilson said:

There was great doubt in his mind as to whether Bolshevism could be checked by arms; therefore it seemed to him unwise to take action in a military form before the Powers were agreed upon a course of action for checking Bolshevism as a social and political danger.²⁷

Soon after the start of the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson and Lloyd George decided to invite all existing Russian governments to the Princes' Islands (Prinkipo) in the Marmara Sea for negotiations

21. J. M. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1967, p. 57.

22. Goldstein, *The First World War Peace Settlements*, p. 3.

23. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace*, p. 5.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

25. C. Alston, 'The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic: Britain, Anti-Bolshevik Russia and the Border States at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919', *History*, Vol. 91, No. 301, 2006, p. 24.

26. D. E. Davis, E.P. Trani, *The First Cold War: The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S.-Soviet Relations*, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002, p. 158.

27. R.S.Baker, *Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement*, Vol. I, New York, Doubleday, Page & Co, 1922, pp. 166-67.

on the restoration of peace in Russia. Yet while the Soviet Government agreed in principle to participate in negotiations on the Princes' Islands, the proposal came to nothing, in part because both British and French politicians sought to undermine any possible talks.²⁸

There was simply no consensus in the position taken by the main allied governments towards Russia. Discussion about Russia's possible participation in the Peace Conference first took place at an inter-Allied Conference in early December 1918. During the meeting Balfour, Lord Curzon and Clemenceau all opposed the idea. Balfour, who served as the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, insisted that Finland, Estonia and Latvia should have an opportunity to address the Conference on problems affecting them - but that these considerations were inapplicable to Soviet Russia. Lord Curzon was inclined to this view, as was Clemenceau, who suggested:

As to our attitude to the small nations and their attitude towards us, the determining factor would be our peaceful policy. We were not bound to recognize the small nations at once; to use a colloquial phrase: 'let them cook', and when they appeared ready, we should recognize them.²⁹

Lloyd George who favoured allowing the Bolsheviks to attend the Conference argued that:

It is impossible to say that the Tartars, the Finns, the Letts, should come to the Peace Conference and not the Bolsheviks who stood for two-thirds of the whole population. The Bolsheviks, whatever might be thought of them, appeared to have a hold over the majority of the population. This was a fact, a sinister one no doubt, but facts could not be neglected because they were unpalatable.³⁰

Some interesting thoughts on this question came from the Italian representative Sidney Sonnino, who suggested that there should be created a federation of autonomous Russian states.³¹ All this shows the disagreements among the major powers about how to best to continue the struggle against Soviet Russia and divide its territory. Lenin aptly observed that 'they [the western powers] were trying to share out the skin of a bear they had not yet killed. They were, in fact, squabbling over a bear they would never kill'.³²

28. For more details, see M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*, New York, Random House, 2003, pp. 63-83.

29. Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, Vol. 1, p. 320.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 321.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 322.

32. *Lenin's Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 325.

Therefore, ‘in the spring of 1919, the League was looked upon by two of its principal designers as an ‘essential element’ in the fight against Bolshevism’.³³ Yet there were divisions about how it should play this role. Some western politicians ‘advocated direct and immediate military intervention in Soviet Russia with or without League participation’. The second group, including President Wilson and Lloyd George, were against direct intervention in Russian affairs and hoped that the new League would help to serve as ‘a defensive bulwark against the spread of Bolshevism into Europe’³⁴ (as well as a guarantor of European security against the threat of a revived Germany). As for the governments of ‘newly independent Transcaucasian states’, all of them hoped to be recognized at the Peace Conference (*for more details see the following sections*). Yet as events unfolded at the Conference, a lot of surprises were to confront the Transcaucasian delegations: the unexpected recognition of Kolchak government by the allies as the government of all Russia; the decision to withdraw British troops from the Caucasus; the proposal to use Italian troops to replace British troops, etc. All of these developments were to cause great concern for the Azerbaijani delegation that finally arrived in Paris in the spring of 1919.

4.2 The Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference

Despite being powerless and largely dependent on the British command, as discussed in previous chapters, the leadership of the Musavat-dominated government tried to take independent steps when addressing the international challenges faced by their country. The main foreign policy objective of the young state was without doubt to secure international recognition of its sovereignty and the existing definitions of its territory. By sending a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, the Musavat government made a tentative but definite step towards self-reliance and an independent existence for Azerbaijan. It continued to pursue this policy throughout 1919, securing a degree of success

33. D. I. Buzinkai, ‘The Bolsheviks, the League of Nations and the Paris Peace Conference, 1919’, *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1967, p. 258.

34. *Ibid.*

in securing its objectives, although the Soviet invasion of the country in 1920 meant that the significance of the achievement was ultimately limited.

As early as November 1918, the members of the Azerbaijani government secured a promise in talks at Anzali with the Chief of Allied Forces, General Thomson, that they would be allowed to participate in the Peace Conference. Following the entry of the Entente troops into Baku, General Thomson, and subsequently General George Milne, repeated that Azerbaijan would participate in the Paris Peace Conference. Thomson and Milne were the official representatives of the Entente in Azerbaijan, and their statement can be regarded as an official invitation to the conference. General Thomson assured the government of Azerbaijan in writing that all disputed territorial issues would be addressed and resolved at the peace conference. He pointed out that in this regard he had formal authorization from the British government.³⁵ When speaking at a meeting of the Azerbaijan Parliament on 26 December 1918, the Prime Minister Khoyski announced on behalf of the newly elected government that ‘the first and principal task of the government’ was to secure international recognition of Azerbaijan's independence. Following the announcement, the delegation was selected for participation in Paris Peace Conference.³⁶ The main task facing the delegation was to achieve recognition of the sovereignty of Azerbaijan and its territorial integrity, as well as political and economic support by the great powers for the Musavat government.

In December 1918, on the eve of the peace conference, the Azerbaijani parliament confirmed the composition of the delegation that was to go to Paris. Ali Mardan-bey Topchubashov, one of the most respected politicians of that time, was elected its head. His deputy was the former Foreign Minister Mamed Hasan Hadjinsky. The consultants were Jeyhun Bey Hajibeyli, Mahammad Maharramov and Mir Yagub Mirmehdiyev. The delegation also included two secretaries and three translators (for English, French and Turkish).³⁷ According to the general mandate given to the delegation on 7 January 1919, its members had the authority ‘to participate in the peace conference of the states and nations that must

35. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 33.

36. *Azerbaydzhanskaya Demokraticeskaya Respublika (1918–1920)*, Vneshnyaya Politika. (Dokumenty i Materialy), Baku, Elm, 1998. p. 116.

37. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 173.

take place after the World War, as well as in all conferences, alliances and agreements between the states and nations, having a right to conclude on behalf of Azerbaijan various contracts and agreements of a political, economic, or financial nature'.³⁸

It was seen earlier that the Azerbaijani delegation that arrived in Constantinople in January 1919 was forced to stay there in the town for three and a half months because the French were unwilling to provide entry visas. In his reports back to Baku, A.M. Topchubashov, the head of the Azerbaijani delegation, noted that the French were perturbed by his presence in the delegation.³⁹ All the available documents suggest that French political circles were influenced by Armenian propaganda, which strongly opposed the admission of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Paris Conference.⁴⁰ This situation was confirmed by the Azerbaijani Consul in Batumi, M. Efendiyev, who informed his government that Ali Mardan-bey was not allowed to Paris because of Armenian intrigues:

According to my information, as a result of the active intrigues of Armenian representatives abroad, our figures like Ali Mardan-bey ... are compromised in the eyes of foreigners right now....The press of the Allies in Istanbul and especially the French newspapers began to attack and slander our eminent figure, the respected Ali Mardan-bey.⁴¹

The delay was also a result of the initial unwillingness by the victorious allied powers to admit to the Conference representatives from the new states established on the territory of the former Russian Empire. By the end of 1918 there had already been established in Paris a new body - the Russian Political Conference - that saw itself as the representative of the various white governments in Siberia and North and South Russia. Its members saw one of their main tasks as opposition to all political movements of non-Russian peoples that sought independent statehood after the collapse of the tsarist empire.⁴² Many representatives of the Entente countries believed that the 'Russian question' had to be solved before any possible discussion might take place about the independence of a number of new republics.

38. Ibid, p. 163.

39. Raevskiy, *Musavatskoye Pravitel'stvo*, p. 26.

40. Gasanli, *Russkaya Revolyutsiya i Azerbaydzhan*, p. 352.

41. Batumskiy Konsul Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki v Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del., 3 April 1919, GAAR, f. 970, op. 1, d. 141, l. 6.

42. A.M. Topchubashov, *Pis'ma iz Parizha. Doneseniya Predsedatelya Delegatsii Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki na Parizhskoy Mirnoy Konferentsii*, Baku, Azerneshr, 1998, p. 19.

Eventually, the Azerbaijani delegations obtained an Italian visa, and on 22 April the entire delegation left for Italy on the steamship 'Bulgaria'. On 2 May, members of the delegation arrived in Rome from where after several days they went on to Paris.⁴³ The Azerbaijani delegation was therefore absent from the opening of the peace conference and only arrived in the middle of May 1919. From the moment of its arrival, Topchubashov tried to establish contact with the diplomatic representatives of the Entente countries in order to make them aware of the problems faced by his country. He gave most attention to establishing links with the representatives of Great Britain, as the country whose armed forces were located on the territory of Azerbaijan, and therefore likely to have a great influence on the future destiny of the Azerbaijan Republic. On 13 May, Topchubashov, along with other members of the delegation, visited the military adviser of the British Embassy in Paris, handing over a letter of introduction from General Thomson. Expressing admiration for the British nation, the delegates asked for an audience with the British Ambassador in Paris (Lord Derby).⁴⁴ Since Derby felt unable to take responsibility for granting an audience to the representatives of Azerbaijan, he wrote next day to Charles Hardinge, the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office, noting that he was personally inclined to receive Azerbaijanis unless Hardinge had any objections.⁴⁵ Hardinge replied on 17 May saying that he himself had no objection to the proposal, although he warned Derby to 'carefully refrain from any encouragement or support to their claims for independence'. He added that if they persisted they should be informed that only the Conference would resolve such questions'.⁴⁶

On 19 May 1919, a meeting took place between the Azerbaijani representatives and Lord Derby, who after receiving general information about the Republic of Azerbaijan, appointed a separate expert to maintain ties with Azerbaijani delegations. The person appointed to this role was a British diplomat, Sir Louis Mallet, an Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office who was attached to the British Delegation in Paris. He was also a former British ambassador in Constantinople and well known for his hard anti-Bolshevik positions. On 23 May, Topchubashov and Hadjinsky visited Mallet, informing

43. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 188.

44. Note for His Excellency the Ambassador, Paris, 13 May 1919, FO 608/100/13, fol. 567.

45. Lord Derby to the Right Honourable Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, Paris, 14 May 1919, FO 608/100/13, fol. 566.

46. Lord Hardinge of Penshurst to Earl of Derby, Paris, 17 May 1919, FO 608/100/13, fol. 569.

him that they would submit a detailed document to the British delegation with their demands.

According to Mallet, among other things, the delegates asked:

Whether His Majesty's Government would support their claim for recognition of their independence and whether there was any possibility of His Majesty's Government accepting a mandate for Azerbaijan. No hope was held out in the latter direction, and they were informed that their claim for recognition of their independence and the question of mandates were not matters which concerned His Majesty's Government alone, but must be decided by the Conference.⁴⁷

The question of a possible British mandate over Azerbaijan, touched upon in the conversation of Topchubashov, was not a random one since the broad issue had already been seriously discussed among the Allies. As early as March 1919, Lloyd George, wishing to ease the burden of maintaining British troops in the Caucasus, raised with the Italians the possibility of sending troops to Azerbaijan while also taking a mandate for the administration of the Caucasus. The prospect of the replacement of British troops by Italian troops raised discontent and anxiety among the dominant political and economic circles of the Caucasian states, who were fearful that Italy could not cope with such a challenge. They were anxious that Italian troops sent to the Caucasus would not be able to protect the region from the Bolsheviks and might themselves be susceptible to the influence of Bolshevik ideology.⁴⁸ It is therefore no coincidence that during the meeting with Mallet on 23 May, Topchubashov stressed that he was extremely regretful to hear rumours about the departure of British troops from the Caucasus.

The most significant event of the first months of the delegation's stay in Paris was its brief reception by President Woodrow Wilson on 28 May 1919. During the meeting, Wilson 'displayed a cold and rather unsympathetic attitude'.⁴⁹ reflecting the difficulty faced by the Azerbaijani delegation in its search for allied support. Reporting to its government, the Azerbaijani delegation stated:

Wilson had stated that the Conference did not want to partition the world into small pieces. Wilson advised the Azerbaijanis that it would be better for them to develop a spirit of confederation, and that such a confederation of all peoples of Transcaucasia could receive the protection of some Power on the basis of a mandate granted by the League of Nations. The Azerbaijani question could not be solved prior to the general settlement of the Russian question.⁵⁰

47. Balfour (Paris) to Earl Curzon, Paris, No. 813, 26 May, 1919, DBFP, Vol. 3, pp. 324-25.

48. L. Mallet, Minutes of Conversation with Colonel Stokes, Paris, 7 June 1919, FO 608/851, fol. 58 A.

49. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 266.

50. 'Report of the Delegation', No.7, June 1919, fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dossier No.3, p.7, cited in Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 266.

A month later, Topchubashov met James Simpson, ‘a member of the Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office, who was responsible for advising on matters concerning Russia and the Baltic states’.⁵¹ During the meeting, stressing that “although Azerbaijan was anxious to be on friendly terms with all its neighbours, he ruled out the idea of returning to a Russian federation, as ‘our language, religion, our ways of living are different from those of the Russians’”.⁵² The allies were simply unwilling to agree publicly to independence for the states of the Transcaucasus at a time when they were still supporting White forces in their struggle against the Bolsheviks.

4.3 The Italian mission in Transcaucasia

As mentioned earlier, when the British arrived in Baku on November 1918, they announced that they had only entered the Caucasus on a temporary basis. Their presence was supposed to last until an international peace conference could solve the political problems in the Caucasus. But three months after British troops entered Baku, in February 1919, Lloyd George's government had already in effect decided to withdraw the troops as soon as possible from the South Caucasus. Yet the British government knew that their forces would need to be replaced in order to secure peace in the region, which was necessary to ensure the free flow of oil. The British War Cabinet at the end of January 1919 came to the conclusion that it was necessary to persuade one of its allies to exercise control in Transcaucasia. However, the British did not want to see the USA or France strengthen their position in the region since both were economic and political rivals. During February and March 1919, the United States and French representatives in Paris openly expressed an interest in Transcaucasia. Lord Curzon noted that he was perturbed at the prospect of France - Britain's greatest imperial rival - becoming a mandate power for Armenia and the Caucasus more generally. He wrote that:

I must say that I am very much alarmed at the idea of the French being there. If you have France there, exercising control that will extend from the eastern corner of the Mediterranean right across to the Caspian, our position will be very assailable in the East...⁵³

51. Alston, ‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’, p. 29.

52. ‘Minute of Conversation with Mr. Topchibasheff, Head of the Azerbaijan Delegation to the Peace Conference’, 1 July 1919, GD40/17/859/3, cited in Alston, ‘The Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic’, p. 37.

53. Annexe to the Minutes of the 40th Meeting of the Eastern Committee, 2 December 1918, cited in Neilson, ‘For Diplomatic, Economic, Strategic and Telegraphic Reason: British Imperial Defence, the Middle East and India, 1914-1918’, in G. Kennedy and K. Neilson (eds), *Far Flung Lines: Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman*, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 103-23.

Yet the prospect of a French protectorate over the Transcaucasian states was never a realistic one. While business circles in France expressed great interest in the economic potential of the Caucasus, Georges Clemenceau's government strongly supported the idea of a 'united and indivisible Russia'.⁵⁴ The French government was indeed the most persistent of the great powers in opposing any recognition of the independence of the new republics.

It was against this background that the idea of involving Italians in the Caucasus was first put forward by the British. Such a development was preferable to handing control of the area to a major imperial rival. It also provided Italy with the prospect of some material gain (the Italian government constantly took on the mantle of the 'offended child' at Paris, convinced that it was being excluded by the other main entente powers). The prospect of Italy assuming some form of mandate in the region was discussed at the Eastern Committee as early as 9 December 1918. 'During a broad discussion about the apportioning of mandates in the Middle East, General Smuts' who represented the South African government in the War Cabinet, had stated that such an approach might solve the difficult 'issue of Italian claims in the Near and Middle East'.⁵⁵ On 30 January 1919, Lloyd George presented a draft resolution on the subject to the other major powers.

Italy was above all interested in the occupation of those parts of the Ottoman Empire which had been promised to it by the London agreement and a later agreement made in Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne in the autumn of 1917.⁵⁶ The Italian government wanted to take part in the occupation of Asia Minor, although the British Cabinet did not consider this necessary, considering it to be a quiet zone where there was no need for the presence of large numbers of foreign troops. When the question arose about the Caucasus, Italy expressed its readiness to join in the occupation of the area, but only on the condition that it would also be allowed to occupy Adalia and Konia. The unwillingness of the British to agree to such an idea was considered by the Italians as evidence that the other leading powers hoped to use Italian occupation of the Caucasus as a way of removing it from participation in the occupation of other regions in which Italy had a stronger position. The Italian

54. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 255.

55. Minutes of the Eastern Committee, EC 42, 9 Dec. 1918, secret, Cabinet Office Papers, CAB/27/24, p. 19., cited in J. Fisher, 'On the Glacis of India: Lord Curzon and British Policy in the Caucasus, 1919', *Journal Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1997, p. 58.

56. P. C. Helmreich, 'Italy and the Anglo-French Repudiation of the 1917 St. Jean de Maurienne Agreement', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 1976, pp. 99-100.

government realized that it would struggle to maintain control of the Caucasus after the end of the civil war in Russia, and reacted cautiously to the British proposals, reluctant to concentrate all its forces in a region so remote from its traditional Mediterranean interests. The participation of the Italian troops in the occupation of Transcaucasia should not, in the opinion of Orlando and Sonnino, be seen as an alternative to the participation of Italy in the division of Asia Minor (which was promised to it under Article IX of the Treaty of London and the agreements of 1917).⁵⁷ During the Paris Peace Conference, Italy was forced to accept the loss of Smyrna, but considered that it should receive compensation elsewhere in Asia Minor, to prevent the balance of power in the Mediterranean moving in favour of France and especially Great Britain.

On 15 March 1919, 'after several preliminary discussions, Lloyd George, without conferring with the Foreign Office, offered Orlando the mandate'.⁵⁸ Orlando again regarded this proposal as an attempt to divert Italy's attention from the division of islands in the Aegean Sea and the western part of Asia Minor, believing that Britain wanted to use Italian forces in the fight against Bolshevism. He also feared that Italian troops would face opposition from the local population who would continue to resent the presence of foreign troops on their territory. At the same time, Orlando also feared to reject the British proposal since it could weaken Italy's position in discussions over Asia Minor. And, of course, the existence of huge oil resources in the Caspian Sea gave an incentive for Orlando to take a certain risk. On 23 March 1919, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sonnino reported to the British and French ambassadors that Italy was ready to replace the British troops in the Caucasus. A preliminary agreement between two countries was then signed at the end of March, under which the British army's positions in Transcaucasia were to be handed over to the Italy's army.⁵⁹ However British political circles were not unanimous on this issue. Lord Curzon, who considered himself to be the expert on the Caucasus matters, believed that sending Italian forces to the South Caucasus was absolute madness. He wrote that:

57. C. J. Lowe, F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870-1940*, London, Routledge, 1975, p. 169.

58. R.G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: From Versailles to London, 1919-1920*, Vol. 2, Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 1982, p. 23.

59. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 306.

The Italians can have very little idea of what they are in for.....They have no knowledge of that part of the world; it has no connections either with their national interests or their political ambitions; they will not carry the smallest weight or respect among the Caucasian peoples.....and the result, I take leave to warn you, will be disorder, bloodshed, and anarchy of a most shocking description'.⁶⁰

But Curzon's words were not taken into account, and on 1 April ministers in London approved the secret agreement that had been signed between Britain and Italy a few days earlier. Its report stated that 'it has been decided by the Allied Premiers that Italy is to be the Mandatory Power for the Caucasus and Italian Staff officers are proceeding immediately to the Caucasus to arrange with British Staffs to take over from them'.⁶¹

On 10 May 1919, General Thomson told the Azerbaijani government that:

I have to inform you that British troops will be superseded by Italian troops. A mission of Italian officers has already arrived in Georgia to make the necessary preparations. I beg you to extend to them every kind of help and assistance.⁶²

Both the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia were opposed to the departure of the British troops and their replacement by Italians. In mid-May, Patrick Stevens, the long-serving British Consul in Batumi, reported that:

News of the replacement of British troops by the Italians had been received with bitter disappointment by all classes of the population and had created a situation verging on panic.⁶³

After receiving the telegram from Thomson, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Jafarov went to Tiflis to meet with the commander of allied forces there. During the conversation Jafarov said that replacement British troops by Italian troops was 'undesirable and would lead to unpredictable results'.⁶⁴ However, General Thomson stressed that it was impossible to change the decision as it had been approved at the Paris Peace Conference. In such a situation, the government of Azerbaijan had no choice except accepting the British government's decision.

60. Curzon to Balfour, 25 March 1919, Foreign Office, SW1, Balfour Papers FO 800/215, fols. 365-68., cited in Fisher, 'On the glaxis of India', p. 61.

61. Weekly Appreciation on matters of Naval Interest No. 15, 29 March 1919, CAB/24/77.

62. The Archives of the Azistpart, fund of the Ministry of Foreign affairs, Dossier No. 54, p. 11, cited in Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 227.

63. Fisher, 'On the glaxis of India', p. 62.

64. Pis'mo Dippredstavitelya Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki v Tiflise M.YU. Dzhafarova V. Tomsonu, 7 April 1919, GAAR, f. 970, op. 1, d. 42, l. 50.

The decision adopted by the great powers during the Peace Conference without the consent of the Azerbaijan government posed new challenges to the delegation. In one of his reports, Topchubashov expressed the opinion that the main motive for the arrival of Italians should be seen as a result of a decision by the allies to provide economic benefits to Italy as compensation for their failure to meet its territorial claims in the Adriatic region.⁶⁵ His assumptions were seemingly confirmed by the attaché of the Italian Embassy in Paris, Count Sadino, who was invited to dinner with the various Caucasian delegations. He told his hosts that the Italian government was pursuing economic rather than political goals in the Caucasus. ‘Italy's military presence in the Caucasus’, he noted, ‘will not last more than 3-5 years. He added that during this time the Caucasian republics should form a confederation’.⁶⁶

The Azerbaijani government, believing that Italy would become the new power in the South Caucasus, sought to emphasise to the Italian government the value and importance of Azerbaijani oil. Topchubashov during his meeting with Count Sadino suggested that his government could supply about 500,000 poods of kerosene monthly to Batumi bound for Italy. And the official government newspaper *Azerbaijan*, referring to the replacement of the British troops in Transcaucasia by the Italians, wrote:

The fact of the arrival of Italian troops in Transcaucasia and the participation of the Italian people in our destiny represents a historical period in the stage of development of our state life. We will find in the person of Italy a new protector of the peoples of the Transcaucasian republics.⁶⁷

The Italian Foreign Minister Sidney Sonnino in turn sent a message to the Italian High Commissioner in Constantinople, Carlo Sforza, noting Italy's interest in Azerbaijan. Stressing the need to send an Italian mission to Transcaucasia, Carlo Sforza replied that:

The present moment is optimal for the implementation of the Italian plans to expand economic and military influence in the Black Sea basin, foremost in Transcaucasia.⁶⁸

65. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, pp. 258-60.

66. Raevskiy, *Angliiskaia Interventsiia*, p. 57.

67. *Azerbaijan*, 18 May 1919, p. 1.

68. D.P. Vincelli, *L'Azerbaijan nei documenti diplomatici italiani (1919-1920)*, Roma, Nuova Cultura, 2013, p. 54, cited in A. G. Nesterov, ‘Azerbaydzhanskaya Demokraticeskaya Respublika 1918-1920 v Diplomaticeskikh Dokumentakh Italii’, *Nauchnyy Dialog*, No. 3, 2016, pp. 370-74.

Despite accepting the British offer to send troops to the Caucasus, the Italian government did not hurry to dispatch any forces; instead it sent a group of experts to check on conditions there. The group of experts consisted of eighteen people who were told to study in detail the internal situation in the Caucasus and find out whether Italy would be able to cope with the situation. At the same time, the military command led by Colonel Melchiorre Gabba was ordered to prepare an expeditionary corps for dispatch to the Caucasus. The group of experts departed by sea from Taranto on 27 April 1919 and travelling through Constantinople arrived in Batumi on 10 May 1919.⁶⁹ The head of the experts - Sforza - immediately began to collect information on the Caucasus. Soon after arrival he wrote Orlando and Sonnino a letter warning them against making any hasty decisions. He noted that although the people of the Caucasus were constantly at war with one another they were united in wanting to prevent the presence of colonizers. He also suggested that one of the reasons the British were so eager to leave this region was the hostility they received from much of the local population. In addition, Sforza warned of the danger of a possible conflict with the Bolsheviks who were bound to make an effort to establish their authority over the Caucasus. He added that in any case, the occupation of the Caucasus, which was a vital region for Russia, 'would inevitably lead to a clash with the Russians, regardless of whether the Bolsheviks or the White Guards wins'.⁷⁰ Orlando listened to the opinion of Sforza, and decided not to send the full military contingent, at least until he received more news from the mission.

'In April 1919, the Italian government dispatched a sizeable military mission under Colonel Melchiorre Gabba to reconnoitre the Caucasus'.⁷¹ On 22 May, he arrived in Baku and held talks with Azerbaijani Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Two important issues became clear during the negotiations. In the first place, the Azerbaijani government asked the Italians to protect it from the any attempt by Denikin to establish his control over the country, reflecting the fact that ministers at this stage believed that White forces posed a bigger threat than the Bolsheviks (Colonel Gabba responded by promising to help the government of Azerbaijan strengthen its defence capability).⁷²

69. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 259.

70. A.B. Shirokorad, *Italiya: Vrag Ponevole*, Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Veche, 2010, p. 152.

71. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, Vol. 1, p. 306.

72. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 259.

And, in the second place, it became clear that Italy's interest in the region was above all one of narrow economic self-interest and that the Italian government had no great desire to protect the Transcaucasian governments.

At the beginning of June, the mission led by Gabba returned to Italy. He warned his superiors of the deep economic and financial crisis in the Caucasus and described the instability of the local governments which felt threatened by both the Bolsheviks and White forces. He also described the open conflicts between representatives of the different nationalities. Gabba and other members of the mission believed that the individual republics were weak, and that the only solution to deal with the crisis was through the creation of a single Caucasian federation, whose leaders could focus on solving the deep internal problems.⁷³ He also stressed the need for the presence of a great power in the Caucasus that could hold together this Caucasian union. Gabba pointed out that control of the region could bring huge economic benefits, given that it was rich in coal, iron and manganese. He therefore suggested that it was important to develop a clear program to achieve economic penetration of the region, suggesting that it was necessary to conclude an agreement with Denikin to not interfere in the internal affairs of the Caucasian republics. He argued that in the case of refusal, the Entente powers should threaten to cease providing Denikin with military and technical assistance in its fight against the Bolsheviks.⁷⁴

After receiving Gabba's information about Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Italian government was in favour of sending troops to the Caucasus, while a little later on 3 July 1919, 'the British government decided to begin the evacuation of its troops from the Caucasus on 15 August'.⁷⁵ It was agreed that British troops should be replaced by Italian troops. In early July, the representatives of Azerbaijan (Topchubashov) and Georgia (Tseretelli) met Louis Mallet (who was as seen earlier a leading member of the British delegation). Mallet confirmed the British decision to withdraw from the Caucasus and explained that the British army in Transcaucasia was needed now elsewhere. With the arrival of Italians in the Caucasus, Mallet noted, 'The situation will not change ... The Italians will

73. Shirokorad, *Italiya: Vrag Ponevole*, p. 153.

74. Ibid.

75. War Office to Milne, 3 July 1919, War Office Records 33/974, No. 4845, cited in Rose, 'Batum as Domino', p. 267.

continue the work begun by the British'. When Topchubashov asked about the threat posed by Denikin, Mallet responded: 'Denikin, will not come either to Azerbaijan or Georgia because the Volunteer Army commander had already received such instructions [from the British].'⁷⁶

The situation became more complicated when the Italian government headed by Orlando resigned. After the resignation of Orlando's government, Francesco Nitti became Prime Minister and head of a government that increasingly focused on the economic and political chaos in Italy itself rather than foreign affairs. Many members of the new Cabinet were opposed to the Caucasian expedition. As a first step, Nitti temporarily stopped the dispatch of any troops to the Caucasus. The new government faced more pressing internal problems. Nitti proclaimed demobilization as his main goal, not least to save money, at a time when the Italian government spent about 2 billion lire a month on its forces. The main foreign policy priority for the new government was not Azerbaijan but rather 'the settlement of disputed territorial issues with Greece (over Albania) and Yugoslavia'.⁷⁷ Nitti's position was supported by the King. Unlike Britain and France, Italy did not provide loans to Russia before the First World War, and although ideologically hostile to the Bolsheviks it had less economic interest in the future of Russia. Nitti in any case anticipated the possibility of a Bolshevik victory and did not want to spoil relations with them, while the growing influence of the left in Italy forced him to be cautious in order not to provoke a revolutionary movement. The Socialists threatened to hold a general strike in the case of an anti-Soviet expedition which could painfully hit the already weakened Italian economy. On 2 July 1919, the Foreign Office received a telephone message from the War Office stating that 'the Italian Military Representative in Paris' had informed the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that Italy had definitely abandoned all ideas of sending a military force to the Caucasus. Referring to this communication, Mr. Balfour sent a telegram from Paris to Curzon reporting that: 'From what Tittoni (the Italian Foreign Minister) said to me recently in a private conversation, I do not think the Italians mean to go to the Caucasus'.⁷⁸

76. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 260.

77. A.C. René, *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1938, pp. 244-47.

78. Balfour to Curzon, No. 296, 6 July, DBFP, First Series, Vol. 3, London: HMSO, 1949, p. 419.

On 30 July, the Italian government formally told the British government that it would not conduct a Caucasian expedition. This was done the day after the signing of the Italian-Greek agreement regarding Anatolia (by which Italy abandoned Smyrna but strengthened its position in Adalia). On 31 July, the head of the Italian military mission in Transcaucasia sent a telegram to the Azerbaijan Foreign Minister informing him that Italy would not send troops to replace the British army in the South Caucasus. At the same time, he added, 'his government wants to maintain friendly relations with the government of Azerbaijan republic'.⁷⁹ The long diplomatic effort to at the Paris Peace Conference to get Italian troops to replace British troops ended in failure.

4.4 In the search of a new protectorate

The Italian government's refusal to send troops to the Caucasus compelled the leaders of the Transcaucasian Republics to look for a new 'protector'. Members of the Azerbaijani delegation therefore had to search for the support of a strong power that could guarantee the protection of the 'independence' of the young state. The representatives of the young republic went from person to person and place to place: from Wilson to Lloyd George, from Lloyd George to Clemenceau, from Paris to London, and from London to Rome. Yet despite their efforts they found little support. Topchubashov as chairman of the delegation noted the challenge in one of his reports saying that:

All are still looking not only for allies, but patrons, protectors, mandate holders. 'On whom to orientate' is the question that was put before independent Azerbaijan during several meetings.⁸⁰

Knowing what disaster could emerge from failure, the delegation after long discussion decided that Azerbaijan should turn to the League of Nations to choose the mandate holder. But the issue continued to cause unease and was again discussed in August among representatives from all the new states in the Caucasus. Topchubashov told the meeting that 'though independence of our republics is one of our greatest desires, we cannot exist without political support and military aid from outside, at least for the present'.⁸¹

79. *Azerbaydzhanskaya Demokraticheskaya Respublika*, pp. 302-3.

80. G. Gasanov, *A.M.B. Topchibashev Gosudarstvennicheskaya Deyatel'nost, 1918 – 1920*, Vol. 3, Baku, ADA-Universitet, 2015, pp. 338-39.

81. Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, pp. 263-64.

During the discussions, a number of proposals were put forward. One representative from Azerbaijan (M.G. Hadjinski) suggested that only Great Britain had the prestige and authority to fulfil such a role and argued that the government in London should be asked to take a mandate over Azerbaijan (he urged all the Caucasus states to follow such a route as well).⁸²

The shifting approach of the Azerbaijan delegation was in part determined by political differences and conflicts among the states that met at the Peace Conference. The French government consistently opposed recognising the independence of the newly formed states of the Caucasus. When a member of the French Parliament asked the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Stephen Pichon about the attitude of France toward the Caucasian Republics, in particular Azerbaijan, his answer was that ‘the Republics of the Caucasus are not legally recognized by the French government ... the existence of Transcaucasia republics currently seems temporary’.⁸³ The other great powers continued to take a similar position in relation to Azerbaijan, guided by a consensus at the Peace Conference to wait for the outcome of events in Russia and above all the struggle against Bolshevism. Yet this temporizing policy put to one side but did not altogether remove from the agenda the question of recognising the independence of Azerbaijan and the other Caucasus states. The Azerbaijani delegation therefore actively continued to seek new patronage and, after extensive discussions, followed the proposal of Hadjinsky that Britain should be asked to take over the mandate for the running of Azerbaijan.

Georgian representatives in Paris supported this proposal and hoped that Britain would accept their appeal, and eventually the following statement was sent to the Chairman of the Paris Peace Conference on behalf of all Transcaucasia Republics:

The undersigned, chairmen of the delegations of the Armenian, Azerbaijanian and Georgian Republics, have the honour to report to the Peace Conference that the planned evacuation of the Caucasus by Allied forces may have undesirable consequences. Because of this, the undersigned have the honour to request that the Peace Conference to postpone the evacuation until independence of above mentioned republics are clarified and recognized.⁸⁴

82. GAAR, f. 970, op. 1, d. 142, l. 205-212, cited in Gasanov, *A.M.B. Topchibashev*, p. 295.

83. Raevskiy, *Musavatskoie Pravitel'stvo*, pp. 52-3.

84. GAAR, f. 970, op. 1, d. 142, l. 45, cited in Gasanov, *A.M.B. Topchibashev*, p. 318.

However by this time, the withdrawal of the British troops from Azerbaijan had already begun. On 4 August, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan wrote to the British commander in Baku (Shuttleworth) asking him to keep troops in the country:

According to official information in the hands of government, in mid-August British troops will leave the country. Given this, the government has decided to ask the government of his Majesty to keep British troops temporarily in Azerbaijan. If the British government agrees to maintain the army then terms and conditions can be prepared on the basis of mutual agreement.⁸⁵

His appeal met with no positive response given that the Government in London was determined to remove its troops. The Musavat government's preference for keeping British troops in Azerbaijan, rather than relying on troops from France, was shaped by the fact that the British unlike the French did not so strongly support the restoration of the Russian Empire (which had for more than a century been the main imperial rival to Britain in Asia). The government in London was opposed to the entry of Denikin's Volunteer Army onto the territory of Transcaucasia. The Azerbaijan government also seemed to hope that Britain's patronage could lead in time to Britain being given the League of Nations mandate to administer the republics of the Caucasus, although the League itself attracted little respect either in Baku or among members of the Azerbaijan delegation in Paris (Topchubashov noted the League might be like a 'stillborn child' and that the great powers were unlikely to work hard to make it work effectively).⁸⁶

The British government was also, despite its decision to withdraw its troops, anxious to see the Musavat government of Azerbaijan protected against the threat from the north (whether from Denikin's forces or potentially Bolshevik forces). At a joint meeting of the delegations of Transcaucasia Republics at the end of July 1919, Hadjinsky was still hopeful that Britain would in some way act to protect Azerbaijan: 'Do not forget that the British sit with us and if they wish, they can create a catastrophe for us'.⁸⁷ However, the nature of British support was bound to be uncertain.

85. *Azerbaydzhanskaya Demokraticheskaya Respublika*, pp. 323-25.

86. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 61.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

The presence of British forces in the Caucasus was not only important for defending the region from Denikin's White forces. It also helped to build peace and stability among the quarrelling Transcaucasian republics. It is impossible not to agree with Churchill's judgement that 'the British division, surrounding the entire Caucasus from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea, was the only guarantor of peace among the rival nations of the Caucasus'.⁸⁸ Yet despite the efforts of the Azerbaijani government and its representatives in Paris, by the end of August 1919 British troops left Baku. The government in London hoped that Menshevik-Musavat and Dashnak-Denikin cooperation, carefully overseen by a small number of remaining British soldiers and civilian officials, would be sufficient to maintain a degree of political order and preserve the economic interests of the British Empire. So, although most British forces physically left Azerbaijan, British diplomacy remained dominant in the region and the British government did not give up its attempts to consolidate its position in the Azerbaijan by seeking new forms of control (informal Empire).

In the months that followed, the Azerbaijani delegation continued to hope that it might eventually convince the British government to establish a protectorate over the young republic. Yet British policy still held that effective penetration and control of the country could be achieved through the establishment of various types of alliances and agreements. British policy had already long been successful in establishing British influence in Persia - or at least the southern part of the country - despite not having formal control over the country. This seemed to be a model of diplomacy that could be applied to Azerbaijan. Thus a new form of the Anglo-Azerbaijani relations began in the autumn of 1919.

In late October and early November, the British gave support to a series of secret meetings held between the Azerbaijani and Persian delegations at the Peace Conference.⁸⁹ During the negotiations, Britain put forward a draft proposal for a military-political union of Persia and Azerbaijan, which would effectively have achieved a final separation of Azerbaijan from Russia and created a new entity under British control. The Persian Foreign Minister Firuz Mirza at one of the meetings with

88. Quoted in Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, p. 265.

89. C. Hille, *State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus*, Leiden, Brill, 2010, p. 189.

Azerbaijani delegation stated that ‘Our delegations need to work together ... Our joint action will help both of us. It is only necessary to discuss the form of the union and for this purpose to establish a joint commission’.⁹⁰

After discussion of this proposal, on 28 October, the joint commission was set up. The meeting of the commission lasted for three days during which the representatives of Azerbaijan made four points:

1. Azerbaijan to be definitely separated from Russia whatever Government be established in that country;
2. Azerbaijan to be recognised as a free and independent Republic with Baku as its capital;
3. Azerbaijan to be joined to Persia under Confederation to be agreed upon by both Governments and approved by Parliaments, the foreign relations of both states being unified;
4. For the above purposes Azerbaijan desires the help of Great Britain for the establishment and maintenance of her independence, etc., on lines similar to that accorded to Persia.⁹¹

Topchubashov wrote enthusiastically in late 1919 that ‘the Persian representative, Firuz Mirza stressed the necessity of the existence of independent Azerbaijan in the Caucasus, and categorically affirmed the declaration by members of the Persian delegation that Persia had no claim on any part of Caucasus Azerbaijan’.⁹²

The talks need to be put in the context of the agreement between Britain and Persia in August 1919 that had guaranteed British access to Persian oil fields in return for loans and military support (an agreement viewed with great concern by other great powers who believed that it damaged their own imperial and economic interests). The Azerbaijan delegation was delighted that the proposed ‘union’ with Persia would provide a kind of recognition by London of the Azerbaijan Republic. Yet such an agreement also effectively limited the sovereignty of the Azerbaijani state in key areas relating to military and foreign policy. The Musavat government in its desire to confirm the independence of Azerbaijan effectively agreed to a high level of British penetration that threatened to turn the country

90. Raevskiy, *Musavatskoie Pravitel'stvo*, p. 55.

91. Curzon to Wardrop, No. 615, 20 December, 1919, DBFP, Vol. 3, pp. 733-34.

92. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 23.

into a semi-colonial country of the British Empire. The decision may have made sense given the geopolitical and diplomatic challenges facing the country. Yet the price of political independence was in effect to be acceptance of a high level of economic dependence and control.

In early December 1919, the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Usubbeyov met the Persian Prince Mirza Riza Kahn, when the latter suggested that Azerbaijan should confederate with Persia. On 7 December, during the conversation with Colonel Stokes in Baku, Usubbeyov asked him whether the British Government would definitely support the proposal (the British had of course supported the original talks).⁹³ On 20 December 1919, Lord Curzon as Foreign Secretary wrote to Britain's ambassador in Tehran, Percy Cox, telling him that senior figures in the Persian Royal Family had said that:

During the war the Turks had shown considerable energy in propaganda in Azerbaijan and Georgia, and had thus stolen a march on the Persians in those districts. Expressing the hope that the Republic of Azerbaijan should live in amity with Persia would meet the requirements of the case'.⁹⁴

Meanwhile, the Persian government decided to recognize the new Azerbaijan republic with the aim of controlling the Pan-Turanian movement in 'there and as well as in Iranian Azerbaijan'.⁹⁵ At the end of March 1920, the head of official Persian mission, Sayyed Ziya 'had concluded a treaty with the Azerbaijan government in Baku and sent it back to Tehran for ratification'.⁹⁶ However, as a result of occupation of Azerbaijan by the Bolshevik forces at the end of April, the treaty was never officially ratified.

93. Wardrop to Curzon, No. 600, 10 December, 1919, DBFP, Vol. 3, pp. 693-94.

94. Earl Curzon to Sir P. Cox (Tehran), No. 280, 20 December 1919, cited in Maxwell, *Azerbaijan Xalq Cumhuriyyeti*, Baku, Çayıoğlu Mətbəəsi, 2008, p. 333.

95. H. Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of Pahlavis*, London, I.B.Tauris, 2006, p. 148.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

4.5 Defeat of the both Kolchak and Denikin governments

From the middle of June 1919, much of the focus of the Azerbaijani (and indeed Georgian) delegations in Paris focused on their opposition to the claims of the government of Admiral A. Kolchak, based in Omsk, to be recognized as an official government of the territories of the former Russian Empire.

The issue also caused considerable division within the British government in London. Winston Churchill, the Minister of War, was a strong supporter of White forces and their claim to represent Russia 'One and Indivisible'. Like them 'he was often hostile to the national aspirations of non-Russian peoples',⁹⁷ believing that they were likely to undermine the unity of anti-Bolshevik forces, making a White victory less likely. Churchill believed the main role British troops based there was 'to help the small States not against Russia but against anarchy'.⁹⁸

Lord Curzon, Foreign Minister, held the opposite point of view. He advocated the creation of independent states in the Caucasus believing they could be a reliable barrier to any future Russian expansion.⁹⁹ These divisions were partly echoed among British troops (and officials) posted to the Caucasus. Members of the officer corps of the units deployed from the end of 1918 along the Baku-Batumi line were typically drawn from the Indian Army and took a negative view of both the Reds and Whites. Officers who had seen service on the Western Front – who were much less likely to be veterans of the Indian Army – were more inclined to sympathize with White forces (most senior military officials who served in Azerbaijan after 1918 were typically members of the Indian Army).

The British Prime Minister David Lloyd George typically acted as a kind of mediator between Churchill and Curzon, although on the question of the independence of the Caucasian republics he was more inclined to the views of the Foreign Secretary. Yet his main priority was to reduce the financial burden created by British involvement in Russia. 'A British White Paper gives England's total outlays for naval and military purposes in Russia from the Armistice to 3 October 1919, as amounting to no less

97. G. Mamoulia, R. Abutalibov, *Topchibashi A. M.: Parizhskiy Arkhiv 1919-1940*, Vol. 1 (1919-1921), Moscow, Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 2016, p. 37.

98. Minutes, Inter-Departmental Conference on Middle Eastern Affairs, 6 March, 1919, FO 371/3661.

99. Mamoulia, Abutalibov, *Topchibashi A.M.*, p. 37.

than 94,830,000 pound sterling'.¹⁰⁰ It was from this standpoint that Lloyd George approached both the question of military assistance to White Army and the question of the presence of British troops in the Caucasus. It was also for economic reasons that Lloyd George was later to support a cautious rapprochement with the Bolsheviks in 1920-21, hoping that it would create new opportunities for British exports, and make possible repayment of some of the loans that British investors had made to the Tsarist government before 1917.

As early as March 1919, realizing that for financial reasons Great Britain would have to reduce its presence in the South Caucasus, Curzon recommended to the Cabinet that the government begin detailed preparations for the evacuation of British troops. As compensation for this, he proposed to increase the supply to the Volunteer Army of weapons and military equipment on condition that General Denikin should not interfere in the affairs of the independent states of the Caucasus.¹⁰¹ Curzon in effect considered the supply of arms to the Volunteer Army as a means to strengthen anti-Bolshevik forces while also ensuring that it did not seek to reconquer the newly-independent states. He also believed that supplies to the Volunteer Army should be delivered over several months in order to ensure effective control over Denikin's forces.¹⁰² Although Churchill was an ardent adherent of Denikin, he too was against Denikin becoming involved in any conflict with these republics, rightly believing it would disperse White forces and weaken them in the fight with the Russian Bolsheviks. He therefore accepted Curzon's proposal about relations with Denikin as a means of giving London the necessary lever of pressure on the Volunteer Army.¹⁰³ Yet Denikin was reluctant to give up 'Russian rights' on the Caucasus.

The political situation was made more complex by the role of Admiral Kolchak, whose forces had by the end of April 1919 advanced from Siberia towards central Russia. Kolchak was determined to have his government recognised as the All-Russian Government. He sent instructions to Sergei Sazanov, the head of the Russian political delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, demanding that he

100. Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, p. 141.

101. Minutes of a Meeting held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Thursday, 6 March, 1919, CAB/ 23/9, fol. 103.

102. *Ibid.*

103. *Ibid.*

should secure recognition by the Supreme Council of Russia's 1914 borders (with the exception of Poland). The members of the Supreme Council were concerned that such a policy would weaken the White's prospects in the struggle with the Bolsheviks since they would incur the hostility of many non-Russian minorities. President Wilson, in particular, was against such a movement. On 9 May 1919, in the Council of Four's discussions, Wilson noted that 'our government has no confidence in Admiral Kolchak, who is supported by France and England'.¹⁰⁴ Thompson notes that 'his dedication to the principle of self-determination of peoples was so great that Wilson was reluctant to intervene against the Bolsheviks, or even sanction such intervention on the part of others'.¹⁰⁵ Partly sharing Wilson's position, Lloyd George 'was definitely opposed to military intervention in any shape'.¹⁰⁶ However, responding to Wilson's claim, the British Prime Minister observed that:

Kolchak is not only a man whom we can trust, but he is surrounded by young men who, before the revolution and at its outset, had taken an advanced position. I think we can impose conditions upon Kolchak if we do it now.¹⁰⁷

Despite the disagreements, the members of the Supreme Council were nevertheless willing to consider recognising Kolchak's government as the All-Russian government if he agreed to certain conditions. At the meeting of the Supreme Council on 26 May 1919, the text of a Note was drawn up that was sent two days later to Kolchak after a number of minor changes. The note outlined the conditions under which the Allies were prepared to provide any further military and financial assistance to the Whites. Among these conditions were: agreement to summon a Constituent Assembly elected by a free, secret and democratic franchise as the Supreme Legislature for Russia; the holding of free elections; joining the League of Nations; recognition of the independence of Finland and Poland; and, finally, payment of Russia's national debts. The note also demanded unconditional recognition of Baltic, the Caucasian and Transcaspian territories as autonomous by Kolchak's government.¹⁰⁸

104. P. Mantoux, *The Deliberations of the Council of Four (24 March-28 June, 1919): From the Delivery of the Peace Terms to the Signing of the Treaty of Versailles*, ed. Arthur S. Link, Vol. 2, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 14.

105. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace*, p. 42.

106. Neilson, 'That Elusive Entity', p. 77.

107. Mantoux, *Deliberations of the Council of Four*, p. 15.

108. Despatch to Admiral Kolchak, 27 May 1919, FRUS, the Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 6, Document 10, Appendix I, pp. 73-5.

At the same meeting, Lloyd George declared that a positive response from Kolchak would determine whether the allies recognized his government as the government of all Russia. In early June, information about the possible recognition of the Kolchak government was leaked to the press, causing extreme concern among the diplomatic delegations of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the North Caucasus in Paris. Their members feared, not unreasonably, that should White forces be militarily successful the Allies would not insist on their adherence to the principle of federation. The response of Kolchak to the Allied Note showed that the concerns of the delegations were not groundless. Kolchak wrote to the Supreme Council of the Entente that the questions of the future organization of the country would be decided by the Constituent Assembly, convened after the victory over Bolshevism. The only concession he made was an agreement to recognize Poland's independence. As regard to Finland, he agreed to the *de facto* recognition of Finland, but stated that the issue of its final recognition *de jure* should be left until 'the decision of the Constituent Assembly'.¹⁰⁹ The Allies nevertheless were generally satisfied that he had offered 'satisfactory assurances for freedom, self-government and peace of the Russian people and their neighbours'.¹¹⁰

In response to the recognition of the authority of Admiral Kolchak in Russia by the main Entente countries, the representatives of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Latvia, Estonia, the Northern Caucasus, Belarus and Ukraine handed over a collective note of protest to the chairman of the Peace Conference. According to Topchubashov, 'neither the Conference nor the allies responded to these protests'.¹¹¹ By the time this protest was issued, Kolchak's armies had already been forced back by the Red Army to the Urals.

From the end of June 1919, the attention of the Azerbaijani delegation again focused on the events taking place in the North Caucasus where the Volunteer Army of General Denikin was temporarily successful in breaking down the resistance of the Mountain people, creating an immediate threat to 'the independence' of Azerbaijan.¹¹² Despite the fact that the British tried to create a buffer zone

109. Telegram from M. Martel, 11 June 1919, FRUS, the Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 6, Document 38, Appendix II, pp. 321-23.

110. Ibid., Document 40, Appendix I, p. 356.

111. Raevskiy, *Musavatskoie Pravitel'stvo*, p. 64.

112. A.I. Denikin, *Ocherki Russkoy Smuty: Vooruzhennyye Sily Yuga Rossii*, Vol. 4, Berlin, Slovo, 1925, p. 126.

between the Volunteer Army and Azerbaijan, demanding that White commanders refrain from the occupation of Southern Dagestan, Denikin never fulfilled this condition. At the same time, the White command secured the support of British officers who were part of the British military mission attached to the Denikin government. For example, in his report, Major General H. Holman, head of the British military mission in South Russia, tried to compromise the 'Mountain Government', calling its members 'adventurers who are taken seriously only in London and Paris, but not in the North Caucasus'.¹¹³ Such 'arguments' appeared more convincing in London when it became known (by early July) that the Italian government was unlikely to send troops to the Caucasus (see above).

On 9 July, General Thwaites, head of the Intelligence Department at the War Office, reported to the Foreign Office that in the absence of Italian troops,

It is impossible to insist that the Volunteer Army must remain in the north of Dagestan. According to the data obtained from local peoples, the Dagestanis have nothing against the presence of Denikin in their territory, and Denikin will refrain from crossing the border with Azerbaijan unless the Azerbaijanis behave aggressively.¹¹⁴

As a result, on 17 July, the British command agreed to the occupation of Dagestan by Denikin with a clear demarcation line directly along the Azerbaijan-Dagestan border.¹¹⁵ Relations between Denikin and the government of Azerbaijan were further aggravated in the late summer of 1919, when the British handed over to the Volunteer Army the ships of the Caspian flotilla.¹¹⁶ London had initially intended to hand over the ships to the Italians, but when the new government in Rome refused to send troops, the British transferred the ships to the Whites. They also handed over to Denikin six coastal motor boats in Petrovsk.

In response to the protest of Musavat government about these developments, General Thomson did not hide in a note to Foreign Minister Jafarov dated 5 August that the decision was due to the anti-Bolshevik character of the British support for Denikin:

As you already know, the Caspian fleet was created to fight against Bolsheviks. In the course of this policy, when our departure has been decided on, the British government has ordered the transfer of these ships to General Denikin.¹¹⁷

113. Major-General H. C. Holman, Memorandum on the Political Questions Reacting on the Military Situation in South Russia, 20 July 1919, CAB/24/87.

114. General W. Thwaites to Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, 9 July 1919, FO 608/881, fol. 139.

115. Ibid.

116. C. Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia, 1918-1920*, New York, Hambledon Continuum, 2006, p. 231.

117. *Azerbaydzhanskaya Demokraticheskaya Respublika*, pp. 344-45.

But the British did not just transfer warships to Denikin. The commander of British forces in Transcaucasia, Major-General G. Cory, made it clear in a letter to the head of the Musavat government on 4 August that ‘the Caucasian republics must refrain from any attack on the Volunteer Army and instead they should assist General Denikin in his fight against the Bolshevik troops’. It was emphasized that ‘noncompliance with these conditions would ... make it impossible for His Majesty's Government to insist that the troops of General Denikin remain to the north of this line’.¹¹⁸

The concern of the Azerbaijani government about Denikin was not misplaced. In a report on the activities of the British military mission in South Russia, Major-General Holman noted that after the transfer of the ships of the Caspian flotilla, Denikin’s officers serving under the command of Captain Sergeyev began ‘plotting an attack on Baku’. Having received information about ‘imminent attack’ from Colonel Rowlandson and Major Watson in Petrovsk, General Holman immediately notified General Denikin about this, who in turn ordered the dismissal of the responsible officers and warned the flotilla command about the unacceptability of the attack on Baku.¹¹⁹ Even so, the presence of the Volunteer Army in the North Caucasus created an extremely dangerous situation for the Republic of Azerbaijan, since it could face attack both from the land (through Dagestan and the Kuban district) and from the sea (with the help of the captured units of the Caspian flotilla). The government of Azerbaijan vigorously protested against all these actions and sent notes. However, in most cases, these notes remained unanswered, since by September 1919, the Volunteer Army was more focused on advancing towards Moscow. All these developments nevertheless made life difficult for the Azerbaijanian mission in Paris. At the end of September, Topchubashov wrote to his government that:

The Allies do not only not advance the discussion of our independence, but apparently, they do not want to do it....To tell the truth the motive will remain the same, as the allies strive primarily to solve all-Russian question.¹²⁰

According to Topchubashov, the allied states continued to provide ‘increased support to the government of Kolchak and the Volunteer Army’ and each ‘victory’ gained over the Bolsheviks increased

118. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

119. H. C. Holman, Report on the British Mission, South Russia, 8 October 1919, CAB/24/94, fols. 65-6.

120. Mamoulia, Abutalibov, *Topchibashi A.M.*, p. 61.

confidence among the allies in the re-establishment of 'a unified Russia'. He concluded that 'All presumably depends on the success of the armies of Denikin and Yudenich'.¹²¹ The disappointment of Azerbaijani diplomats over the first few months of participation in the Paris Conference was so strong that they began to 'cling' to any political combination that might promote the security and independence of the Musavat government of Azerbaijan.

On 15 October 1919, Churchill as Minister of War prepared a special note on this whole matter. He rejected Curzon's earlier view that a White victory was unlikely, given the change in the military situation over the previous two months. Churchill argued that 'the practical steps which are open to the British government' at present are the following:

To recognize the Government of Kolchak and Denikin as the Government of United Russia', and by so doing place ourselves in a still more favourable positions to influence the course of events; to continue to support all the anti-Bolshevik forces so far as our limited resources go; to use our influence to the full in the direction of a broad solution of the Russian Constitution.¹²²

He also believed that Britain could help push the Whites to introduce more liberal forms of government. According to Churchill, the pursuit of such a policy would lead the Russians to regard Great Britain as a friend and ally.¹²³

Until the second half of November 1919, this opinion attracted significant support within the British government, although Curzon and Lloyd George were still sceptical. The subsequent rapid collapse of Denikin's advance quickly changed the picture as it withdrew under Bolshevik attack from Kharkov, Kiev, Tsaritsyn and Rostov-on-Don. Nor should it be supposed that between June and November the British government was unanimous in its support of 'one and indivisible Russia'. Back in July 1919, Curzon succeeded in securing the appointment of Oliver Wardrop to the post of the High Commissioner of Great Britain in Transcaucasia. Wardrop was a specialist in Georgian literature, and one of the founders of English-Georgian studies, a well-known expert on the Caucasus who established amicable relations with the local political leaders. He was in general a convinced supporter of the independence of the Caucasian peoples.¹²⁴ In his telegram to Wardrop, appointing him to his post,

121. *Doneseniya Predsedatelya Delegatsii Azerbaydzhanskoy Demokraticheskoy Respubliki na Versal'skoy Konferentsii ADR* (March-December 1919), Khazar, No. 1, Baku, 1989.

122. W. Churchill, *The Situation in Russia*. Note by the Secretary of State for War, 15 October 1919, CAB/24/90, fol. 254.

123. *Ibid.*

124. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, p. 211.

Curzon outlined the object of his mission:

To report on the political situation in Transcaucasia; to do his utmost to prevent friction between the Volunteer Army and the Transcaucasian Republics; to advance the interests of British trade in Transcaucasia and to report more generally on trade matters. Part of the telegram further stated that in political matters, especially on the advice to be given to the Transcaucasian governments, Wardrop would be independent of the British military command, although he was instructed to consult with them on the various questions that were likely to arise.¹²⁵

On 12 August, before his departure to the Caucasus, Wardrop himself paid a visit to the Azerbaijani delegation that was at that time in London. ‘Understanding fully the importance of regional cooperation in securing independence for the peoples of Transcaucasia’, Wardrop emphasised the need for maximum rapprochement between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia.¹²⁶ When he arrived in Tiflis at the end of August, Wardrop received an enthusiastic greeting, in particular from Noe Zhordania (the Menshevik head of the Georgian government). At the end of September, Wardrop decided to visit Baku (Azerbaijan) and Erevan (Armenia) to see the situation there. On 27 September, he left Tiflis by a special train accompanied by Faris bey Vekiloff, the acting diplomatic representative of Azerbaijan in Tiflis. On his arrival in Baku, on 28 September, he was met at the railway station by Jafarov, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and other representatives of the government and the municipality. He was also taken to the palace of Tagiyev, the richest man in Baku, who acted as host on behalf of the Azerbaijan government.¹²⁷

After holding several meetings with representatives of the Musavat government, Wardrop returned to Tiflis, noting that ‘the people and Government of that region are better disposed to Great Britain than any other country and [that] if we care to help them they will loyally work with us....’¹²⁸ In the middle of October, he visited Armenia, meeting the Armenian President, who begged him to intercede with the British Government to provide immediate recognition of Armenian independence. The President also expressed his desire that the Armenian mandate should be given to Great Britain.¹²⁹ The following day,

125. Curzon to Wardrop, 22 July, 1919, FO 371/2662; see also, No. 329, DBFP, Vol. 3, pp. 451-52.

126. G. Mamouliia & R. Abutalibov, ‘History of Recognition of Azerbaijan’s de facto State Independence at the Paris Peace Conference’, *IRS Heritage*, Vol. 1, No. 33-34, 2018, pp. 29-30.

127. I. Niftaliyev, ‘Missiya Uordropa: Reznaya Musul'manskogo Naseleniya Yuzhnogo Kavkaza v Britanskikh Diplomaticheskikh Istochnikakh’, *Kaspiy*, 28 September 2016, p. 12.

128. *Ibid.*

129. Foreign Countries Report, No. 3, 5 November 1919, CAB/24/154.

on 20 October, at a time when Denikin's army was beginning to retreat, Wardrop sent a telegram to London supporting recognition of the independence of all three Transcaucasian Republics. He wrote that:

Arguments for recognition of Georgia are stronger juridically, politically and economically than those for other republics, but I am of opinion that Armenia and Azerbaijan should at the same time be recognised.....This barrier against Russia seems to me an absolute essential for safety of our position in Persia and India. He also optimistically stressed that further internal struggle between the Caucasian Republics unlikely.¹³⁰

On 11 December, during a conversation in London between the French Prime Minister Clemenceau and senior British ministers, 'Curzon raised the issue of the Caucasus'.¹³¹ The subject was also discussed at length in Paris. 'Although severely disappointed in Denikin, Clemenceau nevertheless continued to oppose the recognition of the independence of non-Russian states'.¹³²

The previous pages have shown that the Western imperial powers preferred to support Denikin during the period of his offensive, stalling any discussion of independence for the government of the Transcaucasian republics, fearing that it might undermine the anti-Bolshevik cause. Only at the end of 1919, when Denikin's army was on the verge of defeat, did the situation change. The western powers then became increasingly ready to establish the Caucasus republics both as a buffer against Bolshevism and a possible base for supporting the White struggle. One important step aimed at creating a union of Whites and bourgeois nationalists in Transcaucasia was the appeal sent to Denikin by Colonel Haskell (High Commissioner of the USA in Transcaucasia). In a telegram dated 2 December 1919, Haskell recommended that Denikin improve relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia governments.

I - Haskell wrote - have already discussed with the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia the issue about their relations with the Volunteer Army, and at my suggestion, both governments expressed a willingness to appoint delegations to meet with you for the purpose of reaching an agreement under which the existing peace in the Caucasus could be maintained (in the future).¹³³

Haskell strongly advised Denikin to meet with the delegations from Azerbaijan and Georgia, and offered his services in organizing the negotiations. Haskell also made it clear that given the importance

130. Wardrop to Curzon, No. 483, 22 October, 1919, DBFP, Vol. 3, pp. 601-2.

131. Mamoulia, Abutalibov, *Topchibashi A. M.*, p. 73.

132. Ibid.

133. A. Popov, 'Iz Epokhi Angliiskoi Interventsii v Zakavkazie', *Proletarskaia Revolutsiia*, No. 9, 1923, p. 128.

placed by the imperialist powers on the subject, any refusal by the Whites to negotiate would be subjected to criticism by the Entente. The content of the telegram was reported to the Paris Peace Conference and State Secretary of the USA.¹³⁴ And, at the same time, the bourgeois nationalists were preparing public opinion for a possible armed struggle against Soviet Russia in alliance with Denikin. On 28 December 1919, the government newspaper *Azerbaijan* wrote: 'It is most likely that we may have a situation where we will share a common enemy with the Volunteer Army'.¹³⁵

By the early months of 1920, most allied leaders realised there was little prospect of defeating the Bolsheviks, at least for the near future. In Britain the government was anxious about the cost of intervention and nervous that continued support for the Whites might cause internal political and economic turmoil. British policy towards Azerbaijan had always been based on the assumption that Britain should seek to dominate the country economically, and ensure it was not vulnerable to Bolshevik aggression, but without incurring the costs of direct military occupation if possible. Although this made sense given the success of Britain's 'informal empire' in countries like Persia and Egypt, it was never likely to be possible in the Caucasus, given the broader strategic problems and challenges facing the region. British policy was often contradictory, not least in deciding whether or not to support the principle of Russia 'One and Undivided', or instead recognise the sovereignty of the new republics. It certainly did not provide a firm basis for Azerbaijan statehood. As one scholar has noted:

The period of full independence, which followed the withdrawal of British troops, turned out to be a period of decline for the republic and was marked by a desperate search for ways of survival and an internal split.¹³⁶

The following pages trace the final weeks of the Azerbaijan republic in more detail.

134. Telegram from Haskell, 18 December 1919, FRUS, Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 9, Document 29, Appendix C to HD-113, pp. 606-7.

135. *Azerbaijan*, 28 December 1919, p. 2.

136. Mustafazade, *Dve Respubliki*, p. 124.

4.6 British policy towards Azerbaijan during the final months before Bolshevik occupation

The situation that unfolded in Transcaucasia at the end of 1919 forced the Allies to change their position on the issue of recognition of the new republics. According to Omer Kodzhaman:

By the end of October 1919, the retreat of anti-Bolshevist forces began on all fronts of the civil war. In the winter of 1919-1920, the pending victory of the Bolsheviks became obvious, including on the Caucasus front.¹³⁷

During the 'meeting in London in December 1919-January 1920, British and French leaders had decided not to enter into new military commitments or to give more assistance to Denikin'.¹³⁸ Therefore, almost all support for Denikin from the western powers came to an end since it was clear that the Volunteer Army could not conduct an effective campaign against the Bolsheviks. Lloyd George noted in December that:

Great Britain had spent about £100,000,000 in Russia, partly on the Archangel Expedition, but mainly in support of General Denikin. This sum included the last 'packet' of £15,000,000 to £16,000,000, which would be delivered by the end of March. She had not got much in return for it.¹³⁹

On 22 December, there took place in London a meeting between Curzon and Philippe Berthelot, a senior official at the French Foreign Ministry, at which the two men discussed among other things the problem of recognizing Azerbaijan, Georgia and the North Caucasus. Curzon suggested that 'should this winter Denikin experience a catastrophe, in the spring of next year the Allies can consider the recognition of Georgia and Azerbaijan'.¹⁴⁰ Two days later, on 24 December, the Foreign Secretary prepared a special memorandum containing recommendations about the possible recognition of the independence of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Noting that Georgia was the more advanced and capable of independent existence, Curzon nevertheless stressed that preserving the independence of the two republics was tied together since 'if the Bolsheviks occupy Azerbaijan, the fate of Georgia will also be decided'.¹⁴¹

137. O. Kodzhaman, *Yuzhnyy Kavkaz v Politike Turtsii i Rossii v Postsovetskiy Period*, Moscow, Panorama, 2004, p. 43.

138. M. Ruotsila, 'The Churchill-Mannerheim Collaboration in the Russian Intervention, 1919-1920', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 80, No. 1, 2002, p. 16.

139. Secretary's Notes of a Conference Held at 10 Downing Street, London, 12 December 1919, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 9, Document 42, p. 356.

140. G. Mamoulia & R. Abutalibov, 'The Path to Independence', *The Visions of Azerbaijan Magazine*, May - June 2015, <http://www.visions.az/en/news/648/e5db6669> accessed on 1 April 2016.

141. Ibid.

Policy-making in London was by the end of 1919 uncertain and contradictory. The defeat of Denikin, along with the victories of the Red Army and the internal situation in Britain, compelled the British government to end support for the armed struggle against Soviet power. Yet the British government did not completely abandon the intervention policy, focusing its efforts on diplomatic efforts to support anti-Bolshevik forces in Siberia and elsewhere.

These changes were felt in Paris where they caused concern to the delegations of the Transcaucasian states. Topchubashov wrote that:

The political situation is changing with such dizzy quickness ... In the last three days the press, especially in Britain, is full of information about a radical change in relations of the Entente with the Soviet government'.¹⁴²

The foresight of Topchubashov was accurate, and in January 1920 the Supreme Council of the Entente effectively decided to lift the blockade of Soviet Russia and formally end military intervention. Against this background, priority was given to finding ways of stopping the advance of the Red Army towards the Caucasus in order to prevent Moscow from building influence in the Near and Central East (areas that were traditionally within the sphere of interest of Britain and France).

On 4 December 1919, General Malleon sent a telegram to the Secretary of State for India stating that 'Tartars, Georgians, Turks and Kurds have joined alliance with Bolsheviks to expel British from Mesopotamia'.¹⁴³ A month later, on 3 January 1920, the British High Commissioner in Transcaucasia, Oliver Wardrop, sent a desperate telegram to Lord Curzon stating that:

It would be prudent to consider [the] possibility of complete collapse of Denikin at an early date. This would immediately be followed by vigorous Bolshevik attack on Transcaucasia. In order to protect our communications with Persia, we should endeavour to raise strong barrier in Transcaucasia...It would seem necessary from point of view of our interests to recognise de facto existence of Dagestan as well as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and promise support for their future claims of self determination.¹⁴⁴

Wardrop's telegram spelled out what he saw as the key tasks of British diplomacy: to obtain urgent recognition of the Transcaucasian republics and to get the agreement of the Entente powers to ensure the military protection of Transcaucasia from Soviet troops. Perhaps the final impetus to the

142. Raevskiy, *Musavatskoie Pravitel'stvo*, pp. 74-5.

143. From Viceroy, Army Department, to Secretary of State for India, 4 December 1919, Malleon Telegraphs 2 December, CAB/24/94.

144. Wardrop to Curzon, No. 630, 3 January 1920, DBFP, Vol. 3, pp. 746-47.

recognition of the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia was a telegram received in London on 9 January 1920 from Wardrop. Wardrop reported that Colonel Stokes, the representative of the High Commission in Baku, had sent him a letter describing an interview which he had had with the Azerbaijan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Khan Khoyski (who had replaced Jafarov), who had given Stokes 'a copy of wireless message' sent from Moscow by the Commissar for Foreign Affairs Chicherin.¹⁴⁵ Chicherin invited the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia to join in the attack on the disintegrating Volunteer Army. Khoyski pointed out to Stokes that:

The successful advance of Bolsheviks on both sides of the Caspian Sea has brought Bolshevik danger to the door of Transcaucasia, and Azerbaijan must decide very soon its policy towards the Bolsheviks. He added that his Government is entirely anti-Bolshevik, but if Great Britain will not come to its assistance it may be compelled to make terms with Bolsheviks.¹⁴⁶

Stokes recommended the immediate grant of full independence and wholehearted support of Azerbaijan, including the despatch of arms and equipment 'and prompt payment of all sums due by us to Azerbaijan in connection with our military occupation...'¹⁴⁷

In the face of such warnings, on 10 January 1920, a session of the Supreme Council of the Peace Conference was convened at the initiative of the British representatives, and was attended by the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Italy. The American and Japanese ambassadors in France, together with the representatives of the delegations of five countries, were also present at the session. During the meeting, Lloyd George told the Council that disturbing news had just been received from the Caucasus:

The Bolsheviks were advancing upon the Caspian: if, having entirely defeated Denikin's army, they should reach the sea, it was possible that the Turks might join with them, an event which would throw the states of the Caucasus into a desperate situation. It was incumbent, therefore, on the Council to find out whether it would be wise to support those states by sending them, for example, arms and ammunition in order to facilitate their resistance to the Bolshevik drive.¹⁴⁸

The ministers of the participant countries shared Lloyd George's anxiety about the dangers of the possible advance of Bolshevik troops and the potential threat that Turkish troops might also cross the borders of the various Caucasus republics.

145. Wardrop to Foreign Office, Tiflis, 8 January 1920, FO 608/271, fol. 177.

146. Ibid.

147. Ibid.

148. Notes of a Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 10 January 1919, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 9, Document 41, p. 837.

Against this background, the representatives of allied powers in Paris were increasingly ready to agree to recognition of the Caucasus republics in the hope that this would deter possible attack by Bolshevik and Turkish forces. The final push came from Lord Curzon, the main initiator of the Paris meeting, who argued that ‘the victory of the Bolsheviks had created a mortal danger for Transcaucasia Republics’ – and that to save them ‘it is necessary to take a political step ... which promises a successful outcome’: that is *de facto* recognition of the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia. Curzon’s arguments persuaded other allied representatives that they should agree to recognize the governments of Georgia and Azerbaijan.¹⁴⁹ French representatives led by Clemenceau supported the statement of their British counterparts and suggested the British drew up a memorandum setting down what kind of military aid might be given to the republics. It was also agreed that the next session of the Council should make the final decision on recognition. No decision was made about the future of Armenia which was deemed to form part of a larger ‘Turkish question’. The following day, on 11 January 1920, the Supreme Council formally agreed that ‘The Allied and Associated governments jointly recognize the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia on a *de facto* basis’.¹⁵⁰

The same day, Lord Curzon sent a telegram to London formally notifying the British government that on his initiative the Supreme Council of the Entente had decided to recognize *de facto* Azerbaijan and Georgia. On 13 January, Oliver Wardrop as British High Commissioner in Transcaucasia reported the decision to the governments in Tiflis and Baku:

Reports roused great patriotic demonstration in Tiflis. Within an hour of announcement the city was flagged, traffic stopped, offices, shops and factories closed. Reports from Azerbaijan state that uncompromising telegraphic reply has been sent to Bolsheviks declaring adherence to Allies and agreeing in tone with Georgian reply. Both Governments harmoniously together and Azerbaijan Minister for Foreign Affairs expected here tomorrow.¹⁵¹

It is impossible to say that the decision to extend *de facto* recognition to Azerbaijan and Georgia was accepted unanimously by all the major powers at Paris, since the representatives of the USA and

149. Raevskiy, *Musavatskoie Pravitel'stvo*, p. 89.

150. Notes of a Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 11 January 1919, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 9, Document 51, p. 959.

151. Wardrop to Curzon, No. 641, 13 January 1920, DBFP, Vol. 3, p. 755.

Japan refused to join it without consulting with their governments.¹⁵² The Japanese government later agreed to endorse the Council's decision but the same was not true of the American government, which was apparently concerned about strengthening British influence in the Caucasus, which it was feared could damage US economic interests. On 13 January, the US Ambassador in Paris reported to Washington that Britain and France had recognised the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia, and planned to extend military help. The return message from Washington accepted the idea of Britain and France giving aid to the republics but nevertheless considered the recognition of their independence as the beginning of the disintegration of Russia.¹⁵³

Developments in southern Russia, where on 10 January Red forces took Rostov-on-Don (the main base of the Volunteer Army), spurred still more discussion on the Caucasus. So too did the alarming messages sent to London by the British representatives on the ground. In mid January, the Foreign Office received a telegram from Halford Mackinder, British High Commissioner in South Russia, reporting that:

To assemble all the anti-Bolshevist states from Finland to the Caucasus, giving them a certain amount of support. Denikin should be re-equipped for defensive purposes but on a more modest scale than before. The British must be prepared to hold the Baku-Batum line and to take control of Denikin's fleet on the Caspian.... It was necessary to adopt the whole policy or to do nothing. The alternative was to see the Bolsheviks come down to the Black Sea, to the Crimea and to Odessa, which would be a complete moral victory for them.¹⁵⁴

Two days later, on behalf of the Supreme Council of the Entente, representatives of the Azerbaijani and Georgian diplomatic delegations were invited to a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France. They met there with the First Secretary of the Ministry, Jules Cambon, along with Philip Kerr (representing Lloyd George) and the Marquis de la Torre (an adviser to the Italian delegation on political and diplomatic matters). The meeting was designed in part to determine the extent to which Azerbaijan and Georgia were ready and able to repel the Bolshevik offensive. The allied powers wanted to determine whether they should take the risk of providing weapons and equipment

152. Notes of a Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, 11 January 1919, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 9, Document 51, p. 959.

153. Gasanli, *Russkaya Revolyutsiya i Azerbaydzhan*, p. 527.

154. Conclusions of a meeting of the Cabinet, held at 10 Downing Street, 29 January 1920, CAB/23/20, cited in B. W. Blouet, 'Sir Halford Mackinder As British High Commissioner to South Russia, 1919-1920', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 142, No. 2, 1976, pp. 228-36.

which might fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks? Topchubashov and the representative of Georgia, Tseretelli, after thanking allied powers for the 'de facto' recognition of their Governments, noted that they wished they had gone further:

They asked that nothing be placed in the way of the course they were following in order to be completely separated from Russia, and they asked for the assistance of the Powers on financial, military and political grounds so as to liquidate their original situation.¹⁵⁵

During the meeting, questions were asked about the state of the military forces of Azerbaijan Republic. The initiative for this conversation came from Philip Kerr, who Lloyd George valued highly, later writing that 'he was especially helpful to me during the difficulties that had arisen in connection with the tangled Russian problem'.¹⁵⁶ Kerr wrote to the Prime Minister following the meeting that he thought it was impossible to wage an effective war 'against the Bolsheviks at this time'...

This is perhaps even undesirable as it may lead to the strengthening of Bolshevism in our country. On the other hand, everyone seemed to agree unanimously that it would be very undesirable to let the Bolsheviks seize those small states that had formed on its periphery ... Everyone [at the Paris meeting] also recognized the desirability of careful consideration of the question of how many people, money and supplies were required for maintenance of the anti-Bolshevik governments in their current situation.¹⁵⁷

Over the following days, there were heated debates both in Paris and allied capitals about what role the leading powers should take in protecting the South Caucasus from the Soviet-Turkish threat. Some representatives of French and British military circles were in favour of direct intervention by means of the transfer of several divisions to the area, but other senior figures in France and Britain believed that aid should be limited to financial, technical and diplomatic support. The first group included men like Marshal Foch of France, the Chief of Staff of the British Empire General Henry Wilson, and the Secretary of State for War Winston Churchill. Their views were also shared by Clemenceau. The second group included Lloyd George and the Italian Prime Minister Nitti. Foch and Wilson both believed that only direct military and naval intervention would make it possible to defend

155. Notes of a Meeting Held in M. Pichon's Room, 16 January 1920, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 9, Document 45, p. 866.

156. Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, p. 231.

157. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-22.

the Caucasus against attack. Churchill agreed that ‘if Britain does not dominate the Caspian Sea, all weapons sent to Caucasus will be seized by the Bolsheviks’. Lloyd George countered that the military knew nothing about politics.¹⁵⁸ In the event it was the more cautious view that predominated. At a meeting of the Supreme Council it was decided to divert weapons originally intended for Denikin to the three Transcaucasian republics. It was also agreed to provide financial and technical support to help strengthen their military forces. The allied representatives in Paris also agreed to use naval forces in the Caspian - including the ships that had previously been passed to Denikin - to ensure control of coastal areas. It was not proposed to send French and British troops in any numbers.¹⁵⁹

On 19 January, the Azerbaijani and Georgian diplomatic missions in Paris were invited to a meeting of the Supreme Council and were again asked about what kind of assistance they would need in case of a military struggle with Soviet Russia. The representatives of the Azerbaijani delegation responded that if equipment was provided by the allies then it would be possible to mobilize an army of a hundred thousand in Azerbaijan - something that was almost certainly not true. Topchubashov also suggested that the situation could be eased by allied recognition of the Mountain Republic in the north Caucasus which could act as a buffer zone. Summing up the meeting, Lloyd George said that it was necessary to provide urgent assistance to the Transcaucasian Republics in the form of the provision of weapons and military equipment and uniforms, but that it was not possible to send allied troops. He urged the Caucasian republics to strengthen their defensive capacity and suggested that Azerbaijan should in particular focus on the defence of Baku.¹⁶⁰

As a result of discussions, then, the Supreme Council accepted the principle of sending help to the Transcaucasian republics in the form of munitions and if possible, food. General Milne was instructed to send an officer from Batumi to visit threatened States and report without delay as to their needs.¹⁶¹

The Supreme Council’s position focused on four points:

158. Gasanli, *Russkaya Revolyutsiya i Azerbaydzhan*, p. 534.

159. Notes of a Meeting Held in M. Pichon’s Room, Quai d’Orsay, 16 January 1920, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 9, Document 45, p. 866.

160. *Ibid.*, 19 January 1920, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 9, Document 48, pp. 894-98.

161. The Earl of Derby to Lord Hardinge, No. 652, 20 January 1920, DBFP, Vol. 3, p. 766.

1. The Government of the Armenian State should be recognised as *de facto* government on condition that this in no way prejudiced the question of the eventual frontiers of that State;
2. The Allied Governments are not prepared to send to the Trans-Caucasian states the three divisions contemplated by the Interallied Military Council;
3. To accept the principle of sending to the Transcaucasian States arms, munitions and, if possible, food;
4. Marshal Foch and Field Marshal Wilson are requested to consider of what these supplies should consist, and the means for their dispatch.¹⁶²

In reality, the adoption of such a resolution at the Paris Peace Conference was not able significantly to affect the balance of power in the region or shape future developments - developments that were in practice almost bound to lead to the fall of the Musavat government. Indeed it shows how the world's major powers had little interest in continuing any open military confrontation with Soviet Russia, and were instead ready to accept the return of the Caucasus into the orbit of Russian influence. European leaders were well aware that the Transcaucasian republics could not withstand the onslaught of the Red Army, even with outside help, and that all such help could do was delay the end of their 'independent existence'. Nor should the decision to recognise Azerbaijan be seen as a success for Azerbaijani diplomacy. In a sense it represented the opposite - a final decision to end any military intervention in the region and with it any hope of Azerbaijan retaining effective independence. In refusing military aid to the Transcaucasian republics, the representatives of Great Powers were following a new political strategy towards Soviet Russia. In 1920, instead of broader plans for the defeat of the Bolsheviks in Russia, they were more focused on defending themselves against the threat of Bolshevism in their own countries. Although there were some like Churchill who still favoured a stronger military response, more common were those like Lloyd George, who subsequently noted that if British troops had been sent to Russia 'the army would mutiny ... the mere idea of crushing Bolshevism by a military force is pure madness'.¹⁶³

162. Notes of a Meeting Held in M. Pichon's Room, Quai d'Orsay, 19 January 1920, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 9, Document 48, pp. 901-2.

163. Notes on Conversations Held in the Office of M. Pichon at the Quai d'Orsay, 16 January 16, 1919, FRUS, The Paris Peace Conference, Vol. 3, Document 32, p. 590.

The *de facto* recognition of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia by the Entente was therefore driven by an effort by the imperialist powers to separate these areas from Russia and provide some kind of 'legal right' to allow them to interfere in their internal affairs. It was a move designed to buy time and allow for more consideration of how to develop a new anti-Soviet campaign. The governments of the Transcaucasian republics were asked to declare their neutrality in the war between Soviet Russia and Denikin which they did. In response to the note of the Soviet Government of 2 January, discussed earlier, the Musavat government in Azerbaijan and the Menshevik government in Georgia stated that their only desire was to live in peace and friendship with Soviet Russia. However, they were in secret making preparations to ensure that in the event of war against the Soviet Republic they could seize Dagestan and the North Caucasus.¹⁶⁴

Two weeks later, on 14 January, the leader of the Georgian Mensheviks, Noe Zhordania, declared in the Constituent Assembly of Georgia that:

West or East - that is the question we have before us and hesitations are impossible here... I must declare emphatically here: I prefer the imperialists of the West to the fanatics of the East.¹⁶⁵

By the 'fanatics of the East' Zhordania of course meant the Bolsheviks. The Georgian Menshevik and the Azerbaijani Musavat government also soon showed that they preferred Whites Guards to Bolsheviks, and offered shelter to the defeated remnants of Denikin's divisions before helping them move on to Crimea to join the forces headed by Wrangel. In return the Whites gave the bourgeois nationalist governments of the Caucasus some of their weapons and equipment.

Yet as was seen earlier, support for the Musavat government by the leading European powers was half-hearted, and by the early spring of 1920 was replaced by a passive expectation of the inevitable. The Azerbaijan government desperately sought more support for the republic's independence. At the end of March 1920, the Azerbaijani delegation headed by Topchubashov travelled from Paris to London in order to seek the *de jure* recognition of Azerbaijan, but such appeals met with little response. Meanwhile armed conflict broke out between Musavat-led Azerbaijan and Dashnak-controlled Armenia,

164. Guliyev, *Borba Kommunisticheskoy Partii*, p. 103.

165. *Dni Gospodstva Men'shevikov v Gruzii* (Dokumenty i Materialy), Gosizdat Gruzii, Tibilisi, 1931, p. 139; see also, Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917-1921*, p. 295.

as the policy of 'divide and rule' long practised by the imperial powers turned against its authors. In trying to 'to impose peace', western representatives in the region including Wardrop sent a note to the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia demanding an end to the conflicts between them and threatening to deprive them from the support of the Entente.¹⁶⁶

As a result of the concerted actions of the Red Army and pro-Bolshevik opposition in the Azerbaijan parliament, the Musavat government was forced to surrender all plenary powers at the end of April 1920.¹⁶⁷ In the face of the threat of the Red Army entering Azerbaijan, the reaction of European diplomacy, in particular of London the most active and committed participant of 'the great Transcaucasian game' was fairly restrained. Despite the objections of a number of influential members of the British cabinet, most notably Churchill, 'the trade agreement, and a consequent normalization of relations between London and Moscow, had been a principal purpose for the Prime Minister throughout 1920'.¹⁶⁸ Lloyd George eventually agreed to the visit of a Russian delegation to Britain (a move opposed by both Churchill and Curzon).

Preliminary negotiations with the Soviet Trade representatives which included senior figures like Krassin (later Litvinov and Klishko) began in on 27 May.¹⁶⁹ The British government knew that the delegation had a formal status because it was headed by Krasin (the People's Commissar of Trade and Industry). The trade talks quickly took on a general political character. The British government quickly formulated a set of demands: stop anti-British propaganda in Afghanistan; withdrawal of Bolshevik troops from the Tashkent - Merv - Ashkhabad area; the dispersal of Bolshevik concentrations on various points opposite the Polish front; the reduction of the Soviet army to a peace footing to be fixed by the Allies.¹⁷⁰ Tellingly, Azerbaijan was not included in the list of priorities of British diplomacy, which was more focused on excluding Bolshevik Russia from exercising influence in the Middle East and India.

166. *Azerbaijan*, 7 April 1920, p. 1.

167. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, pp. 108-9.

168. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations*, Vol. 3, p. 398.

169. Negotiations with M. Krassin, Cab 24/106, C.P. 1360, 27 May 1920.

170. Negotiations with M. Krassin, Cab 24/107, C.P. 1451, 11 June 1920.

The talks reflected the fact that the British government like other allied governments now recognised that it would be impossible to overthrow the Bolsheviks. At a meeting of the British Cabinet on 17 November, where a final decision was made to conclude a trade agreement with Soviet Russia, Lloyd George dismissed opposition to the agreement put by some other ministers:

I have heard predictions about the fall of the Soviet government for the last two years. Denikin, Judenitch, Wrangel, all have collapsed, but I cannot see any immediate prospect of the collapse of the Soviet government.¹⁷¹

In signing the Trade Agreement in March 1921, the government in London agreed to refrain from hostile activities and propaganda in countries that were previously part of the Russian Empire, while the government in Moscow agreed to formal action in India and Afghanistan. Neither side kept their word.

171. Conclusion of a Meeting of the Cabinet held on Wednesday, 17 November 1920, CAB/23/23, Cabinet 61(20).

Chapter 5

A good deal has been said in the previous chapters about the importance of economic questions in shaping developments in Azerbaijan during 1918-20 (the importance of oil, etc). This chapter develops some of these points at more length as a subject of value and interest in its own right. It focuses in particular on Anglo-Azerbaijani economic relations, and especially how British military forces in Azerbaijan, with the approval of the government in London, sought to control the local economy in a way that helped advance British strategic and economic interests. It begins with a brief discussion of the economic situation that existed under Turkish rule during the period September-November 1918. The chapter then goes on to examine in detail the nature of British policy in the economic sphere. It finishes with a brief review of the response of the Azerbaijan government, noting that ministers were largely powerless to resist British demands, while also being unwilling to make any changes that would have helped the mass population if such changes threatened to undermine the interests of local landowners and industrialists (who provided the main support for the Government).

5.1 Anglo-Azerbaijani relations in the socio-economic sphere

The Musavat government that moved into Baku on 17 September 1918 had at its disposal a highly developed oil-extracting and oil-processing industry, which was of course the main engine of the local economy. A rapid recovery of the entire economy of Azerbaijan depended on the effective recovery of oil production and the sale of oil products. Oil production had remained at fairly level during the First World War, despite the disruption caused by the conflict, and only began to seriously fall in the revolutionary year of 1917. During 1917 some 20 oil companies stopped operating in Baku, and the production of Azerbaijani oil decreased by 110 million poods as compared to the level of 1913.¹ The output of other industries was reduced greatly too. In May 1918, the Baku Sovnarkom's decision to nationalise the oil industry had scared off potential investors which, in turn, affected negatively the level of oil production.² In the period of existence of Baku People's Commissars (some four months), about 13 million tons of oil was exported to Russia in return for urgently needed food that was sent through Astrakhan to Baku.

1. J. Guliyev, *Pobeda Sovetskoy Vlasti v Zakavkaz'ye*, Tbilisi, Izdatel'stvo Mecniereba, 1971, p. 133.

2. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 266.

Once the Musavat government entered Baku in September 1918, following the conquest of the city by Turkish forces, it immediately eliminated the socialist measures of the Soviet power in Azerbaijan, denationalising industries and returning plants and factories to the ownership of private capitalists. The government also abolished the 8-hour working day and banned the activities of trade unions and the various labour commissions. It is worth making the point here that despite the harsh criticism of the Bolshevik's economic policy by the leaders of Musavat government, they themselves often subsequently used oil to barter for other assets, including barter with the Soviet government. The talk of some contemporary historians about the 'oil robbery' carried out by the Bolsheviks in 1918, during the time of the Baku Soviet, should therefore be put in the context of what followed. During the subsequent periods of occupation of the city by Turkish and then British troops, the occupying forces made little pretence of paying for local oil, instead seeking to control production for their own benefit. The uncontrolled exports of oil products by the Turks - and later by the British - greatly damaged the oil industry of the region. Turkish commanders ordered the export of oil by railway to support the war effort. Local newspapers also reported that:

Oil, under the convention concluded by Azerbaijan with Georgia, was pumped into Tiflis and Batumi storage tanks through the Baku - Batumi oil pipeline, before being transported on to Constantinople where the price of oil and kerosene has fallen ten-fold recently.³

The true scale of this export of oil is virtually impossible to establish, though there are figures that give some insight: 'Huge reserves of oil have been accumulated in Baku: 30 million poods of crude oil; 40 million poods of fuel oil, 11 million poods of kerosene and etc.....'⁴ The export of these oil products was what brought down the price so dramatically in the Turkish market. This huge 'export of oil' - largely without payment - inevitably had a damaging effect on the economic situation of the Azerbaijani Republic.

On 5 October 1918, the Musavat government adopted a resolution on the denationalization of the oil industry of Azerbaijan:

3. *Bor'ba za Pobedu Sovetskoy Vlasti*, p. 37.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

The government cancels all the decrees and orders issued by the former Baku Council of People's Commissars about the nationalization of the oil industry and associated enterprises, including the merchant fleet within Baku province.⁵

But the vital role of the oil industry in the local economy meant that in order to determine the total oil reserves of the republic, owners and managers in the oil industry were still required to inform 'the Ministry of Trade and Industry about the location and quantity of the existing stocks of oil and oil products'.⁶ The implementation of this decree was carried out in a short period of time. At the end of October 1918, the Ministry of Trade and Industry announced that:

Since all work to record the existence of oil and oil products has been completed, it is time to notify the public that all the trades, plants, ships, and assets of the oil industry and their subsidiary companies should, in line with the second clause of the Council of Ministers' decision dated October 5 1918 on the denationalization of the oil industry, be returned to their former owners.⁷

This particular measure of the Musavat government was designed to restore the principle of private ownership in the territory of Baku and Baku province - areas that had formerly been under the control of the Baku Soviet. Nor did the principle only apply to the oil industry. Other industries were also restored to private ownership.

5.2 British occupation and developments in the oil industry

The presence of British armed forces in Azerbaijan after November 1918 both destabilized the economic situation of the Republic and hindered the implementation of the socio-economic program of the government. Having occupied Baku in November 1918, the British command quickly compelled the Musavat government of Azerbaijan to end the export of Azerbaijani oil to Soviet Russia, with the result that Baku oil lost one of its traditional markets. In November 1918, just a few days after the return of British forces to Baku, the Minister of Finance of Azerbaijan told a journalist on the newspaper *Azerbaijan* that it was 'vitally important' to establish effective connections with Bolshevik controlled Astrakhan in order 'rescue [the] oil industry'.⁸

5. *Azerbaijan*, 7 October 1918, p. 1.

6. Ibid.

7. *Azerbaijan*, 29 October 1918, p. 1.

8. *Azerbaijan*, 20 November 1918, p. 2.

The restoration of the Russian market for Baku oil should not have been difficult since there was no state of war between Azerbaijan and Soviet Russia, but British military commanders firmly refused to allow the export of oil to the Bolsheviks, even though depriving Soviet Russia of its main source of oil also damaged the Azerbaijani economy. Their policy was successful. On April 3 1919, Lenin told an extraordinary plenary meeting of the Moscow Soviet of Workers 'and Soldiers' Deputies that:

You know that the British have robbed us of our Baku oil supplies. They have captured many of the ships in the Caspian Sea, they have occupied Grozny and are preventing us from using the oil. Neither industry nor the railways can work without fuel. We must exert our efforts to the utmost.⁹

The negative impact of British interference in the economic life of the Azerbaijani Republic was not limited only to the oil industry. Other industries faced a grave situation as well. There was a sharp reduction of work in the mining area of Gedabek. There was also a reduction of output in the cotton mills. Even the fishing industry experienced a decline despite the shortage of food. The level of concern about the state of Azerbaijan's economy was reflected in a very important document written by the oil magnate Zeinalabdin Tagiyev which contained a well-founded analysis of the financial and economic policy of the government. Being one of the richest men in Azerbaijan at that time, the author noted that he was writing to the chairman of the Council of Ministers because of his 'love for his native land and his burning desire to see it flourish and prosper'. He expressed concern about the government's economic policy and the subsequent devaluation of the Azerbaijani currency, but acknowledged that it is 'partly caused by common factors beyond our control and management ...'.¹⁰ It is reasonable to assume that his phrase referred to the regulation of the economic life of Azerbaijan by British commanders in a way that was designed to promote British interests rather than those of the local population.

The struggle for oil was of course a key factor shaping British policy in the Middle East (and especially in Persia). And Baku oil was a key factor in the development of Great Britain's Transcaucasian policy. Conditions were favourable in 1918-19 for Britain to capture the most important oil fields in Baku, Persia and Mesopotamia. The chairman of the British 'Bibi-Heybat oil company',

9. *Lenin's Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p. 233, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/apr/03.htm>, accessed on 1 January 2016.

10. Yusifzade, *Pervaya Azerbaydzhanskaya Respublika*, p. 120.

Herbert Allen, declared in London in December 1919 that:

Never in the history of these islands was there such an opportunity for the peaceful penetration of British influence and British trade [in the region], for the creation of a second India or a second Egypt.... The oil industry of Russia liberally financed and properly organized under British auspices would in itself be a valuable asset to the Empire... A golden opportunity offers itself to the British government to exercise a powerful influence upon the immense Grosni, Baku, and Trans-Caspian fields.¹¹

His words showed how the development of British policy abroad was a matter of great importance to key economic interests in Britain. Control of the oil fields was important both in securing the supply of oil - an increasingly important commodity in the world economy - as well as providing valuable opportunities for British investors seeking a return on their capital.

Soon after the arrival of British forces in Baku, British commanders established effective control over the Baku oil industry and immediately started to export oil abroad. According to one leading Soviet scholar, A. Raevskiy, the export of oil products from Baku to Persia and Batumi (in tonnes) was as follows: in 1918 - 6.196; in 1919 - 388.359; and in 1920 (January - May) - 124.425.¹² The oil exported to Persia was intended mainly for British troops stationed there. Most oil sent to Batumi was intended for onward export from the Black Sea port (although some was presumably used locally). The total amount of oil exported by the British from Baku via Batumi, according to the newspaper *Azerbaijan*, was (in tonnes) in 1918 -13.284; in 1919 - 275.309; in 1920 (January - May) - 153.222.¹³ Although these figures are higher than those given by Raevskiy, a comparison of these data with the level of exports on the eve of First World War suggests that the British did not exploit fully the capacity of the Baku - Batumi oil pipeline. It should be recognised that this was not dictated by the lack of oil in Baku storage facilities, where reserves grew dramatically, and the data undermines the claims of some Soviet historians that the British were 'pumping oil like mad'.¹⁴ Yet it must still be recognized that the character of the economic measures carried out by the British command in Baku bore features of a typical regime of colonial exploitation. 'The British military command methodically postponed payment for oil purchased in Azerbaijan' - indeed it never did pay any of the local taxes due on the oil - causing considerable tension

11. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 168.

12. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 21.

13. *Azerbaijan*, 28 June 1920, p. 3.

14. Popov, *Proletarrkaya Revolyutsiya*, p. 231.

with the local Azerbaijani owners of oil wells (and explaining why local elites, although welcoming the security brought by British troops, also often bitterly resented British control of their country).¹⁵

Although British control of the Baku oil industry was harmful to the economic interests of many members of the local economic elite, the Musavat government generally cooperated with the orders of local British officials and soldiers, in large part because they had little real choice. On 12 January 1919, the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan passed a resolution ‘On providing oil to the Allied Powers’, which agreed to ‘Instruct the Ministry of Trade and Industry immediately to meet all the demands of the Allied Powers on the export of oil products from the reserves held by the Government’.¹⁶ In February 1919, British military commanders demanded that the Ministry of Trade and Industry grant formal permission for the export of oil products for the needs of the British forces outside the country to the amount of: fuel oil - 450 thousand poods; kerosene - 150 thousand poods; and petrol - 75 thousand poods.¹⁷ The oil was as noted above taken on credit which was not guaranteed and which (probably) it was never intended to repay. Even the process of making a formal appeal to the Musavat government for permission to export products to British-controlled Batumi ended when, on 23 May 1919, the Azerbaijani authorities passed a resolution recognising their subordinate position: ‘Pass goods to the needs of the British Army without separate authorizations for export’.¹⁸

It seems certain that the decision was made by the Musavat government under pressure from local British commanders. It certainly demonstrates perfectly the real relationship between the ‘independent’ Azerbaijan Republic and British troops in the region, showing how allied representatives on the ground and their political masters back in London regarded the local government. Azerbaijan, which was forced to give a large part of its oil products to meet the needs of the foreign occupiers, was virtually condemned to the position of a tributary. According to the *Azerbaijan* newspaper, nearly 60% of oil products sent to Batumi in the first five months of 1919 were sent there on the orders of British

15. A.H. Arslanian, *Britain and The Transcaucasian Nationalities during the Russian Civil War*, Washington D.C.: Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, Occasional Paper number 104, April 24-25, 1980, p. 6.

16. *Azerbaijan*, 12 January 1919, p. 1.

17. Yusifzade, *Pervaya Azerbaydzhanskaya Respublika*, p. 140.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

commanders.¹⁹ The situation was probably inevitable from the time British troops arrived in Baku. As early as December 1918, General Thomson had ordered the pumping of fuel oil for the needs of the British troops in Batumi, warning the Musavat government that ‘...no duty will be paid’. To the demand by representatives of the local administration about the necessity of payment of duty on the oil exported by British, the British command responded strongly: ‘All oil production intended for the needs of the British government is not subject to any excise taxes, and therefore, in the future, please pass them without any delay’.²⁰ By refusing to pay any duties, the British effectively denied significant funds to the local government. Although the Musavat government attempted to force the British command to pay 36.7 million roubles in taxes,²¹ British commanders simply violated the traditional rights of ‘a sovereign state’ to determine the terms for export of goods, and refused to pay any amount.

The behaviour of British soldiers and officials in Azerbaijan over the oil question reflected the fact that they were in effect an occupying force. The fact that the British were suspicious of the Musavat government for its previous collaboration with Britain’s Turkish enemy made this position still clearer. The position taken by British commanders towards local oil production and trade was echoed in other industries as well. Just as they established effective control over the oil industry so, too, they established effective control over all means of transport. On 22 November 1918, the British command announced the formation of an English water transport management company, to be headed by one Major Brown. Simultaneously, the Caspian shipping company ‘Caucasus and Mercury’ was acquired by a London financial group.²² One of the first orders of Major Brown stated that ‘... the Caspian Sea ports: Petrovsk, Krasnovodsk and Baku remain under British control’.²³ All merchant ships were still the property of their original owners but British control was effectively instituted above them (dictating movements, cargoes, etc). Most local government departments dealing with questions of water transport were gradually abolished. In this way British control was established even as formal ownership of assets remained with members of the local population. This colonial form of behaviour

19. *Azerbaijan*, 15 April 1919, p. 2.

20. Maksudov, Aliyev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya*, p. 48.

21. V.A. Gurko-Kryazhin, ‘Angliyskaya Interventsiya v 1918-19 v Zakaspii i Zakavkaz'ye’, *Istorik-Marksist*, Vol. 2, 1926, pp. 119-20.

22. Maksudov, Aliyev, *Azerbaydzhanskaya*, p. 48.

23. *Azerbaijan*, 29 November 1919, p. 1.

and expropriation was focused on one major objective: the establishment and maintenance of Britain's domination in the Caspian Sea. The effective 'acquisition' of merchant ships by the British command also of course helped to secure control over the export of oil products. One of the first orders of British military commanders after they arrived in Baku was to prohibit the export of oil via the Caspian Sea without permission of the British headquarters (a move intended to prevent Baku oil from being sent to Soviet Russia). The ships effectively placed at the disposal of British headquarters were also used for purely military needs as well as the transport of goods and passengers.

The railway network was also placed under such strict control, with all movements regulated by the British command, ensuring that priority was given to the movement of its own cargos. One British military representative in meeting with a senior Azerbaijani official noted that 'two military and one oil trains will be needed daily for the British transport'²⁴ These rights were used extensively by British officers and soldiers in the spring and summer of 1919 down until their withdrawal from 'hospitable Azerbaijan'. The arrangement allowed the British to minimize the costs for the transportation of oil products for which they had paid little or nothing - still further reducing the cost to Britain of maintaining its military contingent in Transcaucasia. The British command repeatedly postponed the payment of 'thousands of pounds sterling and millions of roubles that were due to the Azerbaijani Railway Department for transporting British troops. Such delays created a very bad impression and helped to arouse hostility and mistrust' in Azerbaijan both among the population and among ministers in the Azerbaijani government.²⁵

The tense mutual relationship between the Musavat dominated government and British commanders was therefore in large part due to the latter's intervention in the internal and economic life of the country (though one should not ignore the role of nationalist sentiment in making the resentment worse). The patience of the government was sorely tried by one statement issued by British commanders which declared that 'if kerosene supplied by the government for export

24. Ibid., pp. 143-44.

25. Arslanian, *Britain and the Transcaucasian Nationalities*, 1980, p. 8.

through Batumi does not have a British control visa in Baku, then it will be subject to a three-fold amount of duty' (a measure designed to prevent the 'illegal' export of such products). In a letter to the British High Commissioner, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan stated in an unusually firm manner that if such policies continued then '... the Azerbaijani government will be forced to stop any export of oil products in the direction of Batumi'.²⁶ But such protests were predictably unsuccessful given that a central feature of British policy was the desire to preserve its monopoly position in regard to Azerbaijani oil and prevent even its allies from gaining access to it.

Italy and France sought to obtain oil from the Caucasus in order to fuel both their military forces and their domestic economies, while obtaining payment from these countries was of acute importance for Azerbaijan. In November 1919, the French petroleum minister, Henri Berenger, contacted the diplomatic delegation from Azerbaijan at the Paris Peace Conference, who said they could deliver 'one million poods of crude oil to the export reservoirs at Batumi by the end of the year' (the offer represented about 16,000 tons or roughly two weeks of France's needs).²⁷ He also negotiated with several independent groups in the Caucasus, including 'Nobel, who had been the largest Russian producer before the war, as well as leading Armenian and Russian enterprises in the region: Mantacheff, Lianosoff, Adjenof, and Tchermoeff'.²⁸ However, the British authorities in Batumi systematically obstructed oil exports from the Caucasus, depriving the French of any opportunity to purchase Baku oil. Berenger wrote to the French Finance Minister that:

This policy of stopping our purchases in the United States is possible only insofar as it can be immediately replaced with a policy of purchasing in Eastern Europe. The English have perfectly understood this, and it is for this reason that their agents want to get their hands on all the oil of the Caucasus, which is, for them, one of the principal keys to the oil of Persia and Mesopotamia.²⁹

The British position was so transparent that on 15 December 1919, the chief of the French military mission, Colonel Pierre Chardigny, wrote a letter to the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Azerbaijan

26. Popov, *Proletarrkaya Revolyutsiya*, pp. 195-96.

27. MAE Europe-Russie, 1918-1929, Vol. 529, 25 November 1919, cited in G. P. Nowell, *Mercantile States and the World Oil Cartel, 1900-1939*, NY, Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 138.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., pp. 138-39.

Republic asking ‘On what basis does the British Command receive an unlimited number of cisterns in Batumi for transportation of fuel oil from Baku to Batumi; if there is pressure from the British side ...can you not explain the nature of this pressure to public organizations in Baku and Batumi?’³⁰

The representatives of the Ministry did not give direct answers, instead explaining their refusal to allow French purchases of oil by reference to lack of transport. The refusal was a diplomatic ploy, and the true motives were highlighted by the questions of Colonel Chardigny, who was well-informed about the working methods of its ally. The newspaper *Azerbaijan* reprinted an article from a French newspaper which said that:

Unfortunately, our British friends control the pipeline and carriages, and oil cannot be taken out without their consent. Thus the Caucasian oil which arrives in Batumi is effectively British oil. As a consequence, France, instead of buying oil in Baku at 25 roubles per pood, has to pay for it in pounds in Batumi....³¹

The American consul in Tiflis, Felix Willoughby Smith, who attempted to establish commercial contacts with important figures in the Baku oil industry, faced the same obstacles. After the withdrawal of most British troops from Baku in the late summer of 1919, he noted that the rich resources of the Caucasus meant that the region was ‘of particular interest to Americans’.³² Discussion took place in Tiflis between representatives of the American business community and local industrialists about the ‘increased involvement of American capital in the local enterprise’. However, while British policy was willing to allow some American expansion in eastern Russia, it actively resisted the penetration of American capital into the economy of Azerbaijan, even when investment could have helped to defuse tension in the oil industry. In June 1919, an Azerbaijani government commission was set up to negotiate with a representative of the American Standard Oil company that was designed to reach a preliminary agreement by which Standard Oil would buy 100,000 tons of petroleum at thirty-three dollars a ton during the following year (providing a large amount of foreign currency for the Azerbaijan government). It was planned for this ‘to be followed by another purchase of an equal amount of oil at the same price’.³³ The local British authorities in Baku did not create obstacles

30. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 77.

31. Newspaper *Tan*, cited in *Azerbaijan*, 3 April 1920, p. 2.

32. Sumbatzade, *Istoriia Azerbaydzhana*, p. 205.

33. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, pp. 224-26.

to such an agreement, at least in public, apparently because politicians and officials in London recognised that President Wilson was playing an important role at the Paris Peace Conference and that negotiations about Britain's mandate over Transcaucasia had not been yet completed. The sheer scale of British war debts to the US following the war in any case gave the American government enormous financial leverage. The contract that was agreed between Standard Oil and the Azerbaijani government was nevertheless disrupted by the British-owned Shell Oil Company, which sought to oppose 'American penetration of the Azerbaijani economy by pressing the government of Azerbaijan to break the agreement', a move that had the tacit support of the British authorities. The agreement was indeed cancelled, even though it cost Azerbaijan at least \$3.3 million dollars (and perhaps twice that amount according to some estimates).³⁴

British commanders in Baku also became heavily involved in the production and distribution of food. Under condition of a severe food shortage, which was worsened by the presence of British troops in Baku, a 'Central Food Bureau' was established under the chairmanship of one Major Inwood. The Bureau aimed to regulate food prices and provide assistance to various organizations in Baku in supplying food to the local population. The efficiency of the Bureau was however so poor that solving the problem of food shortages fell entirely to the Azerbaijan government and various oil-producing enterprises in the city. The British controlled Food Bureau, along with other similar organizations, actually sought to exploit the severe economic situation of Azerbaijan. One example can illustrate this point. On 12 January 1919, General Thomson sent a letter to the Azerbaijani Minister of Finance reporting that the British Food Bureau had large reserves of food. 'These reserves', the General wrote, 'have been bought by me and prepaid in Persia... This food should be bought via Major Inwood...'³⁵ Thomson said in his letter that the reserves he mentioned were at the disposal of the Ministry of Food. Yet the Azerbaijani Minister of Food, in a letter to the Chairman of the Ministerial Council, described the situation in a rather different way:

34. Ibid., p. 225.

35. Raevskiy, *Angliyskaya Interventsiya*, p. 67.

I have no right to hide from you the significant fact that the food that has been bought by order of the British headquarters in Baku is very expensive and can sometimes be bought cheaper on the open market. Moreover, the quality of some products such as rice is so low that, in spite of the relatively low price, the population completely refuses to buy them.³⁶

The British position in Azerbaijan can be compared to an iceberg - consisting of a visible part (the declared commitment to help the local people) and a hidden part (a system of pressure, speculation, and robbery that exhausted the Azerbaijan economy). The occupation of key positions by British soldiers and officials in overseeing the Azerbaijan economy also extended to the financial system (focused primarily on funding the oil industry). The strict regulations imposed by the British on the export of oil products created a difficult situation for the oil industry, leading to the overstocking of extracted oil, and a reduction in the income of local oil entrepreneurs. This state of affairs naturally affected the development of the industry. The imposition of an embargo on trade with the Soviet Russia meant that the British authorities in Azerbaijan were effectively forced for a time to subsidize the oil industry (including the payment of arrears due to labourers in the industry amounting to some twenty-eight million roubles).³⁷ The poor state of the oil industry also led to the devaluation of Azerbaijan currency and undermined the national budget of the Azerbaijan state. At a meeting of Parliament in 2 April 1919, the Minister of Finance noted that:

Monthly government expenditure is about 135 million roubles - about 60 million goes to financing the oil industry, about 35 million is given to the British command, and about 40 million is spent on current public expenditure.³⁸

These figures suggest that the British presence in Azerbaijan in effect cost more than 70% of the Azerbaijani government's budget. Any attempt by the government to improve the financial position by demanding the payment of export duties simply led local British commanders to block the oil pipeline which deprived the local government of any opportunity to export oil (thereby forcing the government to provide duty-free export to the British headquarters).

The Azerbaijani government did not only supply British troops with many products free of charge, but also as noted above had to pay to the British command some 35 million roubles monthly to pay for

36. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

37. Foreign Office Memorandum, November 1918 - January 1919, *Economics of Russian Azerbaijan*, cited in Maxwell, *Azerbaijan Xalq Cumhuriyyeti*, p. 205.

38. *Azerbaijan*, 1 May 1919, p. 2.

its operations. According the Finance Ministry, on 12 October 1919, the total debt of the British command was some 275 million roubles. Yet just a few weeks later, the British government refused to accept direct responsibility for this amount, stressing that it was first necessary to understand the ‘liability of the Azerbaijani government and the Russian state for the amount spent under our direction’³⁹ (effectively making it clear that the British authorities still did not consider Azerbaijan as an independent state from Russia).

British control stretched across almost the entire financial system of the republic. Even the granting of loans for commercial and industrial enterprises could only be made with the approval of British headquarters. There is much evidence testifying to the harmful interference of the British military authorities in the economic and financial life of the Azerbaijan Republic. During the evacuation of Dunsterforce from Baku in August 1918, the retreating troops carried away valuables held by the Baku branch of Russian State Bank (valuables over which the Musavat government claimed ownership).⁴⁰ When the British reoccupied Baku in November 1918, they also took documents relating to ‘a credit of £90,000 due to the Azerbaijani government for oil supplied to the Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Company, along with an estimated 900 million roubles in securities belonging to the Baku branch of the Russian Bank’ (the material was sent to Constantinople). Although they promised to return them to Azerbaijan, this never happened.⁴¹ When the Musavat government raised this issue with the leader of the British forces, General Thomson immediately responded with a statement that ‘I received from Colonel Bicherakhov valuables, documents and money belonging to the branch of the Russian State Bank’. He added that these assets were now ‘under the protection of British soldiers, and the fate of the assets will be determined by the Committee responsible for further development of the activities of the Bank’.⁴² The protection of British headquarters gave the management of the Bank such a degree of ‘independence’ that it refused to implement any of the regulations of the Azerbaijani government.

39. *Dokumenty ob Angliyskoy Interventsii v Azerbaydzhanе v 1918-1919*, Baku, Trudi Instituta Istorii Partii, 1948, Vol. 12, p. 282.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

41. Arslanian, *Britain and the Transcaucasian Nationalities*, p. 6.

42. Popov, *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, p. 202.

In this way, financial assets were effectively taken from Azerbaijan to the benefit of the British Treasury. The scale of this process can be judged from one document dating from January 1920: 'Issued to the British command by the Baku branch of the Russian State Bank on account of military operations (Baku. Dep. of the Russian Bank dated October 15, № 1970) from the current account of the Ministry of Finance ... Rub. 45,500,000; issued by the Baku branch of the Russian State Bank to various institutions and individuals at the request of the British command (Baku. Dep. of the Russian Bank dated October 15) from the current account of Ministry of Finance... Rub. 63,009,119.⁴³

The cost of supporting the British presence represented a large part of the budget of the Azerbaijan Republic, explaining why the government sought repayment (or at least partial repayment) of the money. But the British War Office persistently declined to repay the debts. The material presented above does indeed show how the main economic issues - and above all questions of oil production and distribution - were consistently solved in accordance with the interests of the British. The categorical refusal of permission by British headquarters to export oil to Astrakhan, in order not to violate the blockade of Soviet Russia, was disastrous both for oil exports and the oil industry more generally. It not only damaged the Azerbaijan economy but also undermined the financial security of the Republic.

Even after British troops withdrew from Baku, in the late summer of 1919, the British authorities used their control of oil and kerosene storage facilities in Batumi to set high duties on oil products imported into the Batumi area. As a result, the export of oil and fuel oil from Baku was greatly reduced in 1920. The finances of the Azerbaijani government were indeed in an almost constant crisis during the years 1918-1919, as lack of income and high expenditure on the bureaucracy meant that the Republic was effectively bankrupt. The only reason that 'the financial crisis did not bring about a complete collapse of the country's economy' was that the possession of Baku oil gave the Azerbaijan government credit abroad, even though it was in the short term impossible to take real advantage of the asset.⁴⁴

43. Popov, *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, p. 206.

44. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 225.

5.3 The oil factor in the Musavat government's foreign policy

Before the British re-occupation of Baku in November 1918, Azerbaijan had suffered from a series of temporary governments (Bolshevik, Social Revolutionary, Turk and Tatar), each of which had been guilty of reckless expenditure paid for by effectively printing paper money. Trade had almost entirely ceased, partly on account of the British naval blockade, and partly because of unrest across Transcaucasia. As a result of this stagnation, both the shipping and railway industries had fallen into disrepair. The value of the rouble had decreased, and the price of living had increased, while by November 1918 an industrial and financial crisis was imminent (something which the Turks could not have long staved off even if they had remained in control of Baku and the surrounding areas). The people of Azerbaijan had lost belief in the possibility of just and effective government and had no confidence in financial institutions.⁴⁵ The Azerbaijani government was therefore determined to use the stability brought by British troops to help economic recovery. The previous section looked at economic developments in terms of what the British wanted to achieve during the occupation of Azerbaijan. This section focuses instead on the objectives of the Azerbaijan government (although these still need to be seen in the context of the subordinate relationship with the British).

It was seen earlier that the Azerbaijan economy depended heavily upon the export of oil, and that the Russian civil war had closed off what had once been its main customer for Baku oil. As the level of exports began to drop, the owners of the local oil wells and storage facilities began to reduce wages, resulting in strikes and a growth in Bolshevik tendencies among the workers. 'In an attempt to rescue the oil industry from ruin, the government tried to attract foreign capital to Baku and to sell oil to the countries willing to pay for it in hard cash'.⁴⁶ But both the owners of capital and potential purchasers of oil knew the critical situation of the Azerbaijan economy and negotiated hard for favourable terms. For example, early in 1919 a regular exchange of goods was established with neighbouring Georgia (which was also experiencing severe financial difficulties). In exchange for oil supplies, Azerbaijan received

45. Foreign Office Memorandum, November 1918 - January 1919, *Economics of Russian Azerbaijan*, cited in Maxwell, *Azerbaijan Xalq Cumhuriyyeti*, p. 204.

46. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, pp. 224-25.

payment in cash and in food along with other vital products (charcoal, bread, sugar, cabbage, etc). This agreement was concluded on favourable terms for Georgia, which insisted on a share in the oil that was pumped through its territory, but even so Georgia was still constantly in arrears. By the start of April 1919, its debt to Azerbaijan for oil exceeded 15,9 million roubles.⁴⁷

A similar barter agreement was subsequently arranged with other countries. An agreement was reached with Italy at the end of 1919 by which oil was sent from Baku in return for the supply of various products that were vital for Azerbaijan. The agreement was brokered on favourable terms to Italy by the tough negotiating position taken by the head of the Italian mission in Transcaucasia (Colonel Gabba). The military attaché of Azerbaijan in Georgia reported to the Chief of the General Staff of the Azerbaijani Republic that:

...in a very polite way Colonel Gabba told me that increasing the speed of delivery of one thousand tons of oil ... would give him the opportunity to telegraph to Italy about establishing economic relations with Azerbaijan, and [would] undoubtedly affect the success of our commission in Italy.⁴⁸

The Azerbaijani government, which was by now headed by Usubbeyov, wanted to make Italy its regular partner which was why it offered very favourable terms to the head of the Italian mission. Usubbeyov himself told Gabba in December 1919 that:

The government of Azerbaijan can deliver to Batumi each month for the Italian government about five hundred thousand (500,000) poods of kerosene and about sixty thousand poods (60 000) of fuel oil and crude oil, the prices for kerosene thirty-five dollars per ton, for fuel oil or crude oil twenty-five dollars per ton. The export of fuel oil will begin shortly.⁴⁹

British troops had withdrawn by the time of these negotiations, and reaching agreement with Italy was vital for the leadership of Azerbaijan as a counterbalance to the harsh terms offered by the British and Americans. The Americans, for example, used the threat of holding back food supplies to secure a doubling of the weekly oil supply from 500 to 1000 tons. It also demanded that the Azerbaijani side should bear responsibility for safety of cargo on the route to Batumi (including the Georgian part of the railway). It is noteworthy that the head of the American Military Mission to Armenia,

47. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 95.

48. *Bor'ba za Pobedu Sovetskoy Vlasti v Azerbaydzhane*, p. 341.

49. Guliyev, *Borba Kommunisticheskoy Partii*, p. 114.

General James Guthrie Harbord, stated in categorical form that the contract would only require the Americans to unload flour at Batumi, meaning that it was the responsibility of the Azerbaijan government to move the flour from Batumi to Baku. The Azerbaijan government was forced to agree to the terms or lose access to desperately needed food. The government in return received from the American 'Aid Committee on the Middle East' a promise to supply two wagons of flour a week.⁵⁰ Such 'aid' of the USA was extremely expensive to the Republic! The harsh policy probably in part reflected the fact that American opinion was in general much more sympathetic to Armenia than its neighbours.

It has already been seen that the British were determined to stop the export of any oil that might reach Bolshevik Russia. Since the entire British fleet up to Gibraltar relied on Baku oil, British officials and politicians in London were also determined that Baku oil should be sent to Batumi to meet the needs of British warships. It was largely for these reasons that they banned the export of oil from Baku without specific approval from local British commanders (attempts were also made to continue the policy even after British troops left Baku). The British authorities even banned the sale of oil to allied powers like France and the United States.⁵¹ Without the right to export oil, the nominal ownership of oilfield and oil products by Baku firms became a kind of legal fiction (and, as seen earlier, the British also effectively wrote off many of their debts making the financial position of local owners of oil wells and facilities even more difficult).

The refusal to pay excise duties meant that the Azerbaijani government lacked the resources to protect its people against the consequences of economic collapse.⁵² According to Ministry of Finance data, between December 1918 until June 1919 some 5,307,639 poods of oil and oil products were exported by the orders of the British headquarter but only 21 million roubles was paid in duty, far less than the government needed to finance the state budget.⁵³ The British did not reduce the rate of pumping oil from Azerbaijan even after the military contingent left the country, and at the start of 1920 the British Petroleum Administration in Batumi was still receiving 15 wagons of fuel oil daily only

50. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 96.

51. Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, p. 225.

52. *Bor'ba za Pobedu Sovetskoy Vlasti v Azerbaydzhanе*, p. 63.

53. *Dokumenty ob Angliyskoy Interventsii*, Vol. 12, p. 282.

by railway, still on terms that were harsh to the Azerbaijan government. The colonial pattern of economic relations therefore continued even when the actual British military presence had been removed.

The British naturally had no wish to concede such a 'profitable' trade even its former allies in the entente. In the spring of 1920, the British authorities controlling the distribution of petroleum from Batumi announced that they would only allow the export of fuel oil on condition that 'all invoices for fuel oil sent from Baku were signed by a representative of British petroleum administration in Baku' (although the main British presence had been withdrawn the previous summer, a number of soldiers and civilians remained, responsible for overseeing British economic interests in the area).⁵⁴ This decree meant that Azerbaijan could not ship oil without the consent of the British, while any exports that were allowed had to pay export duty on the oil passed to the European 'partners', in effect perpetuating the subordinate 'colonial' position of Azerbaijan.⁵⁵ It was simply not possible for the Azerbaijan government or the owners of oil wells to find alternative markets, particularly given the impossibility of exporting to Soviet Russia. The fact that almost all oil had to be shipped through Batumi on terms dictated by the British therefore meant that any economic sovereignty for Azerbaijan was in large part an illusion. According to Azerbaijani historians, 'the amount of oil 3,376,000 tons and 3,690,000 tons produced in 1918-1919 respectively, accounted for only half of the amount of oil produced in 1916'.⁵⁶ By 1920 the oil industry of Azerbaijan was in an even deeper crisis.

5.4 Economic monopoly and the impact of the economic crisis on the working class and peasantry in Azerbaijan

It has been seen throughout this thesis that Britain's military presence in Transcaucasia went far beyond strategic and defensive tasks, and by concentrating systematically all power in its hands, the military command also extended its power over the whole economic system. In justifying the actions of

54. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 96.

55. *Azerbaydzhanskaya Demokraticheskaya Respublika (1918-1920)*, p. 208.

56. *Ibid.*

local British commanders, the former financial advisor to Bicherakhov, Lt. Col. H.K. Newcombe, stated in a report to the War Office on 14 August 1919 that:

Our forces being quite small were faced with the problems of restoring law and order amongst [the local population] without the loss of our men. To this end, it was necessary that we should re-establish to a certain extent, the industrial life, giving employment to the workmen, and making adjustments in their wages, in order to meet the increased cost of living resulting from the general disorganisation and non-production.... At this time, I would like to point out that all operations related to the restoration of oil production, of shipping and of the railways was simply one of supervision and incurred no legal financial responsibilities. All this was absolutely essential for the peaceful and bloodless maintenance of our very small force.⁵⁷

By ignoring the governments of the Transcaucasian Republics, the British not only showed that they felt themselves in complete control of the region, but also that they had not yet decided what legal status should define the nature of British imperialism in the region. British economic policies implemented in the South Caucasus were, as has been seen throughout this work, designed to include Baku oilfields within the orbit of British imperialism. Large oil companies like ‘Shell’ and the ‘Anglo-Persian Company’, which hoped to benefit from control over Baku oil, undoubtedly shaped the policy of the British government towards the region. The influence of big oil companies over the British government was very strong. Their decisions to invest or raise prices or withdraw capital exercised great influence on the British government’s policies. ‘The concentration and internationalisation of capital that had taken place over previous decades strengthened the influence which big capital had on government’.⁵⁸ It should be noted that the interests of the oil monopolies did not always coincide with the general line of government policy. Nor was the state unwilling to make use of the rivalries between major oil companies. When Winston Churchill as Minister of War failed to agree with Shell about the price of oil supplies to the British fleet, he eagerly encouraged the British government to strike a deal with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which became the main supplier of oil to the British fleet.⁵⁹ Yet while the process by which key economic interests shaped government policy was complex, the key point to note here is that British intervention was designed above all to advance British imperial interests rather than the interests of the local population.

57. Report by WO Controller of Finance Lt. Col. H.K. Newcombe, 15 August 1919, T 1/12368.

58. V. George, P. Wilding, *Ideology and Social Welfare*, London, Routledge, 1976, p. 104.

59. F.C. Gerretson, *History of the Royal Dutch*, Brill, Netherlands, Leiden, 1953, pp. 291-95.

In the face of the deteriorating socio-economic situation and the ongoing demonstrations of the workers, which were increasingly visible from the start of January 1919, a protracted government crisis began in the country. At a meeting of Parliament on 28 January, the 'Ittihad' faction accused the government of failing to manage the economic crisis or root out corruption. It was supported by the socialists, who stated that the country still 'has neither elected bodies nor the democratic municipal government, and the land is still in the hands of the propertied class'. In the ensuing debate, the government suffered a no-confidence vote, and although the Musavat faction managed to defend the government in tough parliamentary battles, on 25 February 1919, the opposition forced Prime Minister Khoyski to resign.⁶⁰

These political struggles were matched by developments among the working population. The growing labour movement was increasingly politicized by the Bolsheviks, who in March 1919 took control of the Baku Worker Conference and placed their representatives on its presidium. One senior manager of Nobel's Baku operations noted that this created a general character of conflict and fostered an aggressive 'anti-compromise' policy among the workers.⁶¹ The Baku Worker Conference decided in early May to hold a strike, including among its demands the adoption of new forms of collective bargaining and the restoration of trade with Soviet Russia, a demand that was both economic and political in character. In response, the government declared the strike political, and urged people not to participate in it, on the grounds that its main purpose was to undermine the foundations of Azerbaijani statehood. The government clearly understood the need to export oil to Soviet Russia through Astrakhan in order to stabilize the socio-economic situation in the Republic, but it could do nothing given the policy of local British military commanders acting on orders from London. In the event the strike was a failure. Most Muslim workers did not support it, and the Musavat government began to arrest the strike leaders, while the Commander in Chief of the Allied Forces in Transcaucasia, General Milne, ordered the court-martial of those involved in damaging railways, roads, bridges, military depots, and so on.⁶²

60. Volkhonskiy, Mukhanov, *Po Sledam Azerbaydzhanskoy*, p. 90.

61. T. Nasirov, *Bor'ba za Vlast' v Azerbaydzhane (1917-1920)*, Baku, Izdatelstvo Azerbaydzhane, 1993, p. 57.

62. *Bor'ba za Pobedu Sovetskoy Vlasti*, p. 127.

The crisis nevertheless continued as the decline of the oil industry sharply aggravated unemployment among the Baku workers. Every day, hundreds of workers were thrown out into the street. By May 1919, the number of unemployed people in Baku exceeded 10,000 (the real number was probably higher). The nominal and especially the real salary of most workers decreased rapidly (in the course of 1919 real wages fell by about 50%). Prices for basic necessities in the markets rose at a rapid pace. The urban working class of Azerbaijan was subjected to huge exploitation and oppression by a local capitalist elite that itself faced huge pressures as a result of the economic policies followed by the British. The working day in Baku's industries and factories was 9.5-10 hours. It was still higher in the silk-winding enterprises, copper mines and copper smelting plants (typically 10-12 hours). The low wages condemned many workers and their families to a half-starved existence. The unbearable work, bad housing conditions, lack of labour protection, and high level of disease led to a rapid exhaustion and extremely high mortality among the Baku proletarians.⁶³

The Musavat government was operating under constraints that meant it could not respond effectively to such popular protest. The shortage of tax revenue - given the refusal of the British to pay excise duty - meant that it could do little to help the welfare of the people. Nor given the policy of the British could it establish any kind of economic ties with Soviet Russia, even though some members of the government were by the spring of 1919 interested in negotiating a possible trade agreement with the Bolsheviks, in order to increase exports.⁶⁴

The failure to take many practical measures to relieve the suffering may also have reflected the fact that the Musavat dominated government represented the interests of land owners and owners of capital. Although it introduced an eight-hour day, in practice workers who had a job typically worked for 12-14 hours, while thousands more had no work at all. On 22 July 1919, the Bolshevik newspaper *Molot* wrote that:

Thousands of unfortunate victims of capital, unemployed, living skeletons, facing painful death from hunger, now roam the city looking for an opportunity to sell themselves for bread in order to save their whole family from inevitable death. The Musavat government was both unable and unwilling to manage the situation.⁶⁵

63. Guliyev, *Borba Kommunisticheskoy Partii*, p. 120.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

65. *Molot*, 22 July 1919, p. 2.

The situation was little better in the countryside where agricultural production also fell into complete decay as a result of the economic crisis created by the years of occupation and the economic policies pursued by the British. In some districts the area under crops decreased by 60%. The area of grain crops on average decreased by 40%, the area of vineyards by 30%, and orchards by 40%. The livestock population decreased by more than half (over 50% of peasant farms were left without any livestock). Hundreds of villages and thousands of peasant houses were destroyed or fell into disrepair. Much of the peasantry of Azerbaijan was starving. Recognising that the landlord-dominated government was in no great hurry to solve the land issue, a large section of the peasantry was increasingly influenced by Bolshevik propaganda, and refused to give up recruits to the army. On 2 April 1919, the Defence Minister was informed by a report that:

There is now intensified propaganda both among the population and among the troops throughout the territory of Azerbaijan, and the propagandists convince the population not to give their sons for army recruits.⁶⁶

Yet despite such resistance, the situation in villages worsened day by day. Once again, as in the winter of 1918, the peasants restarted their terrorist tactics and seized the lands of the beks (the local princes). A telegram sent by the Elisavetpol governor Colonel Vekilov on 25 February 1919, clearly captured the mood of the peasants:

Among the dark masses of Muslims of Azerbaijan, incendiary information has been spread that the government of Azerbaijan consists exclusively of khans, beks and big landowners who allegedly protect only persons of the Beks' rank and a wealthy class of the population.⁶⁷

Certainly, by the middle of 1919, Azerbaijan was the site of an important revolutionary peasant movement that took the form of an armed struggle against big landowners. In the Ganja - Kazah region of Azerbaijan alone, the number of rebels quickly reached 10,000. It can be safely asserted that during the spring and summer of 1919, the Musavat government almost completely lost the support of the bulk of the peasantry, just as it had lost (to the extent it ever had) any support among the industrial workers of Baku.

66. Ratgauzer, *Bor'ba za Sovetskiy Azerbaydzhani*, p. 5.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

The previous pages have shown how the Musavat-dominated government was throughout the period of British occupation unable to shape the development of an economy which was controlled by the British in order to promote British interests (above all the control of a secure supply of oil). The government was unable to control key areas of the economy or persuade the British to pay the excise duty that was needed if the country was to be run effectively. Leading members of the government resented the condescending way in which they were treated and understood that they were victims of British policy. Yet they were powerless to protest against the situation. They lacked support from the broad mass of the people of Azerbaijan, both urban and rural, who felt little sympathy for a government that was widely seen as dominated by the interests of wealthy landowners and industrialists. They were as a result unable to use even the cloak of nationalism to turn the people against the British, recognising that their own fate largely depended on the support of foreign powers, even after the British pulled out most of their troops in the summer of 1919. Azerbaijan during this time was treated as a kind of colony by foreign powers, above all the British, who saw the country largely in terms of its role in sustaining the commercial and political interests of the British Empire.

Conclusion

This study has made it possible to draw some general conclusions about British intervention in Transcaucasia in general and Azerbaijan in particular which differs from traditional Soviet-Russian and British accounts (and indeed from accounts produced by historians in Azerbaijan since the collapse of the USSR).

The international political and military changes that took place during the First World War transformed the relationship between the great powers. The abandonment of the Caucasian front by Russian troops after October revolution - a process that began some months earlier - led to the effective separation of Transcaucasia from Russia. In the months that followed, the political situation in Azerbaijan was extremely complex, and made more fraught by ethnic tension. The Baku Commune represented a triumph for radical revolution within the city, and reflected the leftist sentiment among the city's proletariat, but it only lasted for a few months as the threat of an attack by Turkish forces encouraged its opponents to band together to seek British support to defend the city. The brief period of German-Turkish rule across large parts of the region did little to bring stability. Nor did efforts to develop a kind of Transcaucasian federation provide successful in the light of the national egoism of the populations of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijani.

At the end of 1918, the defeat of Germany and Turkey opened up a vacuum in Transcaucasia. Great Britain was the most obvious power to fill the vacuum. The region was important for the security and economy of the British Empire given that the region represented a gateway to central Asia and India, as well as holding large oil reserves that had long been of interest to British capital. British intervention in Transcaucasia in the period 1918-20 was indeed the result of a combination of numerous and shifting factors including: the desire to support White forces in their attempt to overthrow the Bolshevik regime; the desire to protect the borders of India from a possible Turkish-German invasion through the Caucasus and Turkestan; the desire to neutralize Bolshevik propaganda in India and Persia; the personal ambitions of leaders 'on the ground' such as General Dunsterville and General Thomson; and so on. It seems clear that the British government in London did not at least

initially aim to occupy the territory of Transcaucasia and create a colony or a protectorate there as Soviet historians repeatedly stated. Yet the patterns of British policy in Transcaucasia during 1918-20 were characteristic of a common form of imperial rule, in which the imperial power offers stability and order, but uses its rule to exercise complex forms of economic control, exploiting local resources and extracting a financial surplus in a way that damages the welfare of the local population. And then, when the imperial power withdraws, turmoil returns to the region. Nor is there any doubt that British occupation forces in Transcaucasia - and above all in Azerbaijan - viewed the local population through the lens of 'neo-imperialism': they sought to use police and military power to secure their rule and treated local customs and values with contempt.

The development of British policy towards Transcaucasia was bound up with the wider geopolitical conflict of the First World War (and its aftermath). General Dunsterville's arrival in Baku in the late summer of 1918 was above all designed to help secure the city against Turkish attack (he failed). And the return of British forces to Baku two months later, under the command of General Thomson, was also largely designed to supervise the withdrawal of defeated Turkish troops and establish order in the area. Yet over the following months, the British established their rule across large parts of Transcaucasia, placing the armed forces along the railway from Batumi to Baku. British forces quickly established patterns of military administration, including extensive control over the local economy, and demanded compliance from the local population. In Baku, in particular, the banking system and oil production were placed under British oversight. Various Commissioners were appointed - some of them military and some civilian - but all tasked with ensuring order and the promotion of British interests. British military and civilian officials cooperated with local governments in the three republics, but it was always clear where the power really lay. Azerbaijan in particular was in many ways a semi-colony, the powers of its government limited, and its economy subject to the demands of British imperial power.

Despite all these 'achievements', there was from the end of 1917 little consensus in the British government about Russia in general and South Russia and the Caucasus in particular. There was certainly no coherent policy to turn Azerbaijan into a colony even if the defence of British interests

was always likely to give a colonial flavour to British rule. Leading Conservatives like Churchill and Curzon were strongly anti-Bolshevik. Lloyd George was always more sceptical about the likely success of intervention against the Bolsheviks (he had down to the summer of 1918 been ready to work with the Bolsheviks in the war against Germany). Yet in the context of Transcaucasia, Curzon and Churchill often disagreed on policy. Curzon as Foreign Secretary believed that it was in Britain's interest to prevent Russian control of the Caucasus - Red or White - since this would increase imperial security and limit the power of Britain's most important potential rival in Asia. Churchill at the War Office regarded Transcaucasia as a secondary region of the Middle East, and recognized it as a zone of influence of Russia, not least because he did not want the issue to complicate relations with General Denikin who led the fight against the Bolsheviks in south Russia.

The conflict between the War Office and the Foreign Office in matters of policy towards the South Caucasus was sometimes reflected on the ground. Men like General Thomson had a great deal of autonomy from London and had to respond to local events as they arose. So too did General Milne who was responsible for the military administration of much of the area round the Black Sea. The British soldiers and officials who had administrative power had even more authority when deciding how to deal with the local people and local governments. In Baku in particular, but also elsewhere, the population was required to carry out orders and co-operate with the British command. The local Musavat government was regarded with little respect, and its protests over various aspects of British policy were ignored, in a way that was typical of what might be called British Imperial Culture. But Thomson in particular was also shrewd enough to realise that with limited forces he could not impose order across the region. He did therefore try to work with the local government, recognising that his own forces did not have the ability to rule effectively. Thomson was a veteran of the Indian Army - and in India too local 'native' governments existed - allowing the British to work with local elites to ease the cost and challenge of ruling.

As for the local Musavat government of Azerbaijan, its main driving forces came from a small number of Muslim intellectuals and a local bourgeoisie of land-owners and oil magnates. On the eve of the February Revolution, there were two broad ideas among this elite about a possible national project.

There were those who believed the future lay in establishing national-cultural autonomy for Azerbaijan within the Russian Empire. But there were others more interested in the idea of establishing a much larger 'Great Turan' that would include Azerbaijan within a much larger entity. Following the October revolution, the local Azeri elite had instinctively been pro-Turkish, but after the defeat of the Turks a year later, their main objective was to secure independence at Paris and to ensure their own economic privileges. This meant they had a complex view of the British occupying forces who treated locals poorly but were a bulwark against radical change 'from below'. Members of the Musavat regime recognised that the British presence helped in effect to maintain the social and economic status quo.

The bourgeois Musavat government tried to behave independently in dealing with the kind of major challenges facing any new state. The main foreign policy objective was without doubt to secure international recognition of its sovereignty and borders. The sending of a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference was a timid but real step intended to increase self-sufficiency and secure an independent existence in the future. This theme did not lose its relevance throughout 1919. The eventual *de facto* recognition of Azerbaijan by Britain and France represented the greatest foreign policy success for the new government. Yet recognition was only really given because the allies were reluctant to provide troops to defend Azerbaijan and the other republics from Bolshevik attack, at a time when Denikin's forces had collapsed. London and Paris seemed to hope that the recognition of the independence of the Transcaucasian republics would somehow make them more determined to fight against Bolshevism.

The Musavat government of Azerbaijan lasted for almost two years (though in the early months without control of Baku). Despite its short period of existence, it still had some remarkable successes: the creation of sovereign statehood; the establishment of an elected legislative body chosen by universal suffrage; the creation of a multi-party system. All these steps show that the Musavat government wanted to create a modern bourgeois democratic republic, though one in which economic power remained in private hands. But political fragmentation of political forces meant that it was very difficult to establish a stable government. Musavat relied on coalition partners in Parliament. The Parliament itself quickly turned into an arena for inter-party struggle. And, as a result, it proved

difficult to establish an effective system of administration (made worse by the fact that many of those who had run Azerbaijan in tsarist times had left taking their expertise with them).

The difficult international and domestic situation meant that the Musavat government would always struggle to establish its authority. By the beginning of 1920, the disintegration of the Musavat regime intensified panic among the bourgeois-landlord parties and the Musavat government itself. At one of its last Congresses in December 1919, many delegates resigned from the Musavat Party, which had discredited itself in the eyes of the working class and peasants. The Bolshevik newspaper *Novyi Mir* correctly noted that the ‘Musavat Party has lost all influence in the country. It is still in power, but is already hanging in the air, and no longer has any support among wide circles of the population’.¹

As for the general population of Azerbaijan, the material consulted in this study suggests that different strata and classes perceived events differently. Some sections of the well-off strata of the population sympathized with the British, seeing in them the guarantors of peace and tranquillity, though often resenting the way in which the ‘imperial’ occupiers treated them. The poorer strata of the population, particularly in Baku, were increasingly pro-Bolshevik and regarded the British presence negatively although usually avoiding open confrontation with soldiers and officials. Yet frequent and well-organized strikes took place in Baku against British colonial policy and against the mistreatment of the local people by British soldiers. The scale and coherence of the strikes reflected the hostile attitude of the population toward the British command. Most sections of the population came to view the Musavat government with a degree of scepticism. The economic collapse and the deterioration in the living conditions of the working people encouraged resistance among the broad masses of the people leading to a general revolutionary upsurge among the working classes in the cities and villages of Azerbaijan. The Musavat government which represented the interests of the upper classes could no longer operate as before. The ‘lower classes’ (urban proletariat, peasantry) did not want to live as before. When the Red Army eventually took control of Azerbaijan in the spring of 1920, then, it did not represent a military takeover against the will of the people or the crushing of an independent state.

1. *Novyy Mir*, 11 January 1920, p. 2.

A large section of the Azerbaijani population rejected both western colonial rule and rule by a Musavat government widely seen as the representatives of wealthy elite of landowners and capitalists. The radical social and economic programme of the Bolsheviks was always likely to have a genuine appeal to large sections of the population after so many years of chaos.

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