

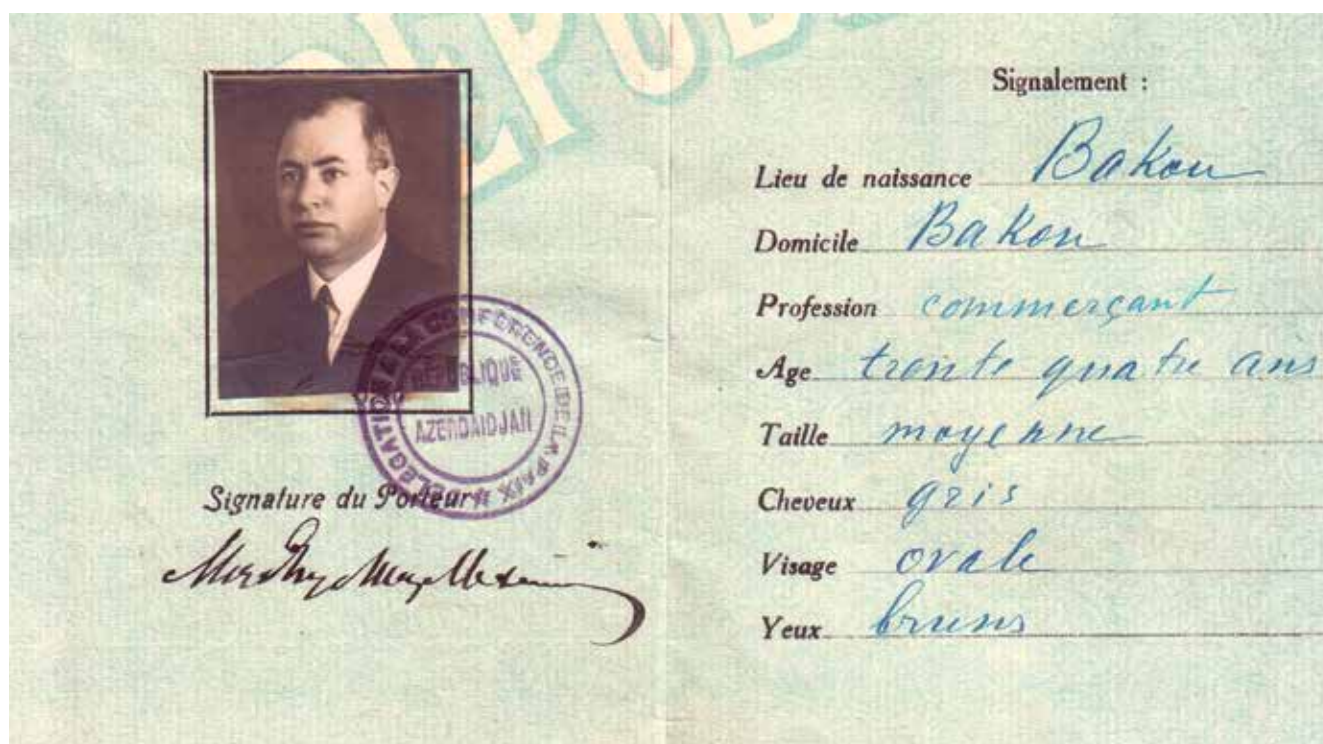
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AZERBAIJANI EMIGRATION AND CAUCASUS PROJECT OF WESTERN POWERS DURING “PHONEY WAR” (1939-1940)

Continuation. See the beginning in IRS-Heritage, № 42

Passport of Mir Yagub Mehdiyev



Passport of Ali Akbar Topchibachy



On December 26, the Foreign Ministry department for Europe sent a diplomatic note to the Council of Ministers and the General Commissariat, itself, regarding the usefulness of establishing cooperation with the Azerbaijanis. The document said that the department had previously maintained informal ties with A. Atamalibayov, Secretary General of the delegation. Nevertheless, the Commissariat's officials were advised to exercise some caution in their exchanges with the delegation members on the grounds that "the Azerbaijani movement, just like most groups of the non-Russian nations of Russia, has sought support in Berlin in the past few years".

"Whereas the unfolding of the international situation that followed in September has brought most of these elements into our midst, we should nevertheless treat them with some caution," the document said. For this very reason, high-ranking representatives of the Commissariat were also advised to refrain from formally replying to the delegation's diplomatic note. However, this did not mean that the Commissariat should turn down its cooperation with the Azerbaijanis. Moreover, the Foreign Ministry was issuing precise recommenda-

tions to this entity, citing specific fields for potential collaboration with the delegation representatives.

"It is also true that we are interested in garnering support of this organization, if necessary, in conducting propaganda among the Turkic-speaking population in the USSR, not in the Muslim East. Needless to say, we will not mind your agencies' employing members of this group, in particular, Mr. Atamalibayov, for specific work on documents" (1).

The Caucasus Confederation Council's stepping up its activity in Britain. In addition to their efforts in France, representatives of the Azerbaijani diplomatic mission in Paris focused on their activities in Britain. According to the agreement concluded with the Confederation Council, these efforts were in strict compliance with the general line of action in the Caucasus. As early as in March 1939, M. Y. Mehdiyev, who chaired the Council's presidium at the time, instructed Andro Gugushvili, Georgia's representative in Britain, to defend the interests of other ethnic centers that were part of this organization, in London, as well (2).

All these endeavors were also of great importance due to the fact that, as mentioned above, the British



government had a more cautious stance toward the Soviet Union, in contrast to France. Even Fitzroy Macklin, a senior expert in the British Foreign Office's Northern Department (his responsibilities included developing policies with regard to the USSR), who was known for his anti-Bolshevik views and was one of the ardent supporters of a military operation in the Caucasus (3), still called for a cautious and vigilant policy toward the USSR in his remarks made on October 29, 1939. According to him, while the Allies were fully engaged in waging a war in Europe, Soviet Russia "got its hands free in the Middle East" for the first time. The Red Army could easily invade the northern part of Iran and Afghanistan, jeopardizing the oil fields in southern Iran and Iraq. Since it would be useless to rely on Turkey's interference in such a situation, "subversive actions against the Soviet authorities in Central Asia and the Caucasus would be inappropriate and almost unrealistic as long as the situation in the Middle East remains stable and the borders are intact" (4). Therefore, Macklin suggested sending agents to Central Asia and the Caucasus region only in case of a Soviet incursion into the Middle East. Amid these developments, "it is necessary to have an organization capable of operating both in the Soviet-occupied territories and in all accessible borderline regions of the Soviet

Union [...]. In fact, the purpose of such an organization should be fostering resistance of ethnic forces and the population against the Soviet expansion [...], arranging uprisings against the Soviet government, potential guerrilla fighting in the occupied territories and, finally, establishing links with disgruntled elements in the USSR, itself, in order to stage riots in the largest regions". As part of preparations for such a course of events, Macklin believed all due measures should be taken immediately by tackling the creation of clandestine groups.

Knatchbull-Hugessen, British Ambassador in Ankara, told the British Foreign Office on November 18, 1939 that according to Turkish sources, the local population in the Caucasus "was showing signs of discontent over the Russian administration, and Turkey's General Staff believes that the population could be incited to launch a rebellion in the event of a war with Russia [...]. Apparently, they are also looking to send weaponry to the rebels" (5).

The right moment for the Caucasians came on November 30 of the same year during the Soviet invasion of Finland. The Western allies feared that the occupation of Finland by the Red Army would lead to an actual division of Scandinavia into regions of the Soviet (northern) and German (southern) spheres of influence.

Schematic map of Baku of 1939

This resulted in a gradual rapprochement of the British and French positions on the Soviet issue. Gugushvili, who was acting as the Caucasus Confederation Council representative in Britain from March 1939, as mentioned above, was quick to take advantage of the situation. In early December, hot on the heels of the outbreak of the Soviet-Finnish war, Gugushvili paid a visit to Laurence Collier, head of the Northern Department of the British Foreign Office responsible for formulating policies with regard to the USSR. Having informed Collier that according to unverified reports, the Germans had sent experts to the Caucasus in order to reinforce the region's defense, Gugushvili handed over several notes to him (6). In a special note aimed at assessing the role of the Caucasus region in the ongoing war, Gugushvili sought to prove that the widespread opinion in the British circles suggesting that the Soviet alliance with the Third Reich was unnatural and therefore temporary was groundless. The document noted that "it would be erroneous to overestimate the significance of the incompatibility of pan-Slavism and pan-Germanism, in particular, after we witnessed Stalin and Hitler's overcoming the differences between Bolshevism and Nazism [...]."

"In any case, regardless of the mode of Germany's future cooperation with Russia, it is surely obvious that it will strengthen Germany's military capabilities on the one hand and consolidate the Soviet regime on the other," it said.

According to Gugushvili, regardless of the course of further developments, the Caucasus is controlled by the Bolsheviks and "will be a source of great danger to Britain due to its geographical and strategic location." "It would suffice to recall that Russia and therefore Germany would be unable to maintain the conflict without Caucasus oil and manganese," he said. The Caucasus nations are fully aware that their struggle for independence would require them to sustain tremendous tangible and physical sacrifices. In conclusion, Gugushvili emphasized the importance of the Caucasus nations' support for future military action of the Allies in the region.

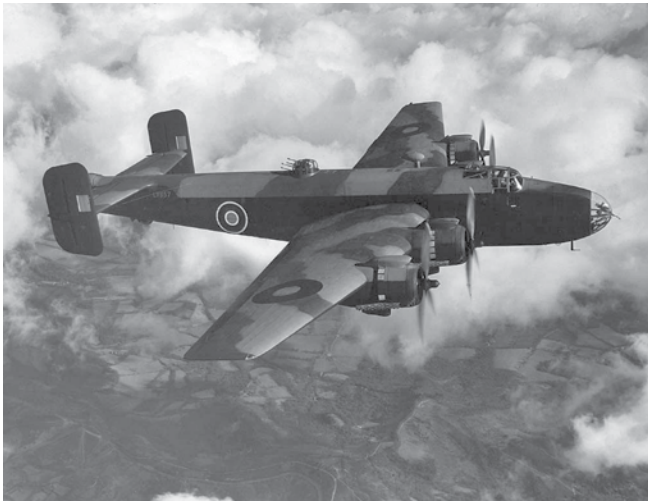
"There is no need to prove that the military operations of Great Britain and its allies in the Caucasus-Middle East region would be significantly facilitated if active empathy of the peoples living there was achieved. It would be easy to secure these sympathies and cooperation if the Caucasus nations were informed beforehand that Britain and its allies, for their part, em-



pathized with them and were ready to support their cause," Gugushvili wrote. He therefore suggested that British diplomats and experts begin comprehensively studying the issue of the Caucasus region's importance for the Allies' future military operations. Representatives of the Caucasus Confederation Council offered their assistance to the Britons in this regard (7).

The Allies' drawing up initial plans for aerial and subversive military operations in the Caucasus. The Poles' return to the stage and reciprocal initiatives of the Azerbaijanis. On December 4, a few days after the mentioned visit, Gen. Edmund Ironside, chief of the British Army's General Staff, made a proposal at a meeting of the chiefs-of-staff of the British Army's allies during discussions on the issue of providing military assistance to Turkey. Ironside suggested stage-by-stage formation of the Turkish air force in order to further use it for secret operations in the Caucasus (8).

On December 19, the supreme military council of the Allies passed a decision to intervene in the conflict in Finland. For this purpose, a special expeditionary corps was to be set up. It would be initially comprised of 50,000 to 60,000 servicemen and their number would be further increased to 150,000. French military men would make up two-thirds of the new corps, while the Britons would account for the remaining one-third. Initial divisions of the corps were ready for a dispatch to Finland by February 1940 (9). At the same time, the allies' military command started to prepare for warfare in the Caucasus region, in a bid to deprive the Third Reich of the opportunity to use Soviet oil supplies. From



English and French bombers were based on airfields of the Middle East

December 1939, the French foreign ministry began to receive analytical notes regularly regarding projects aimed at disabling the Caucasus oil fields. As a rule, these notes, prepared by experts of the country's ministry of war, mainly concerned the technical and purely military aspects of the mentioned issue and had to be evaluated by professional diplomats to determine the feasibility of materializing those plans internationally in that time period. One of the considered ways of elimi-

nating those oil fields was possible staging of the acts of sabotage, which certainly envisaged the involvement of Caucasian emigrants. For example, the analysts who wrote the December 23 note titled "The conditions and ways of attacking the oil-rich centers of the Caucasus" said that "regardless of the real bulk of oil production in the Soviet Union, four-fifths of the oil is extracted at the Baku fields".

"On the other hand, two-fifths of Russian gasoline and almost all of the aviation fuel are refined at those very oil fields," the note said (11).

As for the oil fields in Grozny and Maikop, since they accounted for only 15 percent of Soviet oil production and were located on the other side of the Greater Caucasus mountain range, which nearly ensured their "complete immunity" to attacks, these deposits were mentioned in the note merely as "a reminder" (12).

In addition to Baku, an emphasis was placed on Batumi, located on the Black Sea coast of Georgia. Batumi, which was linked to Baku by an oil pipeline, was a strategic seaport used for the transshipment of



English reconnaissance flight routes over Baku and Batumi



about 6 million tons of oil, according to the mentioned document. Its authors stressed that potential bombing of Baku would entail major challenges for technical reasons (the city was located 500 kilometers away from the Turkish border, which was a significant distance taking into account the capabilities of the allies' aviation of that era), adding that a ground operation against Batumi "could be carried out in much more suitable conditions". This seaport is located only 25 kilometers away from the Turkish border, the authors said. In particular, they believed the city could be invaded through a simultaneous attack from sea and on the ground from the Turkish border. The document also said that if the Allies' warships destroyed the seaport's main infrastructure, oil pipeline terminals, reservoirs and oil refineries, a ground operation might be unnecessary altogether (13). Nevertheless, the document authors noted in conclusion while referring to possible air strikes on Batumi that if aviation was used in concert with operations

by ground troops and the fleet, a paratrooper landing could be carried out along the entire 800 kilometer oil pipeline, along with bombing strategically important facilities. Such an operation "would complicate" the pipeline defense efforts (14), they wrote. Undoubtedly, the last passage envisaged using emigrant saboteurs who were closely familiar with the conditions on the ground (15).

The mentioned document was apparently inconsistent with the political realities of that period while referring to the military aspects of the planned campaign at first glance. In particular, those who wrote it had failed to take into consideration the stance of Turkey, which was reluctant to grant access to the Allies' ships to the Black Sea to wage battles against the Soviet Union. However, it should also be taken into account that the issue of declaring war on the USSR began to be thoroughly considered in France's political circles in late 1939 following the Soviet aggression against Finland.



The possibility of staging subversive acts as an effective tool of cutting off Caucasus oil supplies to Germany was mentioned for the first time in the analytical note called “The aftermath of the German-Soviet pact. The Note on Strategic Warfare”, developed by analysts of the French General Staff on December 30, 1939. In the section dealing with the Caucasus region, they noted that “Russian oil from the Caucasus currently serves the supplies to Germany”.

“It would be of great interest to destroy the Baku-Batumi pipeline and, if possible, the oil fields in Baku, which are producing three-fourths of the Russian oil. Even temporary destruction of the Caucasus oil infrastructure would really cause great difficulty for the Russian economy, taking into account the weakness of its industries and the lack of entrepreneurial spirit, which have evidently taken hold in its administration. The Batumi pipeline is located 25 kilometers from the Turkish border. Thus, it is possible to carry out precision raids without actually invading the country. It appears feasible to agree with Ankara that it would turn a blind eye to the presence of armed gangs seeking to

cut off the pipeline and destroy several pumping stations. Such gangs could be comprised of Circassians or Kurds who reside as refugees in Syria and come from the Caucasus. If we want to launch operations of the largest scale possible, we have to ensure Turkey’s interest in them by promising it Transcaucasia, which was an Ottoman possession until recently” (16).

Interestingly, the issue of conducting a military operation in the Caucasus was raised to the highest level of government during this time. ♦

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Baku oil fields in the late 1930s. Aerial view

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13. Ibidem. Fol. 70-71.
14. Ibidem. Fol. 74.
15. This information was confirmed by British sources. According to a note of Marshal Mitchell, Commander-in-Chief of the British Air Force Middle East Command, dated January 26, 1940, at that time "the Turks were studying the possibility of destroying the oil infrastructure in Batumi and in Baku, if possible, by means of sabotage, which could have been the only effective tool to cut off oil transportation from the South Caucasus". See Osborn. P. R. Operation Pike. Britain Versus the Soviet Union, 1939-1941. P. 70.
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