

The Military-Political Situation in the South Caucasus in the Early 19th Century and the Occupation of the Iravan Khanate by Russia

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Abstract: *This article provides an overview of the general history of the Iravan region, an ancient territory of Azerbaijan. It defines the borders and geographical scope of the Iravan Khanate and focuses on its occupation by the Russian Empire, the subsequent establishment of the Armenian Province in the region, and the process of Armenization. The political situation of the Iravan Khanate in the early 19th century, particularly during the First and Second Russo-Iranian Wars, is examined. The study draws upon primary archival sources, official Russian state documents, and extensive historical literature to analyze Russia's strategic interest in the region and the military-political measures undertaken for its occupation, ultimately shedding light on the process of the khanate's downfall.*

Keywords: *Iravan region, Iravan Khanate, Russo-Iranian wars, Iravan Fortress, fall of Iravan, Armenian Province.*

Introduction

Historically, the Iravan region had been an integral part of the various states that existed on the territory of Azerbaijan. The emergence of the city of Iravan as a significant administrative center dates back to the periods of the Chokhur-Saad beylerbeylik and the Iravan Khanate. Beginning in the 15th century, the lowland valley area stretching from the confluence of the Arpa and Araz rivers to the territory between Mount Ararat and Mount Alagoz became known as the Saadi Hollow, commonly referred to as Chokhur-Saad.

In the early 16th century, during the reign of the Safavid Empire of Azerbaijan, the Chokhur-Saad Beylerbeylik was established with Iravan as

its administrative center. Encompassing a significant part of Western Azerbaijani territories, the Chokhur-Saad beylerbeylik can be regarded as the first comprehensive geographical entity of the region¹.

During the Ottoman-Safavid War of 1578-1590, in the year 1585, the Chokhur-Saad beylerbeylik was occupied by Ottoman forces. In commemoration of this event, a monument named the *Revan Köşkü* (Revan Pavilion) was erected within the grounds of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. According to the Treaty of Istanbul signed in 1590, the territory of the Chokhur-Saad beylerbeylik—along with many other Azerbaijani lands—was ceded to the Ottoman Empire².

During the Ottoman rule over the territory of Chokhur-Saad from 1585 to 1603, the region was referred to as the Province of Revan (Iravan). In relation to this administrative unit, the Ottoman government compiled several comprehensive and summary registers: the *Detailed Register of the Province of Revan* (1590), the *Summary Register of the Province of Revan* (approx. 1595), and the *Defteri Sicili Livayi Revan* (1603)³.

According to the 1590 *Detailed Register*, the Province of Iravan consisted of two main administrative divisions: the *Liva of Iravan*, which comprised 10 districts (Iravan, Karbi, Vedi, Aralik, Talin, Ermus, Abnik, Abaran, Sharabkhana), and the *Liva of Nakhchivan*, which comprised 16 districts (Aghchagala, Mavazi-Khatun, Mulki-Arslanli, Karabagh, Deresham, Dereshahbuz, Bazachay, Sharur, Zar, Zebil, Alinja, Sisian, Azadjiran, Ordubad-apparently temporary in status-Shorlut, and Derenurgat) and one *qaza* (Nakhchivan)⁴.

Socio-political life of the Iravan region (up to the early 19th century)

During the Safavid-Ottoman War of 1603-1612, launched by Safavid ruler Shah Abbas I (1587-1629), the Iravan region was liberated from Ottoman control in 1603. According to the peace treaty concluded in 1612, the Ottoman Empire was obliged to return all territories it had gained through the Treaty of Istanbul in 1590,

including the Chokhur-Saad region, back to the Safavid state.

In the subsequent period, although the Chokhur-Saad region suffered repeated Ottoman incursions, it remained, as before, within the borders of the Safavid Empire until the 1720s.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the Safavid state experienced a profound economic, political, and military crisis, which was exploited by the Russian Emperor Peter I to occupy the Caspian littoral regions. In response, the Ottoman Empire deployed its forces to the region, leading ultimately to the signing of the **Treaty of Istanbul in 1724** between the two empires. According to the treaty, except for the Caspian littoral areas, a significant portion of Azerbaijani territories-including the Iravan region-was ceded to the Ottoman Empire⁵.

Similar to the administrative steps taken in 1590, the Ottoman government compiled a **detailed register (müfessal defter)** of the Iravan province in 1728. At that time, a separate detailed register was prepared for the Nakhchivan region. Several subdistricts-Zar, Zebil, and Sharur-were detached from the *sanjak* of Nakhchivan and incorporated into the Iravan province. Furthermore, the subdistricts of Maku, İğdır, and Sürmeli were also added to the province. Within this newly expanded province, additional administrative units were established, including the districts of Goycha, Mezra, Khinzirek, Gyrkbulag, Derechichek, and Sadarak-the latter being inhabited entirely by Turkic populations-as well as the *liva* of Shuregel. Subdistricts

that had existed at the end of the 16th century, such as Talin, Ermavi, Abnik, and Sharabkhana, were absorbed into these newly created units⁶.

According to the 1728 detailed register of the Province of Iravan, the province consisted of the city of Iravan and the subdistricts of Gyrykbulag, Karbi, Maku, Khinzirek, Karni, Vedi, Derechichek, Abaran, Goycha, Mezra, Sürmeli, Iğdır, Aralik, Sharur, Sadarak, Zarzamin, as well as the *liva* of Shuregel⁷.

After restoring the former strength of the Safavid state, **Nadir Khan** defeated the Ottoman forces and, in 1735, regained control of the Iravan province for the Safavids. Subsequently, the province became part of the **empire of Nadir Shah (1736–1747)**, along with other Azerbaijani territories.

Nadir Shah's administrative-territorial reorganization is of particular interest. He abolished the Beylerbeyliks of Shirvan, Karabakh, Azerbaijan, and Chokhur-Saad—which had existed during the Safavid era—and established a single **unified province of Azerbaijan** with Tabriz as its capital. This decision was not arbitrary; by doing so, Nadir Shah reaffirmed that Chokhur-Saad, like the other Beylerbeyliks, was an integral part of Azerbaijani lands⁸.

Following the assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747, the empire he had established disintegrated into numerous smaller entities—independent khanates. As a result, around twenty khanates emerged on the territory of Azerbaijan. One of these was the

Iravan Khanate. The formation of the Iravan Khanate was partly a consequence of the political vacuum that followed Nadir Shah's death and partly the outcome of the historical development of Western Azerbaijan. As previously noted, the lands of Western Azerbaijan had long been incorporated into various states, yet no independent local state structure had arisen there until this period. The Iravan Khanate became the first such entity⁹.

The Iravan Khanate emerged on the historical territory of Azerbaijan and encompassed lands on both banks of the Araz River, between Mount Ararat and Mount Alagoz. The Ararat plain and the basin of Lake Goycha constituted the central part of the khanate. It bordered Pambak province, the Shamshaddil and Gazakh sultanates, and the Ganja Khanate to the north; the Karabakh and Nakhchivan khanates to the east; the Khoy and Maku khanates to the south; and the Ottoman Empire to the southwest and west. Covering an area of 23 800 square kilometers, the khanate was administratively divided into 15 districts (*mahals*):

1. Gyrykbulag
2. Zangibasar
3. Garnibasar
4. Vedibasar
5. Sharur
6. Shuran
7. Derekend
8. Saatli
9. Talin
10. Seyidli-Akhsakhli
11. Sardarabad
12. Karpi

13. Abaran
14. Derechichek
15. Goycha¹⁰.

From its establishment in **1747** until **1797**, the Iravan Khanate functioned as an independent political entity. Between **1797 and 1828**, it remained under the nominal suzerainty of Iran but managed to maintain a significant degree of internal autonomy, as well as a certain level of independence in its foreign policy. During this period, the Iravan Khanate was ruled by the following khans:

- Mehdi Khan Qasimli (Afshar) (1747-1748)
- Muhammad Hussein Khan Gerayli (1748-1751)
- Khalil Khan Uzbek (1751-1755)
- Hasan Ali Khan Qajar (1755-1759)
- Huseinali Khan Qajar (1759/60-November 1783)
- Ghulam Ali Khan Qajagh (Summer 1783-1784)
- Muhammad Hussein Khan Qajar (1784-June 1805)
- Aliqulu Khan Qajar (June 1797)
- Hasan Khan Makulu (Summer 1797)
- Mehdigulu Khan Qajar (Summer 1805-August 1806)
- Ahmad Khan Maragali (August-October 1806)
- Huseyngulu Khan Qajar (December 1806-October 1827)¹¹.

Like the other khanates that existed in Azerbaijan during the second half of the 18th century, the political history of the Iravan Khanate was characterized by unrelenting **feudal strife, bloody palace coups**, and continuous **resistance against foreign**

invasions¹². Despite these efforts, the attempts to unite the Azerbaijani khanates under a single political authority during the latter half of the 18th century ended in failure. This fragmentation created favorable conditions for **foreign military intervention and occupation** towards the end of the century.

By the late 18th century, the imperial powers most actively involved in realizing their ambitions in Azerbaijan were primarily **Iran and Russia**, with the **Ottoman Empire** playing a secondary role. Iran sought to reoccupy the region and restore the borders of Nadir Shah's former empire. Meanwhile, **Russia**, having pursued a policy of expansion into the South Caucasus since the reign of **Peter the Great**, continued its imperial ambitions. However, despite military incursions into the region during the reigns of **Peter I (1682-1725)** and **Catherine II (1762-1796)**, Russian forces ultimately **withdrew empty-handed** from the South Caucasus.

The territory of the South Caucasus, the majority of which was composed of Azerbaijani khanates, held great political and military-strategic importance for the Russian Empire. Firstly, the conquest of this region could shift the balance of power in the long-standing Russo-Turkish rivalry in Russia's favor. Secondly, Russia had not yet fully conquered the Central Caucasus. The occupation of the South Caucasus would create favorable conditions to encircle the mountainous regions from both the north and the south. Finally, the growing

Russo-British rivalry further enhanced the strategic significance of the South Caucasus, including Azerbaijan. Russia's occupation of these lands would deliver a serious blow to British influence in the East and to the monopoly of the East India Company¹³.

Therefore, following his accession to the Russian imperial throne in 1801, Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) immediately directed his attention to the occupation of the South Caucasus. At that time, the political fragmentation and complex military situation in the South Caucasus facilitated Russia's conquest of the region. Taking advantage of these circumstances, Tsar Alexander I annexed the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti to Russia on September 12, 1801¹⁴.

Subsequently, on December 26, 1802, the commander-in-chief of Russian forces in the Caucasus, K. F. Knorring (1801-1802), invited representatives of the Quba and Talysh khanates, as well as the Shamkhal of Tarki, the Utsmi of Qaraqaytag, the ruler of Tabasaran, and other Dagestani authorities to Georgievsk, where he concluded agreements placing them under Russian "protection"¹⁵.

Following the annexation of Eastern Georgia, territories historically subordinated to the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti such as Gazakh, Shamsaddil, Borchali, and Pambak - also came under Russian control. The Iravan Khanate, which regarded the territory of Pambak as part of its domain, attempted to reclaim it through military confrontation with Russian

forces but ultimately failed¹⁶. Thus, from the autumn of 1801 onward, armed clashes began between the Iravan Khanate and Russian troops.

Russia attached great importance to the occupation of the Iravan Khanate, not only to secure the safety of annexed Eastern Georgia but also because of its strategic location on the Ottoman border, making it crucial in the broader conflict against Iran and the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, in an instruction dated April 24, 1802, Tsar Alexander I directed Knorring to ensure that the Iravan Khanate accepted Russian suzerainty "for the sake of Georgia's security," and to proceed with the occupation of the Ganja Khanate¹⁷.

Even prior to the issuance of this directive, Knorring had made efforts to bring the Iravan Khanate under control. To this end, he sent a letter on April 2, 1802, to Iravan's khan, Mohammad Khan, urging him to accept Russian subjecthood¹⁸. Mohammad Khan, however, became involved in the internal power struggles among Ottoman pashas and sought to delay his commitments to Russia. Instead, he tried to maintain his independence by maneuvering between the political interests of Russia, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire through strategic diplomatic games.

At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the French Revolution (1789-1794) had a decisive impact on international relations. The expansion of France's military campaigns across Europe and Napoleon Bonaparte's landing of

troops in Egypt on July 2, 1798, prompted the Ottoman Empire to seek rapprochement with Russia. As a result, on December 23, 1798, the two powers concluded a 14-article alliance treaty against the French threat (additionally, 13 secret clauses and one annex were included)¹⁹.

Seeking to take advantage of this alliance in actions against the Khanate of Iravan, General Knorring organized joint military operations between Russian forces and the Pasha of Kars against the Iravan Khanate²⁰. At the same time, he sent letters to Mohammad Khan, urging him to accept Russian suzerainty²¹.

During this period, a struggle for leadership of the Echmiadzin Catholicosate unfolded among Armenian clerics. Mohammad Khan of Iravan refused to recognize Daniel, who had been confirmed as Catholicos by decree of the Russian Emperor, and instead endorsed another Armenian cleric, David, who was loyal to him. This decision angered the Russians, and Knorring sought to exploit the situation as a pretext for military intervention in Iravan²².

In 1802, Knorring was replaced by Pavel Dmitrievich Tsitsianov (1802-1806) as commander-in-chief of Russian forces in the Caucasus. This marked a shift from Knorring's relatively moderate policy toward the Azerbaijani khanates to Tsitsianov's rigid reactionary and openly aggressive approach. Tsitsianov launched a direct military campaign against the Azerbaijani khanates. On March 29, 1803, the Jar-Balakan region, and on

January 4, 1804, the city of Ganja was occupied by Russian forces.

Following the occupation of Ganja, Tsitsianov turned his full attention to the conquest of the Iravan Khanate. However, six months of correspondence between Tsitsianov and Mohammad Khan, regarding the latter's acceptance of Russian suzerainty and the recognition of Daniel as Armenian Catholicos, yielded no results²³.

In a report to Emperor Alexander I, Tsitsianov wrote: "Mohammad Khan refuses to comply with His Imperial Majesty's directive recognizing Daniel as the Armenian Patriarch. Leaving him unpunished undermines the authority of His Majesty in the territories we have conquered by arms. Therefore, I must march to Iravan to punish Mohammad Khan and to appoint Daniel as the Armenian Patriarch. Local Armenian merchants have promised to provide us with provisions..."²⁴.

In the same report, Tsitsianov also noted that he required an additional four regiments and 100,000 silver rubles to successfully complete the Iravan campaign. He further stated that with these forces, he would occupy Iravan, Nakhchivan, and Karabakh, thereby completing the campaign to conquer all territories along the Kura-Araz River basin²⁵.

In May 1804, Tsitsianov issued the order to launch a military offensive against the Iravan Khanate. On May 29, Russian forces under the command of Major General Tsutskov began advancing toward the Iravan

Fortress. Shortly thereafter, the remaining regiments under Tsitsianov's command also set out in the same direction. The Russian army moving toward Iravan consisted of 4 370 soldiers and officers²⁶.

The Russo-Qajar struggle over the Iravan region of Azerbaijan

In the spring of 1804, Iran was preparing for war against Russia, which was in the process of occupying the South Caucasus. Sisianov had substantial intelligence regarding this matter. Therefore, he sought to act swiftly and seize Yerevan before Iranian forces could enter the region. At the same time, the independent actions of Mohammad Khan—who was formally subordinate to the Iranian monarch Fath-Ali Shah—drew discontent from the central government in Tehran. As a result, Fath-Ali Shah aimed to remove Mohammad Khan from power in Yerevan.

The simultaneous advancement of both Russian and Iranian troops toward Yerevan compelled Mohammad Khan to act with utmost caution, engage in political maneuvering, and make calculated decisions. Deeply concerned by the fate of Javad Khan, the ruler of Ganja, Mohammad Khan attempted to settle relations with Russia through diplomatic means, but to no avail. He ultimately decided to resist and undertook serious measures to fortify the Yerevan Fortress. The number of defenders was increased to 7 000, and food supplies were stockpiled.

In early June 1804, a detachment consisting of one regiment and two battalions under the command of Tuchkov, accompanied by eight cannons, invaded the Shōrayel district of the Yerevan Khanate²⁷.

On June 10, 1804, diplomatic relations between Iran and Russia were severed, and a few days later, war broke out between the two empires. Iranian troops led by Crown Prince Abbas Mirza advanced toward Yerevan. In view of the gravity of the situation, Mohammad Khan requested assistance from the Iranian High Command. By order of the Shah, the fortresses of Nakhchivan and Yerevan were to be defended at all costs, and the movement of Russian troops had to be halted²⁸.

However, in the initial battles between Iran and Russia at Echmiadzin and Qamarly, Russian forces gained the upper hand. On July 2, Russian troops laid siege to Yerevan. Upon hearing of Abbas Mirza's failure, Fath-Ali Shah personally arrived in the area. A double encirclement was established around Yerevan: the Russians besieged the city, while the Iranians surrounded the Russian forces from the rear, cutting off all supply routes²⁹.

Facing severe food shortages and relentless attacks from Yerevan's defenders, Sisianov's army found itself in a desperate situation³⁰. Russian forces also suffered heavy losses in clashes with the Iranian army³¹. On July 15, an eight-hour Russian assault on the Yerevan fortress was repelled, resulting in over 300 casualties and

forcing the Russians to cease their attack. Although they succeeded in pushing Abbas Mirza's army to the opposite side of the Aras River, they failed to capture Yerevan. Sisianov's repeated appeals to Mohammad Khan to surrender the fortress also proved fruitless.

Encouraged by the Iranian campaign, a wave of uprisings against Russian occupiers erupted in Shamsaddil, Gazakh, Borchali, Jar, and other regions. Meanwhile, Russian forces faced critical shortages of food, ammunition, and fodder. Taking all of this into account, Sisianov convened a military council on August 31, during which it was decided to abandon the siege of Yerevan.

On September 1, Sisianov made a final appeal to Mohammad Khan, urging him to surrender the fortress, but received a firm rejection. Consequently, on September 3, Sisianov ordered the lifting of the siege and the withdrawal of Russian troops from the surroundings of Yerevan³². Thus, the Russian army, having lost more than 2 000 soldiers, was forced to retreat in defeat from the Yerevan campaign³³. Although Russian troops lifted the siege of the Yerevan fortress, the occupation of the territory of the strategically important Yerevan Khanate remained a primary objective for the Russian military command. For this reason, the gradual annexation of the Yerevan Khanate's lands came to the forefront. At the end of March 1805, the Shōrayel Sultanate-subordinate to the Yerevan Khanate and strategically

as well as economically valuable-was fully occupied by Russian forces³⁴.

Returning from the unsuccessful Yerevan campaign, Sisianov quelled uprisings by local insurgents resisting the Russian occupiers, thereby securing the rear for continued war efforts against Abbas Mirza. Subsequently, he intensified military and political pressure on the Azerbaijani khanates. As a result of these pressures, on May 14, 1805, the Karabakh and Shaki khanates were compelled to sign the Treaty of Kurakchay with Sisianov, accepting Russian suzerainty. Following this, on December 25, the Shamakhi Khanate also submitted³⁵.

In early 1806, Sisianov decided to launch another offensive toward Yerevan. However, his assassination during the Baku operation on February 8, 1806, impeded the execution of this campaign. In June 1806, General Field Marshal I.V. Gudovich was appointed as the supreme commander of the Caucasus, receiving orders to completely conquer the Azerbaijani khanates and incorporate them into the Russian Empire³⁶. That same year, the Quba, Baku, and Derbent khanates were occupied by Russia³⁷.

Aware of Russia's expansionist intentions, Abbas Mirza, in the summer of 1805, removed Mohammad Hussein Khan Qajar- criticized for his inconsistent foreign policy-from power and installed Mehdiqulu Khan Qajar (summer 1805-August 1806) as the ruler of the Yerevan Khanate³⁸.

Although Abbas Mirza led the Iranian army in Azerbaijan, he was unable to prevent the Russian occupation

of the Azerbaijani khanates. Due to Iran's failure to capitalize on favorable strategic conditions in the initial battles of the First Russo-Iranian War (1804-1813), Russian forces gained and maintained strategic superiority until the war's end. The Ottoman Empire, remaining loyal to its alliance treaties with Russia signed in 1798 and 1805, offered no assistance to resistance movements against the Russian invasion in Azerbaijan. In some instances, such as the 1802 campaign against the Yerevan Khanate, the Pasha of Kars even supported the Russians³⁹.

Consequently, by the end of 1806, the military campaign had effectively concluded with Russia's occupation of the khanates in Northern Azerbaijan.

In 1806, France, becoming active in Iran and the Ottoman Empire, supported these states in their war against Russia and provided considerable assistance in improving their armies. Husseinqulu Khan (1806-1827), the ruler of the Yerevan Khanate, extensively utilized French military experts' help in strengthening the Yerevan fortress according to European military standards⁴⁰. After the Treaty of Tilsit (1807), England replaced France in carrying out this mission in Iran.

In November 1806, the Russo-Ottoman War (1806-1812) began. With the outbreak of this war on the Caucasus and Balkan fronts, the Russian government initially sought to conclude peace with Iran to focus its full attention on the Ottoman front. To this end, Captain Stepanov was sent to

Tehran for peace negotiations. However, these talks failed due to General Gudovich's demands that the border between Russia and Iran be drawn along the Kur and Aras Rivers up to Arpaçay, and that the Yerevan and Nakhchivan Khanates be ceded to Russia. The increased diplomatic activity of the French in Iran during this period also contributed to the failure of negotiations⁴¹.

Following the unsuccessful negotiations, Russian troops launched a new offensive against the Yerevan and Nakhchivan Khanates in September 1808. On September 25, General Gudovich set out with 240 officers and 7,506 soldiers toward these directions⁴². At the end of September, Husseinqulu Khan retreated after defeat in battles with the Russians, and on October 3, the Yerevan fortress was besieged by Gudovich⁴³.

General-Major Nebolsin received orders to capture Nakhchivan and moved with 78 officers and 3,062 soldiers from Karabakh toward Nakhchivan on October 9³⁴. The defense of Nakhchivan proved untenable, as Kelbali Khan, who held great influence among the local population, had been removed from power in spring 1808 and taken to Iran with his family. His son, Sheikhali Bey, fled to Karabakh with close associates and cooperated with the Russians, playing a crucial role in the fall of Nakhchivan⁴⁵. On October 28, 1808, in the battle near Qarababa close to Nakhchivan, Russian forces defeated Abbas Mirza's army, and on Novem-

ber 1, 1808, Nakhchivan was occupied by the Russians⁴⁶.

The defense of the Yerevan fortress was led by Husseinqulu Khan's brother, Hasan Khan. Despite repeated urgent demands from Gudovich to surrender the fortress, Hasan Khan firmly refused⁴⁷. In response to Gudovich's insistence, Hasan Khan famously replied, "You demand that I surrender the Yerevan fortress voluntarily in exchange for granting me the Yerevan Khanate. If such conduct is acceptable, then you should serve the Shah of Iran and receive control over Yerevan, Tabriz, and other khanates in return"⁴⁸.

The early arrival of winter and the resulting severance of communication with Tiflis caused shortages of food, fodder, and ammunition, placing Russian troops in a difficult position. Consequently, Gudovich concentrated all efforts on taking the Yerevan fortress by assault.

On November 17, 1808, Russian forces launched another large-scale attack on the fortress but encountered strong resistance and failed. Suffering heavy losses, the Russians had to withdraw on November 30, returning from Yerevan defeated. Russian military historian N.F. Dubrovin noted that the Russian regiments suffered such severe losses during the attack that a renewed assault on the fortress was not even worth considering⁴⁹. According to Gudovich's report to the Russian emperor, the battle cost 17 officers and 269 soldiers killed and 64 officers and 829 soldiers wounded⁵⁰.

Seeing that they could not consolidate their position in the region, the Russian detachment under Nebolsin also failed to establish itself in Nakhchivan and was forced to withdraw⁵¹. Due to pursuing enemies and severe snowfall and cold weather, Russian forces suffered an additional loss of about one thousand men while retreating to Karabakh⁵².

This defeat was the second humiliating loss of Russian forces in the Yerevan Khanate since the 1804 campaign. It is also worth noting that during both the 1804 and 1808 campaigns, Armenians fought alongside the Russians, providing not only military assistance but also supplying them with food, fodder, and other necessary resources.

After the defeat at Yerevan, General Gudovich was recalled from his position as the commander-in-chief of the Russian troops in the Caucasus, and General Tormasov was appointed in his place⁵³. Tormasov sought to regulate relations with Iran through diplomatic negotiations. At the same time, the Shah of Iran also proposed initiating talks with Russia⁵⁴. In April 1810, during negotiations held in Asgaran, Russia demanded the Nakhchivan and Yerevan Khanates, while Iran insisted on the Talish Khanate. The Russians, employing a method previously used regarding Crimea, proposed that the Talish Khanate become an independent territory, not subject to either Russia or Iran. However, these negotiations ended without success.

Like his predecessor, Tormasov attached great importance to the occupation of the Yerevan Khanate and believed that its conquest would compel Iran to make peace. Nevertheless, the military and diplomatic skills of Husseinqulu Khan prevented Tormasov's plans from materializing.

During this period, England became active in Iran, providing military and financial aid to the Tehran government in its war against Russia, while simultaneously encouraging Iran to cooperate with the Ottoman Empire in the Caucasus against Russia⁵⁵. Abbas Mirza, who needed Ottoman support to expel Russia from the South Caucasus, again proposed an alliance to the Istanbul government in 1810, initially obtaining their consent. At England's direct insistence, a Russo-Ottoman alliance treaty was signed between Iran and the Ottoman Empire. According to this treaty, Iranian and Ottoman forces were to jointly act against Russia following a plan prepared by the British.

In accordance with this plan, in August-September 1810, Ottoman, Iranian, and the forces of Yerevan Khan Husseinqulu Khan attempted a joint strike on Russian troops from the Akhiska and Akhalkalaki directions; however, this effort failed due to a large-scale Russian offensive launched from the directions of Kutaisi, Surami, and Chalke⁵⁶. Furthermore, a joint campaign planned by the Iranian and Ottoman commands against Russia in the South Caucasus for the summer of 1811 was never executed⁵⁷. Overall, Russian forces

held a complete advantage on both the Russian-Iranian and Russian-Ottoman fronts in the Caucasus.

Anticipating Napoleon's impending attack on Russia, the Petersburg government signed a peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire on May 16 (28), 1812, in Bucharest, two months before the onset of the French invasion⁵⁸. According to the Bucharest peace agreement, although the Ottoman Empire was able to regain some fortresses in the Caucasus occupied by Russian troops, it had to recognize the consequences of Russia's conquest of the South Caucasus.

Simultaneously, after the signing of the Bucharest treaty, Russia, having the opportunity to redeploy troops from the Russo-Turkish front in the Caucasus to the war against Iran, pressured Iran to negotiate peace with certain concessions. However, Russia's proposal to establish the demarcation line along the Kur, Aras, and Arpaçay rivers was rejected by Abbas Mirza. Nonetheless, the complete failure of Abbas Mirza's 1812 military campaign compelled Iran to resume negotiations.

After Russia's victory in the 1812 Franco-Russian War, Britain realized that by directing Russian forces southward, Russia could completely defeat Iran and threaten British interests in the East. Therefore, the British not only sought to compel Iran to make peace to prevent Russia's advance deep into Iranian territory but also acted as mediators in the negotiations between Russia and Iran. Russia, for its part, needed peace to restore its

economy, which had been devastated by Napoleon's campaign, and instructed the newly appointed commander-in-chief in the Caucasus, General N.F. Rtishchev (1812-1816), to expedite peace with Iran. Negotiations mediated by the British culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Gulistan on October 12, 1813. According to this treaty, Iran accepted Russia's conquests in the Caucasus and confirmed that the khanates of Ganja, Karabakh, Shaki, Shirvan, Kuba, Baku, and Talish, as well as Eastern Georgia and Dagestan, were ceded to Russia⁵⁹. The khanates of Erivan and Nakhchivan remained under Iranian control. Thus, the first phase of the early 19th-century war between Russia and Iran over Azerbaijani lands concluded.

Despite the signing of the Treaty of Gulistan, Iran-Russia relations remained tense. Iran did not reconcile with its defeat, while Russia continued to pursue new territories, particularly aiming to seize the Erivan Khanate. In 1816, Russian Emperor Alexander I wrote to A.P. Yermolov (commander-in-chief of Russian forces in the Caucasus, 1816-1827): "It would be very good if the Shah of Iran exchanged Erivan and Nakhchivan for the lands south of the Aras under our control (i.e., the Talish Khanate). However, considering the Iranian side's stubbornness regarding the cession of these lands to Russia, it is unlikely they will agree to this"⁶⁰.

During the interwar period between the two Russo-Iranian wars (1813-1826), diplomatic efforts to resolve disputes between Russia and

Iran yielded no results, mainly due to Russia's strengthening international position and imperial interests.

On July 16, 1826, the Iranian army, commanded by Abbas Mirza, crossed the border and launched an offensive into the territories of Northern Azerbaijan. The forces of Erivan Khan Husseinqulu Khan also attacked Russian positions in the Lori and Shamshadil directions. Thus began the Second Russo-Iranian War (1826-1828).

The initial phase of the war was unfavorable for Russia. Iranian forces advanced as far as Shamkir and Ganja. By late August, Yermolov managed to reorganize the scattered Russian forces in the South Caucasus. In September 1826, Russian troops delivered a crushing blow to the Iranian army in the battles of Shamkir and Ganja. After the Battle of Ganja, the Iranian army was unable to recover. By the end of 1826, Iranian forces had withdrawn from all Northern Azerbaijani territories except for the Talish Khanate⁶¹.

Although the Russian troops had not yet taken the initiative in the war, Emperor Nicholas I (1825-1855) ordered the Russian forces to seize Erivan. In his decree dated August 1, 1826, sent to General Yermolov, the emperor stated, "Immediately march on the Erivan fortress commander. I expect a prompt response from you: with God's help, the commander is no more, and the Erivan province is completely occupied-you and your 15,000-strong Russian army are sufficient to achieve victory"⁶². However,

as Yermolov was focused on suppressing anti-Russian uprisings spreading across Northern Azerbaijan, the Erivan campaign was temporarily postponed.

In March 1827, General I. F. Paskevich (1827-1831) replaced General A.P. Yermolov as commander-in-chief of Russian forces in the Caucasus⁶³. On April 20, 1827, Russian troops who captured the Khudafarin Bridge advanced toward the Erivan Khanate. Simultaneously, forces under General Benkendorf moved from Borchaly toward Erivan, accompanied by the Armenian priest Nerses Ashtaraketsi. On April 13, Benkendorf's attempt to capture Echmiadzin Monastery and then Sardarabad failed. On April 27, Russian troops laid siege to Erivan fortress. At the beginning of June, General Paskevich also arrived before the fortress. Demands by Benkendorf to surrender the fortress were rejected by Huseinquulu Khan's brother, Hasan Khan. Seeing the siege was futile, Paskevich was forced to lift the siege on June 23.

On June 26 and July 7, 1827, the Russian army occupied Nakhchivan and Abbasabad, respectively. Abbas Mirza's resistance proved ineffective. On July 19, 1827, A.S. Griboyedov, together with A. Bakikhanov, visited Abbas Mirza's camp and proposed initiating negotiations for the cession of Erivan and Nakhchivan khanates in exchange for compensation; however, no agreement was reached.

Paskevich decided to compel the Tehran government to peace by first

capturing Tabriz, the arsenal of the Iranian army. Yet, leaving the heavily fortified Erivan fortress behind was a considerable risk. Therefore, Paskevich resolved to first capture Erivan⁶⁴.

After a week-long siege, on September 20, 1827, Russian troops seized Sardarabad and laid siege to Erivan fortress four days later. As before, Paskevich's demands for surrender were rejected by Hasan Khan. The city was subjected to continuous artillery bombardment. Over 40 cannons fired more than a thousand shells at the fortress. Russian historian V. Potto wrote about the destruction caused by the artillery in Erivan city: "It seems to me that what the siege artillery achieved in four days would not have been possible in four centuries"⁶⁵.

On October 1, 1827, the Armenians inside the fortress rebelled and contacted the invaders, demanding that Hasan Khan surrender the fortress. Despite Khan's efforts, the Armenians opened the northern gates of the fortress to the enemy⁶⁶. According to Armenian historian V. Parsamyan, after Hasan Khan fled, the Armenians opened the fortress gates to the Russian forces⁶⁷. Thus, on October 1, 1827, the fortress and city of Erivan were captured by the Russians. Hasan Khan and the entire garrison were taken prisoner. This marked the fall of the Erivan Khanate.

The capture of Erivan generated great enthusiasm in Russia. Upon hearing the news, Emperor Nicholas I hastily returned to St. Petersburg from Riga. Ceremonial celebrations were organized. On November 8, a prayer

ceremony was held at the Winter Palace with the participation of the emperor and his family members to mark the occasion of Erivan's capture. Special medals were instituted in commemoration. For the conquest of Erivan, General I.F. Paskevich was awarded the title of "Count" and the honorary title "Erivansky," as well as a monetary prize of one million rubles. He was also decorated with the 2nd class Order of St. George and numerous other orders and medals⁶⁸. All these honors demonstrated the exceptional strategic importance of the Erivan Khanate for the Russian Empire.

A few days after the occupation of Erivan, on October 6, 1827, a "Provisional Administration" was established in Erivan by the order of General I. Paskevich, commander of Russian troops in the Caucasus. General Krasovsky was appointed head of the administration, General Borodin was named commandant of the Erivan fortress, and Armenian bishop Nerses Ashtaraketsi was included among the administration members. The Provisional Administration was tasked primarily with consolidating full authority in the Erivan region, implementing governance, establishing law and order, and managing the supply and logistics of the Russian forces stationed there⁶⁹.

Simultaneously, the Provisional Administration was charged with ensuring security and organizing guard services in the territory of the Erivan Khanate by forming infantry and cavalry militias recruited from the Arme-

nian population⁷⁰. Despite the Azerbaijani population constituting an absolute majority in the Erivan Khanate territory, no Azerbaijani representation was included in the Provisional Administration. The establishment of armed units from the Armenian population for security and guard duties laid the foundation for the Armenization of the Erivan region.

Following the capture of Erivan, Russian troops occupied Marand on October 2 and Tabriz on October 13. Peace talks between Russia and Iran began at Dehghargan (November 6, 1827-January 7, 1828) but ended without success. Consequently, Russian forces advanced and occupied Urmia on January 28 and Ardabil on February 8. The new Russian offensive caused panic among the Iranian ruling circles. Fearing complete defeat of Iran, the British envoy Macdonald acted as a mediator between the warring parties. On February 6, peace negotiations resumed between Abbas Mirza and Ivan Paskevich near the village of Turkmenchay, close to Tabriz⁷¹. Iran was forced to accept the terms imposed by Russia. On the night of February 9-10, 1828, the Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed between Russia and Iran⁷². Article 3 of the treaty confirmed the annexation of the Nakhchivan and Erivan khanates to Russia.

Shortly after the treaty was signed, on March 21, 1828, by the decree of Emperor Nicholas I, the Provisional Administration was abolished and a temporary administrative unit named the "Armenian Province" was estab-

lished in the territories of the Erivan and Nakhchivan khanates⁷³. General-Major Alexander Chavchavadze, commander of the local troops, was appointed governor of the Armenian Province. The creation of the Armenian Province in the lands of the Nakhchivan and Erivan khanates represented a significant step towards establishing an Armenian state on Azerbaijani territory.

A draft regulation for governing the Armenian Province was also prepared. This draft envisaged certain liberal measures towards the Armenian population. While generally serving to strengthen Russian authority in the province, it also laid the groundwork for the Armenization of the region⁷⁴.

Following the Treaties of Turkmenchay and Edirne, the Russian government began facilitating the resettlement of Armenian populations from Iran and the Ottoman Empire to the South Caucasus. Between February 26 and June 11, 1828-a period of three and a half months- at least 8 249 Armenian families, or no fewer than 40 000 people, were relocated from Iran to the territories of the Erivan, Nakhchivan, and Karabakh khanates in Northern Azerbaijan. Shortly thereafter, more than 90 000 Armenians were also resettled from Ottoman territories to the South Caucasus and settled in the same khanates⁷⁵.

Before the resettlement, the population of the territory later named the "Armenian Province" was 107 224, of which 76.24% were Azerbaijanis and 23.45% were Armenians⁷⁶. In Erivan city, with a population of 9 700, Azerbaijanis constituted 75.6%, while Armenians made up 24.4%. This clear demographic predominance of Azerbaijanis in the ethnic composition of the population is an undeniable fact confirming that these lands historically belonged to Azerbaijan.

Following the resettlement, the ethnic composition of the population changed dramatically. In Erivan city alone, the population increased to 11 463 as a result of the migration. Consequently, the share of Azerbaijani population dropped to 64%, while that of Armenians rose to 36%⁷⁷.

Thus, in return for the services rendered by the Armenians to the Tsarist army during the occupation of Northern Azerbaijan, Russia granted them a territory called the "Armenian Province" in the conquered Azerbaijani lands-specifically in the territories of the Erivan and Nakhchivan khanates. In doing so, the Armenians, under the patronage and support of Tsarist Russia, established a territorial base for themselves in the South Caucasus.

Notes

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