



BOUNDARIES II. WITH RUSSIA

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West of the Caspian. The problem of drawing a stable territorial boundary between the Russian and Iranian powers must have arisen with the first arrival of the Russians in the Caspian area, after the conquest of Astrakhan (Haštarkān, Ḥājī Tarḵān) in 1556. In fact, because of the Persians' minimal interest in maritime activity, seagoing contacts were very limited (see [caspien](#)), whereas west of the Caspian the peoples of the Caucasus and Transcaucasia were caught between conflicting Ottoman and Safavid power. The occasion for the first incursion of Russian armies into the Caucasus and northern Iran was provided by the troubles surrounding the end of the Safavid dynasty and the Afghan invasion of Iran. In 1134/1722 the troops of Peter the Great occupied Darband. Having been called in by the governor of Rašt, who was fighting against the Afghans, they established themselves in the city in Šafar 1135/November 1722, completed the conquest of the province in Ša'bān 1135/May 1723 (Rabino, p. 465), and occupied Baku (Bādkūba) in Šawwāl/July of the same year in order to safeguard their land communications. Shah Ṭahmāsb II was forced to accept a treaty (22 Du'l-ḥejja 1135/23 September 1723) ceding Darband and Baku, as well as Gīlān, Māzandarān, and Astarābād, to Russia (text in Hanway, II, p. 262). In fact, the last two provinces were never effectively occupied by the Russians, who did not penetrate beyond Lāhijān, which was occupied in 1725 (*ibid.*, p. 308). However a treaty between Russia and Turkey signed 23 June 1726 in Istanbul



had established the principles of a partition of North-West Iran, leaving its conquests in western provinces to Turkey and Daghestan, north Šīrvān, and the Caspian coastal provinces to Russia. Once Nāder Shah had reestablished Iranian power, the Russians, weakened by the death of Peter the Great, agreed to evacuate these conquered territories, from which they had drawn no benefit. Under the Treaty of Rašt (1144/1732) Astarābād and Māzandarān were restored, and the Russian forces abandoned Gīlān and Ṭāleš; finally in Du'l-qa'da 1148/March 1735, under the Treaty of Ganja (Elizavetpol), they withdrew from Baku and Darband (Ter-Gukasov, p. 33).

It was not until the end of the 12th/18th century that the Russians established a permanent foothold in Transcaucasia. In 1781 Georgia, taking advantage of the weakening of central authority in Iran under the Zands, had concluded a treaty with Russia, in an effort to escape paying heavy tribute to Iran. In the spring of 1210/1796, however, Āqā Moḥammad Khan Qājār, having secured his power, invaded Georgia and pillaged Tiflis, triggering a new intervention by the Russians, who once again occupied Darband and Baku, along with the Caspian littoral as far as Moḡān; they were preparing to march on Tehran when, after the death of Catherine, Paul I recalled his army. Alexander I resumed the policy of expansion and annexed Georgia in the proclamation of 21 September 1801, thus placing the problem of the boundary on a new footing; it was resolved only after a war lasting more than twelve years. The successive conquests of Šīrvān, Qarābāḡ, and the greater part of the Moḡān steppes were recognized in the Treaty of Golestān (text in Krausse, pp. 332-35, and Hurewitz, I, pp. 195-97) which was signed on 9 Šawwāl 1228/12 October 1813, by its terms all the territories occupied by Russian troops during the war were annexed to Russia, and thus the first precisely defined boundary between the two countries was established. After twelve years of repeated incidents, it was shifted farther to the south in the second Russo-Iranian war (1241-43/1826-28), which ended 5 Ša'bān 1243/10 February 1828, with the Treaty of Torkamānčāy (text in Krausse, pp. 336-41, and Hurewitz, I, pp. 231-37), under which Russia annexed the khanates of Īravān (Yerevan) and Naḡjavān (Nakhichevan). This western section of the border was thus, from the beginning, a battle line, an artificial boundary resulting from military operations. Over most of its length, however, it coincided with topographic and hydrographic features that had formerly served as natural barriers to the advance of Russian troops: the course of the Araxes and the crests of the Ṭāleš mountains, which generally mark the watershed between, on one hand, the small stream basins on the Caspian slopes and, on the other, the Qarasū, as far



as the lower course of the Āstārāčāy. It did, however, divide the Moḡān steppes quite arbitrarily.

This boundary, which divided between two countries the winter pastures of the Šāhsevan in particular, was to be the cause of frequent frontier incidents during the following decades, as the nomads habitually crossed from one side to the other and the Iranian authorities did not hesitate to pursue them into Russian territory, which led to official complaints. Typical of these incidents is the story of the Rezā-Bāglū and the Qoja-Bāglū (also written Bāglū, Bīglū; Radde, pp. 432ff.; Schweizer, p. 107). In 1867, after numerous Russian complaints, these two clans were forbidden to winter on the Moḡān plain. In 1871 the governor of Ardabīl, on the orders of the shah, sent an expedition against them, burned the village of Barzand, and confiscated their possessions. The chief of the clans, through intrigues at the court in Tehran, succeeded, however, in obtaining restitution of the pasture lands (Radde, loc. cit.; Schweizer, loc. cit.). In 1292/1875 representatives of the two countries once again agreed to the clans' permanent removal from the frontier area. They were deported in 1293/1876 to the region of Urmia. But, beginning in the following year, they reestablished their summer home on the heights of the Sabalān, with the authorization of the governor of Azarbaijan, and soon after they also reoccupied their winter quarters in Barzand. In 1869 the two countries had decided to establish a permanent border commission at Bīlasavār, on the southeastern edge of the Persian Moḡān, but the Iranian representatives did not staff their post consistently and effectively. In 1884 the Russian government decided to close the frontier to the Šāhsevan definitively. This decision was catastrophic for the latter, as at that time thirty-five of their fifty-six clans and 5,385 of the 8,635 families wintered on Russian territory (Radde, pp. 437-42).

Although closed to nomad groups, this border still remained open to economic exchanges during the whole of the later 13th/19th century and until World War I. Aside from active smuggling (Chantre, pp. 135ff.), there was an important legal caravan traffic, which crossed the Araxes primarily at Jolfā (ibid., p. 177). Āstārā, a simple customs post on the coast, was flooded with Russian merchandise that had come by land and sea en route to Ardabīl and Tabrīz (Bazin, II, p. 183, with references to many contemporary sources). It is across this frontier that the main economic and human intercourse between Iran and Europe took place before World War I. Construction of the paved road from Anzalī (Enzelī) to Tehran (1893-99) diverted a great part of this



traffic to the sea route, but the establishment of a similar road between Jolfā and Tabrīz (1902) revitalized land connections, which were further strengthened by the railroad linking Jolfā, Tabrīz, and Urmia. Although the concession was granted to a Russian firm in Rabi' I 1331/February 1913, construction of this line was completed only in 1334/1916, and the railway was used mainly for military transport (Issawi, pp. 185, 200-01).

The Russian Revolution almost entirely disrupted these relations. They were not resumed in any serious way until after 1336 Š./1957, when a Russo-Iranian protocol precisely defining the land portion of the border, organizing its posts, and fixing the line of demarcation along the riverbeds (of the Araxes and the Āstārāčāy) was signed; previously Russia had claimed possession of the entire channel of the Araxes, with the boundary fixed on the southern bank (Melamid). The principal result of the agreement was the joint exploitation of the river waters, with the construction in 1967-72 of a dam at Qezel Qešlāq, near Nakjavān (capacity: 1.35 km³), the water from which is divided between the two countries and supplies the irrigated perimeter of the low Moḡān plain. The more ambitious project for another dam, farther downstream at the confluence of the Qarasū and the Araxes, has not yet been completed. Commercial traffic has not reached its former level, and the main trade between Iran and the USSR takes place via the maritime route and the port of Anzalī. The only two land crossings are at Jolfā and Āstārā. On the eve of the Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79 the traffic through the latter village included only 37,000 tons of Russian imports to Iran annually, while the only Iranian export in the other direction was gas, traveling to Āstārā through the pipeline that was built in 1349 Š./1970; an agreement provides for Iran to furnish to the USSR 10 billion m³ a year in exchange for aid in construction of the steel mill at Isfahan.

East of the Caspian. In contrast to what occurred west of the Caspian sea, Russian expansion into lower Central Asia did not come into direct conflict with Iranian power. But the Treaty of Golestān, reinforced by that of Torkamāñčāy, reserved to Russia a monopoly of naval power on the Caspian. A first point of contact, for a long time the only one, thus developed in the southeastern Caspian after 1253-54/1837-38, with the Russian occupation of the island of Āšūrāda at the entrance to the bay of Astarābād, where a naval station continued in operation until the end of the 13th/19th century (see āšūrāda). Once Persia demanded its evacuation in 1854, however, Russia recognized Persian sovereignty over the island without difficulty, while



emphasizing the Turkman danger in order to justify maintaining forces there. Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah, while visiting the island in 1866, confirmed the police powers of the Russians over the Turkman tribes (Curzon, I, pp. 183-85). As a gradual rise in sea level rendered this foothold worthless, the principal Russian naval base in the southeastern Caspian was transferred to Krasnovodsk in 1869. In the face of Persian protests, the Russian government let it be known that it considered Iranian territory to be bounded by the course of the lower Atrak, and a Russian border post was actually established at Chikishlyar (Čekīšlar), immediately north of the mouth of the river (Krausse, pp. 118-19).

The second phase of defining the land frontier was linked to the pacification of the Turkman population. The latter was an agglomeration of nomadic and seminomadic peoples based within ill-defined territorial limits, most of whom had in the 13th/19th century recognized the nominal suzerainty of the Khan of Khiva and who conducted much-feared raiding expeditions onto the Iranian plateau. In the 11th/17th and 12th/18th centuries, under the Safavids, Iranian policy toward the Turkman tribes consisted mainly of settling Kurdish and Azeri populations in Khorasan to serve as guardians of the natural frontier in the eastern Alborz and the Kopet Dag. From that time on Iranian authority tended to predominate, for good or ill, among the tribes nearest to the border, and in the time of Nāder Shah Afšār (r. 1148-60/1736-47) permanent garrison settlements were established in the oases of the northeastern piedmont of these mountains (König, pp. 13ff.). During the 13th/19th century these garrisons all disappeared under pressure from the Teke, the last to fall being Gyaurs and Anau in 1861, and Iran no longer laid claim to the latter locality (*ibid.*, pp. 28-30). The pacification of the Teke by Russian troops in the 1880s naturally established the frontier at the foot of the mountains of Khorasan. The Treaty of Tehran in 1881 (text in Krausse, pp. 360-62) defined the line precisely, first along the Atrak as far as Čāt, from there following the base of the mountains to Loṭfābād in the Daragaz. It incorporated into the Russian empire almost all the Turkman populations in the latter region. On Iranian territory there remained only a few small groups, like those of Keltačīnar, who had long been established in the main mountain valleys and who were at that time vassals of the Kurdish khan of Daragaz (Baker, pp. 271-72). The treaty forbade populations subject to Iran to attempt any new agricultural undertaking that would draw on waters flowing down the northeastern slopes of these mountains.



Farther east a single point of contact was established: at Saraḳs, where in 1884 the Russians had occupied the old city on the eastern bank of the Tajan, facing the Iranian post on the western bank, thus fixing the frontier de facto on the river as far as Afghanistan. The line remained indeterminate between Lotfābād and Saraḳs. Russian demands were related particularly to Kalāt-e Nāderī, which the government in St. Petersburg wished to acquire in exchange for its portion of the Moḡān. Iran refused, and the frontier continued to be fixed at the foot of the mountains by a secret treaty (Curzon, I, pp. 193-94).

The frontier was immediately effective along the whole mountain sector. The portion along the Atrak river, however, remained theoretical for a long time and Iranian authority over the Turkman peoples on the plain entirely nominal (Logashova, pp. 110-39). Until World War I the Russian border officials, who had maintained regular relations with the Turkman tribesmen south of the river in the 1870s and 1880s (Curzon, I, p. 189), always strove to control those who crossed more or less regularly into Russian territory. The permanent pacification of the Iranian Turkman population was accomplished effectively only by Reżā Shah Pahlavī (r. 1304-20 Š./1925-41) after the autumn of 1304 Š./1925. At that time many of the Yomūt settled in the USSR, only to return to Iranian territory en masse in 1930, after the collectivization of the flocks (Irons, pp. 11-12).

Commercial activity was extremely limited on this Turkman frontier of Iran before Russian penetration in the 13th/19th century. There were no more than one or two caravans a year circulating between Astarābād and Mašhad, on one hand, and Khiva, on the other (Stadelbauer, p. 73). The pacification of the Turkman tribes of ‘Ešqābād (Ashkhabad) and Marv, followed by construction of the Caspian railway, had as an immediate result the development of active border commerce throughout the Khorasan mountains (Annenkov, pp. 9, 13ff., 26; Stadelbauer, pp. 367-69). Its principal axis was the auto route from ‘Ešqābād to Qūčān, the Russian section of which was finished in 1888. The Persian section, construction of which had originally been entrusted to the Austrian General Gasteiger Khan, had not yet been finished at that time. Gasteiger was relieved of his duties and the road finished under the supervision of Malek-al-Tojjār of Mašhad (Curzon, I, pp. 87-88). A new settlement, Bājgīrān, grew up rapidly on both sides of the frontier around the customs stations (Curzon, I, pp. 89-90; Schweinitz, pp. 16-18). But many other caravan routes were opened through the passes of the Kopet Dag around Kaakhka (Kāḥkā Qal‘a), Dushak (Dūšaq), and Kyzyl-Arvat. After the 1890s the



volume of Russian merchandise on the market at Mašhad surpassed that of merchandise originating in British India (Curzon, I, pp. 205-09) and was the principal source of European industrial products in Khorasan until after World War I. Iranian exports included mainly agricultural products (wool and skins). This Khorasan border trade remained active until 1925-30, when collectivization in Soviet Turkmenistan brought about a rapid decline (Stadelbauer, pp. 371-72). On the other hand, the Atrak frontier, the Iranian side of which was not really pacified until after this period, almost never played a commercial role.

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