

# The Eagle of Ararat: The Rise, Fall, and Enduring Legacy of the Kurdish Republic of Ararat (1927-1931)

## Introduction

In the tumultuous aftermath of the First World War and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the political map of the Middle East was redrawn amidst a maelstrom of competing imperial ambitions and nascent nationalist movements. Within this crucible of state formation, the short-lived Republic of Ararat (1927-1931) emerged as a pivotal, albeit ultimately tragic, chapter in the long history of the Kurdish struggle for self-determination. Centered on the iconic Mount Ararat in the Armenian Highlands of eastern Turkey, this self-proclaimed state was the most sophisticated and organized expression of Kurdish national aspirations of its era. It represented a conscious attempt to build a modern nation-state, complete with a formal government, a professionalized military, and a clear nationalist ideology.

The Republic of Ararat was not an isolated tribal uprising but the culmination of a strategic evolution in Kurdish political thought, orchestrated by the pan-Kurdish nationalist organization Xoybûn. Under the dual leadership of the charismatic military commander General İhsan Nuri Pasha and the tribal chieftain-turned-president Ibrahim Heski, the republic sought to carve out a sovereign space against the formidable power of the new Turkish Republic.<sup>3</sup> The Ankara government, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was founded on a staunchly unitary and secularist ideology that viewed any expression of non-Turkish identity as a threat to its existence, setting the stage for a brutal and uncompromising conflict.

The fate of the Republic of Ararat, however, was not decided solely on the battlefield. Its existence and eventual demise were inextricably linked to a complex web of regional and international politics. The rebellion became a focal point for the geopolitical interests of Pahlavi Iran, which controlled the republic's vital eastern flank; the Soviet Union, which feared instability on its Caucasian border; and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), which saw in the Kurdish cause a strategic opportunity to advance its own national goals against a common Turkish adversary.<sup>6</sup> The story of Ararat is therefore one of a nascent nation caught between the hammer of Turkish state consolidation and the anvil of great-power politics. This report provides an exhaustive analysis of the Republic of Ararat, examining its historical genesis in the unfulfilled promises of the post-war settlement, the anatomy of its proto-state structure, the military history of the rebellion it led, and the critical international dynamics that sealed its fate. It argues that the Ararat episode was a crucible where modern Kurdish

nationalism was forged and tested, and that its defeat, while catastrophic for the Kurdish movement at the time, paradoxically served to consolidate the very state power it sought to challenge. The republic's legacy endures as a powerful symbol in Kurdish national consciousness and a contested narrative in the historiography of the modern Middle East.

**Table 1: Chronology of the Ararat Rebellion and the Republic of Ararat (1926-1932)**

Year	Month/Date	Key Event	Significance
1926	May 16 - June 17	First Ağrı Rebellion led by Ibrahim Heski and allied tribes. <sup>8</sup>	Initial tribal uprising against Turkish authority, demonstrating regional unrest. The rebellion is suppressed, with leaders fleeing to Iran.
1927	October 5	The Xoybûn (Khoyboun) nationalist party is founded in Bhamdoun, Lebanon.	Marks the creation of a modern, secular, pan-Kurdish political organization to lead the independence movement.
1927	October 28	Xoybûn's central committee declares the independence of the Republic of Ararat. <sup>3</sup>	Formal establishment of the Kurdish proto-state. İhsan Nuri is appointed military commander, Ibrahim Heski civilian president.
1927	October	The village of Kurd Ava (Kurdava) near Mount Ararat is designated the provisional capital. <sup>4</sup>	Establishes a center of government for the new republic.
1927	October 29	Xoybûn and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) sign a treaty of cooperation in Beirut.	Secures a key regional alliance, providing the rebellion with financial and military support against their common enemy, Turkey.
1929	September 14-27	Turkish military launches the Tendürek Operation.	A major Turkish military campaign aimed at suppressing the growing rebellion and cutting off support from Iran.

1930	June - September	Turkish forces, numbering tens of thousands, launch a massive offensive to encircle Mount Ararat.	The final, decisive phase of the military conflict begins, with Turkey committing overwhelming force.
1930	July 12-13	The Zilan Valley Massacre occurs.	Turkish forces kill thousands of Kurdish civilians, a brutal act of collective punishment and terror to break the rebellion's popular support.
1930	August	The Soviet Union pressures Iran to close its border and cooperate with Turkey.	A critical geopolitical turning point; Soviet intervention forces Iran to abandon its tacit support, sealing the rebels' fate.
1930	September 17	The main military campaign against the rebels on Mount Ararat concludes.	The organized military resistance of the Republic of Ararat is effectively crushed by the Turkish army and air force.
1931	September	The Turkish Armed Forces completely defeat the last remnants of the rebellion. <sup>4</sup>	Marks the official end of the Republic of Ararat and the re-establishment of Turkish control over the entire territory.
1932	January 23	Turkey and Persia sign a new border treaty.	The rebellion's geopolitical consequence is formalized; Turkey gains full control of the Ararat massif in exchange for territory near Qutur.

## Section 1: The Genesis of a Rebellion: The Kurdish

# Question in the New Turkey

The Ararat rebellion was not a spontaneous event but the violent culmination of deep-seated political and ideological conflicts that defined the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Its origins lie in the profound chasm between the burgeoning aspirations of Kurdish nationalism, which had been tantalized by the prospect of statehood in the post-war diplomatic shuffle, and the uncompromising nation-building project of the Kemalist state, which demanded the assimilation of all non-Turkish identities into a singular, homogenous national ideal.

## 1.1 From Sèvres to Lausanne: The Betrayal of Kurdish Aspirations

For Kurdish nationalists, the immediate aftermath of World War I offered a fleeting moment of unprecedented hope. The victorious Allied Powers, in dismembering the defeated Ottoman Empire, appeared willing to entertain the principle of self-determination for its subject peoples. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed in 1920, became a foundational document for Kurdish national aspirations, as it explicitly scheduled the creation of an independent Kurdistan in the eastern Anatolian provinces. This international recognition, however brief, legitimized the Kurdish dream of sovereignty and set a benchmark against which all subsequent political developments would be measured.

This hope was shattered just three years later. The Turkish War of Independence, led by Mustafa Kemal, successfully repudiated the terms of Sèvres. The ensuing Treaty of Lausanne (1923) represented a triumph for Turkish nationalism but a catastrophe for the Kurds. The new treaty made no mention of a Kurdish state or even minority rights for the Kurds. Instead, it solidified the division of the Kurdish homeland among four newly configured states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. In Kurdish historiography, this diplomatic reversal is viewed as a profound betrayal, not only by the Great Powers who abandoned their promises, but also by the new Turkish leadership, which had courted Kurdish support during the War of Independence with pledges of equality and partnership, only to discard them once victory was secured.<sup>13</sup> This sense of betrayal fueled a deep-seated resentment and convinced many Kurdish leaders that their national rights could only be secured through armed struggle.

## 1.2 The Kemalist State and the Suppression of Kurdish Identity

The new Republic of Turkey was founded on an ideology that was fundamentally incompatible with Kurdish aspirations. The Kemalist project was centered on the creation of a modern, secular, and unitary nation-state defined by a singular Turkish identity. This vision demanded the assimilation of all other ethnic and linguistic groups. Official state policy viewed the "Turkification" of the Kurds as a natural and necessary process for national unity and

modernization.

This ideological project was swiftly translated into state policy. A pivotal moment was the abolition of the Islamic Caliphate in 1924. While a cornerstone of Kemalist secular reform, this act severed a powerful bond of loyalty for many religious and tribal Kurds, who had viewed the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph as a unifying figure for all Muslims.<sup>5</sup> The removal of this shared religious identity exposed the underlying ethnic divisions and amplified Kurdish feelings of alienation from the new secular state. Subsequently, the Turkish government outlawed all public manifestations of Kurdish identity. The Kurdish language, traditional clothing, and even the words "Kurd" and "Kurdistan" were banned from public life, with Kurds being officially referred to as "Mountain Turks". This aggressive policy of cultural erasure and political suppression created an environment where rebellion was seen by many as the only viable response.

### **1.3 Precursors to Ararat: The Lessons of the Sheikh Said Rebellion**

The first major challenge to the new republic's policies came in 1925 with the Sheikh Said rebellion. Centered in the Zaza-speaking regions west of Lake Van, the uprising was the largest Kurdish revolt to date. While often framed in Kurdish history as having been religiously motivated by the abolition of the Caliphate, it was unequivocally a movement for Kurdish independence, organized by the nationalist society Azadî.<sup>5</sup> The rebellion was brutally crushed by the Turkish military within months, and its leaders, including Sheikh Said, were publicly executed.

The failure of the Sheikh Said rebellion provided critical, if harsh, lessons for the Kurdish nationalist movement. It demonstrated the formidable military power and resolve of the centralized Turkish state. It also revealed the limitations of a movement heavily reliant on traditional tribal structures and religious leadership, which proved insufficient to overcome a modern, organized army. The next generation of Kurdish nationalists understood that a different approach was needed—one that was more politically organized, ideologically secular, and strategically prepared for a protracted conflict.

### **1.4 The Founding of Xoybûn: A Pan-Kurdish Nationalist Front**

The strategic and ideological evolution of Kurdish nationalism following the defeat of 1925 culminated in the founding of Xoybûn (meaning "to be oneself" or "independence") on October 5, 1927, in Bhamdoun, Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> This was not another tribal coalition but a modern political party designed to serve as a pan-Kurdish national front. Its founders were a mix of Kurdish intellectuals, former Ottoman officers, and tribal notables, prominently featuring members of the aristocratic Bedirxan family, such as Celadet Alî Bedirxan, who was elected its first president.<sup>2</sup>

Xoybûn represented a conscious and significant departure from the model of the Sheikh Said

rebellion. The organization explicitly sought to learn from past failures by creating a more sophisticated political structure. Its ideology was explicitly secular, republican, and nationalist, aiming to build a broad-based movement that could transcend traditional religious and tribal loyalties.<sup>2</sup> It established a formal central committee and created two distinct branches: a political wing based in Damascus to handle diplomacy and propaganda, and an armed wing to prosecute the military struggle. This new, pragmatic approach was immediately evident in its first major act: forging a strategic alliance. Within weeks of its founding, Xoybûn negotiated and signed a formal treaty with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), uniting two of the Turkish state's most determined adversaries in a common cause.<sup>2</sup> The establishment of Xoybûn signaled that the next Kurdish uprising would not be a localized revolt but a calculated war of national liberation, orchestrated by a modern political-military organization. The stage was set for the proclamation of the Republic of Ararat.

## **Section 2: The Republic of Ararat (Komara Agiriyê): Anatomy of a Proto-State**

The Republic of Ararat, proclaimed and administered by Xoybûn, was a remarkably deliberate and sophisticated attempt at state-building. Far from being an ad-hoc rebel administration, its structure consciously emulated the institutions of a modern nation-state. This reflected a significant evolution in Kurdish political thought, moving beyond the historical models of autonomous principalities or tribal confederations toward the contemporary ideal of a sovereign republic. Through the establishment of a capital, a formal government with a separation of powers, and the adoption of national symbols, the leaders of Ararat sought to project an image of legitimate statehood both to their own people and to the international community.

### **2.1 The Declaration of Independence and the Capital at Kurdava**

On October 28, 1927 (with some sources citing October 8 or the year 1928), the central committee of Xoybûn formally declared the independence of Kurdistan, giving birth to the Republic of Ararat.<sup>2</sup> The choice of the name "Ararat" was deeply symbolic. The mountain, known as

*Agirî* in Kurdish (meaning "fiery," a reference to its volcanic nature), was a formidable natural fortress and a powerful emblem for the new state.<sup>4</sup> By anchoring their republic to this legendary peak, the nationalists laid claim to a defined territory and invoked a potent symbol of permanence and strength.

To give the new state a political center, the village of Kurd Ava (or Kurdava), located on the slopes of Mount Ararat within the Doğubayazıt district, was designated as the provisional capital in October 1927.<sup>4</sup> While modest, the establishment of a capital was a crucial step in

translating the abstract idea of a republic into a tangible political reality. It provided a headquarters for the government and military command, transforming a zone of rebellion into the territory of a self-proclaimed state.

## **2.2 The Dual Leadership: General İhsan Nuri Pasha and President Ibrahim Heski**

A key feature of the republic's structure, and a clear indicator of its modernizing ambitions, was the establishment of a government with a distinct separation of military and civilian authority. This was a deliberate move away from the traditional model where a single tribal chieftain or religious leader held all power.

The civilian government was headed by President Ibrahim Heski (also known as Bro Heski Telli).<sup>3</sup> Heski was a prominent chieftain of the powerful Jalali tribe and had been a leader of the initial tribal rebellions in the region in 1926.<sup>8</sup> His appointment as president was a shrewd political move, securing the allegiance of one of the most significant local tribes and grounding the nationalist project in the existing social structure of the region.

The supreme military command was entrusted to General İhsan Nuri Pasha.<sup>3</sup> Nuri was a former officer who had served with distinction in the Ottoman and early Turkish armies before dedicating himself to the Kurdish cause.<sup>17</sup> His professional military background, experience in modern warfare, and commitment to a disciplined, organized army made him the ideal figure to lead the armed struggle. Xoybûn promoted him to the rank of General (Pasha) and named him Generalissimo of the Kurdish National Forces.<sup>2</sup> This dual leadership structure—a tribal leader as civilian president and a professional soldier as military commander—balanced traditional sources of authority with the requirements of a modern state at war, representing a sophisticated attempt to unify disparate elements of Kurdish society under a single national banner.

## **2.3 Forging a Nation: The Flag, the Military, and Diplomatic Outreach**

The leaders of the Republic of Ararat understood that statehood required not only territory and a government but also the symbols and institutions of a nation. To this end, they adopted the Kurdish national flag—a tricolor of red, white, and green with a golden sun at its center—a version of which had been created by the Xoybûn organization.<sup>4</sup> This flag, flown over their provisional capital and carried by their soldiers, was a powerful visual assertion of a distinct Kurdish national identity.

Under İhsan Nuri's command, a concerted effort was made to transform the fighting forces from a collection of tribal militias into a disciplined national army. Nuri assembled a core group of soldiers armed with modern weapons and trained in infantry tactics, aiming to build a force that could engage the Turkish army on its own terms. While tribal levies remained essential, the emphasis on a professionalized military structure was a key element of the state-building

project.

Recognizing that their survival depended on external support, the republic's leadership also engaged in a campaign of international diplomacy. Through its political wing, Xoybûn made formal appeals to the Great Powers and the League of Nations, seeking political recognition and material aid.<sup>2</sup> They also sent messages to Kurdish communities in Iraq and Syria, urging them to join the struggle and foster pan-Kurdish cooperation.<sup>4</sup> To further their cause and disseminate their message, they published a newspaper named

*Agirî*.<sup>2</sup> Although these diplomatic efforts were largely unsuccessful, they demonstrate that the Republic of Ararat saw itself not as an isolated insurgency but as a legitimate actor on the international stage, striving for its rightful place in the community of nations.

## **Section 3: The Ararat Rebellion: A Military History (1927-1931)**

The Ararat rebellion, known in Turkish sources as the *Ağrı Ayaklanmaları* (Ağrı Rebellions), was a protracted and brutal military conflict that tested the nascent Kurdish state against the full might of the Turkish Republic. The war unfolded in distinct phases, beginning with impressive initial successes by the Kurdish forces, who capitalized on their knowledge of the terrain and the strategic advantage of the porous Iranian border. However, as the Turkish state mobilized its superior resources, the conflict escalated into a massive counterinsurgency campaign characterized by encirclement, overwhelming force, and the pioneering use of air power as a weapon of both military destruction and psychological terror.

### **3.1 Early Victories and the Establishment of a Liberated Zone (1927-1929)**

Following the declaration of the republic, the Kurdish forces under the command of General İhsan Nuri launched a series of effective guerrilla campaigns. Building on the momentum of earlier tribal actions in 1926, Nuri's more organized military force achieved significant territorial gains.<sup>8</sup> By 1928, the rebels had established a substantial "liberated zone," securing control over the towns of Bitlis and Van, as well as a large swath of the countryside surrounding Lake Van. This area, which included the strategic town of Doğubayazıt at the foot of Mount Ararat, became the heartland of the new republic.

A critical factor in these early successes was the geography of the conflict. Mount Ararat's rugged terrain provided a natural fortress for the Kurdish fighters. More importantly, the mountain straddled the Turkish-Persian border, which at the time was poorly demarcated and controlled. The Iranian government, embroiled in its own border disputes with Ankara, initially adopted a policy of passive non-cooperation with Turkey.<sup>7</sup> This allowed the Kurdish rebels to use Iranian territory as a strategic rear base for refuge, recruitment, and resupply, effectively



neutralizing early Turkish attempts to suppress the uprising. For nearly three years, the Republic of Ararat was able to withstand Turkish pressure and consolidate its control over its mountainous domain.

### **3.2 The Turkish Response: Encirclement and the Ağrı Offensives (1930)**

By 1929, the continued existence of a de facto Kurdish state on its eastern frontier had become an intolerable challenge to the authority and ideology of the Turkish Republic. In a cabinet meeting presided over by Mustafa Kemal himself on December 28, 1929, the decision was made to launch a decisive military operation to crush the rebellion in the summer of 1930.<sup>9</sup>

What followed was a massive mobilization of the Turkish military. Ankara deployed a force of at least 10,000 soldiers—with some estimates placing the number as high as 66,000—to the region.<sup>8</sup> The strategic objective was to completely encircle Mount Ararat, cutting off all avenues of escape and reinforcement. The lynchpin of this strategy was neutralizing the Iranian safe haven. Through intense diplomatic pressure, which included leveraging the threat of Soviet intervention, Turkey successfully compelled Iran to abandon its policy of neutrality.<sup>6</sup> In a pivotal shift, Tehran agreed to allow Turkish troops to cross its border and operate on Iranian territory, enabling the Turkish army to close the ring around the mountain from the east.<sup>6</sup> With the encirclement complete by June 1930, the final, brutal phase of the war began.

### **3.3 "The Iron Eagles of the Turk": The Decisive Role of Air Power**

The 1930 offensive was distinguished by the systematic and devastating use of the Turkish Air Force (TAF). This was not merely a tactical deployment but a core component of the Turkish strategy, designed to break not just the Kurdish army but the will of the entire population. The use of air power in this context represented a pioneering application of what would later be termed "air control"—using aerial bombardment to terrorize a rebellious populace into submission.

From the end of summer 1930, Turkish aircraft relentlessly bombed Kurdish positions, villages, and tribal encampments around Mount Ararat from all directions.<sup>8</sup> General İhsan Nuri Pasha, in his own accounts of the rebellion, stated unequivocally that the overwhelming military superiority of the TAF was the primary factor that "demoralized Kurds and led to their capitulation".<sup>14</sup> The psychological impact of being attacked from the air, with no possibility of defense or retaliation, was shattering. The pro-government newspaper *Cumhuriyet* celebrated the campaign in triumphalist terms, reporting that planes were "raining down" bombs on the mountain and proclaiming, "The iron eagles of the Turk are clearing the accounts of the rebels".<sup>8</sup> The bombing was indiscriminate, targeting civilian areas and tribal groups like the Halikanli and Herki in a deliberate campaign to eliminate any support

base for the insurgency.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.4 The Zilan Valley Massacre: A Policy of Annihilation

The Turkish state's strategy of total war was most horrifically demonstrated in the Zilan Valley. On July 12 and 13, 1930, as the aerial bombardment of Ararat raged, units of the Turkish IX Corps under the command of Lieutenant General Salih Omurtak descended on the valley, located near the town of Erciş in Van Province. What followed was not a battle but a systematic massacre of thousands of Kurdish civilians.

The Turkish state made little effort to conceal the slaughter. On July 13, the front page of *Cumhuriyet* ran a chilling headline: "The purge has begun." The article reported that "All those at Zeylân valley have been completely annihilated, No one from the area has survived".<sup>11</sup>

Casualty figures vary, but they are staggering. The German newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt* reported 4,500 women and elderly killed, while *Cumhuriyet* itself claimed a figure of 15,000 "rebels" were killed, a number that likely included a vast majority of unarmed civilians. Eyewitness accounts from survivors paint a gruesome picture of machine-gun fire mowing down men, women, and children, and soldiers using bayonets on infants and the elderly.

The Zilan Massacre and the air campaign were two facets of the same underlying policy: to crush the Ararat rebellion through a campaign of state terror. The goal was not simply to defeat the Kurdish fighters but to demonstrate the inescapable and annihilating power of the Turkish state, proving that there was no safe haven and that the price of resistance was obliteration. This brutal precedent would cast a long shadow over state-minority relations in Turkey for decades to come.

## Section 4: A Web of Alliances and Betrayals: The International Dimension

The rise and fall of the Republic of Ararat cannot be understood solely as a bilateral conflict between Kurdish nationalists and the Turkish state. Its fate was woven into the complex tapestry of regional geopolitics, where the aspirations of a stateless nation were ultimately subordinated to the strategic interests of established and emerging powers. The rebellion's trajectory was shaped by a pragmatic alliance with Armenian nationalists, a critical pivot in the policy of neighboring Iran, the decisive intervention of the Soviet Union, and the calculated indifference of the Western mandatory powers. Ultimately, the republic's collapse illustrates a harsh lesson of 20th-century international relations: when the territorial integrity of established states is challenged by a transnational ethno-nationalist movement, those states will often form a pragmatic consensus to crush the threat, regardless of their own rivalries.

## **4.1 The Kurdish-Armenian Alliance: The Armenian Revolutionary Federation's Strategic Gambit**

One of the most remarkable features of the Ararat rebellion was the formal alliance between the Kurdish Xoybûn and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), codified in a treaty signed on October 29, 1927.<sup>2</sup> This partnership was born of mutual interest and a shared enemy: the Turkish Republic. For the ARF, the alliance was a strategic gambit. Ousted from power in Soviet Armenia and representing a dispersed diaspora, the ARF's 10th World Congress in 1925 had made the calculated decision to support Kurdish rebellions inside Turkey. Their goals were twofold: to destabilize the Kemalist state that occupied their historic homeland and to create conditions that might one day allow for the repatriation of Armenians to Western Armenia.

The ARF provided crucial support to the Ararat Republic, including financial aid, military expertise, and a contingent of trained fighters. An experienced ARF cadre, Vahan Kalousdian, was even dispatched to command a northern front of the rebellion, tasked with joint Armenian-Kurdish operations. This alliance represented a pragmatic, secular alignment of two nationalist movements, temporarily setting aside historical grievances and competing territorial claims in the face of a common existential threat.

## **4.2 The Persian Pivot: From Border Porosity to a Pact with Ankara**

The role of Pahlavi Iran was perhaps the single most critical external factor in the rebellion's military fortunes. In the initial years, Iran's position was ambiguous and even tacitly supportive of the Kurds. Engaged in its own border disputes with Turkey and wary of Ankara's regional ambitions, the government of Reza Shah allowed its northwestern border to remain porous. This provided the Ararat rebels with an indispensable strategic sanctuary—a place to retreat, regroup, and resupply, beyond the reach of the Turkish army.<sup>14</sup> This de facto safe haven was the primary reason for the rebellion's longevity and early success.

However, by 1930, this critical advantage evaporated. Facing relentless diplomatic pressure from Ankara, as well as its own internal security concerns and the looming threat of Soviet intervention, Iran's policy executed a dramatic reversal. Tehran shifted from passive non-cooperation to active collaboration with Turkey. In a decisive move, Iran granted the Turkish military permission to cross its border to conduct operations against the Kurds, allowing the Turkish army to complete its encirclement of Mount Ararat.<sup>6</sup> This cooperation was later formalized in the 1932 border treaty, in which Iran ceded the Lesser Ararat region to Turkey in exchange for territory near Qutur. This land swap gave Turkey full strategic control of the Ararat massif, permanently eliminating the cross-border sanctuary that had been the lifeblood of the rebellion.<sup>7</sup> Iran's pivot from a porous buffer to a partner in suppression was a fatal blow to the Kurdish cause.

### **4.3 The Soviet Shadow: How Geopolitical Interests Sealed Ararat's Fate**

While Iran delivered the final blow, the hand that forced its action belonged to the Soviet Union. Moscow viewed the Ararat rebellion and its alliance with the anti-Soviet ARF with profound alarm. A successful or prolonged uprising on its sensitive Caucasian border threatened to destabilize the region, potentially ignite nationalist sentiments within Soviet Armenia, and empower hostile political forces like the ARF. The Kremlin's primary geopolitical interest in the region was the stability of its relationship with Kemalist Turkey, which it viewed as a crucial, non-aligned buffer against Western imperial influence.

Prioritizing its state-to-state relationship with Ankara over any ideological sympathy for a national liberation movement, the Soviet Union intervened decisively. In August 1930, Moscow delivered an ultimatum to Tehran, informing the Shah that it was prepared to declare war and even sending Soviet troops briefly across the Iranian border to underscore the threat. This direct pressure left Iran with no choice but to capitulate to Turkish demands and seal the border. The Soviet intervention demonstrated that its state security interests and its strategic partnership with Turkey far outweighed any other consideration, effectively signing the death warrant of the Republic of Ararat.

### **4.4 The Muted Response of the Mandatory Powers: Britain and France**

While Xoybûn appealed to the Western Great Powers and the League of Nations for support, the response was one of cautious inaction.<sup>2</sup> Under pressure from Turkey, both the British Empire, the mandatory power in Iraq, and France, which controlled Syria, imposed restrictions on the activities of Xoybûn members and curtailed the flow of support to the rebellion from their territories.<sup>10</sup> While some evidence suggests that British and French intelligence may have offered some covert support to the Kurds as a means of maintaining leverage against the Kemalist government, this was never substantial or reliable. Ultimately, London and Paris prioritized the stability of their relations with the recognized government in Ankara over the uncertain cause of Kurdish independence. Their refusal to provide meaningful aid left the Republic of Ararat diplomatically isolated and vulnerable to the coordinated pressure of its regional adversaries.

## **Section 5: The Fall of the Republic and its Aftermath**

The convergence of overwhelming Turkish military force and a hostile geopolitical consensus made the fall of the Republic of Ararat inevitable. The final suppression of the rebellion in 1930-1931 was not merely a military defeat; it was followed by a systematic campaign by the Turkish state to consolidate its authority, pacify the region, and ensure that such a challenge

to its sovereignty could never arise again. The aftermath of the rebellion saw the flight of its leadership, the mass deportation of Kurdish populations, and a permanent redrawing of the international border that had been so crucial to the conflict. Paradoxically, the Kurdish attempt to break away from the Turkish state ultimately served as a powerful catalyst for that same state to solidify its control over its eastern periphery.

## **5.1 The Final Suppression and the Flight of the Leadership**

By September 1930, the organized military resistance of the Republic of Ararat had been shattered. Cut off from their Iranian sanctuary and demoralized by relentless aerial bombardment, the Kurdish forces were overwhelmed by the Turkish army's final offensive. The last remnants of the rebellion were mopped up over the following year, with Turkish control fully re-established by September 1931.<sup>4</sup>

Faced with certain defeat, General İhsan Nuri Pasha and other key leaders of the rebellion managed to escape across the border into Iran in 1930. However, their escape did not lead to a renewed struggle from exile. Nuri was effectively a refugee under the control of the Iranian government, which had just collaborated with Turkey to crush his movement. He spent the remainder of his life in exile in Iran, his political activities heavily restricted. He died in Tehran in 1976 after being struck by a motorcycle in what many believe was a politically motivated assassination.<sup>24</sup> The flight and subsequent neutralization of its leadership decapitated the movement and marked the definitive end of the Ararat chapter of the Kurdish struggle.

## **5.2 Pacification and Deportation: Turkish Consolidation of Power**

In the wake of its military victory, the Turkish government implemented a series of harsh measures designed to pacify the Kurdish regions and eradicate the roots of the rebellion. The primary tool of this policy was mass deportation. A law passed by the Turkish parliament on May 5, 1932, authorized the forced resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Kurds from the eastern provinces to other parts of the country, particularly western and central Anatolia. This policy of forced migration had multiple strategic objectives. It aimed to break up the powerful tribal structures that had formed the backbone of the rebellion, shatter communal solidarity, and dilute the Kurdish population in their historic heartland. By dispersing the Kurds among the majority Turkish population, the state hoped to accelerate their assimilation and extinguish their national consciousness.<sup>5</sup> This campaign of demographic engineering, justified by the state as a necessary security measure, was a key component of the broader project of Turkification and the consolidation of centralized control over the restive eastern provinces.

## **5.3 The 1932 Border Treaty: The Geopolitical Consequences of the Rebellion**

The most significant and lasting geopolitical consequence of the Ararat rebellion was the formal redrawing of the Turkish-Persian border. The conflict had starkly revealed the strategic vulnerability of the existing frontier, which had allowed the rebels to operate with relative impunity. Having used the crisis to force Iran into a security partnership, Turkey moved to make this arrangement permanent.

In a treaty signed on January 23, 1932, the border was officially realigned. Turkey gained full sovereignty over the Lesser Ararat region and the entire Mount Ararat massif, which had previously been divided by the border. In exchange, Iran was granted a parcel of territory in the vicinity of Qutur in the Van province.<sup>7</sup> This territorial exchange was a major strategic victory for Turkey. It eliminated the cross-border sanctuary that had sustained the rebellion and gave the Turkish military complete control over the commanding heights of the region, making a future Ararat-style insurgency far more difficult to mount. The rebellion, which began as a bid to create a new Kurdish state, thus ended by reinforcing and hardening the very state borders it had sought to dismantle. It provided the Turkish Republic with the justification and the opportunity to achieve a more secure frontier and project its power more effectively, leaving the state stronger and more centralized than it had been before the conflict began.

## **Section 6: Legacy and Contested Histories**

The Republic of Ararat, though crushed after only four years, cast a long shadow over the history of the region. Its legacy is not a single, settled narrative but a deeply contested terrain, actively shaped and reinterpreted by the competing nationalisms of the peoples who lay claim to its history and its land. For Kurdish national consciousness, it remains a foundational moment of heroic resistance and a potent symbol of the dream of statehood. For official Turkish historiography, it is a cautionary tale of separatist treason, justifying the state's uncompromising stance on national unity. And for Armenian historical memory, it is a complex and often painful episode, layered with the traumas of genocide and the pragmatism of temporary alliances. The story of Ararat thus functions as a "floating signifier," an event whose meaning is continuously redefined to serve the ideological needs of the present.

### **6.1 A Symbol of Resistance: The Republic of Ararat in Kurdish National Consciousness**

In Kurdish national memory and historiography, the Republic of Ararat is revered as a seminal and heroic chapter in the struggle for independence. Despite its brief existence and ultimate failure, it stands as a powerful symbol of Kurdish aspirations for self-determination and sovereignty. It is remembered not as a mere tribal revolt, but as the first modern attempt to establish a Kurdish republic, complete with the institutions of a state.

Figures like General İhsan Nuri Pasha are venerated as national heroes, earning titles like the "Eagle of Ararat" for their leadership and sacrifice.<sup>25</sup> The rebellion is seen as a formative moment in the development of a modern, secular Kurdish national identity, marking a move away from purely religious or tribal frameworks toward a political project of national liberation. For generations of Kurdish activists and intellectuals, the story of Ararat has served as a source of inspiration—a testament to the possibility of Kurdish statehood and a reminder of the enduring dream of an independent Kurdistan. It represents what "could have been" and continues to fuel the political and cultural struggle for recognition and rights.

## **6.2 The Official Narrative: Framing the Rebellion in Turkish Historiography**

The portrayal of the Ararat rebellion in official Turkish historiography is starkly different. Within this narrative, the uprising is framed not as a war of national liberation but as a reactionary and illegitimate challenge to the progressive, modernizing Turkish Republic. It is consistently depicted as a product of "foreign agitation," with Turkish sources frequently emphasizing the role of external powers like Great Britain and, especially, the Armenian Taşnak party, in fomenting the conflict.<sup>9</sup>

This perspective strips the rebellion of its indigenous nationalist character, recasting it as a conspiracy orchestrated by external enemies and carried out by backward, feudal tribes who were resisting the forces of progress and secularism. The leaders are portrayed as "bandits" and "insurgents" rather than as political or military figures. Consequently, the state's brutal response, including the Zilan Valley Massacre, is either omitted, downplayed, or justified as a necessary police action to restore order, suppress treason, and safeguard the territorial integrity of the nation. In this counter-myth, the suppression of the Ararat rebellion is a story of national consolidation, a righteous victory of the modern state over the forces of separatism and reaction.

## **6.3 Re-evaluating a Contested History: The Land and its Peoples**

The legacy of the Republic of Ararat is further complicated by the contested history of the land upon which it was declared. The region, centered on the sacred Armenian symbol of Mount Ararat, is historically known as the Armenian Highlands and was the heartland of Western Armenia prior to the Armenian Genocide of 1915.<sup>30</sup> The genocide resulted in the extermination and expulsion of the indigenous Armenian population, leaving the land depopulated.

From one perspective, the establishment of a Kurdish republic in this territory is seen as the occupation of lands emptied of their native inhabitants, with some historical accounts accusing Kurdish tribes of having participated in the massacres of Armenians. This view introduces a profound tension into the narrative of Kurdish national liberation. However, other

narratives emphasize the deep historical roots of Kurds in the wider region, with some tracing their ancestry to ancient peoples like the Medes who inhabited the area for millennia. Furthermore, the pragmatic military alliance between Xoybûn and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation during the rebellion itself complicates any simple narrative of perpetual conflict. It reveals a moment of shared struggle against a common enemy, demonstrating that relationships between the two peoples were not monolithic but were capable of strategic cooperation despite underlying historical grievances and competing claims to the same land. The history of Ararat is thus a microcosm of the region's complex and overlapping layers of memory, trauma, and identity.

## Conclusion

The Republic of Ararat (1927-1931) stands as a watershed moment in the history of modern Kurdish nationalism. It was, by a significant margin, the most advanced and politically sophisticated attempt at Kurdish state-building of its time. Under the leadership of the Xoybûn party, the movement transcended the limitations of previous tribal and religiously-motivated uprisings by establishing a modern political structure with a clear separation of civilian and military authority, adopting the symbols of a nation-state, and pursuing a coherent military and diplomatic strategy. For a brief period, on the formidable slopes of Mount Ararat, the dream of an independent Kurdistan was made a tangible reality.

However, the republic's demise was sealed not by a failure of will or organization, but by an insurmountable geopolitical reality. Its existence challenged the foundational principles of the new Turkish Republic, which responded with overwhelming and brutal force. More decisively, the rebellion became a pawn in a larger regional game where the interests of established states converged to crush a nascent nationalist movement. The strategic pivot of Pahlavi Iran, compelled by the decisive intervention of the Soviet Union, eliminated the rebellion's vital sanctuary and ensured its military defeat. The fall of Ararat powerfully demonstrated that in the 20th-century Middle East, the state-centric interests of regional powers like Turkey, Iran, and the Soviet Union would consistently override the aspirations of transnational, stateless peoples.

The rebellion left behind a powerful and dual legacy. For the Turkish state, the crisis served as a catalyst for the consolidation of its power. The military campaign and its diplomatic aftermath allowed Ankara to project its authority into its eastern periphery, secure a more defensible border with Iran, and implement its assimilationist policies of Turkification with renewed vigor. For the Kurdish people, the fall of the republic was a catastrophic defeat, but its memory became an enduring and foundational symbol in their national consciousness. The Eagle of Ararat, İhsan Nuri Pasha, and the short-lived republic he defended became legendary icons of resistance, transforming a military loss into a potent political myth that would inspire future generations in the long and arduous struggle for national recognition and self-determination.



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