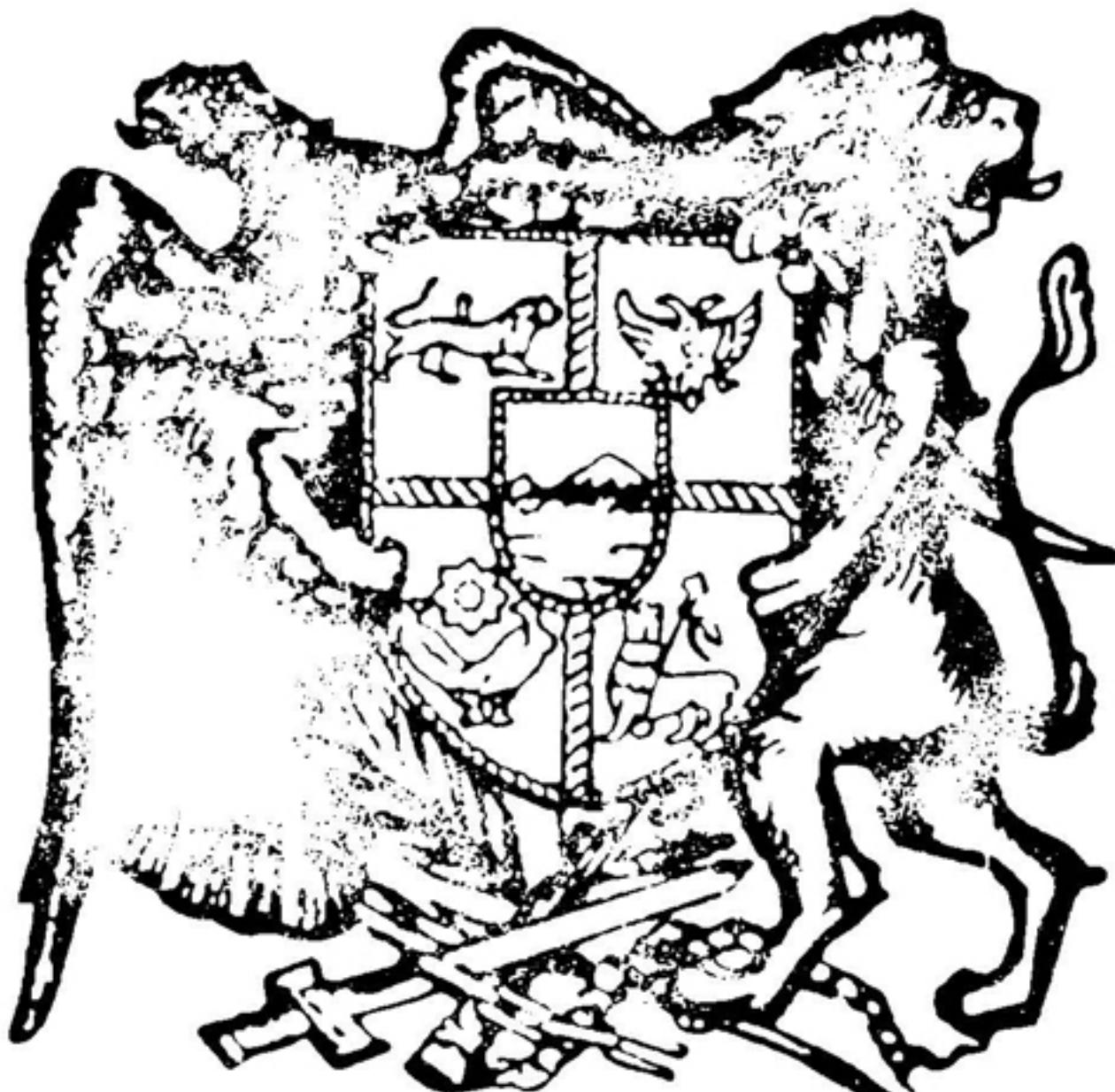


The Republic of ARMENIA



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On June 23, the government issued an official communiqué explaining the reasons for the military action: The fifteen or more self-proclaimed "independent" villages had sabotaged the railroad and become instruments of the reactionary forces of Azerbaijan and Turkey. The statement warned that the same fate awaited all those who refused to acknowledge the authority of the Republic of Armenia.¹² Though the successful military operation could have filled the government's coffers with the wealth of Zangibasar, the aftermath of victory gave cause for deep consternation. Thousands of Armenian civilians, many of them refugees from Nukhi and Aresh, joined the soldiers to plunder with abandon. Wheat, rice, carpets, furniture, money, jewelry, and animals were carried away, the thirst for loot undermining military discipline and turning soldiers into rabble. Intoxicated with victory, they celebrated in the streets of Erevan, shooting off their weapons and behaving in a rowdy manner. The breach of discipline dampened the satisfaction of the gov-

ernment and prevented it from making an orderly assessment and allocation of the great stockpiles of food, equipment, and other resources. The military authorities were ordered to punish violators of the code of military conduct and to confiscate whatever booty could be found in the hands of speculators and residents of Erevan.¹³

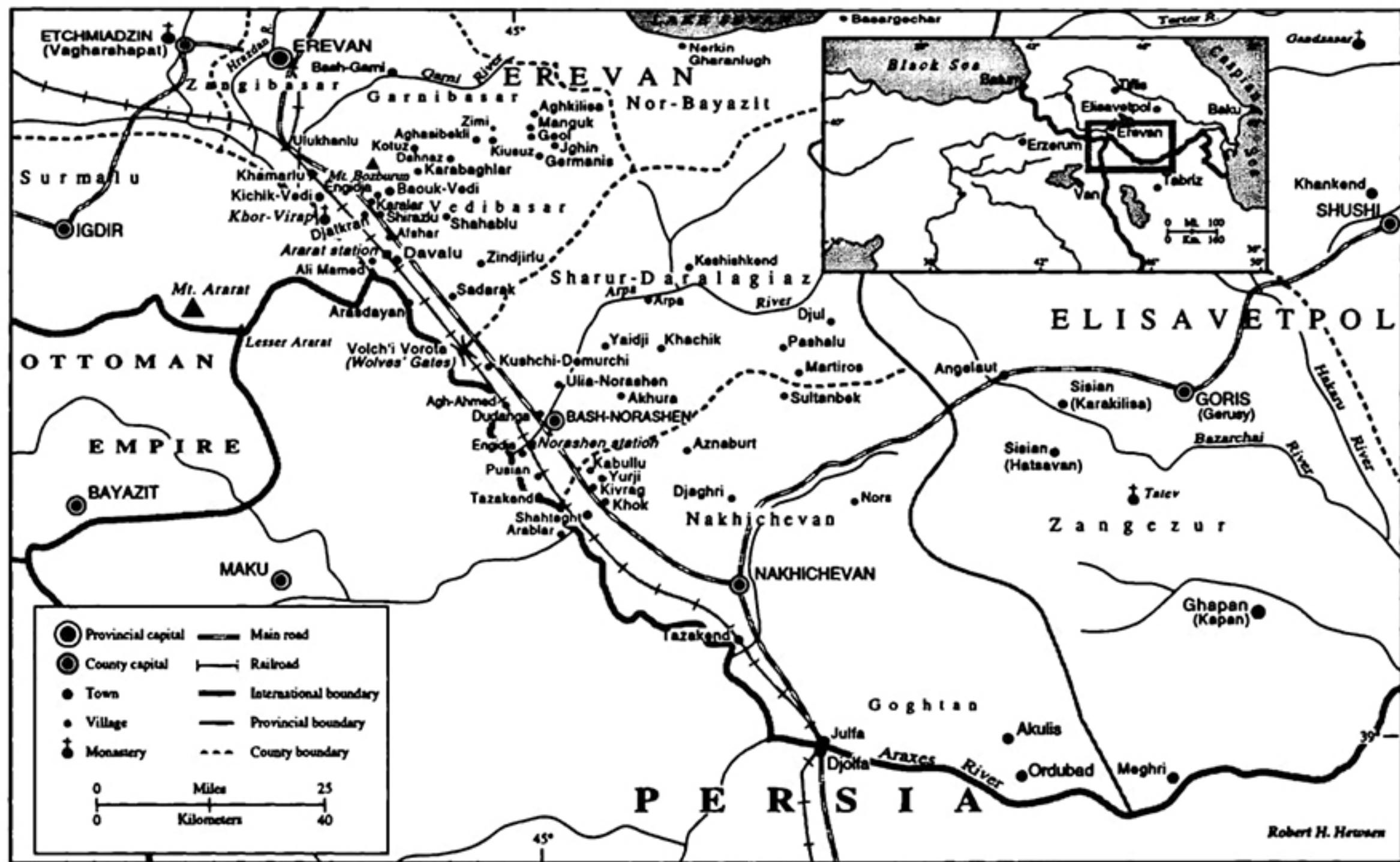
Governmental decrees were of little help in recovering the spoils, much of which was squandered. A small amount of Zangibasar's wealth did eventually end up in government hands. In August the finance ministry recommended the formation of an interministerial committee to inventory those goods and to determine how best to convert them into foreign exchange. The ministry listed the items in its keeping, including gold watches and money, and indicated that the other ministries also were in possession of certain unreported assets.¹⁴ Yet the little that the government was able to salvage had no impact on its fiscal and economic problems. The Armenians had turned into a mob in Zangibasar and caused enormous waste and ravage. Nonetheless, the enclave had been cleared, relieving the pressure on the railway and on the capital city itself. Ruben Ter-Minasian had spoken in the language of force.¹⁵

Armenian successes in Zangibasar and Olti strengthened the hand of militants who insisted that only by a display of might could Armenia rid itself of internal enemies, safeguard routes of communication, and break out of its externally imposed isolation. These objectives could be achieved by recapturing the lower Araxes River Valley and opening the railroad to Julfa and Tabriz, linking Armenia with the entire Persian network of communication, transportation, and trade. Between Erevan and Julfa lay the broad expanse of Vedibasar, Sharur, and Nakhichevan, nearly all of which was controlled by "Tatar" partisans commanded by Turkish and Azerbaijani officers (see map 7).

Vedibasar was centered around the fortified village of Baouk-Vedi in the southern sector of the county (*uezd*) of Erevan. In the summer of 1919 the Armenian army had suffered humiliating losses at Baouk-Vedi before falling back to Khamarlu.³⁵ The expulsion of the Armenian army and administration from not only Vedibasar but the whole of the lower Araxes Valley had put to flight thousands of Armenian villagers and townspeople, sharply aggravating the refugee problem. Now, on the heels of the operations in Zangibasar and Olti, the moment of retribution had arrived. On June 30 the military authorities adopted a plan to occupy Vedibasar and advance as far as the defile known as Volch'i Vora, or Wolves' Gates, at the entrance to Sharur.³⁶

That advance began on the morning of July 11 with twenty companies of infantry, seven squadrons of cavalry, and several artillery batteries and machine gun squads stretched out from Khor-Virap on the Araxes River to Mount Bozburun, facing Baouk-Vedi. General Shelkovnikian's order of the day called for the main Khamarlu detachment to attack Baouk-Vedi. Colonel Dmitrii Korganian would lead six squadrons of cavalry and four companies of infantry against the villages to the east of the railway before joining up with Lieutenant Colonel Kafiev's detachment, which would advance from the Nor-Bayazit perimeter over Jghin. After overpowering Vedibasar, the combined Armenian forces were to move southward with the Vardan Zoravar armored train (which had been returned to the southern front from Alexandropol) into Ararat station and Davalu and as far as the narrow pass at Volch'i Vorota.⁴⁷

The high-spirited, confident Armenian forces rolled over most of Vedibasar on the first day of the campaign. Karalar, Djatkran, Ali Mamed,



7. THE LOWER ARAXES RIVER VALLEY

Kotuz, Aghasibekli, Engidja, Lower Karabaghlar, and other villages fell one after the other; in the northeastern sector the Turkic defenses collapsed in face of the 3d Regiment's advance from Nor-Bayazit over Jghin, Aghkilisa, Geol, Manguk, Zimi, Kiusuz, Germanis, and Dahnaz. By nightfall on July 11, the main Khamarlu detachment had moved to within a mile of Baouk-Vedi. In a desperate effort to hurl back the Armenians, the defenders left their positions on Mount Giavur Ghalasi, but the Armenian 2d Regiment, engaging in hand-to-hand combat, claimed many lives and captured the strategic commanding height. As Baouk-Vedi's defenders and inhabitants fled into the darkness over Zindjirlu toward Davalu, the Khamarlu detachment entered the nearly abandoned village at dawn on July 12, seizing a cannon, machine guns, shells, grenades, ammunition, and other booty of war. The symbol of Turkic defiance had fallen.⁴⁸

From Davalu, Major Ali Demir informed Veysel Bey that the defenses of Vedibasar were crumbling and that the panic-stricken militiamen and peasantry were fleeing into Sharur. Veysel dispatched the 1st Battalion of the 18th Regiment to assist, along with Kalb Ali Khan's militia and General Selimov's Azerbaijani unit. Nothing could stem the exodus, however, and the new arrivals became a part of the disorderly retreat.⁴⁹ By nightfall on July 12, the Armenians had occupied Shahablu, Zindjirlu, Davalu, and Sadarak, and the Armenian armored train pressed southward from Ararat station. Armenian work crews were quickly brought in to repair the rails that the retreating militia had cut to stall the advance of the armored train. On the morning of July 14, the Khamarlu detachment marched through the Volch'i Vorota pass and into Sharur, again putting to flight the detachments of the Turkish 18th and 34th regiments, the militia, and the terrified population.⁵⁰ Outside of Bash-Norashen, General Shelkovnikian's expedition was joined by the Dara-lagiaz detachment, which had overrun the Turkic settlements around

Keshishkend, including Djul, and then descended over Arpa and Yaidji to Norashen and Dudanga. The Khamarlu, Nor-Bayazit, and Daralagiaz columns now combined as the Sharur detachment and, with their initial objectives achieved, prepared to subdue the whole of Sharur and Nakhichevan. On July 16 the Armenian front extended from the Araxes River to Agh-Ahmed, Kushchi-Demurchi, Bash-Norashen, Ulia-Norashen, and Akhura.⁵¹

Sharur-Nakhichevan

The sweep of the Armenian forces to Bash-Norashen, only 33 miles from Nakhichevan, threw the Muslim militia into disarray and put to flight most of the population of the more than sixty villages of Sharur. Abandoning home and field, the people poured into Shahtagh to get across the bridge into the Maku khanate of Persia before it was too late. Concerned about the safety of the Turkish detachments posted as far away as Ordubad, Major Veysel demanded reinforcements from the Nakhichevan National Council, complaining that the Muslim partisans and Azerbaijani soldiers were refusing to engage the enemy. The Turks had come to assist against Armenian aggression, but the land belonged to the khans and people of Sharur-Nakhichevan, and unless they were willing to participate in its defense the Turkish contingents would have no choice but to withdraw.⁵²

Afraid of Armenian retribution, thousands of townspeople and villagers from the Nakhichevan district now forded the Araxes River or concentrated at Julfa at the southern extremity of Erevan province to be prepared at a moment's notice to cross the bridge to Persian Djolfa and the road to Tabriz. Under these circumstances, the Nakhichevan National Council again appealed to the Armenian command to halt the advance to permit further negotiations for the district's peaceful submission. When those discussions resumed in Erevan on July 26, the Armenian government reiterated most of its previous conditions, adding that for the time being Sharur would remain under military occupation and the refugees would have to wait to return. The bountiful fields of Sharur were ripe for the harvest, and it was apparent that the Armenians wanted to reap these spoils of war before letting the Muslim villagers come back. Moreover, Armenian officials were being sent to Tiflis and elsewhere to register Armenian refugees from Sharur and Nakhichevan for their repatriation.⁶⁴