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The History of Transnational Armenian Terrorism in the Twentieth Century

A Historico-Criminological Study

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TO MY FOREIGN READERS

In 2015, a book called *Istoria transnatsionalnogo armianskogo terrorizma v XX stoletii* (The History of Transnational Armenian Terrorism in the Twentieth Century) was published in Baku. This is the first attempt by a Russian academic to study Armenian terrorism. The Armenians who used terror at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries to fight for their interests gave this phenomenon its own national feature. It was not easy to publish this book in Russia. Russia, along with the U.S. and France, are countries with compact Armenian communities and diasporas that take active part in the financial, sociopolitical, and cultural life of their country of residence. These same countries have put up artificial barriers to researching Armenian terrorism, albeit the fact that it was in Russia, the U.S. and France that Armenian terrorist organizations engaged in dozens of acts of vengeance first appeared. After coming out in Baku, the book was then published in Russia, although the Armenian Diaspora launched its entire arsenal of pressure on the law-enforcement agencies, inundating them with complaints and denunciations against the author and costing him a great deal of effort and resources to fend off this onslaught.

After reading the above, any rational person might wonder why the topic of Armenian terrorism is such a taboo in Russia. There can only be one answer—Russia has always protected the Armenians and Armenia at different times in history, be it during the imperial, Soviet, or post-Soviet era. Moreover, if they did not openly protect, the Russian authorities at least never actively opposed the religious and political activity of the Armenians in the Caucasus at any time, thus allowing for the emergence and development of the most radical manifestations of national and religious activity—national-religious extremism and nationalist terrorism.

First, in the aftermath of their victorious wars with Persia in 1826-1828 and the Ottoman Empire in 1828-1829, the authorities of the Russian Empire resettled more than half a million Armenians from these countries in the former Erivan khanate, thus throwing the national composition of the Transcaucasian population into great disarray. In the 1830s-1880s, they did everything they could to assist the proselytism of

the Armenian Gregorian Church and even subordinated the previously autocephalous Albanian Church to the Etchmiadzin Catholicate, not to mention affording the Armenian clergy privileges for acquiring real estate in the Caucasus. In 1887, Armenian students studying in Switzerland, who were subjects of the Russian Empire, created the first revolutionary and terrorist party, Hunchak (The Bell). Three years later, in 1890 a second, even more bloodthirsty, revolutionary and terrorist party called Dashnaksutiun (Commonwealth) was founded in Tiflis (now Tbilisi), the administrative capital of the Russian imperial authorities in the Caucasus. The manifestos of both parties envisaged terror as the main and essentially only available method of revolutionary struggle. At the time, the Russian imperial authorities explained their protection of the Armenian national-religious extremists and terrorists by saying they were using them as a geopolitical tool in Transcaucasia in the global military and political opposition against the Ottoman Empire.

However, it was not Ottoman, but Russian officials who were the first victims of Armenian terrorism, which is more graphic evidence of the immutable truth that any aiding and abetting of terrorism sooner or later turns the tables on those who pander to terrorism and render it political and administrative support. In 1903, the Russian imperial authorities established control over the property and finances of the Armenian Gregorian Church, but encountered open armed opposition from Armenian national-religious terrorists, who killed the Russian officials taking inventory of church property. This subject is covered in sufficient detail in the book, so I will not go into it here. I will only say that the Armenians have never been allies of imperial Russia, while the spiritual hierarchy of the Armenian Gregorian Church has never supported either the Holy Synod or the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. All of the notions imposed today on Russian public opinion about the fraternity of the Russian and Armenian people and the ideological kinship of their churches are shattered against the historical facts presented in this book. The Armenians were never Russia's allies, they only took advantage of its benevolence in their own selfish interests, while having no qualms about using terror against Russia when imperial ambitions or interests contradicted them.

The advent of the Bolsheviks (who also began as revolutionary terrorists) to power in Russia in 1917 and the Sovietization of Transcaucasia that followed made one country too small for different breeds of terrorist. So the Bolsheviks began actively and systematically exterminating the Armenians, their brothers in terrorist methods of political struggle, but opponents in ideology. In particular, in November 1937, U.S.S.R. People's Commissar of Internal Affairs and General Commissar of State Security Yezhov sent a report to Joseph Stalin that said the following: "In order to rid Armenia of anti-Soviet elements, Comrade Mikoian is asking for permission to shoot another 700 people from among the Dashnaks... I suggest shooting another 1,500, making a total of 2,000, in keeping with the previously approved figure."¹ The Bolsheviks, who themselves came to power on the crest of revolutionary terror in Russia, had to know that only mass physical destruction of former terrorist nationalists could preventively stop new outbursts of Armenian terrorism in the Soviet Union. So while Stalin was in power, they were afraid of even mentioning Armenian terrorism.

The shift in political regime in the Soviet Union from totalitarian to authoritarian led to conditions conducive to the revival of Armenian nationalism and the national-religious terrorism accompanying it. It only took one generation for Soviet Armenia to become a hotbed of terrorist ideology and practice again. At the end of the 1960s, Yerevan saw the appearance of the anti-Soviet and anti-Communist National United Party of Armenia, the main goal of which was to establish an independent Armenian state in the territory of the former Armenian S.S.R.

¹ Russian State Archives of Social and Political History (RGASPI), rec. gr. 17, inv. 166, f. 580, sheet 10.

and join several northeastern regions of Turkish Anatolia to it in the future. Terrorism, as is easy to guess, became a tool in the fight of the Armenian people for national independence from Soviet power. In January 1977, activists of the National United Party of Armenia committed three terrorist acts at once in Moscow, including an explosion in a Moscow subway train. There was also an attempt to carry out a terrorist act in October of the same year in the crowded lobby of a railway station. It was only by a stroke of luck that the tragedy was prevented. I also describe this topic in detail in my book.

The transnational nature of Armenian terrorism was most graphically manifested in the last quarter of the twentieth century, when three international terrorist organizations of Armenian nationalists began functioning in the countries of the Greater Middle East, Europe, and North America at the same time—the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide, and the New Armenian Resistance Group. The insurgents who belong to these organizations are responsible for more than 300 terrorist acts in more than twenty countries around the world over a span of fifteen years (1975-1991). One of these terrorist structures, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, worked in close contact with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and even had its command center at the headquarters of this insurgent organization in the capital of Lebanon, Beirut. As we know, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine enjoyed the constant support of the political leadership and intelligence services of the Soviet Union, which gives reason to believe that the terrorist activity of ASALA (at least in Western Europe and North America) was also under their control. As we know, any intelligence service is very unwilling to reveal its secrets, which is why the topic of transnational Armenian terrorism in present-day Russia is taboo, and studying it and publishing the results is considered extremism. There are enough indirect reasons to claim that Armenian terrorism of the last quarter of the twentieth century is mainly the result of the activity of the Soviet KGB, and this largely explains why the Russian authorities do not want to hear anything about it and shun away from it.

In the context of the global geopolitical standoff between the Soviet Union and the United States (including their allies in the Warsaw Pact and NATO, respectively) and between the intelligence services of these two countries, an active and even vicious fight developed in the 1980s to establish or retain control over the organizational structures of transnational Armenian terrorism. This topic is also described in detail in this book. Running ahead, I will say that the U.S. CIA was able to outwit the Soviet KGB in this area. Moreover, the Americans had managed to form a controllable mini army out of Middle East terrorists of Armenian nationality by the mid-1980s and, with the help of the authorities of the Armenian S.S.R., send it to the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region of the Azerbaijan S.S.R., after which ethnic upheavals began in this region of Soviet Transcaucasia that led to the Karabakh war of 1988-1994—the first terrorist war in the history of humanity. This topic is also covered in this book.

As we see, Armenian terrorism in its most diverse historical guises has been part and parcel of Russian history over the past 130 years. At first, it made a significant contribution to the downfall of the Russian Empire, after which it was equally instrumental in the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a Russian patriot, I wrote this book to warn the current political leadership of my country against showing any trust in the current political regime in Yerevan, most of the members of which have participated in the combat ranks of transnational Armenian terrorists in one way or another in the Karabakh war of 1988-1994, often being directly subordinate to Middle Eastern militants in those years. Transnational Armenian terrorists succeeded in creating a quasi-state in the areas of Karabakh they seized, which in turn, by means of the terrorist act in the parliament of the Republic of Armenia in 1999, when the parliament speaker and prime minister were killed, was able to occupy that country too. Today Armenia is essentially inundated by transnational Armenian terrorists who have been able to legalize and legitimize

themselves through the country's political institutions. It is they, and not the Armenian people, who hold all the moral and legal responsibility for the situation in Karabakh. The solution I offer is also set forth in this book.

Bringing this word to English-speaking readers to a close, I would like to repeat that this book was primarily written for Russian and Russian-speaking readers who, for objective reasons, have no access to sources of information on the history of transnational Armenian terrorism. I wrote it with the intention of breaking the stereotypical thinking that has emerged over the past hundred years regarding this constituent issue. To do this, I had to use logical evidence, some passages or fragments of which might not be entirely understandable or seem unnecessarily evocative to the foreign reader.

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