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RUSSIAN-PERSIAN DIPLOMACY AND THE PROCESS OF BORDER FORMATION BETWEEN THEM IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

Abstract

The Russo-Persian relations in the 18th and 19th centuries were marked by a complex interplay of diplomacy, warfare, and territorial redistribution. This had a significant impact on the geopolitical landscape of the Caucasus and the surrounding regions. During this period, the Russian Empire sought to expand its influence southward into Persian territories, driven by a desire to control trade routes and strategic interests. European conflicts and alliances, as well as internal developments within both empires, influenced Russo-Persian relations. Persia, weakened by internal conflicts and economic difficulties, found it particularly challenging to resist Russian advances. Russia's expansion was motivated by military ambitions, economic interests, and a desire to dominate rival powers in the region. This article will examine the key events and processes that shaped the relationship between the two states.

Keywords: Russian Empire, Persia, Caucasus, warfare, diplomacy.

Introduction

The South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea region have long been arenas of confrontation between various empires. By the late 17th and early 18th centuries, Russia's interest in this region grew, leading to conflicts between Persia and Russia. Consequently, the Russian Empire began engaging in active military and diplomatic actions to establish its presence in the South Caucasus and along the western coast of the Caspian Sea (Dunaeva 2018, 44-45).

From the 17th century, Peter the Great inherited two complex issues: the Turkish and Swedish. Resolving these meant gaining access to the seas: in the first case, the Black Sea, and in the second, the Baltic Sea. This allowed Russia to extend its influence over the Black and Caspian Sea regions (Latsabidze 2023, 69). After the signing of the Treaty of Nystad¹ 1721, and the end of the Great Northern War, Peter the Great began implementing a new plan that involved the first Persian campaign (1722-1723). As a result of this successful campaign, the Russian Empire took control of the cities of Baku and Derbent, along with the surrounding areas, as well as the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran, and Astarabad (Potemkin 1941, 266, 271, 272).

Treaties Signed in the 18th Century and Their Impact on Russian-Persian Relations

The 18th century began with significant diplomatic activity between Russia and Persia, leading to the signing of the first agreements. Following Peter the Great's first Persian campaign in 1722-1723, an agreement was reached, resulting in the Treaty of Saint Petersburg². The treaty was signed on September 12 (23), 1723. On Russia's side, the treaty was signed by Emperor Peter the Great, while Persia was

¹ The Treaty of Nystad was signed on August 30 (September 10), 1721, in the town of Nystad (present-day Finland) between the Kingdoms of Russia and Sweden, marking the end of the Great Northern War, which lasted from 1700 to 1721.

² The Treaty of St. Petersburg was not ratified by the Shah of Persia. Later, according to the Treaties of Resht in 1732 and Ganja in 1735, the territories transferred under the Treaties of St. Petersburg of 1723 were returned to Persia.

represented by “Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary” Ismail Beg. The treaty consisted of a preamble and five articles declaring “good and perpetual” friendship between the states. It stipulated that in the event of an attack on either party, the other would assist. Russia was also obligated to help Shah Tahmasp II secure the Persian throne, as he was fighting against rebellious Afghan tribes at the time. In exchange for military assistance, Persia ceded its Caspian territories to Russia, which included the cities of Baku and Derbent along with their surrounding areas, as well as the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran, and Astarabad (Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossijskoj imperii 2007-2019, T. 7, 110-112). The territorial gains made by the Russian Empire were recognized by the Ottoman Empire in the Treaty of Constantinople³, signed in 1724 between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, although this treaty was later rendered null after signing the Treaty of Rasht in 1732 (Latsabidze 2023, 71).

On January 21 (February 1), 1732, the Treaty of Rasht was signed between Russia and Persia. The agreement aimed to resolve territorial issues in the Caspian region, specifically concerning the territories Russia had acquired under the Treaty of Saint Petersburg in 1723. The treaty consisted of a preamble and eight chapters, declaring a permanent “neighborly” friendship between the two countries. Russia committed to returning the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran, and Astarabad to Persia within 1-5 months. Russian troops were to withdraw north of the Kura River and, in the event of Persia's victory in the war with the Ottoman Empire (1730-1736), Persia would regain the cities of Baku and Derbent along with “adjacent lands”. In exchange, Russia was granted the right to free and untaxed trade with Persia and to transit trade with India and other countries. The Persian government promised to assist Russian merchants in conducting trade and recovering goods in the event of shipwrecks. To maintain diplomatic contacts and protect the interests of merchants, both sides were allowed to have representatives at courts and residences in the rank of ministers, as well as consuls and agents in cities (Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossijskoj imperii 2007-2019, T. 8, 614-620).

On March 10 (21), 1735, the Treaty of Ganja was signed between Persia and Russia. The treaty was signed by Prince Golitsyn on behalf of Russia and by Nadir Qoli Beg Afshar, the ruler of Iran, who later became Nadir Shah Afshar in 1736 (Axworthy 2010, 17-56). At the time of the treaty's signing, Persia and the Ottoman Empire were engaged in a war (1730-1736). According to the agreement, the Russian Empire returned the cities of Baku and Derbent, along with their provinces, to Persia. In return, Persia promised not to cede these territories to the control of any other state and to continue the war against the Ottoman Empire until all territories occupied by the Ottomans were regained. The Treaty of Ganja declared “perpetual peace” between the parties and granted Russian merchants the right to free trade within Persian territory. Both sides once again recognized the provisions of the 1732 Treaty of Rasht and pledged not to sign a separate peace with the Ottoman Empire. Despite the Treaty of Ganja, Nadir Shah conducted separate negotiations with the Ottomans in late 1735 and signed the Treaty of Constantinople in 1736 (Yuzefovich 1869, 202-207).

In the 18th century, the South Caucasus remained one of the main issues in Persia's foreign policy (Sanikidze 2011, 127). Consequently, the agreements between Russia and Persia had a significant impact on the Caspian Sea and South Caucasus regions (Latsabidze 2023, 73).

The Treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828): Results and Challenges

As a result of the wars fought between the Russian Empire and Persia in the 19th century, which concluded with the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813 and the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, new borders were established. Persia's defeats in these two wars led to a significant reduction of its influence in the region (Cornell 2015, 9).

According to the treaties, the entire Caucasian coast of the Caspian Sea was annexed to the Russian Empire. Russia was granted exclusive rights to maintain a military fleet on the Caspian Sea. At the same time, Persia was only allowed navigation rights in the Caspian, permitting its merchant ships to

³ The Treaty of Constantinople was signed on June 12 (23) between the Russian and Ottoman Empires. The agreement concerned the demarcation of borders in the Caucasus and Caspian regions. According to the treaty, Russia retained all Caspian territories specified in the Treaty of St. Petersburg of 1723, while the Ottoman Empire was granted control over Kartli (including Tbilisi) and the Erivan Khanate in the South Caucasus. Additionally, the cities of Kermanshah and Hamadan in western Persia fell under Ottoman control.

enter Russian ports. The treaties established, for the first time, a legal regime for navigation on the Caspian Sea; although they did not regulate the use of natural resources, nor did they clarify the issue of maritime boundaries between the coastal states (Janusz-Pawletta 2015, 15).

The Russo-Persian War, which lasted from 1804 to 1813, ended with the signing of the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813. In October 1812, the breakdown of negotiations between Persia and Russia led to the resumption of military actions. Persia's military failures, coupled with the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest⁴ between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire in 1812, forced Persia to resume negotiations. The negotiations occurred in the summer of 1813 in Tbilisi. The British ambassador to Persia, Sir William Gore Ouseley⁵, acted as a mediator in the negotiations (Agazadeh 2018, 1). On October 24, 1813, through British mediation, negotiations held in Gulistan (Karabakh, Azerbaijan) concluded with the signing of a peace treaty. The agreement was ratified by Fath-Ali Shah in April 1814 and by Alexander I in May of the same year. The ratification documents were exchanged on September 15, 1814, in Tbilisi. According to the Treaty of Gulistan, the Russian Empire gained control over Dagestan, the Kingdoms of Kartli-Kakheti and Imereti, the Principalities of Guria, Samegrelo, and Abkhazia, as well as the Khanates of Karabakh, Ganja, Shaki, Shirvan, Derbent, Quba, Baku, and Talysh.

On February 10 (22), 1828, the Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed between Russia and Persia. The signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchay marked the end of the Russo-Persian War, which took place from 1826 to 1828 (Shostakovich 1960, 119-120). According to the treaty, the new border between Russia and Persia was established along the Aras River. Persia ceded the Khanates of Yerevan and Nakhchivan to the Russian Empire and recognized Russian jurisdiction over all lands and islands between the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea. A "Trade Act" was signed along with the treaty, granting Russian merchants the right to trade freely throughout Persia. A unified 5% duty was imposed on the import of Russian and Persian goods.

Following the Russo-Persian Wars of 1804-1813 and 1826-1828, through the Treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay, Persia recognized the South Caucasus region as a sphere of Russian influence, effectively marking the end of Persia's active involvement in the political affairs of the region (Shengelia 1988, 55-72). In the 19th century, relations between the two countries shifted from military confrontation to diplomatic engagement. Recognizing its relative weakness, Persia increasingly sought Russia's assistance in both domestic and foreign matters. This period has laid the groundwork for complex and tense relations.

The Process of Defining the Border Between Russia and Persia Towards Central Asia

After consolidating its positions in the Caucasus, Russia began to take action towards Central Asia, which affected Russo-Persian relations. Russia sought to solidify its position on the Caspian Sea. After occupying significant positions on the western coast of the Caspian Sea, it also began operations to the east of the Caspian Sea (Kulagina 2010, 77-78).

The border-establishing process between Russia and Persia in Central Asia can be traced back to the Tehran Convention, signed on December 9, 1881. It became necessary to delineate the border between the newly conquered territories by Russia and the southeastern provinces of Persia (Kulagina 2010, 84). As a result of negotiations, the Tehran Convention (1881) was signed in Tehran on December 9 (Khalfin 1965, 353-354). The convention defined the Russo-Persian border to the east of the Caspian Sea. In addition to establishing the state border, the convention included special provisions for using border rivers/waterways and regulated trade and economic relations between Russia and Persia along the Caspian coast (Kulagina 2010, 87).

In 1882, demarcation work established the precise border between the Russian Empire and Persia. In 1884, the Merv Oasis (Central Asia) was incorporated into Russia. As a result, further border adjustments were necessary since the 1881 Tehran Convention had only defined borders up to Baba-Durmaz. The final borders were established by the Convention of May 27, 1893. The previously

⁴ The Treaty of Bucharest of 1812 was signed on May 16 (28) between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, ending the Russo-Ottoman War of 1806-1812.

⁵ Sir William Gore Ouseley (June 24, 1770 - November 18, 1844) was a British diplomat and linguist who served as the United Kingdom's ambassador to Persia. Through his mediation, negotiations were held between the Russian Empire and Persia, resulting in the signing of the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813.

established borders were modified: the Firuze district was ceded to Russia, while Russia relinquished a plot of land on the right bank of the Aras River in front of the former Abbasabad fortress in the South Caucasus. The fifth article of the convention ultimately defined the demarcated section of the border from Baba-Durmaz (Turkmenistan) to Afghanistan. This process finalized the formation of the Russo-Persian border in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Kulagina 2010, 93).

The formation of the Russo-Persian border, which had been ongoing for several centuries, was completed by the early 20th century (Kulagina 2010, 95). For the Caucasus region, the border issues were regulated using the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay and the border description dated January 18, 1829, while for Central Asia, the 1881 and 1893 conventions and the protocols developed by the border delimitation commissions were used. With Russia's annexation of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, the land and maritime border between Russia and Persia reached approximately 2,500 kilometers. The maritime border was not defined, and the parties enjoyed the right to free navigation (Kulagina 2010, 95).

Conclusion

Russia significantly expanded southward, consolidating its positions along the western, northern, and eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, while Persia retained control over the southern coast. Although border issues between the two countries were documented in various treaties, the border between Russia and Persia was not fully resolved. Final demarcation was not completed in all sections, with some islands in border rivers remaining disputed and issues regarding the use of these rivers' waters unresolved. This led to border conflicts, and local commissions were established to address them (Kulagina 2010, 95). Notably, to avoid dissatisfaction among the local population, nomadic tribes were allowed to move between Russia's southern regions and Persia's northern regions (Amiri 2006, 243).

With Russia's conquest of Central Asia, a significant portion of the Caspian Sea fell under its influence. These agreements remained in effect until the post-World War I period (until the October Revolution of 1917) (Latsabidze 2023, 79). Russo-Persian relations in the 18th and 19th centuries were shaped by imperial ambitions, territorial conflicts, and shifting alliances, which long influenced the political and cultural landscape of the Caucasus and surrounding regions.

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