

**AMERICA'S MORAL RESPONSIBILITY?: THE DEBATE OVER  
AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN THE NEAR EAST  
AFTER WWI**

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## ABSTRACT

After the First World War, there was widespread support for U.S. intervention in the Near East to assist Christian minorities in the region, but the Wilson administration and the U.S. Senate took little action. The Armenian cause in particular was foremost in the minds of Americans. Many Americans felt the United States had a moral responsibility to help Near Eastern Christians. For many observers, American interest coupled with the opportunity for increased participation in Near Eastern affairs made it seem likely that the United States would emerge from the peace process as a major influence in the Area. However, this was not the case, and proposed initiatives that would increase American participation in the area were either ignored or rejected. There was broad interest in getting more involved in the Near East, but no consensus on how to do so. Some favored an American mandate over Armenia, while others wanted a larger American mandate over Armenia, Constantinople, and Anatolia, and others sought to avoid mandates altogether and instead preferred sending direct aid to Armenia and the Near East. By the time it seemed clear that American intervention in the Near East would only happen along the terms favored by those seeking to limit American costs and responsibility, the solidification of isolationist sentiment in the United States, antagonized by the long League of Nations debate, and changing circumstances in the Near East made a dramatic increase in U.S. influence in the region unlikely. The debate over American intervention in the Near East provides insight into larger discussions about American imperialism and its relationship to humanitarianism, American isolationism in the interwar years, and the partisan atmosphere of American postwar politics.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

After the First World War, there was widespread and deep U.S. interest in the fate of the Near East. Many Americans supported U.S. intervention in the region to protect Christian minorities in the area, however, the Wilson administration and the U.S. Senate took few practical steps to aid them. In the early twentieth century, *Near East*, a term that has been largely replaced by *Middle East*, for the most part denoted the lands of the Ottoman Empire at its largest extent.<sup>1</sup> The Ottoman Empire's territory included modern day Turkey, Syria, and Armenia, among other countries. The Ottoman Empire's defeat at the hands of the Allies left its future uncertain. European nations had long been considering what was to be done with the Ottoman empire, which was seen as a declining power by those in Europe. While America was never at war with the German allied Ottoman Empire, its profound interest in the Near East peace settlement was due in large part to the sympathy for Christian minorities in the Ottoman state that had been fostered by decades of missionary and philanthropic activity. The Armenian cause in particular was paramount in the minds of Americans, but the welfare of other groups, such as the Greeks, the Nestorians, and Syrian Christians, also captured American attention. Many Americans felt they had a moral obligation to help Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire. Despite their

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the paper, the term *Near East* is frequently used because it was the preferred term for the region used by Americans. Maps, official government documents, and personal correspondence most often referred to the lands of the Ottoman Empire, including territory which it had recently lost, as the Near East. The terms *Ottoman Empire*, *Ottoman territory*, or *former Ottoman territory* could be appropriate at times but are tricky because many of the areas discussed were still formally Ottoman territory until a peace agreement was signed but occupied by other powers and soon destined to be removed from Ottoman state, which itself was in a transition period from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey. *Near East* also often referred to Russian Armenia, which had not been part of the Ottoman Empire since the early nineteenth century.

neutrality towards the Ottomans in the war, the United States and President Woodrow Wilson were in a position to influence the Allied peace terms toward the Ottoman Empire. The international political capital the United States had accumulated allowed it to challenge the aims of the Allied powers and gave it the potential to significantly increase its involvement in the Near East. For many observers, American interest coupled with the opportunity for increased participation in Near Eastern affairs made it seem likely that the United States would emerge from the peace process as a major influence in the area. However, this was not the case, American policymakers ignored or rejected several proposed initiatives that would increase American participation in the Near East.

Immediately after the war, there was broad interest in getting more involved in the Near East, but no consensus on how to do so. There were disagreements over what the U.S. role in the region should be. Some favored an American mandate over Armenia, while others wanted a larger mandate over Armenia, Constantinople, and Anatolia, and still others sought to avoid mandates altogether and instead preferred sending direct aid to Armenia and the rest of the Near East. Many Republican internationalists favored actions that avoided long term commitments and preserved American independent action, but many Democrats were more inclined to support proposals that committed the United States to the long-term welfare of the region and to preserve peace in the same spirit as the League of Nations. Despite the many proposals and pleas for swift action, American policymakers made few impactful decisions regarding U.S. involvement in the Near East. Wilson felt that American entrance into the League was a natural first step before any decisions could be made regarding the Near East, and Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the eventual chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, often claimed circumstances

dictated that only the president, not Congress, could take action by using his executive authority. The lack of consensus, combined with the inclination of the Allies and the United States to handle the peace process in Europe first, delayed any definitive action regarding the peace in the Near East. By the time it seemed clear that American intervention in the Near East would only happen along the terms favored by those seeking to limit American costs and responsibility, the solidification of isolationist sentiment in the United States, antagonized by the long League of Nations debate, and changing circumstances in the Near East made a dramatic increase in U.S. influence in the region unlikely.

The narrative of the debate over postwar American intervention in the Near East provides a broader understanding of larger questions about American foreign policy. It offers insight into American imperialism and its relationship to humanitarianism in this period. Humanitarianism could be enough to mobilize significant support for American intervention outside its borders, but no action would likely be taken unless a sufficient number of American policymakers could agree whether any policy would remain within America's self-interests while simultaneously achieving U.S. humanitarian goals. Humanitarian motivations were an insufficient impetus for American intervention without a consensus on how any proposed action could benefit the United States or have minimal costs and risk. This does not mean that humanitarian rhetoric was always insincere, but that humanitarianism alone was unlikely to spur American action.

Humanitarianism, whether genuine or an insincere justification for American action, has had a close relationship to American imperialism and internationalism. When the United States went to war with Spain in 1898, the American public and press expressed concern for the Cubans under Spanish rule and provided humanitarian justifications for

war. Historian Richard Hofstadter claimed, “the humanitarian impulse behind the war was strangely coupled with a taste for battle; similarly the imperialist impulse that led to ready acceptance of annexation was also coupled with and softened by much talk of duty and responsibility.”<sup>2</sup> Once the United States defeated the Spanish and took control of the Philippines, gaining a strategic foothold in the Pacific, the Americans claimed to be looking out for the best interests of the local inhabitants and discussed their responsibility of helping the Filipino people. In 1916, the Wilson administration reaffirmed the need for policies and actions in the Philippines that showed the world America’s benevolent position towards the Filipinos and all races of the world.<sup>3</sup> Wilson’s interventions in the Caribbean also involved rhetoric about America’s responsibility to help locals and develop the native people’s governments and institutions. In all these instances, humanitarianism was combined with American self-interest.

In the case of Armenia and American intervention in the Near East, there was also considerable humanitarian agitation towards greater involvement in the region. Assisting and protecting Christian minorities, particularly the Armenians, provided a justification for claims that America had a moral responsibility to increase its role in the Near East. There was a widespread conviction that the United States should assist the Christian people of the Near East in some way. These humanitarian concerns were sincere and not simply justifications for selfish interests. While there was widespread sympathy for Ottoman Christians, increased American involvement in the Near East would neither provide access

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Hofstadter, “Cuba, the Philippines, and Manifest Destiny,” in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1965), 146.

<sup>3</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 32.

to Far Eastern markets nor shore up American hegemony in the Western hemisphere. The benefits for the United States were unclear and contested. There were differing views among Americans on what actions would prove beneficial to the United States. Supporters of Wilsonism saw the mandate system and an American mandate in Armenia as part of the process of reforming international politics and therefore beneficial to Americans. They believed any costs and burdensome responsibilities that the United States assumed by taking a mandate would be worth it. Those who doubted Wilsonian principles but still wanted to help Christians in the Near East looked for other practical justifications for American involvement in the region. Proposals for larger mandates over more former Ottoman territory were more concerned with the practicality of larger mandates than increasing the number of people that would benefit from American oversight. They argued that the economic potential of these additional territories would allow U.S. policymakers to justify American involvement in the region and make the success of any U.S. intervention more likely. Those who were skeptical of mandates altogether and supported direct aid hoped to achieve humanitarian goals with minimal cost to the United States. Direct aid would allow Americans to help Christian minorities in the Near East without risking large U.S. expenditures with minimal financial compensation or armed conflicts with the Russians, Turkish nationalists, or other potential adversaries. All these different positions on America's proper course of action were trying to reconcile their humanitarian urges with the need to act in the best interest of the United States. The lack of agreement on potential benefits for the United States was a major hinderance to American action. Widespread sympathy for the Christian minorities was enough to mobilize significant support for the United States to do something to assist them, but without a consensus plan

on how American action could benefit both Americans and Christians in the Ottoman Empire or how that action could be taken with minimal American costs and risk, no agreement on a policy would be made.

Much of the scholarship discussing American involvement in the Near East after the war focuses heavily on Armenia and the Armenian genocide. This is understandable given the events of the Armenian Genocide and the continuing violence involving Armenians after the armistice, but it has led many scholars to portray the safety of the Armenians in the Near East as the primary issue that was at stake in the debate. There has been little consideration of how an expanding American presence in the Near East was related to American imperialism.<sup>4</sup> Many scholars have dissociated U.S. consideration of expanding its influence in the Near East with American imperialism because of the humanitarian motivations and rhetoric. Historian Firuz Kazemzadeh attempted to refute claims by Soviet historians that Wilson and the Americans were planning on using an American mandate in Armenia to implement a secret imperialist conquest of Asia Minor and Persia. Kazemzadeh argued that Wilson's motives for seeking a mandate in Armenia were purely humanitarian.<sup>5</sup> While Kazemzadeh was correct in stating humanitarianism was the primary motivation for supporters of a mandate in Armenia and that there was no clear American plan to use a mandate as a springboard to dominate the entire region, that does not mean the debate was unrelated to American imperialism. Increased involvement of the

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<sup>4</sup> John DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), James B. Gidney, *A Mandate for Armenia* (Kent State: The Kent State University Press, 1967), Charlie Laderman, "Sharing the Burden? The American Solution to the Armenian Question 1918-1920" *Diplomatic History* 40 (2016): 664-694. Mark Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 349-365.

<sup>5</sup> Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)* (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1951).

United States may have helped the welfare of the Armenians and the Armenian state, but humanitarianism has in many instances been a component of American imperialism.

Another consequence of the intense focus on Armenia in the secondary literature dedicated to America's postwar involvement in the Near East is that less attention has been paid to the efforts to safeguard American rights and privileges in the Near East and the proposals for larger mandates. Unlike many scholars, various American diplomats and supporters of larger mandates were thinking about Armenia within the context of the conditions and demands of the whole Near East and Armenia's relationship with the rest of the Ottoman Empire. Putting emphasis on these larger mandate proposals shows how Americans tried to find accommodations to allow them to act on their humanitarian impulses while respecting the needs and limitations of an imperialist state. The efforts of Americans to maintain and expand their rights in the Near East are also important because it shows that economic benefits and special privileges for American citizens were not dependent on mandates. Understanding that American political, economic, and judicial rights and privileges in the region were not considered to be contingent on whether the United States took a mandate or not helps explain why opponents of mandates in the Near East could portray them as purely humanitarian projects. Similarly, it also helps clarify why supporters of mandates rarely made arguments based on gaining special advantages by taking one.

The debate over America's role in the Near East also provides insight into discussions of American isolationism between the world wars. *Isolationist* is a term that has been used to describe many American politicians of different eras. Bear F. Braumoeller, a political scientist, claimed that isolationism has often mistakenly been

closely associated with the interwar period, beginning with the defeat of the League of Nations.<sup>6</sup> Isolationism in this period is often linked to Lodge and the Republican party. Some scholars have more convincingly described Lodge and many other leading Republicans as internationalists and imperialists with a different conception of America's role in the world than Wilson and his colleagues.<sup>7</sup> In the scholarship on the potential American intervention in the Near East, Lodge and other opponents to mandates have also been subjected to claims of isolationism. Many scholars have claimed opponents of the mandate proposals, particularly Lodge and his fellow Republicans, were isolationists.<sup>8</sup> Republican hostility to mandates did not equate to isolationism. Many Republicans' opposition was based on doubts about the practicality of mandates and their chances of being beneficial to Americans. They favored other methods for American involvement in the region through direct aid that limited American risk.

The debate over America's role in the Near East also allows a different vantage point to view the contentious atmosphere of America's postwar foreign policy. The League

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<sup>6</sup> Bear F. Braumoeller. "The Myth of American Isolationism" *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6 no. 4 (2010): 349-371, 349. Braumoeller cites Denna Frank Fleming *The United States and the League of Nations, 1918-1920* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968) and Harold U. Faulkner, *From Versailles to the New Deal: A Chronicle of the Harding-Coolidge-Hoover Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950) as examples of scholars who attribute Isolationism to the failure of American entrance to the League of Nations and America's interwar foreign policy.

<sup>7</sup> John Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), William C. Widenor, *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), Richard Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). Immerman's analysis of Lodge is focused mostly on the period before World War I but details Lodge's internationalist and imperialist views.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), Joseph L. Grabill *The Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810-1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), Merrill D. Peterson *Starving Armenians: America and the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1930 and After* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2004).

of Nations debate is the most cited aspect of the discussions surrounding the United States's international role after the war, but the discourse surrounding U.S. expansion into the Near East was part of the same debate. Much of the general and wide-ranging scholarship on American involvement in the peace process after World War I and Wilsonian era foreign policy neglects the debate over the United States expanding its influence in former Ottoman territory or discusses it superficially.<sup>9</sup> A small number of works provide in-depth analysis on American participation in the Near East settlement and the debate over America's role in the region.<sup>10</sup> The sympathy for Armenians was widespread, but the U.S. government failed to take decisive action to assist them. American inaction highlights the quarrelsome atmosphere of America's postwar global outlook. The rivalry between Senator Lodge and President Wilson is often pointed to as a major part of the contentiousness of American politics after the war. Historian William Widenor claimed that personal issues did affect both men's policy positions at time, but not to the extent others have claimed. He argues

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<sup>9</sup> Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations*, Fleming, *The United States and the League of Nations, 1918-1920*, Lawrence Emerson Gelfand, *The Inquiry: American Preparations for Peace, 1917-1919* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), David Robert Johnson, *The Peace Progressives and American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent: Kent State University, 2009), Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co, 1959).

<sup>10</sup> Laurence Evans, *United States Policy and Partition of Turkey, 1914-1924* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), Paul C. Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace of 1919-1920* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974), Harry N. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History, 1913-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1931), These books provide an analysis of America's role in Near East settlement but don't go into depth about proposals for American intervention in the region. Harry N. Howard, *The King-Crane Commission: An American Inquiry in the Middle East* (Beirut: Khayats, 1963), Andrew Patrick, *America's Forgotten Middle East Initiative: The King-Crane Commission of 1919* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015). Howard and Patrick's books examine the King-Crane Commission which was sent by Wilson to ascertain the local opinions on matters related to the peace process.

that while electoral politics likely played a role in their antagonistic relationship, they also had many intellectual differences and opposing value systems.<sup>11</sup> The disagreements of Lodge and Wilson, as well as supporters and opponents of mandates, in the discussions surrounding America's proper role in the Near East was also likely enflamed by partisan politics and personal differences but was primarily rooted in differing ideas about what policy was best for the United States.

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<sup>11</sup> Widenor, *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy*, 171-176.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BEFORE THE ARMISTICE**

Prior to World War I, the United States had limited influence in the Near East. American businessmen had insignificant financial and commercial interests in the region and American missionaries were the primary connection between the United States and the Ottoman Empire. American missionaries worked primarily with the Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire and their work fostered some concern for the welfare of Near Eastern Christians, particularly the Armenians, among the American public and elite. American concerns for the Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire dramatically increased with the outbreak of World War I and the beginning of the Armenian Genocide. During the first several years of the war, the United States was neutral and aimed to assist the Christians in the Near East through philanthropic aid. As the United States entered the war, The Wilson administration chose not to declare war on the Ottoman Empire because American missionaries claimed they could better assist the beleaguered Christians by continuing to provide humanitarian aid and war between the United States and the Ottomans would disrupt relief work. The widespread concern for Christian minorities, fostered by the work of American missionaries, provided the primary rationale for increasing U.S. involvement in the Near East after the war.

America did not have extensive business interests in the Near East. Lack of governmental interest in the Ottoman Empire and European competition were major factors in the lack of commerce by American businessmen in the Near East. An effort at dollar diplomacy, known as the Chester Project, was the most noteworthy American business

venture in the region after 1900. However, the State Department backed railroad and mining scheme was a failure.<sup>12</sup> On the eve of World War I, there was more interest in economic opportunities for American businessmen, but it had not materialized into anything tangible.<sup>13</sup>

American interests in the Ottoman Empire primarily revolved around philanthropic activity and the efforts of missionaries. As a result of their involvement in the Near East, missionaries would become leading supporters for increased American presence in the region and they generated U.S. interest in the Near East. Protestant Christian organizations, led chiefly by the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, had considerable investment in people and resources in the Near East. The number of American missionaries grew to be quite significant, with three hundred operating in the Ottoman Empire by 1900.<sup>14</sup> American missionaries originally had goals of proselytizing to the Muslims and Jews in the region, but the seeming futility of their efforts led them to concentrate on reforming “the degenerate Churches of the East,” in the words of the American Board, to more resemble their own Protestant beliefs and practices.<sup>15</sup> Their faith was not the only cultural export of the American missionaries because of the inherent connection between their practice of Christianity and American liberal values and ideas. Historian Joseph Grabill claimed that “missionaries disavowed the union of church and

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<sup>12</sup> Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East*, 37-38.

<sup>13</sup> Peterson, *Starving Armenians*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Peterson, *Starving Armenians*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East*, 8.

state, not Christianity and culture.”<sup>16</sup> American proselytizers had no qualms about spreading American values and ideas. Protestant missionaries were bringing American culture, as well as American ideas of freedom of expression and justice in the face of oppression.<sup>17</sup>

The primary way that American missionaries spread their ideas was through formal education. They opened colleges and schools to provide religious and educational instruction, with particular emphasis on women. By 1914, America had a larger network of schools in Asia Minor than any other nation did. The most influential institutions were Roberts College, Constantinople Women’s College, and the Syrian Protestant College. By 1914, there were over 2,500 college students, 4,500 students in fifty high schools, and 20,000 in four hundred elementary schools in the Northern Ottoman Empire alone with another 6,000 in Syria at various levels.<sup>18</sup> The missionaries also provided some material aid for the people of the Ottoman Empire. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of the 300 American missions had hospitals. As a result of their work, the missionaries had extensive and valuable real estate holdings in the Near East. The efforts of the missionaries also fostered interest and sympathy in the United States for Christian minorities. Christian organizations in the United States would become stout advocates for American intervention in the welfare of Near Eastern Christians.

The involvement in the Near East of American missionaries entangled them in discussions concerning the future of the Ottoman Empire. Before the war, the Ottoman

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<sup>16</sup> Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East*, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 23-28.

<sup>18</sup> Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East*, 27.

Empire was already losing territory in Europe and many Europeans thought that the Ottoman Empire was declining. European nations began considering what place the Ottoman Empire had in European politics, what would be done with territory that may no longer remain under Ottoman sovereignty, and how to safeguard the rights of minorities in the empire.<sup>19</sup> Despite the correct European assumptions that the Ottoman Empire would soon cease to exist, it was not inevitable.<sup>20</sup> The Ottoman elite were instituting changes and policies that could potentially save their empire, but Europeans continued to believe that the Ottoman Empire would collapse in the near future. The work of American missionaries involved the United States in questions surrounding the fate of the empire. For both American missionaries and the American public, issues surrounding the Armenian minority were particularly interesting. The Armenians were scattered throughout the Near East, but their ancestral homeland was in the southern Caucasus region, which had long been part of the Ottoman Empire. A large portion of Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire while many also lived north of the Ottoman portion of the Caucasus in the Russian Empire. The Armenians were particularly appealing to Americans because of their shared faith. Armenia held a special place in the American imagination because the Kingdom of Armenia became a Christian state prior to the Roman Empire, the Armenian Apostolic

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<sup>19</sup> Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East*, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Selim Deringil, *The Well Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 3 and 166. At the turn of the twentieth century, Western economic interests had penetrated the Ottoman Empire, which had frequent financial crises, but the Ottomans still had a strong navy and remained a force to be reckoned with. The Ottoman elite were aware of the internal and external threats to their rule and worked to legitimize their position. The Ottomans were trying to adjust and adapt to the current global and local conditions of the twentieth century, as other multi-ethnic empires were. Deringil argued that the Ottomans worked to create a modern secular state, while maintaining religious motifs and terminology.

Church was one of the oldest Christian communities, and the biblical Mount Ararat was located there.<sup>21</sup>

Massacres of Armenians in the late 1890s, portrayed in the United States as ethnically motivated and carried out by the Armenians' Turkish and Kurdish neighbors, galvanized American interest in Armenia. Primarily Ottoman resistance to attempts at reform and Armenian political activism spurred the violence. Approximately twenty thousand Armenians were killed in the first round of violence.<sup>22</sup> American missionaries witnessed these massacres and word spread back to the United States. The killings strengthened negative U.S. sentiments towards the Ottoman ruling class, rooted in longstanding criticisms of Ottoman governance and conceptions of Muslims as oppressors. The U.S. responded to the massacres of the late 1890s by organizing humanitarian aid for the beleaguered Armenians. Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, led a relief expedition to the Near East, which she coordinated from Constantinople. The National Armenian Relief Committee was a bipartisan organization that, in conjunction with the Rockefeller Foundation, raised \$300,000 for Armenian relief in one year.<sup>23</sup> The U.S. Congress also took an interest in the Armenian issue. In December 1894, Massachusetts Senator George Frisbee Hoar introduced a resolution asking President Grover Cleveland to send Congress all he knew about the situation. In 1896, Senator Wilkinson Call of Florida proposed a resolution advocating U.S. intervention. A less radical resolution proposed by Illinois Senator Shelby Cullom passed instead, which allowed the president to

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<sup>21</sup> Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 43-61.

<sup>23</sup> Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 63-70.

support any European action to help the Armenians and put pressure on the Ottoman government. But the White House ignored it.<sup>24</sup> At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish American War diverted attention away from Armenia, but interest would reemerge during World War I.

In the war, the Ottomans would ally with the Germans and the Central Powers against the Allies. Many critics of the Ottoman government and the leadership of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) claimed the political leaders in the empire were moving away from Ottomanism, which embraced the composite nature of the empire, towards Turkism and a strong identification with Turkish and Muslim identity. Some historians have agreed that the CUP was promoting the Turkification of the Ottoman Empire. Historian Vahakn Dadrian argued that the CUP's policy of Turkification required "the liquidation of the Empire's residual non-Turkish elements," which later made the Armenians a prime target for eradication during the genocide.<sup>25</sup> Other scholars such as Hasan Kayali, have argued that Turkification was a misleading criticism leveled by Europeans and proponents of a decentralized Ottoman State.<sup>26</sup> He points out that the CUP, or The Young Turks, was not at strictly a Turkish nationalist group and had Arabs, Albanians, and Jews among its members, as well as Armenians and Greeks during its early

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<sup>24</sup> Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 71-73.

<sup>25</sup> Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Armenian Genocide: An Interpretation," in *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*," edited by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60.

<sup>26</sup> The fact that many American and Armenian sources refer to the Ottoman government or the non-Christian people of the empire as "the Turks" highlights the prevalence of claims about Turkification. Many scholars of the Ottoman Empire claim that using "the Turks" disregards the multi-ethnic nature of the Ottoman people and government. The use of "the Turks" in private and public documents demonstrates that Americans equated Ottoman rule with Turkish rule, which discounted non-Turkish elements of the Ottoman government and elite. The use of "the Turks" misleadingly insinuated a political identity for the empire that centered around Turkish identity.

stages. While there were segments of the Ottoman elite who promoted Turkish language and culture, Kayali claims that the CUP never had a consistent policy of Turkification and instead promoted a centralized secular Ottoman civic identity. He argues that Christian minorities in the empire were resistant to a centralized secular state because it challenged the rights and privileges they gained as a distinct community.<sup>27</sup> Turkification, regardless of whether it was an accurate description of Ottoman policy or simply a tool used by opponents of the CUP, combined with Armenian attempts to change their relationship with the Ottoman State and the fact that many Russian Armenians fought with the Allies against the Ottomans in the War, intensified hostility towards Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

In 1915, in the midst of world war, a larger string of related massacres of Armenians would begin in what is today known as the Armenian Genocide. In 1915 alone, some estimate, 800,000 Armenians were killed, with a total of 1.2-1.3 million killed between 1915-1922. One of the main features of the genocide were forced deportations, which were violent and often resulted in death for the deported Armenians.<sup>28</sup> Many American missionaries and diplomats reported what they saw back to the United States. The American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, was deeply concerned for the Armenians and worked to raise awareness in the United States. The American public became aware of the Armenian massacres quickly. *The New York Times* published 145 articles on the Armenian massacres in 1915 alone.<sup>29</sup> There developed an extensive, diverse,

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<sup>27</sup> Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 4, 82-83, 208-209.

<sup>28</sup> Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 175-179.

<sup>29</sup> Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 282.

and bipartisan base of support for the Armenians in the United States. As it had in the late 1890s, the United States channeled its sympathy for the Armenians into humanitarian aid efforts. In November 1915, the Armenian Relief Committee merged with the Persian War Relief Fund and the Syria-Palestine Committee to found the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR). James Barton of the American Board chaired the committee and would be a major voice for Armenian interests in the United States after the war. By January 1918, the ACASR, which was later called Near East Relief, had raised about \$7 million dollars for relief in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>30</sup>

As the U.S. entered the war against Germany in April 1917, the opportunity for direct American involvement in Armenia and the Near East increased. However, the United States decided not to declare war on the Ottoman Empire. There were many who favored war against the Ottomans, including influential journalist Walter Lippmann and former president Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt felt that American intervention could help rectify the Armenian massacres and prepare the United States for an increased role in the Near East.<sup>31</sup> Vahan Cardashian, an Armenian diplomat who was representing the Ottoman Government in the United States as the Armenian massacres began and would become one of the leading advocates of Armenian interests in America, also lobbied for a declaration of war. However, James Barton and Cleveland Dodge, who was also involved in ACASR, cautioned that a declaration of war would likely result in the destruction of American missionary property and endanger the lives of American citizens there.<sup>32</sup> Missionaries also

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<sup>30</sup> Peterson, *Starving Armenians*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East*, 96.

<sup>32</sup> Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States," 352-353.

argued that Americans could best serve the Armenians by not declaring war so the relief effort could continue. If all Americans were expelled from Asia Minor, relief work could not continue and their work would be undone.<sup>33</sup> The Ottoman Empire also did not threaten U.S. security, nor was it directly linked to the rationale the American Government used to justify its declaration of war on Germany.<sup>34</sup> The decision not to declare war on the Ottomans would end up being crucial in formulating a postwar peace in the Near East. While some would optimistically argue that it would allow the Americans to maintain their image as disinterested in the region, juxtaposed to Europeans with their imperialist territorial aspirations, the decision in many ways hampered any attempts to increase the involvement of the U.S. in the region after the war.

As the fighting came to an end and the peace process began, the prevalent humanitarian concern for the Armenians and other Christians in the Ottoman empire provided a powerful motivation for increasing the American presence in the Near East. The work of American missionaries provided a foundation for the substantial interest in Near Eastern Christians. The events of World War I and the Armenian Genocide expanded and deepened the attention paid to Christians in the Ottoman Empire. American citizens in the Near East and the United States raised money and provided humanitarian relief for the Near Eastern Christian. There was ample sympathy for Christians in the Near East and a widespread conviction that the United States should assist them, however, finding a policy that was agreeable to a sufficient number of American policymakers would prove to be difficult.

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<sup>33</sup> Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 305.

<sup>34</sup> Laderman, "Sharing the Burden," 665.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **AMERICAN INDECISION**

As the peace process began after the First World War, the United States was in a position to influence the Allied peace terms with the Ottomans despite its neutrality towards the German allied empire. Immediately after the war, the negotiation of an Allied peace treaty with the Ottomans was delayed for several reasons. As diplomats at the Paris Peace conference focused primarily on the peace process in Europe, there were preliminary conversations regarding the fate of the Near East in the first few months after the war. Wilson advocated for a mandate system and cautioned against annexation and blatant imperialism. Despite the widespread conviction that the United States should help Near Eastern Christians, there were several disagreements among American policymakers on what the proper role for the U.S. in the region should be. Americans continued providing relief and negotiated the preservation of American rights and privileges in the region without much disagreement, but American policymakers could not decide whether the United States should take a mandate or what type of mandate they should agree to. Many Americans, Allied diplomats, and groups within the Near East encouraged an American mandate in the region, however, there were differing opinions on whether the United States should take a mandate for Armenia alone or a larger portion of former Ottoman territory. There were also those who opposed mandates altogether and instead supported direct aid. American policymakers could not reconcile their differing opinions on America's proper role in the Near East after the war, even when there was renewed concern over the safety of the Armenian people as the British occupying forces prepared to withdraw.

On October 30, 1918, the Allies signed the Armistice of Mudros with the Ottoman Empire. Less than two weeks later, the Allies signed an armistice with the Germans that ended the fighting in World War I. In January 1919, the Paris Peace Conference convened, and Allied powers set out to dictate the terms of the peace. Foremost in the minds of the Allies and the delegates at the conference were issues surrounding Europe and the treaties with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The terms of the peace with the Ottomans was secondary to the diplomats in France. The focus on Europe delayed the peace process in the Near East but there were additional reasons as well. The Allies, especially France, were hesitant to discuss specifics of the Ottoman settlement until the United States committed to taking a mandate over former Ottoman lands. Wilson insisted he could not take a mandate without getting approval from Congress and that American membership in the League of Nations was a natural first step before taking a mandate.<sup>35</sup> In May 1919, Wilson told a prominent Armenian that a campaign for an American mandate over Armenia was premature and unwise.<sup>36</sup> Some American diplomats felt that the Allies were delaying the settlement to consolidate their positions in the Near East. A longer delay meant a longer Allied occupation during which the Allies could entrench their imperialist interests.

While the Allies and Americans delayed deciding, circumstances on the ground in the Near East continued to complicate a prospective peace agreement throughout the first half of 1919. After the Russians had withdrawn from the war, the treaty of Brest-Litovsk

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<sup>35</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "Press Conference, July 10, 1919," in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson vol. 50*, edited by Robert C. Hilderbrand (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 793.

<sup>36</sup> Frank Polk to the American Mission, May 26, 1919, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

had granted their territory in the Southern Caucasus to the Ottomans, including Russian Armenia. The Russians withdrew their soldiers, but the Georgians and Armenians still had control of the area. As the Ottoman defeat at the hands of the Allies seemed imminent, Russian Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan declared their independence from both Russia and the Ottomans. The Russian Armenians created an independent republic just north of Turkish Armenia. Many of the refugees of the Armenian genocide in Turkish Armenia fled to the Armenian republic. These refugees were sorely lacking in food and supplies, and the newly formed Armenian republic did not have the resources to remedy the situation. The Armenian republic was in constant conflict with its neighbors. Georgia and Azerbaijan were disrupting efforts to get relief into the land locked Armenians and American officials believed it was part of a plan to force the Armenians into a defensive alliance against the Russians.<sup>37</sup> Violence across ethnic lines continued, as Kurds, Armenians, and Turks reified and strengthened ethnic distinctions through bloodshed. Conflict between the Armenians and their Muslim neighbors, motivated by longstanding animosity, persisted. Armenians claimed that the Turks were trying to finish what they started during the massacres of 1915 and to unite with the Muslim groups residing north of Armenia in the upper Caucasus.<sup>38</sup> Turkish nationalism was also on the rise and Mustafa Kemal, an Ottoman military officer during the war, later known as Atatürk, led a movement against the current Ottoman regime in Istanbul.<sup>39</sup> In May 1919, the Allies allowed the Greeks to occupy Smyrna, a portion of

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Bristol to the American Mission, July 16, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>38</sup> This is one of many examples where Armenians and Americans use the term *the Turks* to refer to those in power in the Ottoman empire. The use of *the Turks* promoted the claims of Turkification and the Turkish identity of the Ottoman ruling class.

<sup>39</sup> Many Ottomans had begun calling Constantinople by the name Istanbul instead, but westerners continued to use Constantinople.

the Ottoman Empire with a significant Greek population. The Greek occupation agitated Turkish nationalism and precipitated violence. Admiral Mark Bristol, the American high commissioner in Constantinople and leading American diplomat in the Ottoman Empire, repeatedly denounced the Greek occupation as detrimental to the stability of the region.<sup>40</sup> Despite the chaos in the region after the war, the Allies and Americans were in no rush to put their full weight behind solving these problems.

Even with the delays, there were preliminary discussions about the Near East settlement at the peace conference in Paris, among American politicians, and in the public. Despite not having been at war with the Ottomans, the United States was still able to influence the debate. Wilson opposed Allied imperialism and the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire. Before American entrance to the war, the Allies had divided up the Ottoman Empire among themselves in a series of secret treaties. Wilson opposed these treaties and championed the idea of a mandate system that rejected outright annexation and instead required a great power to oversee the development of former Ottoman territory until it could be given full independence.<sup>41</sup> The official structure of the mandate system separated different German colonies and parts of the Ottoman Empire into different classes. “A” class mandates were for the communities that would be separated from the Ottoman state and were developed enough that their independence could be provisionally recognized. Mandatory powers of “A” mandates would only need to give advice and assistance in accordance with the local government’s wishes. “B” mandates would entail

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<sup>40</sup> Mark Bristol to the American Mission, Telegram, August 5, 1919, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>41</sup> Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres*, 8-10, 26-27.

more direct control over former German colonies in Africa and “C” mandates applied to German colonies in Southwest Africa and the Pacific. “C” mandates would be considered part of the mandatory powers’ own territory.<sup>42</sup> Wilson did not create the mandate system but adopted it and added it to his postwar rhetoric. Point twelve of Wilson’s famed Fourteen Points address also guided American and Allied policy: “The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty,” it read, “but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity for development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.”<sup>43</sup> Point twelve provided a coherent policy statement against European imperialism in the Near East by reaffirming the defeated Turks’ right to sovereignty over their own lands and guaranteeing the autonomous development of the other groups within the empire, including the Armenians.

While opposing European imperialism, the United States was also considering ways it might consolidate and expand its own involvement in the Near East. American diplomats were working to secure American legal, institutional, and economic rights and privileges in the Near East. Admiral Bristol was actively involved in this process at the direction of the Department of State. During the war, the Ottoman government had abrogated the capitulations that gave special privileges and rights to subjects of certain

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<sup>42</sup> Susan Pederson, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 31. Pederson goes on to outline how the mandate system over time became a shadow of its Wilsonian self. Promises to consult local wishes and build independent national governments were broken.

<sup>43</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Address of the President of the United States, Delivered at a Joint Session of the Two Houses of Congress, January 8, 1918*, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1918.

nations, mostly Europeans and Americans. After the war, the Americans joined with Allied governments in attempting to restore the status quo ante bellum. At the recommendation of Bristol, the secretary of state sent a letter to the Ottoman government declaring that the United States “fully concurs in the action taken by the Entente High Commissioners in order to put an end to the illegal interference of the Turkish Government in the application of the capitulations.”<sup>44</sup> Americans also sought to preserve their economic benefits. Leland Harrison suggested to William Westermann of the American Peace Commission that a clause should be placed in any treaty with the Ottomans stating that “subjects of the Allied and Associated Governments shall have the right to carry on business under the terms of concessions and agreements already granted, without diminution of their existing rights.”<sup>45</sup> Harrison claimed that American business interests had obtained concessions both during and after the war. He argued that these rights should be safeguarded in any treaty with the Ottoman Empire, and in the case of any transfer of sovereignty of territory currently belonging to the empire. In addition to restoring the capitulations and protecting business interest, Bristol and the State Department were guarding against any nation gaining favorable rights that Americans did not possess. For example, in November 1919, the consul general at Smyrna wrote to the secretary of state that British, French, and Italian subjects were having any cases against them dropped in Ottoman courts and that new suits

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<sup>44</sup> The Acting Secretary of State (Frank Polk) to the Minister in Sweden (Morris), United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 815.

<sup>45</sup> William Westermann to Leland Harrison, May 12, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

could not be filed.<sup>46</sup> Bristol responded to this news by informing the Ottoman government that the United States would not accept any discrimination against its citizens and successfully applied enough pressure to have the same judicial privilege extended to Americans.<sup>47</sup>

American missionaries were also trying to safeguard the privileges that they had acquired before the war and gain even further freedom to give religious instruction. In a letter to the American Peace Commission in Paris from two representatives of Roberts College, they asked that three main principles be confirmed. The first principle was freedom for those within Ottoman lands to choose their own religious beliefs without civil or police restriction. The second was a guarantee of the personal freedom of those engaging in missionary or philanthropic work. The final request was that all citizens of countries belonging to the League of Nations, which they believed would include the United States, would be permitted to cooperate in the work of education. They suggested that American policymakers make sure these principles were established by placing them in the League of Nations covenant, in any formal documents assigning mandatory powers to former Ottoman lands, and in any treaties related to peace settlement in the Near East.<sup>48</sup> In a letter to the secretary of state, representatives of Roberts College asked for the preservation of additional rights—to issue diplomas, to teach in the English language, and to pursue work

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<sup>46</sup> Consul General at Smyrna (Horton) to the Secretary of State, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919. 815-816.

<sup>47</sup> The High Commissioner at Constantinople (Bristol) to the Secretary of State, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919. 816-817.

<sup>48</sup> Mr. Dominian to Mr. Dresel, April 15, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

in specific academic fields. They also requested that they continue to be exempt from taxation and custom house duties under the same circumstances as before the war.<sup>49</sup> Leland Harrison recommended to the American Peace Commission that the rights of any future religious, educational, and philanthropic organizations be guaranteed to have the same privileges as those in existence now.<sup>50</sup> American diplomats worked to secure legal guarantees that were protected no matter what the United States role in the region would be.

Perhaps the most publicly discussed reason for increasing the American presence in the Near East was to provide an amicable solution to the Armenian question. Broad sympathy and interest in the plight of the Armenians continued in the United States after the armistices were signed. Herbert Hoover, an important coordinator of American relief efforts during and after the war, would later recall, “the name Armenia was in the front of the American mind.”<sup>51</sup> President Wilson was sympathetic and expressed his desire to help the Armenians. In a letter to Pope Benedict XV in December of 1918, Wilson claimed that the suffering of no other people aroused deeper sympathy than that of the Armenians. He stated that “it will be one of my most cherished desires to play any part that I can in securing for the wronged and distressed people the protection of right and the complete deliverance from unjust subjugation.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>American Consul General to Secretary of State, March 4, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>50</sup> William Westermann to Leland Harrison, May 12, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>51</sup> Laderman, “Sharing the Burden,” 671.

<sup>52</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “Letter from Woodrow Wilson to Pope Benedict XV, December 24, 1919,” in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Volume 53*, edited by Arthur S. Link (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 489.

Wilson's sympathy for and interest in Armenia and the Near East led him to dispatch two fact finding missions to the region. The first was the King Crane Commission. Wilson originally planned for an Allied commission that would investigate the conditions in the Near East and make recommendations about its future administration. However, the Allies were concerned that the results of this commission might be detrimental to their interests and they delayed in organizing and sending it. Wilson grew tired of the delays and sent a commission comprised strictly of Americans led by Henry King, president of Oberlin College, and Robert Crane, an industrialist with ties to Roberts College.<sup>53</sup> The second commission was led by General James Harbord. The general was serving as the chief of staff of the American Expeditionary Force before his appointment as chief of the American Military Mission to Armenia. Harbord was tasked with investigating the political, military, geographical, administrative, and economic considerations involved in possible American interests in the region.<sup>54</sup>

Senator Lodge would be recognized by his peers as one of the chief American officials with heavy interest and sympathy for Armenia. Like his close colleague Theodore Roosevelt, Lodge had long been interested in Armenia. A few months before the fighting ended and it seemed clear the Allies would win, Lodge spoke in the Senate regarding the future peace process. He expressed his sympathy for the subjugated peoples of the world, singling out the Armenians, and hoped for fair and just treatment for them. Advocates for the Armenian cause in America were appreciative of Lodge's speech and several

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<sup>53</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Armenian Genocide and American Post-War Commissions," in *America and the Armenian Genocide, 1915*, edited by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 260.

<sup>54</sup> Frank Polk to James Harbord, August 13, 1919, Box 8, James G. Harbord Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

individuals, including Miran Sevasly of the Armenian National Union, wrote to Lodge thanking him for his support.<sup>55</sup> Lodge wrote back “I am anxious to aid in any way in my power.”<sup>56</sup> In December 1918, Lodge introduced a resolution in the Senate supporting Armenian independence from the Ottoman government. He had been corresponding with A. Mahdesian of *The New Armenia*, a bi-monthly periodical published in New York City, and with Vahan Cardashian about the details of the resolution before he submitted it to the Senate.<sup>57</sup> Lodge received many letters supporting his position on Armenia and thanking him for introducing the Senate resolution. H. H. Gulesian wrote that Lodge could not realize how happy he made the Armenians, and a lawyer from Connecticut informed Lodge that a large group of Armenian-Americans and friends of Armenia in Hartford asked him to write to the senator to give him their thanks.<sup>58</sup> In June 1919, James Gerrard of the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia identified Lodge “as leader of the Armenian movement.”<sup>59</sup>

Lodge lent his influence in the Senate to further the U.S. government’s involvement in Near Eastern relief efforts. The Massachusetts senator aided in the passage of a bill to

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<sup>55</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to Miran Sevasly, August 28, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>56</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to Miran Sevasly, August 30, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>57</sup> A. Mahdesian to Henry Cabot Lodge, November 19, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. And Vahan Cardashian to Henry Cabot Lodge, November 28, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>58</sup> Edward L. Steele to Henry Cabot Lodge, January 21, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. And H. H. Gulesian to Henry Cabot Lodge, December 13, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>59</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to James Gerrard, Telegram, June 21, 1919. Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

incorporate a committee for relief in the Near East. The bill charged the committee “to provide relief to the dependent people of the Near East.” Near East Relief would be responsible to provide congress with a full accounting of all receipts and expenditures.<sup>60</sup> Lodge got a letter requesting his help in getting the bill passed.<sup>61</sup> Shortly thereafter, Lodge called the bill forward and secured its passage.<sup>62</sup> This was not the only involvement of the U.S. government in relief efforts for Armenians and other groups in the Near East. In January 1919, the ACASR outfitted a relief expedition to carry 8,000 tons of flour to the Near East. The flour and expedition members were carried across the Atlantic by American naval vessels and the State Department secured cooperation from the Allied commissioners who oversaw the Ottoman ports.<sup>63</sup> On July 11, 1919, Colonel W. N. Haskell of the U.S. Army was appointed to high commissioner in Armenia under the authority of the British, French, American, and Italian governments. Haskell was charged with overseeing and managing all relief efforts in Armenia.<sup>64</sup> He would bring a staff of officers with him, but no military personnel for any combat purposes or to maintain stability and peace. In November 1919, Near East Relief asked that the president authorize the United States

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<sup>60</sup> The Executive Committee of Near East Relief to Secretary of State, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 821-823.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to C. V. Vickery, December 12, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>62</sup> C. V. Vickery to Henry Cabot Lodge, December 16, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>63</sup> The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Great Britain (Davis), United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 819-820.

<sup>64</sup> The Commission to Negotiate Peace to the Acting Secretary of State, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 827.

Grain Corporation to sell grain and foodstuffs to either the Armenian Republic, the Armenian National Delegation, Near East Relief, or any organization that could effectively administer relief and accept either bonds or credit from the Armenian Republic as payment.<sup>65</sup> Wilson promptly authorized the United States wheat director and president of the Grain Corporation to sell the Armenian government 35,000 tons of wheat and wheat flour on credit.<sup>66</sup> High Commissioner Haskell carried out the distribution of this wheat. Continuing relief was one of the few things American policymakers could agree on.

The U.S. division on a policy towards involvement in the Near East began with the debate over Armenian independence. While Russian Armenia had declared its independence, it was not yet recognized by the major powers. Many Armenians and Armenophiles in the United States favored complete independence for Turkish Armenians from Ottoman sovereignty. They sought the unification of Turkish Armenia and the newly formed Armenian republic. The Armenians argued that they were capable of governing themselves and deserved independence. After the First World War, Wilsonian rhetoric about self-determination inspired many peoples to seek political independence. In what historian Erez Manela called the Wilsonian moment, Armenians were one of the many groups that tried to seize upon the international sentiment favoring self-determination.<sup>67</sup> H. Gulesian wrote to Lodge in December 1918 that the time for Armenian independence

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<sup>65</sup> The Executive Committee of Near East Relief to Secretary of State, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 821-823.

<sup>66</sup> The Secretary of State to the Commission to Negotiate Peace, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 824.

<sup>67</sup> Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

was at hand and the worldwide public sentiment favoring the independence of small nations ought not to be squandered.<sup>68</sup> The Armenians argued that their suffering at the hands of the Ottomans and their commitment to the Allied cause strengthened their claim to independence. Cardashian argued that, due to “their suffering, their fidelity to the allied cause, and their vital contributions to the allied-arms,” the Armenians deserved to be a free nation.<sup>69</sup>

The Armenian National Union of America published a pamphlet entitled “The Case for Armenia,” where they put forth the arguments for an independent Armenian state. The pamphlet echoed Cardashian’s arguments about Armenian commitment and contributions to the Allied cause and provided quotes by British officials recognizing the Armenian role in the war. It also argued that the Armenians possessed the moral fitness for self-rule. They pointed to Armenia’s history of self-rule prior to 1375, as well as the fact that many Armenians were literate and had advanced educations and experience in government.<sup>70</sup> This was important because many western leaders doubted the ability of non-Europeans to govern themselves. America’s recent history in the Philippines and Caribbean highlighted their belief that certain peoples could be unfit or not ready for self-rule. Wilson subscribed to the idea that U.S. colonial rule would eventually allow underdeveloped nations to exercise self-rule but only after a period of tutelage and cultural and institutional

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<sup>68</sup> H. H. Gulesian to Henry Cabot Lodge, December 13, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>69</sup> Vahan Cardashian to Henry Cabot Lodge November 28, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>70</sup> The Armenian National Union of America, “The Case of Armenia,” Pamphlet, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

development.<sup>71</sup> If the Armenians could convince the Allies and the Americans that they possessed the qualities for self-rule, their case for independence would be strengthened. The Armenians felt that they met the criteria for being an “A” class mandate because they had reached the necessary level of development.

The Armenians not only wanted independence but also had specific territorial demands. Cardashian argued that the Armenians should be given control of their historic kingdom, which included Russian and Turkish Armenia, as well as Cilicia. The Armenians claimed seven Turkish Armenian vilayets and argued that Cilicia should be removed from the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire and joined with Russian Armenia.<sup>72</sup> Cardashian argued that Armenians had a just claim to this land “by right of occupancy for centuries and they now constitute the only people there morally and intellectually capable of self-government and with capacity to develop the full resources of the country.”<sup>73</sup> Cilicia was crucial to the future of an Armenian Republic as it gave Armenians port cities for trade. Armenian territorial claims rested on fragile ground, as ethnic intermingling under Ottoman rule led to a dispersion of peoples in the empire. Even before the genocide devastated their population, Armenians did not have majorities in some of these areas.

Many Ottoman elites opposed Armenian independence. Mustapha Kemal’s party tried to prevent or limit the dismemberment of their empire at the peace conference and informed the American and Allied delegations in Paris of their hostility to Armenian

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<sup>71</sup> Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 26-31.

<sup>72</sup> Vilayets were the Ottoman equivalent of a province.

<sup>73</sup> Vahan Cardashian to Henry Cabot Lodge November 28, 1918, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

independence.<sup>74</sup> The Armenians argued that Ottoman opposition was also fueled by the Turk's designs to unite the Islamic-Turanian world and join themselves with the Turanian peoples of the East.<sup>75</sup> They claimed that part of the Ottoman war aims was to unite the Turks of Constantinople to the Tartars of the Caucasus and the Kirgisses of the Trans-Caspian to create a Pan-Turanian state. The advocates of Armenian independence claimed such a scheme was against the interests of the world and that an Armenian buffer state would be beneficial to civilization.<sup>76</sup>

Many Americans supported Armenian desires for political autonomy. Lodge's December 1918 resolution in the Senate supported Armenians' independence and territorial aspirations. The resolution urged the Peace Conference to make arrangements to help the Armenians establish an independent republic.<sup>77</sup> This resolution would merely inform President Wilson and the Allies of the opinion of the Senate and not bind American policy to any position, but its passage would still be helpful to the Armenian cause. Americans sympathetic with the Armenians began trying to muster support for the passage of Lodge's proposed resolution. Cardashian had seventy five ministers of the Reformed Church in America send cable messages to members of the Foreign Relations Committee and mail letters to all members of the Senate asking for their support of the Lodge

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<sup>74</sup> American Embassy in Paris to the American Mission, Telegram, August 14, 1919, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>75</sup> Vahan Cardashian to Henry Cabot Lodge, Undated, Reel 52, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>76</sup> James Gerrard to Henry Cabot Lodge, December 5, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>77</sup> 57 Congressional Record 237 (1918) (Independence of Armenia).

resolution.<sup>78</sup> He also won the support of other Christian leaders and organizations, such as the New York Federation of Churches, the Baptist Union of New York and the Bishop of Ohio.<sup>79</sup> Cardashian was also able to get a petition supporting Lodge's resolution signed by twenty thousand ministers, eighty-five Bishops, forty governors, and over two hundred university presidents. Despite this support, Lodge was not able to get his resolution passed. Senate Democrats were wary of doing anything that might undermine or interfere with the president's negotiations in Paris.<sup>80</sup> In February, Lodge wrote regrettingly to Cardashian that the Foreign Relations Committee was unwilling to report anything to the Senate regarding the resolution and that he hoped the Paris Peace Conference would grant Armenian requests.<sup>81</sup>

Cardashian continued to work for Armenian independence by forming the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia (ACIA). Cardashian, James Barton of the American Board, and the former American ambassador to Germany, James W. Gerrard, would lead the organization. Lodge and Democratic Senator John Sharp Williams, also of the Foreign Relations Committee, would serve as honorary executive members of the ACIA. Charles Evans Hughes, a Supreme Court justice, Oscar Strauss, former ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, and Elihu Root, former senator and secretary of state,

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<sup>78</sup> Vahan Cardashian to Henry Cabot Lodge, January 19, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>79</sup> Vahan Cardashian to Henry Cabot Lodge, January 27, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. And Bishop of Ohio to Henry Cabot Lodge, February 1, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>80</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to James Gerrard, June 26, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>81</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to Vahan Cardashian, February 8, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

were a few of the many influential Americans involved with the ACIA. Most were not involved in the day to day activities of the ACIA, but the attachment of their names provided added weight to ACIA statements and published materials. The fact that the ACIA was able to recruit a host of elite Americans into its ranks demonstrated the fashionableness of the Armenian cause in the United States.<sup>82</sup> The ACIA worked tirelessly to promote Armenian independence and rally the support of the American elite and public opinion.

Not all Americans supported Armenian independence. Admiral Bristol was a firm opponent of Armenian political autonomy. Bristol recommended that the whole question of the Near East be discussed broadly for the benefit of the greatest number of inhabitants in the region and that any special or selfish claims of individuals or groups be disregarded.<sup>83</sup> What was best for the Armenians was not necessarily what was best for all the inhabitants of the Near East. Bristol cautioned against “an influence continually exerted to involve America with Armenia and divert our attention from the big question of the whole Near East.” He claimed that “enthusiastic missionaries” and other supporters of Armenian independence were engaged in a propaganda campaign to gain American support. He claimed that this was a ploy from leaders of the Armenian republic’s government to extend their political control using the natural sympathy that was accorded to them as a persecuted minority. American sympathy was being traded upon by selfish interests. No one was talking about Armenian desires for territory as continually agitating their neighbors or the instances where Armenians took forceful military action against Muslims. Bristol also

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<sup>82</sup> Malkasian, “The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States,” 352.

<sup>83</sup> Mark Bristol to the American Mission, Telegram, August 1, 1919, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

warned that any attempts to grant Armenian independence could provoke reprisals against Christians in the rest of Ottoman Empire, as the Greek occupation of Smyrna had. Bristol recommended that the United States stop all agitations for a separate Armenia and any other partition of Ottoman Empire.<sup>84</sup> Bristol felt that much of the conflict in the region was due to Ottoman resistance to the partitioning of their empire and that keeping the whole of the Ottoman Empire intact under one mandatory power would greatly diminish violence in the region. Bristol firmly argued against Armenian independence throughout 1919 but later felt the need to clarify in January 1920 that he did not support Turkish rule over any of the minorities within the Ottoman Empire. He claimed that none of the groups in the region could govern themselves and that all had suffered from bad government, including the Turks. He suggested that they be aided by a civilized Western power by means of a mandate.<sup>85</sup> The goal should be to create good government with rights and freedom throughout the Near East. Bristol found support for some of his views with Caleb F. Gates, the president of Roberts College in Constantinople. Gates also believed that the separation of Armenia would only cause strife in the Near East.<sup>86</sup>

While the Armenians believed that they had the capability for self-rule, they also recognized the likelihood of Armenia being placed under the guardianship of a mandatory power. Whichever nation took a mandate would have some influence over the Armenian government and be responsible for the development of the nation towards full

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<sup>84</sup> Mark Bristol to the American Mission, August 15, 1919, Box 65, Mark Bristol Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>85</sup> Mark Bristol to VIA Eastern, Telegram January 29, 1920, Box 72, Mark Bristol Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>86</sup> Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States," 353.

independence. The Armenians favored the United States to serve as the mandatory power. The Armenians claimed that America was ideal because it was free of suspicion of territorial and political aggrandizement. While it is unclear whether the Armenians truly believed a United States mandate would come free of imperialist aspirations, it could not hurt to appeal to America's self-perception that it did not engage in the same sort of imperialism as European nations. Unlike European nations, the United States did not have many established economic interests in the Near East and Wilson, despite his interventions in the Caribbean and other imperialist ventures, did have an international reputation as a champion of self-determination. For the Armenians and their desires for eventual full political autonomy and self-sufficiency, the United States was likely a more appealing option than any of the other Allied powers.

The Allies also supported an American mandate for Armenia. The Allies had sincere sympathy for Armenia, but they also had priorities elsewhere. The Allies, while recognizing the mandate principle, still hoped that the responsibilities of overseeing the various parts of the Ottoman Empire would be divided in accordance with the secret treaties, with the United States taking the responsibilities that had been designated to Russia. An American mandate for Armenia also served British strategic purposes by checking France's influence in the region and providing a buffer between India and potential Bolshevik, pan-Turanian, or pan-Islamic threats. The British government also hoped that Wilson's international perceptions as an anti-imperialist would help counter accusations that the mandate system was merely old European imperialism under a different guise.<sup>87</sup> Bristol was suspicious of British motives for insisting on an American

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<sup>87</sup> Laderman, "Sharing the Burden," 673.

mandate in Armenia and claimed the British desired it to serve as a buffer between Russia and their interests in the Suez Canal.<sup>88</sup> He also warned that American involvement would be a de facto sanction of the Allied efforts to partition the Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence, which was what the mandate system was becoming.<sup>89</sup> If the United States took a mandate, it would merely be taking part in old European Near East diplomacy.

Some Americans favored an American mandate over Armenia. William Westermann of the American Peace Commission believed America should take a mandate to ensure the validity of the mandate system. Unlike Bristol, Westermann thought that if the Americans got involved, they could keep the mandate system from being essentially recycled European imperialism. Westermann claimed that Allies had little inclination to develop independent nations and the United States could keep the mandate system honest by taking one for Armenia. Without an American presence in the Near East, the mandate system would lead to permanent protectorates. He pointed out that the existing military occupation and the likely future mandates were absolutely along the lines of the secret treaties. Westermann also thought the United States would have a better chance of maintaining stability in the region. He claimed that only the United States could keep peace between the Kurds, Armenians, and Turks in the Armenian sectors because of their “great fund of ‘good will’” among these peoples due to their years of humanitarian work.<sup>90</sup> Many

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<sup>88</sup> Mark Bristol to the American Mission, July 23, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>89</sup> Mark Bristol to the American Mission, August 5, 1919, Box 65, Mark Bristol Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>90</sup> William Westermann, “Arguments for the Acceptance by the United States of a Mandate over Armenia,” Memorandum, Reel 59, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

missionaries also favored an American mandate over Armenia. The mandate would allow protection for Armenians and the missionaries to continue their work. Their many years working with the Armenians and witnessing the massacres during the war led many missionaries and Christian organizations to have a stronger sympathy for the Armenians. They were convinced America had a moral responsibility to help the Armenians because of the suffering their fellow Christians endured. Wilson, while initially hesitant, slowly came around to the idea of America accepting a mandate over Armenia but informed the Allies that he could do nothing without congressional approval.

Many of the leading Republican foreign policy experts were hesitant to support an American mandate in Armenia. Henry White, a prominent diplomat and one of the few Republicans at the Paris Peace Conference, was open to the idea in early 1919, but as the conference moved along, he became less inclined to an American mandate in Armenia. In February 1919, in one of his frequent letters to Lodge from Paris, White indicated that American public opinion could be rallied to support an American mandate. He hadn't given the idea much thought before recently but was not opposed to it and implied that he understood Lodge's opinion to be the same.<sup>91</sup> A few months later, White indicated that he was more torn about the mandate question. He claimed to have a great objection for mixing up the United States in the affairs of Europe but recognized how beneficial an American mandate could be to the people in the region.<sup>92</sup> Lodge responded that he believed that Americans were opposed to mandates and that he was increasingly disinclined to the idea

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<sup>91</sup> Henry White to Henry Cabot Lodge February 10, 1919, Reel 59, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>92</sup> Henry White to Henry Cabot Lodge April 22, 1919, Reel 59, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

as he considered the proposed League of Nations covenant being drafted in Paris.<sup>93</sup> He did not have any great prejudice against the idea as others had, Lodge stated, and could see the great advantage it could be to the United States to take a mandate. However, he believed the general feeling throughout the country and in Congress was against mandates anywhere. “It does not appeal to the American people,” he claimed.<sup>94</sup> Lodge thought the American people would oppose the expected manpower requirements and financial costs of potential mandates.

Other American politicians opposed the Armenian mandate because they only supported a mandate over a much larger area of the Ottoman Empire. Opponents of Armenian independence naturally opposed the Armenian mandate scheme because it was dependent on Armenian autonomy from the rest of the Ottoman state. Admiral Bristol opposed an American mandate over an independent Armenia, but he did advocate for an American mandate over larger parts of the Ottoman Empire. Bristol and many others believed a larger mandate could appease the Ottoman elite and lessen the conflict in the area. American politicians believed that the Ottomans preferred an American mandate over any other nations. The American Embassy in Paris reported that Mustapha Kemal, the Turkish nationalist leader, preferred no mandatory power but if the Ottomans must have one, he said privately that he preferred the United States.<sup>95</sup> If the Ottomans could be

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<sup>93</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to Henry White, May 6, 1919, Reel 59, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>94</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to Henry White, June 23, 1919, Reel 59, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>95</sup> The American Embassy in Paris to the American Mission, Telegram August 14, 1919, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

appeased, Bristol argued, there was less of a chance for continued violence in the region and the likelihood of a successful mandate would be increased.

Many felt that a mandate for Armenia without other parts of the Ottoman Empire wouldn't be practical for administrative and economic purposes. Henry White, while skeptical of an American mandate anywhere, was convinced that if the United States were to take a mandate for Armenia, it could not succeed unless it also contained Constantinople and Anatolia.<sup>96</sup> While in Paris with the peace delegation, either White or his close associate Elihu Root wrote to Lodge that "under no circumstances should we take a mandate for Armenia or even Constantinople alone, or both together without Anatolia." He pointed out that there were few natural resources in Armenia and that Anatolia remaining under the control of the Ottomans lessened the chance of doing any real good in the region.<sup>97</sup> A memorandum to the secretary of state from the peace commission stated that a mandate in Armenia would be costly to the mandatory power and if the United States were to take a mandate, it would need to insist on taking a mandate for Mesopotamia as well because of its economic potential.<sup>98</sup> Dr. Mary Patrick, an educator in a missionary college in the Ottoman Empire, argued that America should take a mandate because it was the only great power that all the groups in Asia Minor respected and because peace in the Near East could only be attained by cooperation of all the peoples there. One mandate would allow the United States to institute uniform coinage, railway systems, and custom house regulations

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<sup>96</sup> Henry White to Henry Cabot Lodge May 26, 1919, Reel 59, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>97</sup> Elihu Root to Henry Cabot Lodge, June 12, 1919, Box 191, Elihu Root Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>98</sup> The Commission to Negotiate Peace to the Acting Secretary of State, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 825-826.

for the whole region. America could apply its expertise to the region's agricultural practices, and its rich mines and ports combined with American commercial methods would make the area a great commercial center. Increased trade between the United States and Ottoman Empire would benefit both nations.<sup>99</sup> Many agreed that a larger mandate would have a larger chance for success.

The report of the Harbord Commission solidified the view that America should not accept a mandate for Armenia alone. The commission argued that a mandate for Armenia without control of Asia Minor, Anatolia, and Constantinople was unfavorable. Constantinople was the political and commercial seat of the region, and while the Ottoman Government was not effective, there existed a political machinery that could be used by the mandatory power. Fewer foreign soldiers would be needed because the Ottomans would be appeased. Incorporating places with a Turkish or Kurdish majority into an Armenian state would cause problems and a large mandate would avoid this without cutting Armenia off from its historic lands. The United States could also benefit by controlling the foreign policy of the Ottomans and the granting of economic concessions. The Harbord report overall recommended that the United States take a mandate for all of Asia Minor and Armenia and presented fourteen reasons the United States should take the mandate and thirteen reasons it should not. The report claimed that the United States, as a future founding member of the League Nations, could not justify refraining from taking part in a system it helped create. Harbord argued the mandate provided an opportunity to prevent future wars, provide humanitarian relief, and stop the massacres of Christians. It also provided a chance for the United States to further familiarize itself with world politics and

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<sup>99</sup> Henry White to Dr. Mary Patrick, July 9, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

to increase American international prestige. Harbord argued that the United States was the logical choice for the mandatory power because of its clean record and lack of imperialist motives while simultaneously citing Cuba and the Philippines as proof that America could perform the duties of a mandate. His final argument was that America could do the job better than anyone.<sup>100</sup>

Harbord's report, while ultimately supporting an American mandate in Asia Minor, also voiced several downsides to a mandate that were already being expressed or would be adopted by opponents of a mandate. The general warned that the region has been plagued by imperialism and militarism and an American mandate would weaken the Monroe Doctrine, create a U.S. confrontation with Russia, and involve Washington in the politics of the old world. The report stated that the United States had many domestic responsibilities and nearer foreign obligations and humanitarian needs. The mandate would be expensive in both money and soldiers, and America's first duty was to its neighbors. The general also claimed that American philanthropy was worldwide and taking a mandate because of humanitarian reasons could commit the United States to a policy of meddling around the world. If the United States took a mandate in the Near East, it would create a precedent for U.S. involvement in any territory where American missionaries were present. The report also claimed that another great power, which had more experience in such things, would likely take a mandate if the United States did not. Regardless, American rights were sure to be respected by all.

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<sup>100</sup> The Chief of the Military Mission to Armenia (Harbord) to the Secretary of State, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 842.

Both Lodge and White were skeptical about the advisability of taking a mandate in Armenia or for all of Asia Minor but not wholeheartedly opposed to it. However, their support was conditional on the support of the American people, which they doubted. Both White and Lodge felt compelled to help the Armenians and demonstrate American power in the process, but a mandate would be a stark change from traditional American foreign policy. Taking a mandate would go against George Washington's advice to avoid any foreign entanglements and against the Monroe Doctrine, which promised that the United States would stay out of the affairs of the old world. These cornerstones of American foreign policy continued to have weight in the early twentieth century. Lodge had a long career in Congress supporting American imperialism. He was unabashedly a leading voice for U.S. imperialism in the Senate in the 1890's. He favored annexation of Hawaii, war with Spain, occupation of the Philippines, and U.S. intervention in Hawaii.<sup>101</sup> To him, however, a mandate in Armenia would be a far different task. Never before had the United States taken such responsibilities in a region with a long history of European intrigue so close to Europe. Those who favored a strict adherence to the Monroe Doctrine felt the Near East was outside the United States's proper sphere of influence. If the United States took a mandate over Armenia, it would also be under the authority of the League of Nations which would in some ways limit American independent action. The mandate was perfect for Wilson's vision of America's role in the world. He was more than willing to involve America permanently in the affairs of the old world and cede some authority to the League of Nations.

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<sup>101</sup> Immerman, *Empire for Liberty*, 128-163.

Those who opposed mandates or felt that the likelihood of them getting accepted was low proposed direct aid and involvement in the Near East instead. Direct aid would minimize any entanglements with the Allies and retain American independent action. Cardashian felt that Armenians had the ability for self-government and only needed help provisionally until their government could be set up. Cardashian thought America only needed to lend Armenia money and provide some civil and military advisors. If properly organized and equipped, the Armenians could police their own lands and protect their borders.<sup>102</sup> Cardashian, along with many others, also suggested sending munitions and military equipment to Armenia. Cardashian and his associates at the ACIA sent a telegram to president Wilson urging direct aid to Armenia and sending enough supplies and equipment for 50,000 Armenian soldiers. This telegram was signed by Henry Cabot Lodge, Charles Evans Hughes, Elihu Root, John Sharp Williams and other prominent Americans.<sup>103</sup> Williams, a Democrat who seemed to have a strong professional relationship with the president, wrote to Wilson separately also suggesting that they send munitions to Armenia. He recognized this may be difficult since the United States was never at war with the Ottoman Empire, but Williams felt it could surely be done.<sup>104</sup> Others proposed that the United States send military personnel to the Near East to help the Allies keep the peace there. S. E. Mezes of the American peace delegation proposed sending American officers

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<sup>102</sup> Vahan Cardashian to Henry Cabot Lodge, June 16, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>103</sup> The Acting Secretary of State to the Commission to Negotiate Peace, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 824.

<sup>104</sup> John Sharp Williams to Woodrow Wilson, Telegram, August 9, 1919, Box 2, John Sharp Williams Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

to command the Armenian soldiers.<sup>105</sup> The most fully developed plan for sending American military forces was a proposal that American soldiers help in the repatriation of Turkish Armenian refugees from the Armenian republic back to their homes. The Kurds would be compelled to promise not to interfere with the refugees return and protection for the Armenians would be provided, mostly by local forces under foreign officers. American and British commanders could oversee the operations from the capitals of each Turkish Armenian vilayet.<sup>106</sup> Admiral Bristol vehemently opposed this repatriation plan, arguing that it would cause disturbances as the Greek occupation of Smyrna had. Unless the Allies were willing to occupy all of the Ottoman Empire to prevent backlash elsewhere, he recommended helping the Armenian refugees where they were. He claimed to be negotiating with the Ottoman government to peaceably allow the refugees to go back to their homes.<sup>107</sup>

As the Allies and Americans continued to delay any settlement of the Near East and American opinion on its future in the region remained divided, the announcement of the impending British withdrawal of all military forces from the Caucasus caused great alarm. Beginning in August of 1919, the British were withdrawing all their soldiers from Armenia and the Caucasus. While this withdrawal was announced in March, many had hoped that the British would be compelled to stay. The British claimed that many of their soldiers' enlistments were expiring and they could not maintain a policy of conscription to

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<sup>105</sup> S. E. Mezes to the American Commission, Memorandum, March 8, 1919, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>106</sup> William Westermann to C. A. Herter, June 1919, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>107</sup> Mark Bristol to the American Mission, July 23, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

continue to occupy the Caucasus.<sup>108</sup> The British also claimed that they were stretched too thin and did not have the resources to continue. An American consul in the Ottoman Empire warned that the British were withdrawing chiefly to compel the United States to send their own soldiers there in an effort to commit them to a mandate.<sup>109</sup> Wilson suggested privately to Senator Williams that the British were falling back on their old policy of never angering “the Turks.”<sup>110</sup> The Allies proposed the Italians as a possible option to replace them, but their government claimed that the domestic situation in Italy was too fragile to do so.<sup>111</sup> There was also interest from the French, but they only intended to occupy the southern part of Armenia. Despite the suspicion that France was only trying to get a better foothold in Asia Minor, the State Department was hopeful France would take the responsibility of protecting all of the Caucasus.<sup>112</sup> The British continued to insist that the responsibility should go to the Americans.

Despite the fact that the British occupation had failed to keep order, there was still much concern over the impending British withdrawal. Bristol said the British commander in the Caucasus admitted to him that they were not authorized to try to stop all the violence

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<sup>108</sup> John Davis to the American Mission, August 12, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>109</sup> Vice-Consul Doolittle to American Mission, Telegram, July 31, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>110</sup> John Sharp Williams to Woodrow Wilson, August 28, 1919, Box 2, John Sharp Williams Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>111</sup> Elihu Root to Henry Cabot Lodge, August 2, 1919, Box 191, Elihu Root Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>112</sup> The Secretary of State to the Commission to Negotiate Peace, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, Volume II Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 838-839.

going on in the region, and even if they were, they did not have a big enough force.<sup>113</sup> Even though the British were not preventing the violence already taking place, many worried that the withdrawal of British troops would lead to the complete annihilation of the Armenian people.<sup>114</sup> There was widespread fear, that without American intervention, all of the American philanthropic donations over the last several years would have been for naught because of the destruction of the Armenians as a people. Bristol tried to calm these fears and claimed that selfish interests were exaggerating current conditions in the region, but few shared his view.

Wilson felt that he needed congressional authority to send American soldiers to the Caucasus. Wilson had used executive authority to order soldiers elsewhere prior to this crisis, but the British withdrawal was set to begin as the debate over the Versailles Treaty was going on in Congress. Wilson worried that sending armed forces without the approval of Congress might antagonize Congress and work against passage of the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations Covenant.<sup>115</sup> Williams introduced a resolution to give the president the authorization he desired. Senate Joint Resolution 106 would grant the president the authority to “use such military and naval forces of the United States as in his opinion may seem expedient for the maintenance of peace and tranquility in Armenia” until a permanent settlement could be decided. The resolution also enabled the president to partially suspend the Foreign Enlistment Act to the extent that it would allow Armenian-

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<sup>113</sup> Mark Bristol to the American Mission, Telegram, July 28, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>114</sup> Vice-Consul Doolittle to American Mission, Telegram, July 31, 1919, Box 53, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>115</sup> Laderman, “Sharing the Burden,” 682-683.

Americans to raise money and arms to equip themselves to assemble a force to go aid their countrymen. Williams tried to muster support and gathered petitions with signatures supporting the resolution.<sup>116</sup>

There was significant opposition to the Williams resolution and the idea of sending American soldiers to Armenia. Bristol warned of the potential consequences. He claimed that it would provoke violence in similar ways to the Greek occupation of Smyrna. He also cautioned against doing anything to agitate either the Russians or “the Turks,” who were friendly nations to the United States.<sup>117</sup> Henry White cautioned that sending American soldiers could commit the United States to a long term occupation or a mandate, which he now firmly opposed.<sup>118</sup> Lodge repeatedly argued that the decision to send soldiers was an executive concern and that Congress had no authority to do so. Lodge wrote to James Gerrard of the ACIA that helping Armenians at this moment was an executive matter, not a congressional one. “We [the Senate] cannot order troops. We are not in control of the peace conference. We could give money if it was asked for, but we have given a hundred millions as a matter of fact for food purposes and I doubt if you could get another great gift of that sort through,” Lodge wrote.<sup>119</sup> Lodge was not clear as to why exactly Congress could not order troops, but a comment from Root in a letter to Lodge may indicate the

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<sup>116</sup> American National Union of America, “Petition Supporting Senate Joint Resolution 106,” Box 119, John Sharp Williams Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>117</sup> Mark Bristol to the American Mission, Telegram, October 3, 1919, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C. And Mark Bristol to American Mission, November 5, 1919, Box 46, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>118</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to Elihu Root, October 11, 1919, Box 191, Elihu Root Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>119</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to James Gerrard, August 8, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

reason. Root claimed the United States did not declare war on the Ottomans to protect Christian colleges there. “Now, being at peace with Turkey, the only way in which he [Gerrard] can protect Armenian Christians is to ask authority from congress, which would be equivalent to declaring war just as our Allies are about making peace,” Root wrote.<sup>120</sup> It seems Congress did have the authority to send armed forces to Armenia, but only for war related purposes. The United States was never at war with the Ottoman Empire and Lodge held the conviction that a peacekeeping force must have been ordered to Armenia by Wilson with his authority as president. Lodge and Congress were able to recommend that the president send soldiers to Armenia, as Williams’s proposed resolution did, but Lodge was opposed to making any recommendations to the president and claimed Wilson had the authority act on the question without the involvement of Congress.<sup>121</sup> Ultimately, Lodge had Williams’s resolution sent to a newly created subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee dedicated to investigating the situation in Armenia and what the American response should be. The resolution would not make it out of the subcommittee, which would take months to make a final recommendation and present an alternative resolution. Wilson would not send American forces on his own authority.

Immediately after the war, as the peace process in the Near East was delayed, American policymakers struggled to settle on a policy that would increase U.S. involvement in the region. A majority of Americans involved in this debate were sincerely concerned for the Christians in the Near East and felt the United States had a moral

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<sup>120</sup> Elihu Root to Henry Cabot Lodge, September 26, 1919, Box 191, Elihu Root Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

<sup>121</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge and James Gerrard, August 8, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

responsibility to help them in some way, but they disagreed over what actions to assist Near Eastern Christians would also be within America's own national interests. Supporters of a mandate over Armenia, larger mandates, or direct aid all thought their suggestions were the best way to achieve their shared humanitarian goals while simultaneously benefitting the United States, or at least achieve their goals with minimal costs and risk. Shared humanitarian impulses were not enough to produce an agreeable policy to a sufficient number of American policymakers without a collective understanding of how any action would be within America's self-interests. Opposition to mandates was not based on isolationist rational, but on concerns that mandates would be costly and risk burdening the United States with undue responsibility, as well as potentially embroil the American military in conflicts with Turkish nationalists, the Russians, or other potential rivals. The disagreements over America's proper role in the Near East were also not primarily rooted in partisan animosity. These policymakers had ideological and practical motivations for their opposition or support of specific policies. The disdain of American policymakers for their political opponents is evident in their personal correspondence and public speeches but it was not the primary factor in their failure to agree on a policy in the Near East. As the Americans made few decisions regarding their future involvement in the Near East, the vote on the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations would drastically reduce the chances that the United States would take a mandate for either Armenia alone or a larger portion of former Ottoman territory.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE LEAGUE, MANDATES, AND THE SENATE

The debate surrounding American involvement in the Near East occurred at the same time as the debate in the Senate over the peace treaty with Germany. The rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and the denial of American membership in the League of Nations proved to be a major factor in the discussions surrounding the Near East. The League debate solidified hostility to potentially burdensome international commitments and proposals for an American mandate in the Near East. Despite the apparent opposition to Wilsonianism and mandates in the Senate, President Wilson continued to advocate for an American mandate in Armenia. Lodge and Republican senators promoted a plan that would send an American warship and Marines to the Near East to protect American lives and property, as well as maintain communication and supply lines to Armenia. Wilson ignored this request and instead formally requested the Senate for the power to accept a mandate over Armenia. While there was never a moment where it seemed that the Senate would grant him this power, there was sporadic debate over several days before the Senate eventually rejected his proposal. After the Senate rejected Wilson's request for the power to take a mandate in Armenia, it seemed that direct aid was the only way the United States could assist Armenians or other groups in the Near East, however, by the time this was clear the Russians and the Turkish nationalist had consolidated their power in the region and were better able to limit outside influences.

The U.S. debate over the peace treaty with Germany and the League of Nations, which culminated in the failure to ratify the Treaty of Versailles in November of 1919, drastically affected the debate over what role the United States should have in Armenia

and the rest of the Near East, but it did not preclude the United States from sending direct aid to the Near East or even from taking a mandate. Some people thought that a final decision on taking a mandate would be reflected in the acceptance or refusal of the Treaty of Versailles, but this was not the case.<sup>122</sup> The United States could still take a mandate on behalf of the League without being a member. While the rejection of the treaty did little to limit the potential options for expanding U.S. involvement in the Near East, the debate surrounding the League and the treaty did influence the discussion surrounding the Near East. Lodge felt that the League fight had brought about great hostility to the idea of a mandate.<sup>123</sup> Many opponents of the League feared the long term international commitments that did little to benefit the United States and that would result from American membership in the League. As the League debate progressed, potential mandates were becoming seen as the sort of burden that would be placed on the United States had it entered the League of Nations. The vigorous debate over the League lessened public support for even smaller actions that could lead to international commitments, such as sending American soldiers to support the Armenians without taking a mandate. America's absence from the League also removed one of the strongest arguments for taking a mandate in the Near East. The argument that the United States, as a founding member of the League who helped draft the covenant, needed to take a mandate to participate in a system it helped create was no longer valid.

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<sup>122</sup> Henry White to Henry Cabot Lodge, November 1, 1919, Reel 54, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>123</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to James Barton, March 15, 1920, Reel 61, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

The League debate was even more related to the debate over the Near East in Armenia because they were two strands of the same debate over what type of internationalist and imperialist the United States would be. Some contemporaries and historians have thought of the League fight as one between internationalists and isolationists. While it is true that there were isolationists factions, led by Senator William Borah in the Senate, Lodge and other Republicans were internationalists but with a very different vision than Wilson's.<sup>124</sup> Lodge supported the idea of a League but his operated very differently than Wilson's. Neither supporters of Lodge or Wilson were willing to compromise too much to get some version of the League passed. Had all the Democrats voted with Lodge and the reservationists, the United States would have ratified the treaty and entered the League under certain conditions. Elihu Root, who was heavily involved in drafting the reservations for the treaty, worried that the perception of the League debate was becoming "League vs. no League not Wilson League unchanged vs. Americanized League."<sup>125</sup>

Like the League debate, the concurrent debate over American involvement in the Near East was not between isolationists and internationalists. It featured disagreements between internationalists who favored Wilson's idea of U.S. responsibility to a community of nations and to promote peace and internationalists such as Lodge who also favored peace but not at the expense of American interests or the U.S. ability for independent action. The same rationale that led to opposition to the League was applied to mandates in the Near East. By taking a mandate, the United States would be committed to the long-term

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<sup>124</sup> Widenor, *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy*, 276-277.

<sup>125</sup> Elihu Root to Will Hays, Undated, Box 138, Elihu Root Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

maintenance of peace in the region and would submit itself to the authority of the League on some matters. After the rejection of the treaty in November, it seemed clear to many that American involvement in the Near East would not likely occur under a Wilsonian framework.

The Allies continued to look to America to serve as the mandatory power in Armenia even after the rejection of the Versailles treaty. Many believed a mandate was unlikely and continued to call for direct aid to Armenia. Relief work under General Haskell continued, but others asked that more be done. James Gerrard of the ACIA wrote to the secretary of state that the mandate had little chance of success and he should advocate for helping Armenia without taking a mandate.<sup>126</sup> In his correspondence with Gerrard, Lodge told him that he was right in believing that there was little chance of a mandate, but he hoped something may be done another way.<sup>127</sup> James Barton suggested that the Allies recognize Armenia and all its territorial claims and that the United States assist in pacifying Armenia, setting up an adequate government, and developing the nation's resources without taking a mandate. Lodge claimed it was impossible to get Congress to send soldiers to Armenia, but he had no problems with his plan. However, he continued to stress that the president had to do it and that getting the administration to do anything on this matter was impossible.<sup>128</sup> While some continued to press for direct aid, Admiral Bristol and the State

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<sup>126</sup> James Gerrard to Frank Polk, January 23, 1920, Reel 61, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>127</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to James Gerrard, January 31, 1920, Reel 61, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>128</sup> James Barton to Henry Cabot Lodge, March 13, 1920, Reel 61, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. And Henry Cabot Lodge to James Barton, March 15, 1920, Reel 61, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

Department continued to work to ensure the rights of American citizens in the Near East, regardless of what the American role in the region would be. Bristol continued to ensure the capitulations system was being upheld by the Ottoman government to the benefit of Americans, including mediation with the Ottoman government on certain taxes at the behest of Standard Oil.<sup>129</sup> The State Department was involved in a scheme to get American interests to take over the German investments of the Deutsche Bank, who would no longer be able to keep their shares after the enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles began. The proposal would allow American businessmen to take control of the Anatolian and Bagdad Railways.<sup>130</sup>

After many months, the subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee dedicated to investigating Armenia made its recommendations, which culminated in a resolution put forward by Senator Warren G. Harding. The subcommittee finished its report in March 1920, but nothing came of it at first. Lodge noted that Harding's absence from Washington hampered efforts to get it passed.<sup>131</sup> On May 13, 1920, Harding presented a proposed resolution that had been unanimously approved by the Foreign Relations Committee and then passed by the Senate. The resolution congratulated the Armenian government on official recognition by the U.S. government, which finally occurred in April, and claimed they hoped that the Armenians could form a stable government which

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<sup>129</sup> The High Commissioner at Constantinople (Bristol) to the Secretary of State, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920*, Volume III Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 762-763.

<sup>130</sup> The Commissioner at Berlin (Dresel) to the Secretary of State, United States Department of State, *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920*, Volume III Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 766.

<sup>131</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge to James Gerrard, April 21, 1920, Reel 61, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Microfilm Edition, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

could have full realization of its nationalistic aspirations. The proposal requested that the president send a U.S. warship to Batum with a force of marines to disembark and to protect American lives and property. This request's stated goal was to provide necessary protection for Americans at the port and along the railroad leading to Baku. Harding stated that the resolution had an additional goal, which was to "guarantee the maintenance of a communication line through the port of Batum to Erivan [The Armenian republic]." The Marines would facilitate the safe sending of aid and provide moral uplift for Armenians.<sup>132</sup> The operations of the Haskell mission were drastically hampered by obstructions of rail and communications lines by the Georgians. The Marines would ensure the accessibility of relief to the landlocked Armenian Republic and access for the Armenians to the sea and the outside world.

James Gerrard was pleased with the recommendations but hoped more could be added. Lodge told him it would be hard getting the Senate to do more than the subcommittee recommended and that the League fight had made many wary of any meddling in the affairs of Europe. The resolution was about the extent of what Lodge and other leading internationalist Republicans were willing to do. On May 24, 1920, Wilson responded to Harding's resolution by requesting that he be given the authority to take a mandate for Armenia. Wilson wrote to the Senate "I cannot but regard it as providential, and not as a mere casual coincidence" that he got word of the resolution at the same time that the Allies formally requested the United States take a mandate for Armenia. He

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<sup>132</sup> 59 Congressional Record 6978-6979 (1920).

requested that he be given congressional authority to accept the mandate, stating that he believed it was the earnest wish of the American people he do so.<sup>133</sup>

After a few days discussing the mandate in the Foreign Relations Committee, Lodge presented the committee's response to Wilson's request. Its resolution denied the president the power to accept a mandate. Lodge hoped to vote on the resolution without much debate, because the Senate had previously discussed mandates during and after the League debate. Democratic Senator Gilbert Hitchcock of Nebraska asked that the vote be delayed so that he could perfect an amendment. He worried that the committee's resolution would discourage Armenians, and while he did not want to accept a mandate, he wanted to show that Americans were willing to assist the Armenians within reasonable bounds. His amendment would allow the president to appoint financial advisors for Armenia and allow them to sell bonds in the United States for the purpose of building up Armenian infrastructure. Lodge pointed out that such an idea was part of a larger plan for direct aid suggested by James Gerrard. Gerrard's plan called for additional measures, such as providing military equipment for fifty thousand men and sending fifty American officers to help reorganize the Armenian army. Lodge commented that these are "methods by which we could properly be of assistance to the Armenians." Lodge claimed that there was a very general desire in the United States to not turn a deaf ear to the Armenians. However, he claimed the aid suggested by Hitchcock and Gerrard is "wholly different from taking the mandate and assuming the care of that country for we cannot say how many years to come."<sup>134</sup> The Senate granted Hitchcock's request to postpone the vote, but Lodge

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<sup>133</sup> 59 Congressional Record 7533-7534 (1920) (Mandate over Armenia).

<sup>134</sup> 59 Congressional Record 7875-7877 (1920).

counseled that the Senate should make a quick decision once Hitchcock presented his amendment because the Allies deserved a prompt response and Congress would be in recess soon.

Despite Lodge's belief that the mandate issue didn't require much more debate, other senators disagreed. Extensive debate ensued sporadically over the next week. Opponents of the mandate cited a wide range of oppositions and concerns about taking a mandate. Many of the mandate's detractors cited Harbord's report, which emphasized the grave responsibility and serious difficulty the mandate would present. They often pointed to his argument that a mandate for Armenia without Anatolia and Constantinople was unadvisable. They also emphasized the general's conclusion that a strong military force and large expenditures would be needed to police Armenia, protect it against its neighbors, and establish a functioning government. Senator Walsh countered these arguments by pointing out that all the costs referenced in the Harbord report were for a mandate for all of Asia Minor, not just Armenia. The \$712 million estimated cost was based on the assumption of no revenue being generated in Armenia to contribute to the functioning of the government and a larger mandate.<sup>135</sup> The true cost would be less. Senator Andrieus Jones of New Mexico also suggested that they might take a limited mandate, which would also reduce the cost in both dollars and soldiers.<sup>136</sup> The League of Nations covenant recognized the different needs and stages of development of different potential mandates and the United States could restrict its mandate to simply providing administrative and military advice. Class 'A' mandates only called for limited involvement from the

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<sup>135</sup> 59 Congressional Record 8066 (1920).

<sup>136</sup> 59 Congressional Record 7887 (1920).

mandatory power. Senator Reed, a Democrat from Missouri, asked proponents of a limited mandate how they could provide advice to Armenia if it was being overrun by an outside power. Without military assistance, the mandate would be meaningless.<sup>137</sup>

Opponents of a mandate also stressed that the United States was getting the mandate that no other Allied power wanted. “England is there holding Mesopotamia; France is holding Syria; Italy has a great block of territory in the neighborhood, and Armenia is the point at which they must be protected,” Lodge claimed. “There are three banks and a poor house there, and we have been given the poor house.” Lodge’s ire was aimed not at the Armenians, for whom he continued to have great sympathy, but for the Allies who wished to give the United States the most difficult and thankless mandate while taking the profitable ones for themselves.<sup>138</sup> Senator Frank Brandagee seconded Lodge’s point, claiming the Allies, having “divided among themselves those parts of the Empire which had economic resources and were strategically important, offer to the United States that part which, by the United States at least, is militarily indefensible and of which the economic resources are nil.”<sup>139</sup> Brandagee and Lodge were tapping into the widespread sentiment that Allies were trying to leverage U.S. sympathy for Armenia into taking a mandate that served European strategic interests more than American ones and had little chance of recouping the money spent to perform the role of mandatory power.

The senators opposed to a mandate were also particularly concerned with possible confrontations with Armenia’s neighbors. Senator James A. Reed argued that a mandate in

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<sup>137</sup> 59 Congressional Record 7065 (1920).

<sup>138</sup> 59 Congressional Record 7889 (1920).

<sup>139</sup> 59 Congressional Record 8059 (1920).

Armenia would bring the United States into conflict with Muslims: “Let us for a moment further consider the hornet's nest which we are invited to enter. The country over which we are asked to accept a mandate is surrounded by over 250,000,000 Mohammedans; on every side it is bounded by Mohammedans.” He argued that white world supremacy was being challenged across the globe and if the Muslims united against European imperials, “the soldiers of the United States will form the wall of flesh and blood which will be expected to break the force of the Moslem assault.”<sup>140</sup> Other senators echoed Reed’s concerns about potential conflict with Muslims and expressed similar apprehensions about Russia. Senators pointed out that the Bolsheviks were already showing some interest in regaining the influence in the Caucasus and Persia that they had forfeited during the Russian withdrawal from the war. Senator Joseph McCormick protested that the American soldiers who had just been brought out of Russia, ending Wilson’s intervention into the Russian Revolution, at the insistence of the Senate, would be returned to the “same undeclared war they waged before.”<sup>141</sup> Senator Thomas Walsh attempted to dispel this fear of the Russians by pointing out that if either Armenia were a part of League of Nations or the United States put a clause into its acceptance of a mandate on behalf of the League, the other members of the League would be obligated to assist under article 10 of the League covenant. But his comments had little effect on his fellow senators.<sup>142</sup>

Some Senators who may have been inclined to the idea of an American mandate over Armenia at some point in the future opposed granting the president power to accept

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<sup>140</sup> 59 Congressional Record 7068 (1920).

<sup>141</sup> 59 Congressional Record 8060 (1920).

<sup>142</sup> 59 Congressional Record 8065 (1920).

the mandate because his message was vague as to what that might mean or because the United States should only take a mandate if it was in the League of Nations. The president asked to take a mandate over Armenia, but the Armenian boundaries were not even settled. The president also did not outline what the American responsibilities in a mandate would be. Several senators were wary of granting the president power without more information. Others, who supported joining the League of Nations, were worried that taking a mandate made little sense if the United States was not a member.

Proponents of a mandate argued that America had an obligation to take the mandate whether or not they joined the League. Senator Robinson claimed that the Christian peoples of the United States felt morally bound to help the Armenians. He claimed that “every man who believes in the Cross and the principles taught by the founder of the Christian religion believes that this Government should do something for the protection of Armenia.” He warned that, if the United States did not intercede, Christians would remain subordinated by Muslims in that part of the world. He also claimed the United States was obligated to help because it encouraged Armenians to fight for the Allies based on the promise that if the United States won, Armenian persecutions would cease.<sup>143</sup> Senator Hoke Smith countered that many of the reasons for taking the mandate were moral and altruistic but, he asked, how could senators in good conscience tax the American people and ask mothers to give their boys to the service for such reasons? He felt the senators did not have the authority to do so, and nor should they if they did have the authority.<sup>144</sup> Brandagee pointed

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<sup>143</sup> 59 Congressional Record 8056 (1920).

<sup>144</sup> 59 Congressional Record 7889 (1920).

out that the United States did not have the same responsibilities as the other Allies in the Near East because it was never at war with the Ottoman Empire.<sup>145</sup>

During the debate, the senators often referred to America's recent imperialism to justify their positions. Many senators referenced how the Americans had balked at an arrangement similar to taking a mandate over Mexico during the recent Mexican Revolution but now wanted the country to take a mandate in Armenia. Mexico was America's neighbor and more deserving of American aid because of the Monroe Doctrine, they argued. Senator Smith argued that the mandate in Armenia was much more burdensome than temporary supervision over Mexico would have been.<sup>146</sup> Senator McCormick, referencing the Biblical proverb of the good Samaritan, asked if America would play the Levite to Mexico and the Samaritan to Armenia. He also questioned a colleague who favored moral reasons for taking a mandate in Armenia "as to whether he would distinguish between our obligation toward Armenia, not toward the landed investors in Armenia, but the people, and our obligation toward Mexico, not toward landed investors in Mexico."<sup>147</sup> America's imperialist resume was also brought into the debate over of the constitutionality of an American mandate. Senator Brandagee questioned the legality of an American mandate. He challenged the notion Congress had the authority to use taxpayer money to support a government in Asia Minor. Senator Walsh responded by asking if the United States could absorb Armenia into its dominion. Brandagee claimed they could, as they had the Philippines. Walsh then asked, if the

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<sup>145</sup> 59 Congressional Record 8057 (1920).

<sup>146</sup> 59 Congressional Record 7889 (1920).

<sup>147</sup> 59 Congressional Record 8064 (1920).

United States could exercise full sovereignty over Armenia, why could it then not exercise a more limited sovereignty in the form of a mandate? Brandagee replied that the United States had not acquired Armenia in any functional sense, and unless it did, the affairs of Armenia were none of their business. Walsh finally questioned if the United States had acquired Haiti before exercising sovereignty there. Brandagee, likely realizing Walsh was correct, directed the conversation in a different direction.<sup>148</sup> The incorporation of America's imperialist past into the debate highlighted the fact that the decision to accept a mandate was a question of how the American empire would operate. In retrospect, the mandate over Armenia could be cast as a moral imperative and beneficial to the Armenians, but even if that were true, it did not negate U.S. imperialism. The incorporation of America's imperial past showed that contemporaries did not distinguish the mandate from other American imperialist interventions.

Ultimately, the resolution to deny the president the power to take a mandate was passed with fifty-two senators voting yes, twenty-three no, and twenty-one abstaining. The denial seemingly solidified the reality that any increased American involvement in the Near East and Armenia would not be along Wilsonian lines but would need to be in the form of direct aid that did not entail much cost or commitment. However, Wilson responded mostly by withdrawing American involvement in the peace process in the Near East and declined to use his authority to provide substantial aid to Armenia. Wilson decided not to heed Harding's resolution, which proposed the dispatch of an American battleship and Marines to the Caucasus. By the end of November 1920, Bolshevik pressure from both outside and within was too strong and the Armenian Republic became part of the Soviet Union. Direct

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<sup>148</sup> 59 Congressional Record 8058-8059 (1920).

U.S. aid to the Armenian government was no longer a popular option. The United States was not officially involved in either the conference at San Remo, which was taking place at the same time as the debate over granting the president the authority to take a mandate over Armenia, or the later ones at Sevres and Lausanne that determined the Allied peace treaties with the Ottoman Empire. The Allies had originally negotiated the Treaty of Sevres, but the continued strengthening of Turkish nationalism forced the Allies to dictate new terms friendlier to the Mustafa Kemal's government, which culminated in the Treaty of Lausanne. With the Sovietization of Armenia and the solidification of Turkish sovereignty in Asia Minor, there was less opportunity for increased American involvement as there were immediately following the First World War. By the time Wilson's ideas for America's role in the world and the Near East were soundly defeated and a compromise might have been found, circumstances in the Near East limited what options were open to Americans.

The rejection of the peace treaty with Germany provided a major blow to proponents of American mandates in the Near East. The ideological forces that resisted American membership in the League of Nations were equally applicable to the opposition of mandates. Partisan enmity influenced both the League debate and the concurrent debate over American involvement in the Near East, but ideological differences also produced the many disagreements among American policymakers. These disagreements resulted from differing internationalist visions, not a conflict between internationalism and isolationism. When the Senate voted on the Armenian mandate, the opponents of mandates did not claim that the United States should be absent in the affairs of the Near East altogether, but they were opposed to long term international commitments that could work against America's

national interests. Many senators were eager to help the Armenians but felt that the United States could not accept a mandate because it would be both costly and risky. Most senators involved in the debate claimed they wanted to act on their humanitarian impulses to help the Armenians in other ways. After the Senate rejected an American mandate in Armenia and the Russians and Turkish nationalists consolidated their power, efforts to increase American involvement in the Near East and protect Christian minorities in the region waned. Relief organizations remained active, but there was less agitation for the involvement of the U.S. government and military.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

America's widespread interest in the fate of the Near East and the Christian minorities there was not enough to form a consensus U.S. policy while their remained an opportunity to dramatically increase American involvement in the region. At the close of the First World War, American interest in the Near East was high and many Americans had deep sympathy with the Armenian cause. American missionary and philanthropic activity in the region before and during the war had fostered the American public's awareness of the issues surrounding the Armenians and the Near East in general. Many favored some form of American intervention and increased influence in the region, but there was little consensus on how that might take place. Some favored taking a mandate and other favored direct aid, but there were disagreements even within each group. Immediately after the war, neither the Allies or the Americans were in any rush to come to a quick settlement of the peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire. While the United States was never at war with the Ottoman Empire, they were still in a position to influence the Allied treaty with the Ottomans. In the first several months after the Armistice, while the delegations at the Paris Peace conference were primarily focused on Europe, there was some discourse surrounding what would be done with the Ottoman Empire. During these months, the differing positions on the United States proper role in the Near East never found a compromise or promoted a coherent policy that had the support of a majority of American policymakers. In August 1919, when Senator Williams proposed sending American soldiers to replace evacuating British forces from Armenia, American policymakers could not muster enough consensus to pass or reject the resolution.

While an Armenian subcommittee in the Senate deliberated, the debate over the larger issues of American entrance in the League of Nations and the passage of the Treaty of Versailles ultimately sealed the fate of American mandates in the Near East. The debate over American involvement in the Near East was closely related to the League debate, not only because any possible mandates would be under the authority of the League, but also because they were part of the same conversation about what the U.S. postwar role in the world should be. Those who favored the League were more open to the idea of a mandate and those who disliked the League were often hesitant to support it. The U.S. retreat from the Treaty of Versailles and the League was a tough blow for Wilsonianism and the president's international vision. Wilson continued to push for an American mandate in the Near East and requested the power to take one in Armenia. Despite the fact that all of the senators expected the president's request to be denied, there were several days of debate in the Senate. Ultimately, the Senate voted against the president, and it became clear that any increased American involvement in the Near East would only come in the form of direct aid that limited American responsibility and costs. However, by the time this was clear, changing circumstances in the Near East limited American options. The Soviet Union had absorbed the Armenian Republic and the triumph of Turkish nationalism had reduced the opportunity for America to become significantly involved in the Near East.

The debate over postwar U.S. involvement in the Near East provides a greater understanding of wider discussions about American imperialism and foreign policy. It offers insight into American imperialism and its relationship to humanitarianism. Historians discussing the U.S. involvement in the Near East debate have often disentangled it from discussions of American imperialism because of the humanitarian motives and

rhetoric involved, but humanitarianism has often been closely related to U.S. imperialism. Humanitarianism was the primary motivation for those seeking to expand American involvement in the Near East, but humanitarianism alone was not enough to elicit action. American policymakers needed to frame any action that would help Near Eastern Christians within America's self-interests. They tried to justify different policies by arguing they could be beneficial to the United States, or at least low risk. Humanitarianism was able to generate significant support for some form of American intervention, but there was no agreement on what actions and policies would be beneficial to the United States. Without a clear understanding of how any decision would benefit Americans or allow them to achieve their humanitarian goals with little risk or responsibility, a consensus plan of action could not be found. The debate over the Near East also adds to discussions about American isolationism in the interwar years. Historians have argued that Lodge and other opponents to the League of Nations were isolationists, however, others have more convincingly described many of them as internationalists with a different global outlook than Wilson's. Similarly, scholars have argued that Lodge and opponents of mandates were motivated by isolationist reasoning, but their opposition was based on doubts about the mandate system and its underlying principles, not isolationism. The debate over the Near East also provides further understanding of the contentious atmosphere of American politics after the war. Historians often point to the League of Nations debate and the postwar period as a time of intense partisanship that affected politicians' policy decisions. The differing positions on America's proper role in the Near East may have been agitated by partisan conflict, but policymakers' convictions were primarily based on a genuine belief in the correctness of their own ideas and doubts about their opponents' policies.

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