



RUSSIA II. IRANIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS (1917-1991)

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From the outset, the very first international resolutions of the young Soviet state had an immediate impact on relations with Iran. On October 26 1917, the second All-Russian Congress of Soviets passed the Decree on Peace declaring the abrogation of all unequal treaties. On December 3 1917, the Appeal of the Soviet government “To All Working Muslims of Russia and the East” was published. Among other items, it declared that “the Treaty on the division of Persia (this is how the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 was known in Russia) has been torn up and annulled. As soon as military activities cease, the troops will be called off from Persia, and the Persians will be provided with the right to decide freely about their destiny on their own” (*Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 1, p. 12). Due to persistent requests from the Russian side, the text of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty between Russia and Germany and its allies included clauses about the withdrawal of foreign troops from Persia. In February 1918 Asad Khan, the Persian chargé d’affaires in Petrograd, received an official diplomatic note in which the Soviet government expressed its agreement to begin negotiations regarding the withdrawal of the Russian troops. At the same time, an order was given to the General Headquarters of the Caucasian Front to evacuate the Russian troops from Persia, and by the



end of March the evacuation was over. However, a part of the Russian troops headed by General Baratov, as well as officers of the Persian **Cossack Brigade**, refused to obey the Soviet Command, remained on Iranian soil and joined the military service of the British.

In early December 1917, all tsarist diplomats who did not agree with the politics announced by the new authorities were dismissed from the diplomatic service of the Soviet Russia. The Soviet government abolished all diplomatic ranks, and the heads of all diplomatic representatives were now addressed as plenipotentiaries of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic). Persia recognized the new Soviet government in December 1917, and thus the diplomatic relations between Russia and Iran were not in fact interrupted. The Iranian diplomatic mission also continued its work in Petrograd after the October Revolution and was granted financial and other help. In a memorandum to the RSFSR government dated 30 January 1918, the Persian government expressed “complete readiness to start negotiations for concluding new treaties, consular conventions and other acts, on the principles of free agreement and mutual respect of peoples” (*Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 1, p. 92). However, the establishment of diplomatic relations was delayed. This was mainly due to the strong pressure exerted on Persia by Great Britain which, upon occupying a part of Trans-Caucasia, Central Asia, and Persia in 1918-19, had managed to sign a strategically important treaty with Persia in 1919. N. Z. Bravin, who had been appointed the diplomatic representative of the RSFSR in Persia, arrived in Tehran in January 1918. Without refusing to deal with the representative of the new power in Russia, the officials in Tehran, nonetheless, continued to recognize the tsarist envoy von Etter as the official diplomatic representative of Russia, because Russia was in a state of civil war and faced with foreign intervention, and the status of the Soviet government did not look very stable. By the middle of 1918, the British had gained an extremely powerful position in Persia and were thus opposed to substituting the tsarist embassy by the Soviet representatives. In the summer of 1918, N.Z. Bravin was appointed the head of the diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, while I.O. Kolomiytsev was assigned as the permanent representative of the RSFSR in Persia. However, the Persian government did not recognize the mission of Kolomiytsev. In November, the mission was extirpated in Tehran, and its members were sent to Mesopotamia under escort. Kolomiytsev was the only one who managed to escape. In July 1919, the government of the RSFSR deputed him to Persia again, but he was captured on his way there by the Persian Cossacks acting on the orders of the British and



killed on the island of Āšūrādā.

In spite of the fact that the Soviet Republics created on the territory of the former Russian Empire (the first integration into a unified state was in 1922) delegated issues of foreign policy to the RSFSR, they could still undertake quite autonomous foreign activities. An example of such activities was the deputing of the diplomatic mission to Persia from the Soviet Turkistan whose capital was at Tashkent. The mission had the objective of establishing regular commercial relations with the Northern provinces of Iran, as the supply of food to Central Asia from Russia had been interrupted. The head of the mission was E. A. Babushkin who was entrusted with consular rights to organize a representative office of the Republic of Turkistan in Mashad. However, this mission too was aborted by the British troops and its members arrested. In 1919 Babushkin and some members of the mission were transferred to India and then to Europe, and liberated only after long negotiations between the RSFSR and Great Britain (Popov, 1974).

In response to the [Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919](#) which was signed in Tehran in August 1919 and which could have potentially made Iran a de facto British protectorate, in late August 1919 the Soviet government announced in its appeal “To the Workers and Peasants of Persia” that it did not recognize the Agreement. Aiming to weaken the British position in Persia and acting from ideological considerations (mainly having the idea of spreading the proletarian revolution to the East), the leadership of the Soviet Republics in Russia, Trans-Caucasus and Turkistan started to provide considerable help to the Jangali movement of Mirza Kuček Khan. The order of the Political Office of the Revvoensovet (Revolutionary Military Council) of the RSFSR No. 107, dated October 8 1920, stated that “political work in the East is the most vital objective for the RSFSR. This work must be taken up with as much determination as was done for the preparation of October [i.e. the October Revolution].” (RTsKhIDNI, Fond 122, Inventory 1, Case 261, unnumbered folio). The immediate reason given for the military help to Kuček Khan was the return of the ships driven away to Anzali by the troops of A. Denikin and the British. In May 1920, the ships of the Volga-Caspian fleet, under the command of F. Raskol’nikov, approached Anzali and landed troops there. An infantry regiment entered Persia from the recently created Soviet Azarbaijan. The offer by the Iranian side to set up diplomatic relations with both the RSFSR and Soviet Azarbaijan was welcomed by Moscow at a time when it felt endangered by the real possibility of British intervention in Russia being strengthened from the South



and mainly from Persian territory. The establishment of relations with Persia provided a clear opportunity to prevent the possibility of such an intervention. In a diplomatic note dated May 23, Moscow explained that the Anzali operation had been carried out through the initiative of the military command, and without any prior agreement with the central government. This was undoubtedly a diplomatic ploy, since the government had known about the operation. It should, however, be borne in mind that the central authorities in Russia and in other Soviet Republics did not share a unanimous opinion with regard to whether the movement of Kuček Khan should be supported to the detriment of relations with the central government in Persia. Thus, in the radio ultimatum sent to the British with the request to surrender Anzali, Raskol'nikov declared that "he was acting on his own initiative, without orders from Moscow, and considered this action necessary for the safety of the Caspian Fleet" (Genis, 2000, p. 68). On May 25, the situation in Persia was discussed at the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP (b) [Russian Communist Party (of the Bolsheviks)]. It passed a resolution instructing Raskol'nikov to provide "necessary support to Kuček Khan by supplying stores, instructors, etc. Anzali and other localities of Persia, which are in our hands, should be given over to the latter's control. The fleet should be withdrawn from these localities after a declaration is made upon the order of the Soviet government confirming its refusal to interfere in Persia's domestic affairs. A section of the fleet sufficient in size to offer continuing assistance to Kuček Khan, is to be left at Anzali under the pretext of police service but under the Azarbaijani flag" (Idem, p. 21). The Soviet Republic of Gilān was thus established in May 1920 in the city of Rašt (the provincial capital of the Gilān province) with the backing of the Russian Bolsheviks (Chaqueri).

Since the state interests of Russia made the normalization of relations with Persia of paramount importance, the Moscow government started to insist on evacuating its troops from Persia. F. Rotshtein, who was appointed the plenipotentiary of the RSFSR in Tehran in November 1920, wrote a personal letter to Lenin in which he asked him to exert his influence upon those people in Baku who had initiated military raids on territories in Iranian Azarbaijan and Gilān. On 26 February 1921 the Soviet-Iranian Treaty was officially signed in Moscow. This had been prepared and agreed upon prior to the military coup of Reza Khan on 21 February 1921 (see [COUP D'ETAT OF 1299/1921](#)). According to its terms, the Soviet government annulled all its previous treaties with Persia, as well as other treaties of the Tsarist government concluded to



the detriment of Iranian interests, and surrendered the rights to the loans of the Tsarist government and its concessions. All the facilities belonging to Russia were handed over to Persia including: railways, roads, and telegraph lines, port facilities at Anzali and on lake Urmia, the Russian Discount-Loan Bank and other properties, but on the condition that these were not handed over to other countries. The Āšurādā and other islands on the Caspian Sea were transferred to Persia. Clause 11 confirmed for Persia the rights to keep its fleet under the Persian flag on the Caspian Sea. The treaty stipulated the rights of the transit trade for both countries. In essence, it was the first equitable treaty for Persia, and it was even more profitable to Tehran than to Moscow. For the Soviet government, the safety of the frontiers was of more importance, and in exchange for the refusal from all claims to the property of the Tsarist Russia, clauses 5 and 6 were included in the treaty. These two clauses excluded the possibility for organizations or individuals engaged in armed struggle against the government of either country to reside or operate on the territory of the other country (clause 5), and envisaged the possibility of the Soviet troops entering Iranian territory if the Persian government proved unable to avert this threat (clause 6). These two clauses, which undoubtedly violated the sovereign rights of Persia, were implemented during the Second World War. The treaty of 1921 is fundamental to relations between the two countries. It has remained valid to the present, except for clauses 5 and 6 that were unilaterally annulled by the Iranian side after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In the course of the negotiations in Moscow, the Russian side (G. Chicherin and L. Karakhan) tried to retain the oil and fishing concessions for Russia. The issue of the oil concession was not settled definitively from a legal point of view, while the fishing concession (the former concession of Lianozov) was retained for Russia (Aliev, 2004, p. 131).

The question of how to set up relations with Persia, even after the conclusion of the treaty, remained a controversial issue within the Soviet government. One alternative suggested by Karakhan envisaged the “Sovietization” of Persia through direct intervention and the removal of the shah. For this purpose Karakhan proposed to strengthen the Soviet forces in Anzali by using the expeditionary corps. This would enable the expulsion of the British from Persia and the formation of a Socialist-nationalist government (Persits, 1996, p. 36). These radical aims were not, however, pursued and instead attempts were made to develop relations with Persia through peaceful economic measures. These policies began to be implemented at a time when Reza Shah was



consolidating his power and influence over Persia. He had always been personally afraid of Moscow's political intrigues, and not only in the context of the expansion of the communist influence, but also in view of the possibility of his assassination by agents of the NKVD [People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs] (Mokhtari, 1998, p. 53). However, the interests of the country and, more immediately, the development of its northern provinces, required the normalization of relations.

By 1923-25, both countries had consolidated their state and administrative structure and had managed to crush internal separatist movements. In terms of conditions for achieving complete political independence, the main problems shifted to the sphere of the economy. Both in Persia and in the USSR (established in 1922), efforts were made to unfetter and expand private enterprise. In the USSR, this was made through the policy of NEP [New Economic Policy], and in Persia through the policy of encouraging the formation of companies. This also reflected in the way foreign trade was channeled through the creation of joint companies. Already in 1923, the Commercial Representative Office of the USSR was opened in Tehran, and later its branches were established in Tabriz, Anzali, Mashad and Bābol. They supervised the activities of the newly formed Soviet-Iranian societies. Some of the latter were specialized commercial companies, while others were engaged in export-import operations. In 1923, the Soviet-Iranian company Perskhlopok [Persian Cotton] was organized. It had a fixed capital of one million of Rials which increased tenfold by 1930. Not only did this company engage in exporting Iranian cotton to the USSR, which consumed 99% of Iranian exported cotton in the late 1920s, but it also provided agro-technical assistance and participated in the formation of enterprises for the primary treatment of raw cotton (Entner; see also [COTTON ii. PRODUCTION AND TRADE IN IRAN](#)). Improved American and Egyptian cotton seeds were introduced, model farms opened, and several dozen cotton-cleaning plants built. In Isfahan and Sabzavār alone, Perskhlopok built eight cotton-cleaning plants. Butter-making and soap-making workshops were opened in 1927 at plants built by Perskhlopok in Khorasan (in Terek). The company also reconstructed and launched plants located in Bandargaz, Ašraf, Bārforuš, Qom, Torbat and other cities, which had been closed in the period 1915-23 (Rabizade, 1970, p. 27).

Similar work was done by Persshelk [Persian Silk] company, which had also been created by the Commercial Representative Office of the USSR in 1923 (see [ABRIŠAM](#)). Silkworm breeding in northern Persia was in fact re-established



with its help. Soviet-Iranian companies Sharq (Šarq), Rusperssakhār [Russian-Persian Sugar], Perssovneft [Persian-Soviet Oil] and Mansujāt-e Persorus were engaged in export-import operations. Avtoiran [Auto-Iran] and Byuopers [Bureau-Persia] companies provided transportation service for the Soviet-Iranian trade, Ruspersbank [Russian-Persian Bank] dealt with clearing transactions. Series of representative offices of the Soviet organizations, such as Glavkhlopok and Zakgostorg, were at work (Palyukaītis, 1965, pp. 200-01). In 1923, the Soviet-Iranian Bank (Ruspersbank) began its work to provide credit for the joint companies.

Trying to retain the right to the concession for oil extraction in the northern regions of Persia, which had been received in 1916 by the Russian industrialist A. M. Khoshtariya, the Soviet government in 1925 bought out his allotted shares (65%) in the Kavir-e Kūriān Company that owned several low-powered wells in the Semnān region. However, the government did not recognize the legitimacy of the deal, which was part of the conditions for the withdrawal of Soviet troops during the Second World War.

On the basis of the fishing concession reserved for the Soviet side for five years according to the treaty of 1921, the joint company Persryba [Persian Fish] (later Iranryba [Iranian Fish]) was created in 1927 after the concession expired. The juridical basis was the agreement of 1927 for joint exploitation (for 25 years) of fish resources of the southern coast of the Caspian Sea and at the mouth of the rivers Safid-rud, Bābol, and Gorgān. This agreement was signed simultaneously with the Treaty of Warranties and Neutrality concluded in 1927 in Moscow, for three years with automatic annual extensions, so long as both sides agreed to it. Another agreement was also signed which legally laid out the organizational perimeters of the foreign trade and the economic relations already formed by then. The quota system and the trade balance ratios were fixed so that every import transaction had to be accompanied by an export transaction of approximately equal amount. During that period, upon initiating the monopoly for the foreign trade and starting the industrialization, the USSR toughened the currency control. The negotiations were long and difficult, and, for the purpose of gaining concessions from the Soviet side, Persia even resorted to boycotting Soviet goods in early 1927. In April 1927, replying to the proposal of the delegation of merchants to close the Iranian border to the import of Soviet goods, Reza Shah suggested to wait for the results of the negotiations (Agaev, 1971, p. 63). As the Soviet government agreed to establish the license-free mode in the trade with Persia, with the



right for the Iranian merchants to perform commercial transactions immediately on the Soviet territory, the question of the boycott was never raised any more.

Additional benefits were granted to the participants in the annual trade fairs held until 1928 in the cities of Nizhniy Novgorod and Baku, and in which Persia took an active part. The trade with Persia was important both for the USSR and for Persia. It is not without reason that a study commemorating the 30th anniversary of the founding of the National Bank stated that “at the moment of creation of the National Bank in 1928, the economic situation in Iran was very difficult. However, upon establishing commercial relations with Russia, the situation changed towards the revival of the economy that enabled the Iranian government to carry out a series of economical measures” (*Tārik-e sisāla*, p. 155).

The further development of the Soviet-Iranian relations was influenced by changes in the power structure in the two states as they both increasingly gravitated towards dictatorship, as well as by the world economic crisis. In the period 1929-33, the foreign trade turnover of Iran was reduced 3.3 fold and the Soviet Union accounted for 35 percent of Iranian foreign trade. However, it was most important for Iran to retain its share of the Soviet market. In those years, the USSR was buying 100 percent of all Iranian exports of fish and ambary, 97.5 percent of rice and cattle, 90 percent of cotton, 86 percent of wool, 68 percent of silkworm cocoons, 47 percent of leather and hides (*Vneshnyaya trgovlya k VII S"ezdu Sovetov SSSR. Otchyot Narodnogo komissariata vneshnei trgovli*, p. 52). Already in 1931 Persia passed a law establishing a monopoly in foreign trade and, before that, a law for the currency monopoly, and the state began to interfere vigorously into the economy of the country, including foreign trade. The USSR was the first country to recognize the monopoly in foreign trade that Persia and Russia had declared, in the treaty of 1931, on trade and sea navigation. This treaty confirmed the principle of establishing a trade balance, though this time not for each transaction but for annual results. The Treaty of 1931 covered trade rules for a period of three years.

In these years, the NEP (New Economic Policy) was being curtailed in the USSR, and private capital was completely forced out not only from industry, but from commerce too. All joint Soviet-Iranian companies ceased their activities, except for Soviranryba (Soviet-Iranian Fish) that stopped its dealings after the expiration of the 25-year period of agreement, in 1952.



The new Treaty of 1935 (also concluded for a period of three years) was put into practice by the state organizations exclusively. Not only did they carry out the trade, but they also participated in the building and equipping of various state-owned plants and in supplying transportation means for the northern section of the Trans-Iranian railway, which then was under construction. In this period, Persia and the USSR signed a convention for combating horticultural pests and diseases, a sanitary-veterinary agreement, and a convention for fighting locusts in the border regions. Relations on the national level were fairly buoyant. In 1935, a commercial-industrial delegation from Persia headed by the Minister of Commerce and the Minister of Agriculture visited Moscow, and so did the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran. In 1935, the USSR agreed to hand over to Iran the lighthouses located on the Iranian shore of the Caspian Sea. When the USSR joined the League of Nations in 1934, Iran tried to use this move to persuade the USSR to delete clause 6 from the Treaty of 1921 (see above), on the grounds that the Charter of the League of Nations itself guaranteed the members' security. However, the USSR refused to do so and this had an adverse effect on any further development of relations between the two countries.

After the expiration of the period of validity of the Treaty of 1935, economic relations between the USSR and Iran practically ceased, as the Iranian side refused to prolong the treaty. The share of the USSR in the Iranian foreign trade turnover in 1939-40 dropped to 0.5 percent. The political relations of the USSR with Iran were at a level well below those with Turkey and Afghanistan. The concept of Germany as a "third power" to counter-balance the excessive Russian and British influence on Iranian affairs started to play an ever-increasing role in the foreign policy of Iran.

Worsening of relations in this period was, to a certain extent, connected to the increasingly repressive measures adopted by the Iranian government against Iranian communists and the trade unions. This was the period of the expulsion of Iranian migrants from the USSR to Iran. Many of them had been seasonal workers as early as in the period of the Tsarist Russia and mainly lived in Trans-Caucasus, in Azarbaijan. The number of those who were expelled just from the Caucasus exceeded 3,000 people.

The government of the USSR had to cut down the network of its consulates and reduce the number of the consular and diplomatic representatives. By 1938, only the consulate in Bandar-e Pahlavi (Anzali) was functioning. At the same time, the Soviet leadership also demanded a reduction in the number of the



Iranian consulates within the USSR.

The problem of the frontier (in the region of Moğān and Atrek) was left unresolved, until boundary controversies were settled by the Soviet-Iranian Treaty of 1957, which finally resolved the frontier issues. In the 1930s, the juridical status of the Caspian Sea was fixed legally for the first time. In 1931, the convention of settlement, trade and sea navigation was passed, in which the legal status of the Caspian was fixed as that of a common sea. Yet, the question of the demarcation of the waters was not raised. However, in subsequent years, the Soviet Union actually unilaterally established the boundary sea line as a conventional line connecting the opposite points of the land frontier—from Āstārā to Ḥasan-Qoli. Iranian ships were not allowed beyond this line (423 km). This may have been a pragmatic decision, but it was not in anyway legally related to the navigation treaties between the two countries, the Treaty of Navigation of 1935, or the Treaty of Trade and Navigation of 1940. The Treaty of 1940 became the final and the crucial document regarding the status of the Caspian Sea. The Caspian was regarded as a Soviet and Iranian sea; equal rights were envisaged for navigation under the national flag, and the order of using the ports, carriage of freights and fishing was stipulated. According to the clause 13, only the ships of the USSR and Iran were allowed in the Caspian Sea. For the first time, the treaty discussed the question of the territorial rights of the coastal zone, defined to exist within the limit of ten nautical miles.

The welcoming attitude of the Iranian government towards the expansion of the German presence (economic and military) in the late 1930s made relations between the USSR and Iran even more tense. Even though, after the outbreak of World War II, Iran declared its neutrality, the danger of using its territory by the German troops remained considerably high. Iran was of strategic interest for Germany, both as a bridgehead to advance into the USSR and British India, and as a source of oil. After the invasion of the USSR by German troops, the Soviet government sent diplomatic notes to the Iranian government on June 26, July 19 and August 16, 1941 requesting the expulsion of German agents from the country; similar notes were dispatched by the British government. The growing Soviet-British pressure over Iran was accompanied by the concentration of troops at the borders. The legal basis for bringing the troops in was the clause 6 of the Treaty of 1921. On August 25, 1941, the Soviet troops entered the territory of Northern Iran through the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the British troops entered Southern Iran. The



agreement between Iran, the USSR and Great Britain, concluded on 8th September 1941, defined the troop disposition according to which the Iranian troops remained in the central part of Iran. However, since the main condition of the Agreement, namely the expulsion of the representatives of Germany, was not fulfilled, the Allied troops occupied Tehran on September 15. The next day Reza Shah abdicated from the throne in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza. The official reasons given for bringing in the troops were the threat of an offensive against the USSR directed from Iran, preventing the potential use of Iranian troops against the USSR and the necessity to transport military supplies and food to the USSR through Iranian territory. The Iranian operation turned out to be practically the only military success in the initial period of the war, since by September 1941 the Germans had occupied the Baltic Republics, the Byelorussia and a considerable part of the Ukraine, and the Red Army was suffering heavy losses. In January 1942, the USSR, Great Britain, and Iran concluded a Union Treaty according to which Iran made its territory available for transit supplies to the USSR. Great Britain and the USSR declared their respect for sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Iran, pledged to protect it against aggression from Germany and to withdraw their troops not later than six months after victory over Germany. In November 1943 Tehran was the venue for the Allies' Conference, which charted out the further development of the war and its aftermath. It was the only trip ever made by Joseph Stalin outside the USSR.

In the autumn of 1945, Great Britain and the U.S. began to withdraw their troops, since their period of stay would expire in December 1945. Since on November 12 the Democratic Republic of Azarbaijan was declared in Tabriz, claiming a wide measure of autonomy within Iran, and in January 1946 the Kurdish Autonomous Republic was proclaimed, the Soviet troops prevaricated and did not follow suit. The Iranian side, through their prime minister, Aḥmad Qawām (Qawām-al-Salṭana), who visited Moscow in February 1946, was trying to speed up the withdrawal of the troops and agreed to the proposal of the Soviet side to grant the USSR a concession for exploiting oil in the Northern regions of Iran. At the time when the Soviet troops were sent into Iran, a geological survey group from Baku was deputed to the Northern Iranian provinces. The group attested to the existence of substantial oil deposits in Iranian Azarbaijan, Gilān and other northern provinces. However, all subsequent data from the region has failed to substantiate this claim. Large-scale geological surveys carried out in the last decade of the 20th century has not found any indications of commercially significant oil deposits in this



region either. It appears that the earlier positive conclusion was made under pressure from Bagirov who, as the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Azarbaijan, was eager to occupy and control the Azarbaijani territories of Iran with the perspective of their unification with the Soviet Azarbaijan. Also, the fact that there were substantial oil fields in Soviet Azarbaijan, made the possibility that similar fields were also to be found on the Iranian side more credible to the Soviet Union. On 4 April 1946, the Agreement on Oil was signed in Tehran. Upon signing the provisional communiqué, the USSR announced the withdrawal of the troops. In a letter by Qawām addressed to Stalin, which the Persian prime minister sent before leaving Moscow, he assured Stalin that his aim was “to consolidate the political, economic, and cultural relations between our two countries” (Aliev, 2004, p. 222). This, to the Russian side, implied the retaining of the democratic autonomous governments in Azarbaijan and Kurdistan. However, already by December 1946, government troops entered into Azarbaijan and Kurdistan after the earlier withdrawal of the Soviet troops in May 1946. The regional movements for local autonomy were suppressed, and their activists arrested, and many killed. Thousands of Iranian families emigrated to the Soviet Union, mainly from Azarbaijan and Kurdistan. The 1946 Agreement on Oil was rejected by the parliament (*majles*), which declared it null and void.

After that, the relations between the USSR and Iran were restricted to formal diplomatic contacts. The strengthening of the influence of the USA in Iran had a negative impact on the bilateral relations, especially after the US-initiated coup of 1953, which deposed the government of Moṣaddeq (see [COUP D’ETAT OF 1332/1953](#)), and after Iran joined the [Baghdad Pact](#) in 1955. Nevertheless, both sides took steps towards improving relations. In 1954, an agreement was signed for settling controversial frontier and financial questions, and in 1956 the Soviet side officially abandoned its claims to oil explorations by the Kavir-e Kūriān company. In June-July 1956, the Shah of Iran and Queen Soraya visited the USSR. However, after the downfall of the monarchy in Iraq, a military treaty signed between Iran and the United States clearly had an adverse impact on Iranian and Soviet relations. In 1959, Iran was engaged in negotiations with the USSR for the conclusion of the treaty of non-aggression but was delaying the negotiations by putting forward new conditions each time. As a result, the Soviet delegation left Tehran, and the relations between the two countries suffered a new crisis.

The White Revolution (*enqelāb-e sefid*) of 1963, heralding a series of reforms



from above, was preceded by a new stage in the normalization and expansion of the relations with the USSR. In a redirection of its foreign policy, Iran turned from an exclusive orientation to the USA and engaged in the tactics of flexible maneuvering between the West and the East. On 15 September 1962, the Iranian government declared to the Soviet government in a diplomatic note that Iran “shall not grant any foreign state the right to have missile bases of whatever type on the territory of Iran” and “shall never allow Iran to become an instrument of aggression against the territory of the Soviet Union” (*Pravda*, 16 September 1962). In the autumn of 1962, Leonid Brezhnev visited Iran, and in 1965 the Shah reciprocated by visiting the Soviet Union. In 1963, for the first time after the war, a major agreement on economic and technical cooperation was signed in Tehran. It envisaged cooperation in the construction of the sites which were important for the development of economies of both countries, such as hydro-technical facilities on the frontier river Aras (a dam, a water reservoir and two electric power stations), sturgeon-breeding plant, grain elevator, melioration works in the region of the Bay of Mordāb on the Caspian, and others. Financing of the works was arranged on an equal footing. For the purpose of paying for the supply of equipment and technical services from the USSR, Iran was given a twelve-year credit to the amount of 35 million rubles with annual interest rate of 3.6 per cent. Given the rapid pace of industrialization that Iran had embarked upon, it was envisaged that the loan could be repaid through the export of Iranian goods to the USSR.

In August 1964, an agreement on airways was signed between Moscow and Tehran that made it possible for Soviet planes to fly to countries in Asia via Tehran and through Iranian air space and for Iranian planes to fly to Europe via Moscow.

In January 1966, the Soviet-Iranian Agreement of Cooperation in building industrial and other facilities was signed. This agreement envisaged the participation of the Soviet Union in the construction of the Isfahan metallurgic complex with an annual production capacity of 500-600 tons of steel. Besides that, the USSR was to cooperate in the creation of a plant to manufacture machine tools, and in the construction of the Trans-Iranian gas pipeline for exporting gas to the USSR. According to the agreement, Soviet organizations would design and survey the plants, supply equipment and provide experts for providing technical assistance. The Agreement envisaged supplies of gas to the Soviet Union and supplies of machinery and equipment to Iran for the period from 1970 to 1985. For these purposes, the USSR granted a credit to the



amount of 200 million rubles for 12 years at an annual interest rate of 2.5%.

The steel-works in Isfahan was launched in March 1973. Mines for coal and iron ore extraction were launched with the help of the USSR to provide the complex with raw materials. For those employed at the complex, the USSR built the city of Āriyāšahr with its necessary economic and social infrastructure.

The plant for the production of machine tools in the city of Arāk, which was built with the help of USSR in 1969-72, had the capacity of 30 thousand tons of products per year and was the first multi-purpose enterprise for manufacturing lifting cranes, steam-boilers, equipment for sugar and cement plants, and agricultural machinery.

The 1,106 km Trans-Iranian gas pipeline was launched in 1970. Its northern section of 500 km was built by the Soviet side. From the locality of Bid-e Boland, where the head facilities are situated, the pipeline passed along a route to Isfahan, Kāšān, Qom, Tehran, Qazvin, Rašt, Anzali, and Āstārā. From Āstārā, the gas entered the USSR, and in late 1970, supplies of gas to the Trans-Caucasus began. It was Iran's first export gas pipeline; prior to that the gas had been burnt off as waste. Already in 1972, the export of gas amounted to 8 milliard cubic meters and was on the increase in subsequent years.

As early as 1968, the Permanent Soviet-Iranian Commission for Economic Cooperation was set up with the aim of strengthening Soviet-Iranian economic relations. The Commission had had regular meetings up until the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In connection with the construction of the hydro-technical facilities on the Aras river, an Additional Protocol to the Agreement of 1954 was signed in May 1970. The protocol defined the new line of the border across the water reservoirs of the Aras hydro-technical unit and the Mil-Moğan intake water dam on the Aras River. Upon completing the demarcation works in August 1973, Iran and the USSR signed an Additional Protocol for the Treaty about the regulations of the Soviet-Iranian boundary of 1957 that was connected to the changes in boundary lines (Kulagina and Dunaeva, 1998, p. 75).

In 1972, a new treaty on developing economic and technical cooperation was signed which envisaged the participation of the USSR in the development of Iranian ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, oil-and-gas and petrochemical



industries, irrigation, agriculture, power energy facilities, and grain elevators. Considerable attention was paid to cooperation in the field of personnel training. The treaty was concluded for a period of 15 years with automatic annual renewals for the subsequent five years so long as neither side formally requested its suspension.

Further expansion of economic relations and strengthening of political relations were interrupted by the Revolution of 1979 in Iran. After the overthrow of the shah, the leadership of the USSR declared its intention to develop friendly and neighborly relations with Iran. Besides that, it counted on the consolidation of the positions of the pro-communist parties within the new power structure and viewed the revolution as democratic and petty bourgeois in its inception. Many activists of the Tudeh (tuda) party, who had lived for years in exile, returned to Iran. The plenary session of the Tudeh Party's (or PPI, People's Party of Iran) Central Committee, which took place in East Berlin in late February 1979, declared its full support for the idea of creating an Islamic Republic in Iran. The Soviet leadership was likewise attracted by the anti-American mood of the new authorities. Even though the Islamic leadership announced the main trend of its foreign policy to be "neither East nor West," it was the USSR ambassador who was the first foreign envoy to be received by Ayatollah Khomeini (Komeyni) after the Islamic Revolution.

However, subsequent events indicated that the new regime was curtailing its ties with the USSR. Immediately after the revolution, Iran made an appeal to the UN to denounce clauses 5 and 6 of the Treaty of 1921 and then announced a price rise for the gas supplied to the USSR. The Iranian-Soviet relations also suffered an important setback when the Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. Like the United States, the Soviet Union was also branded and denounced as a "Satan." There were attacks on its embassy in Tehran and on the Consulate in Isfahan. Relations were also adversely affected by the supply of Soviet weapons to Iraq at the peak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1982, and by the suppression of the Tudeh party and subsequent show trials of some of its prominent members on television. Because of the disagreement on gas prices, Iran cut off supplies to the gas pipeline in February 1980, even though there was no market for the Iranian gas other than in the Soviet Union. In 1983, a group of people employed at the Soviet Embassy was expelled from Iran, and in 1984-85 the number of the Soviet Diplomatic Corps at the Embassy was reduced. The Soviet-Iranian Cultural Center in Tehran was closed down, and it



became exceedingly difficult for Soviet nationals to obtain entry visas to Iran. However, the viewpoint of those in authority in the USSR who did not support the economic embargo of Iran gradually prevailed and given the immediate needs of Iran for essential consumer commodities and for replacing equipment, especially after the end of the war with Iraq, a slow amelioration in the relationship between the two states began to emerge. Already during the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moḥammad Javād Lārijāni, visited Moscow and handed over a message from the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 'Ali Khamenei (Kāmene'i), regarding the intention of the Iranian leadership to develop good neighborly relations with the USSR. In February 1988, the Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, V.F. Petrovskii, attended the celebrations of the 9th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. Together with the Iranian Prime Minister Mir Ḥosayn Musavi, they discussed questions of renewing large-scale cooperation. The Treaty on transit was signed, and the USSR became a regular participant in the international trade fairs in Tehran. In 1988, the two countries signed an Agreement of cooperation for the construction and exploitation of hydro-technical units in Kōdā-Āfarin and Qiz-Qalasi on the Aras River.

A new stage in the improvement of relations is connected with the beginning of the perestroika period in the USSR and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. On January 1 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini addressed Mikhail Gorbachev with a message in which he spoke of the necessity of learning about Islam and said that Communism should be looked for in museums of political history and that Iran follows the principles of being a good neighbor. In February 1989, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eduard Shevardnadze, visited the Islamic Republic of Iran for the first time and was received by Ayatollah Khomeini. Soon after the death of Khomeini, the Speaker of the Iranian majles, 'Ali-Akbar Hāšemi-Rafsanjāni, who became the president of the country shortly afterwards, visited the USSR. On June 22 1989, a long-term program for commercial-economic, scientific-technical, and cultural cooperation until the year 2000 was signed in Moscow. Simultaneously, treaties were signed regarding commodity circulation supplies of Iranian gas, which were renewed in April 1990 (after the breakdown of the USSR it ceased to be the property of Russia), the construction of the railway Tejen-Saraks- Mashad, and the participation of the USSR in the modernization of the Iranian energy power supply sources including the development of nuclear energy. The program also envisaged military-technical cooperation, which mainly included supplies of military equipment.



After the breakdown of the USSR, Russia, as the legal successor of the international obligations of the former, continued the cooperation with Iran on the basis of this program, with the exception of those sites which had immediate bearing to the interests of the newly formed post-Soviet states. The new stage of cooperation with Iran is connected with the formation of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) as an independent state.

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