



# **International Boundary Study**

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## **Turkey – U.S.S.R. Boundary**

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**INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY**

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# TURKEY - U.S.S.R. BOUNDARY

## I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Turkey - U.S.S.R. boundary is 335 miles in length<sup>1</sup> and is partly physical and partly historical in nature, for some sectors follow river courses or drainage divides while others are based on old administrative borders. Starting from a point on the Black Sea coast just south of the village of Sarpi, it runs generally eastward across the Coruh Nehri (Chorokh) for 60 miles to approximately 42°30' E. longitude. From here it extends in an east and southeasterly direction for 121 miles, following the old administrative borders of Ardahan and Kars Provinces, to its junction with the Arpa Cayi (Akhuryan) west of Leninakan. It then follows the thalweg (main channel) of the Arpa to the Aras River, and the thalweg of the Aras (Araxes) to the Iranian border. The length of the boundary along these two rivers is 154 miles. The area through which the Turkey - Soviet boundary passes changed hands several times during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but since 1921 the present boundary has remained unaltered.

## II. BACKGROUND

### A. Geographical

The border area of Turkey and the Soviet Union is occupied principally by the Armenian Plateau, with elevations in the western and central portions averaging 5 - 7,000 feet, dropping in the extreme southeast to below 3,000 feet. Along the Black Sea coast is a narrow lowland, a mile or so in width. The plateau is composed largely of volcanic rock; rising above it are numerous mountains - extinct volcanoes - culminating in Mt. Ararat (Agri Dagi) (16,945 feet) on the Turkish side of the boundary, and Mt. Alagez (Gora Aragats) (13,435 feet) to the northwest in the Soviet Union. Earthquakes are not infrequent, and there are many mineral springs. Rivers cutting into the plateau have created deep, but often broad, canyons in the soft rock. Thick, fertile soils have accumulated in the depressions, and it is here below the level of the plateau, that much of the agriculture of the area is carried on.

The principal rivers are the Aras, rising in east central Turkey and flowing east and southeast to mark the easternmost portion of the boundary; the Kura (Kurucay) which comes from Turkish Armenia to cross the boundary in a deep canyon and become one of the major rivers of the Soviet Transcaucasia; and the Coruh, whose tributaries drain much of northeastern Turkey. Among the tributaries of the Aras are the Razdan (Zanga) draining Lake Sevan in Soviet Armenia, the Kars on which is located the Turkish city of Kars, and the Arpa which for over 67 miles marks the boundary between Turkey and the Soviet Union.

Climate in the border area is severe, with cold winters and hot, dry summers. Only along the immediate Black Sea coast are there subtropical conditions and heavy

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<sup>1</sup> Measured on the AMS 1:250,000 maps showing the boundary.

rainfall. Here tea and citrus fruits are raised, but wheat, cattle, and sheep are the major inland agricultural products. In the Aras plain of the southeastern border area, annual precipitation drops to less than 15 inches and irrigation is necessary for crops. The western uplands are forested, as are the high mountains in northern Soviet Armenia; elsewhere the predominant vegetation is steppe, or, in the southeast, desert.

The international boundary passes through an area which was, until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, ethnographically as complex and involved as its jumbled topography. In recent years people from the central and western areas of Turkey have been resettled along the border and in 1960 the two Turkish provinces along the boundary (Artvin and Kars) had between them a population of 750,000. The largest Turkish towns are Kars, 30,000; Artvin, about 6,000; and Igdir, about 10,000. On the Soviet side there are 1.8 million people in the Armenian S.S.R. (88 percent of which are Armenians), and another 250,000 in the Adzhar (Adzharskaya) A.S.S.R. in the extreme west, in and around the port of Batumi. Yerevan, capital of the Armenian S.S.R. with over 500,000 people is the largest city. Others include Leninakan (formerly Aleksandropol), 110,000 and Batumi, 70,000. Along the Black Sea coast of Turkey are a few settlements of the Laz, who are akin to the Muslims of the Adzhar A.S.S.R. across the border.

The rugged character of the upland area is reflected in the relatively few road and railroad facilities existing there. One railroad crosses the boundary, connecting Tbilisi and Leninakan with Kars and Erzurum. From Leninakan, a line runs southeast on the Soviet side of the boundary, connecting ultimately with Tabriz, Iran. A spur from this line serves Yerevan. Batumi is also linked to the north by rail, but except for the line through Kars, all of eastern Turkey is without rail service. Year-round highways link Kars with Ardahan, Artvin, and Batumi, with Igdir and Yerevan, and with Leninakan and the growing highway system in Soviet Armenia. On the Russian side, south from Batumi, a highway follows the full length of the boundary at a distance varying from 10 to 20 miles. The smaller towns and villages on both sides of the boundary are served by secondary roads, but these are subject to closure by snow or spring floods.

The Soviets have been carrying out extensive economic programs both in the Armenian S.S.R. and in southwestern Georgia. Yerevan has many industries including tanneries, clothing factories, fruit and vegetable canneries, and a synthetic rubber plant, while Leninakan has cotton textile mills and sugar beet refineries. Batumi has an oil refinery and is an important port for Soviet Transcaucasia. The Soviets have constructed hydroelectric stations on the Razdan River which falls from Lake Sevan to the Aras. They are using the waters of Lake Sevan for irrigation of cotton and fruits near Yerevan, and have a dam on the Aras River near Oktemberyan (Sardar-abad) which provides irrigation water for the Yerevan Plain.

Development has progressed more slowly in the Turkish border area. A large copper mine and smelter has been established at Murgul, and will be expanded to produce sulfuric acid as well as blister copper. Kars manufactures rugs, woolens and leather products. The black sea areas produce tea and hazelnuts, both high value commodities

which enter Turkey's export trade. However, traditional agriculture remains the mainstay of northeastern Turkey, with meat, wool and dairy products the principal commodities delivered to other markets. In 1953, agreement was reached between Turkey and the Soviet Union for Turkish use of waters from the Oktemberyan dam to irrigate cotton and wheat in the Igdir Plain. Turkey's Five Year Plan, which emphasizes development of the central and eastern areas, can be expected to stimulate industrial growth in the border area and assist the region to realize its high potential for production of livestock and other agricultural commodities.

## **B. Historical**

The area of the present Turkey - U.S.S.R. boundary has been a landbridge between East and West for varied races and peoples since historic times. It has been a battleground of rival interests for centuries. During the later phases, the Transcaucasian area became the locus for contention between Turkey and Russia modified at times by the interests of Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijani who were forced to defer to the stronger neighbors.

Forerunners of the Ottoman Turks arrived on the scene in the 11th century. By the late 15th and early 16th centuries the new and expanding Ottoman Empire reached into the area, eventually encompassing considerable land north of the present boundary, including much of the eastern coast of the Black Sea. During the reign of Peter the Great, the tide began turning against Turkey. In 1774 the Ottoman Empire, by the terms of the Treaty of the Kucuk Kaynarja with Russia, was obliged to cede some of the lands north of the present boundary and to relinquish the unilateral control of the Black Sea it had previously enjoyed.

The Russians came to Transcaucasia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, gradually extending their boundaries southward at the expense of both Persia and Turkey. By the Treaty of Turkmanchai (Torkaman) in 1828, the Russians won the plain of Erivan from Persia, establishing the Aras River as the boundary between the two nations. The following year the Treaty of Adrianople (Edirne) between Russia and Turkey delimited their common boundary as a line running north of Batumi and Kars. The Treaty of San Stefano, ending the Russo - Turkish War of 1877 - 78, provided for Russian military occupation of the border area until the Sultan introduced and implemented certain reforms in the area. In 1878, by the Treaty of Berlin, which revised the Russian - Turkey Treaty of San Stefano, Russia won the provinces of Batumi, Ardahan and Kars from Turkey. The Russians then shifted their attentions to Central Asia.

During the First World War the Russians occupied northeastern Turkey in 1916 - 17; but, after Russia's withdrawal from the war, the Turks demanded that Batumi, Ardahan, and Kars be returned to Turkey - a move written into the Brest - Litovsk Treaty of 1918.

An independent Armenia was established in 1918, but it soon succumbed to the Nationalist Turkish forces. By November, 1920, the Turks had reoccupied that part of

Armenia within their borders, and, by the Treaty of Aleksandropol (December 2, 1920) between Turkey and the Armenian Republic in the Soviet Union, the Turkish boundary was re-established as it had been prior to the 1878 Treaty with the exceptions (1) that Batumi Province was split, the northern part, including the port of Batumi, remaining in Russia; and (2) that the Turks received a southern portion of the Russian province of Erivan, moving the boundary there northward to the Aras River. This new region was incorporated into the vilayet of Kars. The Aleksandropol Treaty was subsequently confirmed by the Soviet Turkish Treaty of Moscow (March 16, 1921) and the Turkish - Armenian Treaty of Kars (October 13, 1921).

Since 1921 the boundary has remained unchanged. The Soviet Republic of Armenia was combined with Georgia and Azerbaijan into the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic in 1922, and in 1936 became a separate constituent republic of the Soviet Union. It surrounds on three sides the Nakhichevan A.S.S.R., a border area peopled largely by Tatars, which is administratively a part of the Azerbaijan S.S.R. Turkey has combined the old provinces of Ardahan and Kars into the Kars vilayet, and has named its portion of the former Batumi province Artvin vilayet.

The Turkey - Soviet boundary was the subject of controversy between The Soviet Union and Turkey following World War II. The Soviets in 1945 asked the Turks to consider the cession of 10,000 square miles in the Kars - Ardahan area to the U.S.S.R., returning the boundary to its pre-1921 position, but this the Turks refused to do. In the same year a publication in the Georgian S.S.R. suggested that an area stretching 180 miles along the Turkish Black Sea coast be joined to the Georgian Republic on the grounds of ethnic affinity of the population there to the Georgians. The Soviets in 1953 renounced their claims of 1945 - 46, and they have not pressed any new territorial claims in the border area.

### **III. BOUNDARY ANALYSIS**

The Turkey - U.S.S.R. boundary was delimited in the 1921 Treaties of Moscow and Kars and demarcated in 1925 - 26 by a mixed Soviet - Turkish commission.<sup>1</sup> The boundary begins in the west just south of the village of Sarpi, located on the Black Sea coast about 10 miles southwest of Batumi. It crosses a wooded upland in a general easterly direction, rising to 5,000 feet and following a drainage divide, for nine miles before reaching the valley of the Coruh River. Turning south, it follows the Coruh on its east bank for one and a half miles, before swinging again east across the uplands for a distance of 50 miles. It follows drainage divides including that of the Shavshetskiy Khrebet (mountain range) to Kanli Dagi (mountain) located on the administrative border of Kars vilayet. In this sector elevations rise to over 7,500 feet. Up to this point the boundary has been cutting through the pre-1921 province of Batumi, separating the Turkish vilayet of Artvin from the Adzhar A.S.S.R. of the Georgian S.S.R. Kanli Dagi is a tri-point, since there the administrative border between Artvin and Kars vilayets meets with the international boundary.

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<sup>1</sup> Official Turkey - U.S.S.R. Boundary 1:25,000 scale series (sheets 1 - 49) 1926.

From Kanli Dagi, the boundary follows a general southeasterly course for 121 miles, conforming with the old administrative borders of Ardahan and Kars provinces, before reaching the Arpa Cayi (stream), a tributary of the Aras River. At one point the boundary lies along the channel of the upper Kura River for five miles; further east, it crosses Hazapin Golu (lake). Elevations in this sector are from 6 - 8,000 feet, with occasional points over 9,000 feet. For over 100 miles after leaving the Coruh River, the boundary is crossed by few roads and there are no towns of significance within 20 miles of the boundary except for the Soviet town of Akhaltsikhi, lying nine miles northeast of the boundary's northernmost point.

Eleven miles northeast of Kanli Dagi, the administrative border of the Adzhar A.S.S.R. ends and the boundary then separates Kars vilayet from the Tbilisi oblast of the Georgian S.S.R. Eighteen miles southeast of Hazapin Golu, the international boundary is joined by the administrative border between the Georgian and Armenian republics. Below this point the boundary separates Kars vilayet from the Leninakan okrug of the Armenian S.S.R.

Just before its juncture with the Arpa Cayi, the boundary is crossed by the highway and rail line linking Leninakan with Kars. The boundary follows the main channel of the Arpa Cayi, south for 67-1/2 miles until it joins with the Aras, and then 86-1/2 miles along the Aras, again following the main channel until it is joined on its west bank by the Turkish - Iranian Boundary. Eight and one-half miles from this final juncture, the boundary meets the administrative border between the Armenian S.S.R. and the Nakhichevan A.S.S.R. of the Azerbaijan S.S.R., and in its final course the boundary separates the A.S.S.R. from the Kars vilayet.

Southward from Leninakan, the boundary is followed on the Soviet side by both a highway and a railroad. Except for a few miles below the juncture of the Arpa Cayi and the Aras, there are not major highways along this sector of the boundary on the Turkish side.

#### **IV. TREATIES**

Russia's expansion against Turkey during the 19th century in the area east of the Black Sea led to the Treaties of Adrianople (1829) and Berlin (1878), but, following World War I, Turkey regained the Kars and Ardahan areas, lost to the Russians in 1878. The Treaty of Moscow (1921) delimited the boundary as it exists today.

##### **A. Treaty of Adrianople, signed September 14, 1829 between Turkey and Russia.**

Article IV delimits the Russo - Turkish boundary along the northern administrative borders of the sanjaks of Batumi, Ardahan, and Kars.

**B. Treaty of Berlin, signed July 13, 1878 by a group of nations including Turkey and Russia.**

Article LVIII provides for the transfer of Batumi, Ardahan, and Kars from Turkey to Russia.

**C. Treaty of Aleksandropol, signed December 2, 1920 between Turkey and the Republic of Armenia.**

This treaty annulled the Treaty of Sevres, concluded August 10, 1920, and provided for the return of Ardahan, Kars, and the southern portion of Batumi to Turkey.

**D. Treaty of Moscow, signed March 16, 1921 between Turkey and the Soviet Union.**

Articles 1 to 3 confirm the cession of nearly 10,000 square miles of territory by the Soviet Union to Turkey as outlined in the Treaty of Aleksandropol.

**E. Treaty of Kars, signed October 13, 1921 between Turkey and Armenia.**

Appendix 1 confirms the northeastern boundary of Turkey as delimited in the Treaty of Moscow.

## **V. SUMMARY**

The Turkey - U.S.S.R. Boundary, 335 miles in length, passes through an area which was, until the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, as complex as its jumbled topography. Although known historically as a land-bridge for varied races and peoples, the boundary area has remained stable since the termination of World War I. The international boundary was delimited in the 1921 Treaties of Moscow and Kars and demarcated in 1925 - 26 by a mixed Soviet - Turkish commission. Army Map Service series N-501 (scale 1:250,000) and the official Turkey - U.S.S.R. Boundary series (scale 1:25,000) are authoritative and officially available.



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