

A Necessary Alliance: Diplomacy and Resistance in Kurdish–Armenian Relations (1919–1930)

Hevalbendiyeke Pêwîst: Dîplomasî û Berxwedan di Têkiliyên Kurd–Ermenî de (1919–1930)

Zorunlu Bir İttifak: Kürt–Ermeni İlişkilerinde Diplomasi ve Direniş (1919–1930)

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Abstract

This article re-examines Kurdish–Armenian relations during the transition from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire to the consolidation of the early Turkish Republic using the concept of a “necessary alliance”. Drawing on previously unused archival materials from the Dashnaksutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) archives, the study analyses diplomatic coordination, military cooperation, and institutional experiments between 1919 and the suppression of the Ağrı Uprising in 1930. The central argument is that Kurdish–Armenian cooperation emerged not from ideological convergence but from structural vulnerability in the post-imperial order. Kurdish demographic strength and military capacity combined with Armenian diasporic diplomacy and international networks to produce an asymmetric but complementary alliance. However, chronic financial weakness, fragmented authority, tensions between diaspora strategies and local realities, and the expanding coercive power of the Republican state undermined its durability. The article further demonstrates that the Ağrı

resistance constituted a modern political project rather than a localized rebellion, featuring a national assembly, declaration of a republic, symbolic state institutions, and transnational diplomacy. The Zilan Massacre is interpreted as a major turning point that generated a shared grammar of victimhood, linking Kurdish experiences to Armenian mass killings memory and transforming trauma into political mobilization. Ultimately, the study situates forced alliances, fragile solidarities, and state violence as central dynamics of nation-building in the modern Middle East and repositions the Ağrı Uprising as a formative moment in Kurdish political modernity.

Keywords

Kurds, Armenians , Ağrı Uprising , Hoybun, Dashnaktsutyun, zilan massacre.

Puxte

Ev gotar têkiliyên Kurd û Ermeniyên di navbera hilweşandina Împaratoriya Osmanî û sazkirina Komara Tirkîyê de, di çarçoveya “hevalbendiya pêwîst” de ji nû ve analîz dike. Lêkolîn di bin sîbana belgeyên arşîva Taşnakan ku heta niha di literatûrê de nehatibûn bikaranîn , mijarên wek navbera 1919 û 1930 de dîplomasî, hevalbendiya leşkerî û ceribandîna sazîkirin yê rêxistina neteweyî ya Kurd dinirxîne. Argumana bîngehîn ya gotarê ev e ku hevalbendiya Kurd-Ermeniyên ne ji nêzîkbûna bîrdoziyê ye, lê ji qelsiyên strukturel yê rêza piştî-împaratorî ve hatiye çêkirin. Hêza demografîk û leşkerî ya Kurdan bi torên dîplomatîk û diasporayî yê Ermeniyên re hevalbendîyeke asîmetrîk û temamker çêkiriye. Bes kêmasiya aborî, parçebûna (eşîrî) civakî û desthilatî, pevçûnên di navbera siyaseta diasporayê û ya herêma de, û berfirehbûna amûrên zorê yê Komarê ev hevalbendî lawaz kiriye. Gotar di heman demê de nîşan dide ku berxwedana li Agirîyê ne şoreşeke herêma ye, projeyeke siyasî ya nûjen e ku meclîsek neteweyî, ragihandina nûjen , sembolên dewletî û hewldanên dîplomatîk di nav xwe de dihevine. Her weha Komkujiya Zîlanê wekî şikestina sereke tê analîz kirin ku bi bîra Komkujiya Ermeniyên a 1915’an re girêdayî ye ku vê jî “hevalbendiya qurbanan” çêkiriye û travmaya kolektîf veguherandiye û kiriye sermayeya siyasî. Di encamê de gotar hevalbendiya mecbûrî, hevrêziyê qels û tûndiya dewletê wekî hêmanên bîngehîn ên avakirina neteweyan li Rojhilata Navîn ji nû ve bi cih dike û Serhildana Agirîyê wekî serdemeke bîngehîn di modernîteya siyasî ya Kurdan de dide nasîn.

Peyvên Sereke

Kurd, Ermeni, Serhildana Agirîyê, Xoybûn, Taşnak, komkujiya Zîlanê.

Öz

Bu makale, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun çözülüşü ile erken Cumhuriyet döneminin kurumsallaşması arasındaki geçiş sürecinde Kürt-Ermeni ilişkilerini “zorunlu ittifak” kavramı çerçevesinde yeniden ele almaktadır. Çalışma, Dashnaktsutyun (Ermeni Devrimci Federasyonu) arşivlerinde yer alan ve literatürde daha önce kullanılmamış belgeler temelinde, 1919 ile 1930 yılları arasında iki ulusal hareket arasındaki diplomatik koordinasyonu, askeri iş birliğini ve kurumsal siyasal girişimleri analiz etmektedir. Makalenin temel savı, Kürt-Ermeni iş birliğinin ideolojik yakınlıktan ziyade post-empéryal düzenin yarattığı yapısal kırılmalara sonucunda ortaya çıktığıdır. Kürtlerin demografik varlığı ve askeri kapasitesi, Ermeni diasporasının diplomatik gücü ve uluslararası ağlarıyla birleşerek asimetrik fakat tamamlayıcı bir ittifak

üretmiştir. Ancak kronik mali yetersizlikler, otoritenin parçalı yapısı, diaspora merkezli siyaset ile yerel direniş arasındaki gerilimler ve erken Cumhuriyet devletinin genişleyen zor aygıtı bu ittifakın sürdürülebilirliğini zayıflatmıştır. Makale ayrıca Ağrı merkezli direnişin yerel bir isyan değil; meclis kurulması, cumhuriyet ilanı, sembolik devlet kurumları ve ulusötesi diplomatik girişimler aracılığıyla modern bir siyasal proje olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Zilan Katliamı, Kürt deneyimi ile 1915 Ermeni Soykırımı arasında kurulan hafıza bağı üzerinden ortak bir mağduriyet dili yaratan belirleyici bir kırılma olarak yorumlanmaktadır. Bu süreçte kolektif travmanın siyasal mobilizasyona dönüştüğü gösterilmektedir. Sonuç olarak çalışma, zorunlu ittifakları, kırılğan dayanışmaları ve devlet şiddetini modern Orta Doğu'da ulus inşasının merkezî dinamikleri olarak konumlandırmakta ve Ağrı İsyanı'nı Kürt siyasal modernitesinin kurucu bir eşiği olarak yeniden değerlendirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kürtler, Ermeniler, Ağrı İsyanı, Hoybun, Taşnaktsutyun, Zilan katliamı.

Introduction

Kurdish–Armenian relations have followed a complex historical trajectory characterized by both conflict and cooperation, particularly during the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Republic of Turkey. Within the Ottoman Millet system, these relations were structured by a hierarchical distinction within what can be described as the (*millet-i hâkime*) ruling community and (*millet-i mah-kûme*) subject community, which granted relative privilege to Sunni Muslim groups and positioned Armenians as a subordinated Christian population. From the nineteenth century onward, the spread of modern nationalist ideologies and the gradual disintegration of imperial authority destabilized this hierarchical order. Kurdish and Armenian political visions developed during a time of imperial decline, political fragmentation, and growing state violence. Changing alliances and state policies forced both groups to repeatedly adapt and redefine their political goals.

This article analyses the transformation of Kurdish–Armenian cooperation between the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and the 1930 Ağrı Uprising, contending that the alliance formed during this period was both necessary and fragile. Both movements experienced political and military isolation in the post-Ottoman context, confronted by the increasing power of the Ankara-centred Kemalist state and the indifference of the international system. In this environment, cooperation arose not from ideological alignment but as a strategic response to shared vulnerability. The Kurds provided demographic presence and military capacity, while the Armenians mobilized diasporic networks and diplomatic capital. This uneven distribution of resources resulted in an asymmetric alliance.

A key contribution of this study is its use of archival materials from the Dashnatsutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) archives in Boston, which have not previously been incorporated into academic literature. Correspondence between İhsan Nuri Pasha and Dashnak representatives during the resistance centred on Mount Ağrı reveals aspects of the alliance that extend beyond military coordination. These documents shed light on diplomatic initiatives, symbolic practices, and efforts at institutionalization, challenging the official Turkish historiographical narrative that has characterized the Ağrı movement as banditry. The Ağrı movement thus emerges as an institutional project with transnational aspirations and international references, rather than a purely local revolt.

The alliance's internal fragility was apparent from the outset, yet it also rested on a pragmatic and, in many respects, symbiotic logic. Kurdish and Armenian leaders recognized that, under the pressures of state violence, territorial dispossession, and diplomatic exclusion, mutual support could enhance their prospects of political survival and strengthen claims to collective rights. At the same time, weak economic infrastructure, fragmented tribal organization, uncertainty in the international balance of power, and the expanding coercive capacity of the modern state continued to

undermine the alliance's long-term sustainability. This relationship was not entirely symmetrical: Armenian political actors generally possessed stronger organizational networks, greater experience in transnational mobilization, and broader access to diasporic and great-power channels, which often placed them in a comparatively advantageous position vis-à-vis Kurdish intellectual and political elites. The 1930 Zilan Massacre and the subsequent siege of Mount Ağrı constituted decisive turning points, with significant military, psychological, and political consequences. By centring the perspectives of Kurdish and Armenian actors, this article reinterprets nation-building processes in the modern Middle East, positioning forced alliances, asymmetrical solidarities, symbiotic dependencies, and fragile partnerships as central analytical categories rather than peripheral phenomena.

1. The Eve of the Alliance

1.1. Violence and Mass Killings

Kurdish–Armenian geographical coexistence, present since antiquity, assumed a more structured form under traditional Islamic law, particularly during the Ayyubid and Mervanid periods, within the frameworks of *millet-i hâkime* (ruling community) and *millet-i mahkûme* (subject community) (Mansız, 2024, pp. 60–61). This hierarchical system conferred specific privileges on Sunni Kurdish groups, while Armenians experienced corresponding material and moral losses. Following the consolidation of the Ottoman–Kurdish alliance after 1514, Kurdish tribes, especially in rural Western Armenia, developed relationships with Armenian communities that by the eighteenth century increasingly resembled a vassal–serf structure (Bazîdî, 1979, p.35,38).

This balance shifted markedly in the first half of the nineteenth century, when Tanzimat-era sultans eliminated Kurdish emirs who had previously mediated between tribes and the Ottoman centre as part of broader state centralization efforts. The dissolution of these principalities produced a fragmented socio-political order marked by intensified competition among tribal, religious, and local powerholders. In this context, violence against Armenians increased in many districts, particularly under the growing influence of the Halidi sheikhs, as tribal structures were increasingly reorganized into networks of religious followers (Ulugana, 2022, pp. 90, 113). Yet these coercive transformations were not directed exclusively against Armenians. Kurdish peasants, as well as Turkmen and other Muslim rural populations living in the same region, were likewise subjected to exploitation, dispossession, and violence by newly empowered aghas, sheikhs, and beys. By the late nineteenth century, the establishment of the Hamidiye Regiments can be interpreted as a de facto reconstruction of the Kurdish principality structure that had previously been abolished de jure, reconstituting local authority through a new imperial-military framework (Örs, 2019, p. 45). Within this reordered system, incidents of looting, forced dis-

placement, abduction, and murder—often perpetrated with the partial knowledge, tolerance, or supervision of local Ottoman administrative and military officials—became both publicly visible and widely documented.

Simultaneously, the spread of European-centred nationalist movements in the Balkans, where Christian populations rejected the traditional Ottoman subject status and established nation-states, profoundly influenced the Armenian intelligentsia. This development redirected Armenian political expectations toward the Ottoman central government, known as *Dersaadet*. In this context, the formation of the Hamidiye Regiments marked a significant rupture in Kurdish–Armenian relations (Ter Minassian, 2012, pp.9-10). These regiments, composed primarily of Kurdish tribes, acted as local agents of violence and conducted pogroms against Armenians under orders from the central government.

Despite the violence associated with the Hamidiye, the Taşnaksutyun, or Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), founded in 1890, engaged in negotiations with certain Hamidiye Kurdish tribes, particularly in the Sason and Van regions. Building on earlier, limited attempts at local cooperation in the Kızılbaş Kurdish hinterland during the 1850s and 1860s, these negotiations represented a renewed effort to form an alliance. However, despite the ARF's promises and propaganda, Kurdish tribes generally declined to collaborate with Armenians against the Ottoman authorities, whom they referred to as “Rumi” (Ulugana, 2022, p. 23).

Subsequently, the ARF began to develop a “Kurdish policy,” though it remained incomplete and internally contested, resulting in two dominant positions. The neo-nationalist approach, associated with Antranik Ozinyan, advocated for the complete removal of Kurds, who, alongside Turks, had inflicted suffering on Armenians, from historical Western Armenia. In contrast, the faction led by Rouben Ter Minassian and Garo Sasunnian viewed Kurds as a related people who required liberation from ignorance and Turkish domination and transformation into a modern nation. From this perspective, Kurdish emancipation from state-induced cycles of violence was seen as essential for Armenian peace and security. Thus, a Kurdish–Armenian alliance against the Ottomans was envisioned as both inevitable and mutually liberating.

In this context, Kurdish societies established in Istanbul after the reinstatement of the Constitution and the reopening of parliament became important arenas for the articulation of cultural claims and collective self-definition, and some of these circles received support from the ARF (Ter Minassian, 1925, pp. 38–41). Rather than fully developed nationalist organizations in the later political sense, these associations may be more accurately understood as expressions of an early or pre-national phase of mobilisation, centred primarily on language, education, representation, and the recognition of Kurdish communal rights. Yet these aspirations remained institutionally limited. Kurdish nationhood did not crystallise into durable political structures, and these societies were unable to exert lasting influence over many Kurdish tribes.

Consequently, despite intermittent reductions in violence and continued efforts at persuasion, tribal violence against Armenians persisted (Ulugana, 2022, p. 57).

1.2 Common Diplomatic Front: The Sharif Pasha–Nubar Pasha Agreement

Contrary to claims frequently found in state-centred or nationalist interpretations of the Armenian mass killings, the reaya, or non-tribal settled population, appears in many local contexts to have participated more actively in the violence of 1915 than certain tribal groups. This pattern was shaped not only by ideological mobilisation and religious legitimisation, but also by material and socio-economic incentives. In numerous districts, the confiscation of Armenian agricultural land, houses, livestock, shops, and movable property created powerful motives for participation or complicity. The expectation that deported Armenians would not return, and that their assets could be redistributed locally, encouraged segments of the settled population to align themselves with the machinery of persecution. By contrast, a significant number of tribal forces had been deployed to the Caucasus front as so-called precautionary units, which altered the balance of actors involved in violence in some regions (Sasuni, October 1930, p. 136). Accordingly, anti-Armenian violence should be understood not solely through the lens of ethno-religious antagonism, but also as a process deeply entangled with opportunism, local competition, and the reallocation of wealth and property.

Turkish sources report that, in the months following the mass killings, thousands of Kurds were killed in a military offensive described as revenge, conducted by Armenian volunteer battalions affiliated with the ARF and by Russian Cossack regiments in the provinces of Van and Erzurum. This campaign has subsequently been used to support the mutual killing thesis that continues to influence official Turkish historiography (Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001, pp. 20–136). From the Armenian perspective, however, this operation is viewed not as a campaign of revenge but as a retaliatory response to the killing of approximately four thousand Armenians who had evacuated Van and were attacked in the Begirî–Muradiye area (Sasuni, October 1930, p. 139).

By 1917, the ARF had established a strong military alliance with Yezidi Kurdish tribes in the Van region and, during the ongoing war, made renewed attempts to engage Sunni Kurdish tribes. These initiatives coincided with the expansion of the Kemalist movement into Kurdish–Armenian regions, where it emerged as a significant barrier to the formation of a Kurdish–Armenian alliance. In this context, the Kemalist movement’s most effective propaganda tool was the concept of a mass killings debt (Selek, 1999, pp. 141–142). The assertion that Armenians would seek revenge against tribes involved in the mass killings was quickly internalized among many tribal groups. Simultaneously, the newly established Armenian state centred in Yerevan, which included the northeastern borderlands of Erzurum province, contained a substantial Muslim Kurdish population. The Armenian government’s reliance on

the victorious Western powers, combined with its distrust of and indifference toward this Kurdish population, inadvertently facilitated Kemalist efforts to prevent rapprochement (Sasuni, November 1930, p. 85).

On 20 November 1919, Sherif Pasha, representing the Kurdish delegation, and Bogos Nubar Pasha with Dr. H. Ohancanyan, representing the Armenian delegation, prepared a joint declaration and agreed to participate jointly in the Paris Peace Conference. This declaration serves as a significant historical record of the diplomatic initiatives undertaken by Kurdish and Armenian political elites during 1919–1920, as well as the limitations they faced. Signed in Paris, the Armenian–Kurdish joint declaration symbolically articulated a shared sense of destiny and a mutual aspiration for national independence. It expressed a desire to escape the oppression of the Unionist regime and advanced demands for the establishment of independent states under Western protection. By advocating a common diplomatic front, the declaration sought to convey a strong message to both the international community and Turkish political actors (Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) Archives, 20 November 1919).

The emphasis on the “Aryan race” in the declaration was not solely a biological or ethnological classification but also a strategic appeal to the diplomatic language of the era. Race-based classifications prevalent in early twentieth-century European politics and scholarship, particularly the category of Indo-European (Aryan) peoples, were closely linked to claims of modernity, civilization, and proximity to the West (Elhan, 2019, p. 19). Within this context, defining Armenians and Kurds as Aryan distinguished them from Turkishness, which was characterized as Eastern in the dominant Ottoman discourse, and positioned them higher within what was then perceived as a hierarchy of civilizations. For Armenians, this claim aligned with an existing narrative connecting Christianity to Western values, while for Kurds, it served as a means of gaining visibility and recognition in the modern diplomatic sphere (ARF Archives (A), n.d.).

The primary audience for the declaration was the delegates of the Paris Peace Conference, particularly representatives of Western powers such as France, Britain, and the United States. In the colonial imagination of these actors, Aryan identity was associated with peoples considered civilizable or predisposed to civilization. The invocation of Aryan identity was therefore intended to present both Armenians and Kurds as deserving of support, progressive, and entitled to nationalist claims. The alliance was framed not only as a temporary political arrangement but also as a partnership grounded in historical, cultural, and racial terms. However, this discourse obscured significant internal differences and contradictions. Attacks by Kurdish tribes aligned with the Kemalist army against Armenians persisted, both along the borders of the Republic of Armenia and in interior regions such as Cilicia (Nubar Library Archives, 15 May 1920).

Sherif Pasha acted primarily on his own initiative and on behalf of the Istanbul-based Kurdish Teali Society, without election or formal mandate from Kurdish tribes or broader intellectual circles. This situation highlighted the limited institutionalization and heterogeneous nature of the Kurdish national movement at the time (Meclisi Mebusan, p. 208). In contrast, despite greater political experience and prior engagement with statehood, Armenian actors also failed to achieve unity between diaspora leadership and state representation (ARF Archives, 20 February 1920). These tensions reflected the multi-centred and internally contradictory character of the Armenian national project. Following the agreement, Armen Garo's criticism of Bogos Nubar and Ohancanyan underscored deep disagreements within Armenian political circles regarding territorial claims. The continued advocacy for an "Armenia from sea to sea" as an inalienable right revealed the conflict between pragmatic and maximalist approaches within Armenian nationalism (Nubar Library Archives, 30 April 1920).

Sherif Pasha's subsequent withdrawal from the Kurdish delegation and his rejection of the agreement further highlighted the instability and fragmentation of Kurdish diplomatic initiatives. The Kurdish national movement's inability to develop a unified discourse and address issues of representation limited its effectiveness as a diplomatic actor during this period. The Treaty of Sèvres, which granted independence to Armenia and defined borders through Wilsonian arbitration, was addressed in detail in the declaration. These borders, which included Western Armenia, demonstrated the central role of the great powers in shaping the post-war order. Similarly, Articles 62, 63, and 64 envisaged autonomy or independence for the Kurds, yet the Kurdish side lacked the institutional capacity to implement these provisions (Budak, 2002, p. 837).

Although the Treaty of Sèvres envisioned the creation of multiple ethno-religious states in former Ottoman territories, the Kemalist movement that emerged in Anatolia effectively rendered this vision obsolete. This abrupt geopolitical shift created profound strategic uncertainty for both Armenian and Kurdish political circles, each of which had been allocated a place within the Sèvres framework. The Ankara government capitalized on this uncertainty. The ultimatum issued on 24 June 1920 by Bekir Sami, foreign minister of the Kemalist administration, accused the Armenians of serving as "a tool of British imperialism" (ARF Archives, 24 June 1920). Ankara further sought to legitimize its claims by referencing the Brest-Litovsk and Batum treaties. In response, the Yerevan government's reply of 30 June 1920 asserted that military actions targeted "anarchist elements" and emphasized that equal rights were granted to the Muslim population (ARF Archives, 30 June 1920).

In the subsequent years, the Kars war, during which İhsan Nuri—later a significant figure in renewed Kurdish–Armenian relations—fought on the Turkish side as a captain, decisively altered the balance of power (Ulugana, 2023, pp. 10–11). Mustafa

Kemal Pasha's telegram to Kazım Karabekir on 31 October 1920, announcing the fall of Kars, marked the conclusion of this diplomatic confrontation. This military victory decisively shifted the balance on the Eastern Front in Ankara's favour and brought the Dashnaksutyun administration to the brink of collapse (ARF Archives, 31 October 1920). The rapid Armenian defeat, however, cannot be explained solely by battlefield developments. It was also conditioned by severe structural asymmetries in international support. Unlike Greece in Western Anatolia, which benefited from substantial diplomatic backing, military assistance, and political legitimacy from the major Western powers, the Armenian Republic received no comparable and sustained external support at this critical moment. Isolated diplomatically, exhausted by war, burdened by large refugee populations, and facing acute economic and military constraints, Yerevan was far less capable of sustaining prolonged resistance. In this context, Ahmet Muhtar Bey's peace proposal to Yerevan in November 1920, presented by the victorious side and including provisions on minority rights and a referendum, ultimately confirmed Ankara's diplomatic as well as military dominance (ARF Archives, 8 November 1920).

2. A Period of Enforced Silence

2.1. Strategic Realignment

Between 1921 and 1924, Kurdish–Armenian relations experienced a period of enforced silence. This phase did not indicate a total cessation of communication, but rather a strategic pause necessitated by significant geopolitical changes. Key developments during this time fundamentally altered the political context. The Sovietisation of Armenia resulted in the Dashnaksutyun losing its base in Yerevan and continuing its activities in the diaspora, which significantly limited its operational capacity and resources (Nubar Library Archives, 8 December 1920). Concurrently, the Ankara government consolidated its authority domestically and internationally through the Battle of Sakarya and the Great Offensive, culminating in formal recognition via the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (Bayrak, 2023, pp. 997–1004). This consolidation greatly restricted opportunities for opposition movements. After the suppression of the Koçgiri Uprising in 1921, the central Kurdish organization, the Ligue Kurde¹, also relocated abroad (Aytepe, 1998, p.336). Collectively, these developments established structural barriers to substantive contact between Kurdish and Armenian political actors during this period.

1 A group that split from the Kurdish Advancement Society (Kürd Teali Cemiyeti) established a new organisation in 1920 under the name the Ligue Kurde (Kürd Teşkilat-ı İçtimaiye Cemiyeti) . Among its founders were several prominent Kurdish intellectuals and political figures of the period, including Ferit Bedirhan, Şükrü Baban, Fuat Baban, Hikmet Baban, Dr Abdullah Cevdet, Dr Şükrü Mehmed Sekban, Bitlisli Kemal Fevzi, Ekrem Cemil Paşa, Kerküklü Necmeddin Hüseyin, Mevlanzade Rıfat, and Memduh Selim Bey. Following this split, *Jîn* began to be published from its twenty-first issue onward in newspaper format under the responsible editorship of Memduh Selim, serving as the official organ of the Ligue Kurde. See: Cemil Paşa, K. (1991). *Doza Kurdistan: Kürd milletinin 60 yıllık esaretten kurtuluş savaşı hatıraları* (p. 61). Ankara: Özge Yayınları.

During this interval, both parties were largely unable to communicate and were compelled to address internal challenges while facing mounting pressure from Ankara. The resulting silence should be interpreted not as the end of their relationship, but as a suspension imposed by external circumstances. This period of suspension concluded in autumn 1924, when a twenty-three-article agreement, designated as “secret,” was signed by Kurdish and Armenian representatives in the diaspora. Finalized in Beirut on 16 November 1924, the agreement was established between the Armenian Revolutionary Party (Dashnaktsutyun) and the Kurdish Social Society (Ligue Kurde) (Sasuni, November 1930, p. 93). It formally documented both movements’ commitment to national independence and their intention to pursue a coordinated struggle against the Republic of Turkey (ARF Archives, 16 November 1924).

The initial five articles of the agreement addressed mutual recognition of the right to independence for Armenia and Kurdistan, the delineation of borders, and future political arrangements. These provisions reflected the broader discourse of national self-determination that gained prominence following the Wilsonian principles. The 1924 Beirut Secret Agreement, comprising twenty-three articles, established a comprehensive framework that extended beyond immediate military cooperation to encompass long-term economic, cultural, and institutional arrangements. The independence clauses articulated a shared normative foundation based on the right of nations to self-determination. Both movements sought to reinforce their respective claims by legitimizing each other’s national aspirations — a dynamic I term “double legitimacy,” whereby mutual recognition simultaneously validated each movement’s community and its political objectives.

The identification of the Republic of Turkey as a common adversary intensified military interdependence between the two movements. Simultaneously, the functional division of labour within the alliance, with Kurds primarily active locally and Armenians engaged internationally, introduced vulnerabilities that became increasingly evident. This asymmetric alliance proved challenging to maintain. The agreement’s focus on diaspora mobilization and propaganda highlighted the critical role of transnational networks as essential resources for national movements and the development of statehood aspirations. It was generally assumed that the Armenian diaspora’s political and organizational capacity would complement the Kurds’ local demographic presence.

The economic and institutional provisions in Article 19 further demonstrated that political actors lacking statehood could nonetheless articulate financial and constitutional frameworks for the future. In this context, the modern nation-state emerged not only as a political goal but also as a conceptual and anticipated structure. Consequently, the secret 1924 Beirut Agreement can be viewed as a proto-diplomatic document. Although neither party held state sovereignty, both adopted the language and formal conventions of international law, anticipating mutual obliga-

tions and institutional mechanisms. This approach reflected a broader pursuit of legitimacy in the international arena. However, the agreement's weaknesses were also apparent. Its secrecy, unresolved representation issues, dependence on external support, and flexible termination clauses all compromised its durability. In subsequent years, neither a widespread Kurdish uprising occurred as envisioned, nor did enduring institutional unity develop between the two movements.

2.2. New Endeavors and New Hopes

Between 1924 and 1925, İhsan Nuri became a central figure in both the military and political aspects of Kurdish–Armenian cooperation. His career is essential for understanding the transition from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire to the establishment of the Republic, and subsequently to the development of a modern resistance base near Mount Ararat. After graduating from the Military Academy in 1910, İhsan Nuri served as an officer in the Ottoman army in various regions. He actively participated in suppressing uprisings in Albania, the Arab provinces, and the Balkans, and further developed his military discipline on the Caucasian Front during the First World War. This period was also significant in the gradual development of his Kurdish political consciousness.

After returning to Istanbul following the war, İhsan Nuri established connections with Kurdish intellectuals such as Memduh Selim and Kemal Fevzi and began publishing articles in the newspaper *Jîn*. At this stage, he primarily identified as an Ottoman officer rather than as a leader of the Kurdish national movement (İhsan Nuri, n.d., p. 9). This dual orientation, simultaneously moving toward Kurdish national consciousness while remaining committed to Ottoman military traditions, continued to influence his political actions in subsequent years. In his writings referencing the Wilsonian principles, he advocated for Kurdish self-determination while also supporting Mustafa Kemal's movement in Anatolia. This tension exemplified a broader contradiction within the Kurdish movement of the 1920s, which was divided between a statist–militarist legacy from the Ottoman era and a growing aspiration for national liberation.

The Beytüşşebap Uprising of 1924 marked a decisive turning point in İhsan Nuri's political trajectory. Organized by the Azadi organization under the leadership of Cibranlı Halit Bey, the uprising was primarily coordinated by Kurdish officers within the army. İhsan Nuri participated alongside Hurşid, Tevfik, and Rasim Bey. Contemporary documents indicate that the rebellion had a significant impact within military circles, resulting in accusations of “treason” against officers previously associated with the Special Organisation (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*) (BCA, 12/13 September 1924). However, the uprising failed due to the reluctance of local tribes to provide support. The group of “rebellious Kurdish officers” was quickly defeated and forced to escape through Syria to Iraq.

Although the British Mandate administration offered İhsan Nuri positions in the Iraqi army, he declined, asserting his commitment to fighting for Kurdish free-

dom rather than serving British interests (İhsan Nuri, n.d., pp. 21–22). This stance demonstrates his pragmatic yet nationalist orientation, emphasizing Kurdish political agency over collaboration with imperial powers. The Beytüşşebap experience had two significant consequences for the Kurdish movement. First, it highlighted the importance of military expertise and the central role of modern officers in organizing uprisings. Second, the failure of early revolts initiated debates about “premature uprisings,” leading to a more cautious approach among both the Kurdish Social Society and Taşnaksutyun cadres. The focus shifted from supporting poorly prepared rebellions to planning broad-based and carefully coordinated general uprisings. This strategic perspective also influenced the subsequent direction of Kurdish–Armenian cooperation.

After Beytüşşebap, connections established with the diaspora through Iraq and Iran further reinforced the foundations for Kurdish–Armenian collaboration. Documentary evidence shows that a “unity agreement” was reached between Kurdish and Armenian representatives during meetings with Taşnaksutyun representative Leon Pasha in Baghdad after 1925, continuing the trajectory set by the 1924 Beirut Secret Agreement (İhsan Nuri, n.d., p. 40; ARF Archives, 30 December 1925). Following the suppression of the Sheikh Said Rebellion, many Kurdish leaders sought refuge in Iran and Iraq. During this period, Dashnaksutyun increasingly emerged as a reliable ally by supporting Kurdish groups in and around Tabriz. For the Kurds, Armenians provided not only material resources but also access to international legitimacy through extensive diaspora networks in Europe and North America. For Armenians, the Kurdish movement was viewed as a potential “military force multiplier” for their own independence aspirations (ARF Archives, 5 February 1926).

In the fragmented territories claimed by Armenian political actors after 1915, it was widely acknowledged that independence was unattainable without Kurdish support, especially in the six provinces known as vilayat-ı sitte, which were ethnically mixed and subject to competing Armenian, Kurdish, and Ottoman claims.

Cooperation developed at the intersection of mutual interests. This relationship is best described as an “asymmetric alliance.” The Kurds contributed demographic presence and military capacity, while the Armenians provided diaspora influence and international connections (ARF Archives, 17 June 1927). This asymmetry fostered complementarity and interdependence: the Kurds depended on Armenians for international recognition, while Armenians relied on Kurdish military strength (ARF Archives, 2 November 1926).

As a result, İhsan Nuri’s political development and the experience of Beytüşşebap established the military and political foundations for the Kurdish–Armenian alliance that later crystallized in the Ağrı region between 1927 and 1930. This process marked the point at which both Kurdish and Armenian movements began to operate as complementary strategic actors within a broader phase of nation-building.

3. Institutionalization of the Kurdish–Armenian Joint Resistance on Mount Ağrı

3.1. National Assembly, Republic, and Flag

Although İhsan Nuri Pasha consistently stressed the importance of documentary evidence in his memoirs, he also recognized the limitations of his memory, stating: “When I left Ağrı, all my papers and notes remained there. That is why I have forgotten many things and cannot recall them” (İhsan Nuri, n.d., p. 62). Despite this loss, the Dashnaktsutyun meticulously preserved the original documents and copies of the reports and correspondence to which he referred. The correspondence between Dashnaktsutyun representatives in Iran and the central organization of Hoybun on Mount Ararat spans the years 1927 to 1930. This period coincided with the height of clashes between Kurdish forces in Ağrı and the regular army, including its subordinate militia units, as well as the peak of civilian massacres perpetrated by these forces.

Since the historiography of the Ağrı Uprising has predominantly relied on official state sources, the reports authored by Hoybun’s Extraordinary Commissioner, İhsan Nuri (using the codename “Cemşit”), provide a distinct perspective. These reports contextualize the uprising within a modern political and organizational framework. As Isaiah Berlin famously argued, history should not consist solely of the triumph of the victor, but also include the story of the defeated (Carr, 2018, p. 17). In a similar vein, an African proverb reminds us that until lions write their own history, the tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunters.

Accordingly, these documents, nearly a century later, restore the Kurdish actors of Ağrı—previously depicted solely as the defeated—into the historical account of the uprising.

The reports offer substantial empirical evidence for analysing the organisational structure of the Ağrı resistance, its internal dynamics, institutional connections with Hoybun, and efforts to establish diplomatic relations with Iran and European states. In contrast to contemporary Turkish press portrayals—which depicted insurgents as “savages” or compared them to “Native Americans”—the leadership of the mountain republic attempted to construct institutions associated with modern statehood, including a telephone network, a printing press, a newspaper, and plans to obtain radio equipment, then considered advanced technology. The supply lists compiled by the insurgent command likewise reveal efforts to sustain both military and administrative functions, containing items such as medals inscribed “Ağrı Assembly,” flags, uniform insignia, telephone cables, batteries, photographic chemicals, tincture of iodine, glycerine, alcohol, and various consumer goods (ARF Archives, 16 April 1930). Yet these initiatives remained limited in scale and effectiveness. The rebellion continued to suffer from weak communication and transportation infrastructure, inadequate material resources, the incomplete development of national conscious-

ness, and a level of institutionalisation insufficient to meet the political and military demands of the period—factors that significantly contributed to its eventual defeat. İhsan Nuri's arrival in Ağrı in September 1927, despite the reservations of the newly established Hoybun, transformed local tribal resistance into a political initiative (ARF Archives, 31 August 1927; 1 September 1927). Tribal conflicts, previously regarded as judicial or local disputes, were redefined as components of a national liberation movement (Vakit, 22 July 1930, p. 1). Within this context, a National Assembly of thirteen members was formed on 21 November 1927, predominantly composed of tribal leaders. Biroyê Heskê Têlî was appointed president, İhsan Nuri became minister of war, and Seyit Abdulvahap was responsible for religious affairs (ARF Archives, 15 December 1927). This structure operated as a transitional regime, drawing parallels to both the Ottoman Meclis-i Mebusan and the Grand National Assembly established in Ankara after 1923. In contrast to Mustafa Kemal's centralized leadership model, the Kurdish movement adopted a collective leadership approach to balance tribal interests rather than consolidating authority in a single individual. While this strategy increased social legitimacy, it also led to fragmentation and complicated decision-making.

After the formation of the Ağrı Assembly, the “Ağrı Kurdistan Republic” was declared (ARF Archives, 15 December 1927). Documentary evidence indicates that both the Kurdish term *Civîna Agirî Kurdistan* and the French term “*République kurde d'Ararat*” appeared in official communications, highlighting the movement's dual local and international orientation (ARF Archives, 27 November 1927). Armenian cadres played a direct and significant role in this process. Individuals such as Ardeşir Muradyan (Zilan Bey), Kara Vahan (Vali/Veli Bey), and Baron Apram (İbrahim) were present in the Ağrı region, providing logistical, military, and diplomatic support, while Rupen Ter Minasyan, serving as representative in Iran, managed foreign relations (ARF Archives, 27 May 1930). These developments illustrate that an uprising previously labeled in official historiography as a “bandit movement” was, in reality, evolved into an institutionalized political project.

Armenian involvement in the Ağrı uprising also held significant symbolic importance. It signaled to the international community that the Kurds were not acting alone, as Dashnaktsutyun, the most established political organization among neighbouring peoples, supported their efforts. This alliance increased the Kurdish movement's visibility in the international press and enabled Armenian political actors to position their aspirations for independence within a broader strategic context.

A particularly revealing aspect of Kurdish–Armenian cooperation involved debates over national symbols, especially the flag. Hoybun's founding members supported adopting the tricolour flag (red, white, and green) designed in Istanbul in 1920, which had been presented to European states and was considered the “official” Kurdish flag. (ARF Archives, 21 January 1928). In contrast, İhsan Nuri pro-

posed a black flag featuring a white sun with radiating rays and religious motifs. He interpreted black as symbolizing the dire condition of the Kurdish people, while the sun's rays signified future victory. By including verses from the Qur'an and hadiths, he aimed to garner support from tribal and religious groups (ARF Archives, 15 December 1927). By 1930, Turkish newspapers reported that resistance fighters were using a green flag inscribed with verses from Surat al-Fath and hadiths (Vakit, 1930, July 25, p. 1; Anadolu, 1930, July 25, p. 1). This diversity reflected a broader tension in constructing national symbols: whether to adopt a modern, secular emblem or one rooted in religious legitimacy. The flag debate thus mirrored ideological differences between the headquarters on Mount Ararat, which prioritized religious mobilization, and the Hoybun leadership, which favoured secular, modern symbolism.

Hoybun's central leadership, however, maintained a cautious distance from the republic declared in Ağrı (ARF Archives, 5 March 1928). They believed that a premature declaration of statehood could provoke increased Turkish repression and weaken international support (ARF Archives (B), n.d.). In correspondence with İhsan Nuri, Memduh Selim advocated postponing the uprising and aligning actions with Hoybun's strategic framework (ARF Archives, 24 February 1928). The issue of Iran further exacerbated internal divisions. Hoybun cadres generally regarded Iran as a "natural ally," influenced by concepts of Aryan nation, while İhsan Nuri envisioned a broader front involving simultaneous resistance against Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. Partly influenced by Dashnaktsutyun, Hoybun rejected this broader approach and insisted on prioritizing Turkey (ARF Archives, 5 March 1928; *Vakit*, 20 August 1930, p. 2.).

In summary, the developments in Ağrı can be understood as an "attempt at statehood" within the framework of nationalism theories, where the creation of institutional structures is a key component of nation-building. The establishment of a National Assembly, ministries, a printing press, a telephone network, and the vigorous debates over flags all suggest that the Kurdish-Armenian alliance was moving toward this objective. Simultaneously, the process highlights the significance of symbols within an ethno-symbolist perspective.² Mount Ararat served both as a symbol of freedom for the Kurds and as the sacred Ararat of Greater Armenia for Armenians. The flag debates reflected efforts to translate this complex symbolism into the discourse of modern politics.

2 The ethno-symbolic approach argues that modern nations are not entirely "invented" formations of the modern era; rather, they are rooted in earlier ethnic communities (*ethnie*), collective memories, myths, symbols, shared historical narratives, sacred sites, and common cultural attachments. According to this view, nationalism may be a modern political ideology, yet its success depends on its capacity to mobilise symbolic resources inherited from the past. In other words, nations acquire their political form in the modern age, while the cultural materials that make them possible often derive from pre-modern periods. See Ertan, T. F., & Örs, O. (2018). *Milliyetçiliğin müphemliği: Milliyetçilik nedir? Atatürk Yolu Dergisi*, 62, 39–84.

3.2. Financing, Amnesty Legislation, and Plunder: The Economic Vulnerability of the Alliance

A primary weakness of the Kurdish–Armenian alliance was the fragility of its economic infrastructure. While the military and political aspects of the uprising became increasingly institutionalised, this process remained unsustainable without a resolution to the financing problem. Documentary evidence demonstrates that the outcome of the resistance in Ağrı was largely determined by Hoybun’s inability to meet its financial obligations and the resulting social consequences.

Beginning in 1927, nearly all reports from İhsan Nuri to Hoybun headquarters included repeated appeals for material assistance (ARF Archives, 29 September 1927). However, Hoybun was unable to provide the necessary support, largely because resources were diverted to organizational activities in Lebanon and Syria. Documentary records indicate that only “fifty Ottoman gold coins” were sent, with the expectation that remaining needs would be met locally in the “Ararat neighborhood” (ARF Archives, 21 January 1928). This strategy significantly undermined the morale of the fighters, as the sustainability of the uprising relied on a consistent supply of ammunition, food, clothing, and communication equipment (ARF Archives, 10 October 1928). While Hoybun’s central leadership, particularly the Bedirhani family, prioritised diplomatic and foreign relations, local actors in Ağrı viewed material support as essential for survival. İhsan Nuri’s strongly worded letter to Memduh Selim in October 1928 underscored this frustration, warning that Hoybun’s neglect could precipitate the collapse of the resistance in Ağrı (ARF Archives, 8 October 1928).

To address these financial challenges, a compulsory taxation system called *avariz* was introduced, requiring each household to contribute according to its capacity, with proceeds directed to the resistance (ARF Archives, 14 August 1928). This initiative coincided with the Republican government’s proclamation of an Amnesty Law on 9 May 1928, which hastened the disintegration of the mountain uprising. Prominent individuals such as Sheikh Abdülkadir took advantage of the amnesty and returned to their villages, and clans from the Sakan and Kotan tribes—early supporters of the Ağrı headquarters—also withdrew from the resistance (ARF Archives 24 April 1928). While İhsan Nuri extended privileges to influential tribal leaders (ARF Archives, 19 June 1928), the surrender of ordinary fighters was classified as “treason” and met with capital punishment, resulting in the implementation of strict internal disciplinary measures. The growing number of amnesty beneficiaries ultimately undermined the social legitimacy of the resistance (ARF Archives, 21 January 1928).

Positioned between the state’s assurances and Hoybun’s failure to provide material support, many Kurdish tribes faced a significant dilemma. As Hoybun’s promised funding did not materialize, resistance fighters in Ağrı increasingly resorted to looting, a practice they had initially sought to avoid (ARF Archives, 25 November

1930). Although looting was familiar within Kurdish tribal culture, it conflicted with the movement's stated objective of establishing a modern state. İhsan Nuri opposed such actions and, according to documentary evidence, "tried to avoid it as much as possible." Nevertheless, escalating desperation compelled the resistance to adopt these measures, intensifying the tension between the uprising's modern national ambitions and traditional tribal customs (ARF Archives, 2 September 1928).

Simultaneously, internal divisions intensified as certain tribal leaders prioritized personal interests, exploiting Hoybun's vulnerabilities. Individuals such as Ferzende Bey and Halis Bey corresponded with the Dashnaksutyun, accusing İhsan Nuri of being a leader who "thought only of his own interests," in an attempt to diminish his authority. This factionalism further weakened the cohesion of the Ağrı resistance (ARF Archives, 5 April 1930).

Contrary to initial expectations, the Armenian Dashnaksutyun did not provide substantial or consistent funding. While some financial assistance was delivered through diaspora networks, this support was sporadic and unsystematic. The Armenians' principal contributions were in logistics and diplomacy, including maintaining postal networks in Iran, conducting propaganda in Beirut, and lobbying in Europe. For Kurdish cadres, this dynamic reinforced their reliance on Armenian support, as even limited aid could prove decisive in times of scarcity. Simultaneously, it accentuated the asymmetrical character of the alliance: the Kurds shouldered the material and human burdens locally, while the Armenians provided strategic guidance through international activities (ARF Archives, 21 December 1929).

In the end, neither Hoybun nor the Dashnaksutyun established an effective system for mobilising resources. The movement's sustainability required not only ideological commitment but also the capacity to secure material support. The vulnerability of the Ağrı uprising became most apparent at this juncture. As resistance costs rose and resources diminished, participation declined. This structural deficiency directly weakened the military and political effectiveness of the Kurdish-Armenian alliance. Consequently, a movement aspiring to establish a modern Kurdish republic was forced to adopt traditional survival strategies, a contradiction that undermined both its internal cohesion and international legitimacy.

3.3. The Zilan Massacre and the Systematic Application of Air Power: The Decisive Fracture in the Alliance

The summer of 1930 represented a pivotal moment in the Ağrı Uprising. Attacks along the Erciş and Zilan lines heightened concerns that the uprising could extend toward the Lake Van region. However, this potential expansion was countered by systematic operations conducted by the Turkish army. The Zilan Valley was specifically targeted due to its strategic significance and dense civilian population. State forces targeted civilian populations, undermining the uprising's social foundation. By late June, the Ninth Corps had completely encircled the area (ARF Archives, 2 July 1930).

During this period, local Hoybun branches pursued external support through Rupen Ter Minasyan (ARF Archives, 19 June 1930). Appeals were submitted to the League of Nations and the Socialist International, but these efforts yielded no tangible outcomes (ARF Archives, 14 July 1930). Consequently, the Kurdish–Armenian alliance remained isolated within the international arena. The Zilan massacre was rendered particularly decisive by the systematic and intensive deployment of air power. Archival records and contemporary press accounts document that aircraft bombarded the region for several days, resulting in the destruction of entire villages (Anadolu, 13 July 1930, p. 1). This campaign led not only to military defeat but also to a significant psychological collapse. As İhsan Nuri reported, “everyone was concerned above all with protecting their families and children” (ARF Archives, 25 November 1930). Aerial bombardment constituted a form of violence that surpassed the boundaries of traditional tribal warfare. While Kurdish resistance had historically benefited from mountainous terrain, the advent of a modern air fleet eliminated this strategic advantage (Esat Mahmut, 1930, July 17, p. 1).

The violence in Zilan targeted both resistance fighters and civilians. Thousands of individuals were killed, and numerous villages were destroyed (Hizmet, 18 July 1930, p.1). Contemporary testimonies indicate that the killing of women, children, and infants—many with bayonets—intensified the atrocity of the massacre. For Kurdish survivors, these events evoked strong associations with the Armenian mass killings. Rupen Ter Minasyan explicitly underscored this parallel in his appeals to the League of Nations, characterizing the violence against Kurds as a continuation of the destruction experienced by Armenians in 1915. Thus, the Kurdish–Armenian alliance increasingly assumed the character of an “alliance of victims.” (ARF Archives, 14 July 1930). Following the Zilan massacre, the alliance’s resistance cadres in the field experienced a significant moral setback. Prior to this event, fighters in Ağrı had maintained a sense of psychological superiority. The republic established at the mountain’s base, with its printing press, telephone network, and flag, had conveyed an image of political authority. The mass killings in Zilan and the unprecedented scale of aerial bombardment irreparably damaged this perception.

At this critical juncture, the Dashnaktsutyun attempted to intervene with greater urgency. In communications to the Ağrı headquarters, Rupen Ter Minasyan asserted that “external support would certainly be provided” emphasizing lobbying efforts by the Armenian diaspora (ARF Archives, 14 July 1930). However, for Kurdish fighters in the field, these assurances appeared increasingly unattainable. Their most immediate and urgent requirement was ammunition.

Concurrent with the Zilan massacre, negotiations between Iran and Turkey reached a decisive resolution (ARF Archives, 5 June 1930). Iran transferred the portion of Mount Ağrı within its borders to Turkey, thereby severing the logistical corridor that had supported the resistance (*Milliyet*, 14 July 1930, p. 1). This de-

velopment critically undermined the geographical basis of the uprising. İhsan Nuri described the decision as “a conspiracy by Iranian Azeri officials influenced by Turanism, who rejected their Aryan identity” (ARF Archives, 27 May 1930). In contrast, Hoybun cadres adopted a more cautious perspective, stressing the importance of avoiding direct confrontation with Iran. Regardless of interpretation, the result was unequivocal: the resistance in Ağrı became completely isolated, both geographically and strategically.

3.4. The Siege of Mount Ağrı and the End of the Uprising

During the summer and autumn of 1930, the joint Kurdish–Armenian resistance on Mount Ararat faced its final challenge. After the Zilan massacre, the resistance lost its moral authority and became geographically isolated due to agreements with Iran. In this context, the Turkish army initiated the Third Ararat Campaign. On 6 September, approximately 18,000 troops, supported by dozens of aircraft, advanced on Ağrı (Turkish General Staff, 1992, Vol. 1, pp. 121–128). This offensive demonstrated not only numerical superiority but also the deployment of nearly all of Turkey’s modern military technology (*Vakit*, July 29, 1930, p. 4).

Correspondence between Hoybun and the resistance forces in Ağrı during this period indicates that propaganda and morale-building became as essential as logistical and military support. İhsan Nuri Pasha’s repeated requests for “only ammunition” under siege conditions highlighted that the sustainability of armed resistance relied primarily on a continuous supply of ammunition. In contrast, a letter from Kamuran Ali Bedirhan, Hoybun’s Foreign Relations Representative, served mainly as morale-building discourse. The letter included claims that did not reflect the actual situation. Minor initiatives along the Iraq and Syria borders were portrayed as evidence of a “large-scale uprising,” and it was asserted that coordinated resistance had begun in Oramar, Botan, Heverkan, Mazi Mountain, Sason, Viranşehir, Urfa, and Dersim. This rhetoric aimed to project unity and solidarity to the besieged forces in Ağrı. The explicit mention of prominent tribal leaders and members of the Bedirhan family in this correspondence functioned as a strategy to establish authority and legitimacy. Declaring İhsan Nuri Pasha as “commander-in-chief of all Kurdish forces” was not solely a military appointment but also a symbolic gesture intended to present the uprising as an internationally recognized resistance (ARF Archives, 3 August 1930).

However, actual developments did not support this rhetoric. The only initiative that materialized was the siege of Barzani in Oramar, which collapsed under aerial bombardment (*Vakit*, July 29, 1930, p. 4). Other planned actions either failed or were not executed. Thus, Kamuran Ali Bedirhan’s letter served more to maintain morale than to outline military strategy.

This situation reveals two structural issues. First, Hoybun’s diaspora-focused organization, largely shaped by the Bedirhanis, often remained disconnected from conditions on the ground and produced discourse primarily aimed at moral encour-

agement. Second, during the intensive air and ground operations by the Turkish army in the summer of 1930, the Bedirhanis adopted a strategy that concealed the resistance's limited logistical capacity and weak coordination in Ağrı. The Bedirhanis were also tasked with expanding diplomatic relations with Iran, but this effort was unsuccessful. As previously noted, Iran's stance was decisive in tightening the siege. The Iranian state not only ceded its portion of Mount Ağrı to Turkey but also allowed Turkish forces to cross its borders, resulting in the resistance being attacked from an unexpected direction (İhsan Nuri, n.d., p. 88).

In contrast to the rhetoric of an "Aryan–Iranian peoples" alliance, this encirclement revealed the geopolitical limitations of the Kurdish–Armenian alliance. Iran was unwilling to engage in direct military confrontation with Turkey. This development significantly undermined the strategic narrative of a "Kurdish–Persian–Armenian Aryan union" advanced by the Hoybun Central Organization and the Dashnaktsutyun (ARF Archives, 5 June 1930).

Reports document the testimonies regarding the severe conditions of the siege. The killing of women and infants with bayonets, the destruction of villages by bombardment, and the total depletion of ammunition indicated the collapse of the resistance in Ağrı (ARF Archives, 11 October 1930). On the night of 12 September, a decisive plan was made: the siege would be broken, and the fighters would cross into Iran in two groups. İhsan Nuri and part of his staff, along with their families, sought refuge in Iran (ARF Archives, 25 November 1930), while the second group, led by Biroyê Heskê Têlî, retreated through the Axorik Valley (İhsan Nuri, n. d., p. 79).

This outcome represented a military defeat. However, as İhsan Nuri emphasized in his writings, the defeat should be seen as "a national spirit that breaks its dam like water" (İhsan Nuri, n.d., p.81). He argued that the loss at Mount Ararat would not halt the broader Kurdish pursuit of freedom. Ultimately, the Siege of Mount Ararat signaled the collapse of the Kurdish–Armenian alliance on the battlefield, but it did not end relations between the two groups. Instead, it established a foundation for renewed solidarity in later years. The siege thus became both a defeat and a legacy, serving as a memory space where shared victimhood was transformed into lasting political capital within Kurdish and Armenian national narratives.

Conclusion

This study re-examines Kurdish–Armenian relations during the transition from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire to the consolidation of the early Turkish Republic, focusing on the concept of a "necessary alliance." Its principal contribution is the systematic use of Dashnaktsutyun archival materials previously unavailable to academic research. These sources shed light on diplomatic correspondence, military coordination, and everyday practices of cooperation between Kurdish and Armenian actors from the 1919 Paris Peace Conference to the suppression of the 1930

Ağrı Uprising, thereby highlighting perspectives often marginalized by state-centred historical narratives.

The central argument is that the Kurdish–Armenian alliance was not simply tactical or contingent, but emerged from structural conditions as a result of the post-imperial order. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire created a political opening in which both Kurds and Armenians were presented with new opportunities to shape their futures. Yet these possibilities emerged under conditions of military vulnerability, diplomatic marginalization, and severe material scarcity, which limited their capacity to convert opportunity into durable political gains. For the Kurds in particular, the post-imperial transition ultimately led not to empowerment, but to a further deterioration of their position. Neither community possessed sufficient resources for political survival independently. The combination of Kurdish demographic presence and armed capacity with Armenian diaspora influence and access to international diplomatic networks created strong incentives for cooperation. Yet this cooperation remained limited in scope and was concentrated primarily at the organisational leadership level rather than between two fully mobilised peoples. In particular, Kurdish organisations faced serious difficulties in communicating with and politically mobilising the broader Kurdish population, whose national consciousness remained unevenly developed. As a result, the relationship is more accurately understood as a constrained and asymmetric collaboration between political organisations than as a comprehensive popular alliance.

Yet the same structural conditions that made the alliance necessary also rendered it fragile. The documents demonstrate that failures in resource mobilization, the fragmented nature of tribal authority, tensions between diaspora-centred strategies and local realities, and the overwhelming coercive capacity of the early Republican state ultimately undermined the alliance’s sustainability. Initiatives associated with modern state-building—such as the establishment of a National Assembly on Mount Ararat, the declaration of a republic, the production of flags, newspapers, and official correspondence—were symbolically powerful but materially underfunded. Lacking sustained financial support and external protection, this experiment in political institutionalization could not solidify into a durable structure.

A significant finding of this study is the shared grammar of violence and memory that connected Kurdish and Armenian experiences. Contemporary actors drew explicit parallels between the 1915 Armenian mass killings and the 1930 Zilan Massacre, consolidating what can be termed an “alliance of victims.” The systematic aerial bombardment of civilians in Zilan not only destroyed the social foundation of the Ağrı resistance but also caused a profound psychological rupture within Kurdish society, articulated through analogies to Armenian suffering in 1915. In this context, victimhood operated not only as a marker of historical loss but also as a translatable memory space that generated political claims and international appeals.

This study also contributes to the literature by highlighting the diplomatic efforts of Kurdish and Armenian movements during the interwar period. The 1919 Sharif Pasha–Bogos Nubar Pasha declaration, the 1924 Beirut Secret Agreement, and the extensive Hoybun–Dashnaksutyun correspondence demonstrate a sustained attempt to engage with the frameworks of international law and self-determination. The inability to secure lasting support from the League of Nations or the Great Powers underscores a critical structural limitation: national movements in the Middle East were influenced not only by internal capacities but also, and more decisively, by the shifting geopolitical priorities of imperial and post-imperial powers.

Within this broader framework, the Ağrı Uprising emerges as both the most concrete expression of the Kurdish–Armenian alliance and a pivotal moment in the history of Kurdish nationalism. For the first time, Kurdish political actors attempted to articulate sovereignty through modern institutional forms—assemblies, ministries, symbols, and media. In this sense, Ağrı can be understood as an early state-building experiment, in which the contours of a modern Kurdish political imagination were tested under conditions of extreme violence. Ihsan Nuri Pasha’s leadership played an important role in this transformation, facilitating a shift from localized tribal resistance toward a national political project.

Although the Republic of Ağrı was ultimately defeated militarily, its significance extends beyond the notion of failure. The uprising generated lasting institutional memory, reinforced collective identity through shared trauma, and redefined the relationship between state violence and national consciousness. The Zilan Massacre, in particular, served as a formative event that deepened Kurdish political awareness and influenced subsequent forms of resistance.

In conclusion, although the Kurdish–Armenian alliance did not endure as a sustained political project, it produced a lasting historical legacy along three interrelated dimensions: the transformation of victimhood into political capital, the foundational role of symbols and institutions in nation-building, and the initial articulation of a modern state vision within Kurdish nationalism. The uprising on Mount Ararat was therefore not merely a suppressed revolt, but a critical turning point that provides critical insight into the dynamics of alliance, violence, and political imagination in the modern Middle East.

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