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**AZERBAIJAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS:  
PAST AND PRESENT**

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The vacuum created after the collapse of the Soviet Union in its southern regions is rapidly filling by new relations. The newly independent states and older countries in the region have begun to look at each other and to discover new neighbors. Most people have realized that as a result of nearly two centuries of separation many things have changed. Therefore, the lifting of the "Iron Curtain" did not bring about an automatic integration.

The emergence of new states has created a new frontier against Russian expansionism. In the past, the old frontier countries prevented Russian attempts to gain access to warm waters. However, this task has now to be continued by the newly independent states, and accordingly the West has begun to reconsider the old countries' role. Furthermore, it is clear that the newly independent states now undergoing rapid nation-state building processes have huge energy resources as well. On the other hand, the fundamentalist regime in Iran is considered as an obstacle to the export route of the potentially tremendous quantities of oil and natural gas and other raw materials; the civil war in Afghanistan is another obstacle.

Lightning-fast geopolitical changes are leading to collisions between old and new states. Recently-created problems in relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran require firm attention from the viewpoint of ensuring stability and peace in the region. Azerbaijan-Iranian relations are one of the most sensitive and essential objects of argument in the region.

## **I. Ideological and Historical Background of Relations**

There are two contradictory concepts of the history of Azerbaijan-Iranian relations. Perso-centrism and its special approach to Azerbaijan, Kasravism, is the ideological background for the first concept. The Perso-centrists, in evaluating current Azerbaijan-Iranian relations, are enlisting the loosely introduced method of "historical determinism." According to this concept, since Azerbaijan once was a part of Iran, "historical justice" must be restored. The main theses of Perso-centrism, widely propagated within Iran and abroad, are as follows:

- The ancient (autochthonous) inhabitants of Azerbaijan, like the other provinces of contemporary Iran, were exclusively Aryans;

- Past inhabitants of Azerbaijan spoke one of the Persian dialects - "Azeri";

- After the invasion and settlement of some "wild" Mongolian and Turkic nomads in Iran, local inhabitants "were forced to change their native language " within 70 years; therefore, "to correct history's error" and "to ensure the national unity of Iran," it is necessary to Persianize the population of Azerbaijan.<sup>1</sup>

To improve this concept various books have been, and are being, published, arguing that the name of the Republic of Azerbaijan should not even be "Azerbaijan." Another argument they adduce is "lack of ethnic unity" between North (the Republic of Azerbaijan) and South (the north-western part of today's Iran) Azerbaijanians.<sup>2</sup> Shireen Hunter<sup>3</sup> and some other active advocates of Perso-centrism in the West are characterizing Azerbaijan-Iranian relations based on above concept, and are presenting their wishful thinking as fact.

The second concept, Turkism, on the relation between two countries is the antithesis of Perso-centrism. The national approach to ethnic history in the Republic of Azerbaijan clarifies various aspects of the subject.<sup>4</sup> The main components of the formation of the Azerbaijan national ideology within Iran are as follows:

-There is no absolutely autochthonous people in contemporary Iran; just like the ancient Turks and other people, the Persians have migrated to this region at definite periods of history.

-The ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijanis has not yet been adequately researched and it is difficult to fix the initial period of settlement of the Turks in the territory of Azerbaijan; nevertheless, historical facts illustrate that the Turks have been settled in the territory of modern Azerbaijan at least since the beginning of the first century AD.

-The roots of the rich history of Azerbaijani Turks go to Central Asia's deep past; throughout their history they have never accepted others' supremacy; therefore, today's Azerbaijanis should be proud of their history.

-Contrary to the Perso-centrist arguments, the Turks having become the supreme rulers of Iran after the end of Arab rule did not impose Turkish on the "Azeri-speaking population of Azerbaijan", but maintained the use of Persian in the state chancellery and cultural life.

-The late Pahlavi regime's policy was based on total denial of the national existence of Azerbaijan and on the Persianization of its population; this policy had a reactionary character and has resulted in disturbance of the multinational country's normal development; the current Islamic regime must respect the ethnic rights of various nationalities in Iran.

It is necessary to note the role of Shi'ism when discussing Azerbaijan-Iranian relations. Gaining power in the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the Safavi dynasty declared Shi'ism as the state sect, thus dividing both the Islamic and the Turkic worlds. Shi'ism was seen as the main tool by which diverse nationalities of Iran were kept together. Shi'a-Sunni differences were used in approximately 150 years of Ottoman-Safavi wars. Nadir Shah Afshar's attempt at reconciliation of the two sects did not produce any results.

Russia began to conquer the de facto independent Khanates of Azerbaijan at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the involvement of Qajar Iran in two unsuccessful wars (1804-1813, 1826-1828) Azerbaijan was divided, and the two parts of Azerbaijan were forced

to proceed on different paths. However, until the creation of Stalin's "Iron Curtain" in the 1930s there were direct connections between the two Azerbaijanis. At the same time, during Reza Shah's rule, the Iranian Empire was converted into the Persian state, and pursued a discriminatory policy toward the non-Persian nationalities.

## **II. Experiences Of 1918-1920 and After**

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was created as a sovereign country on May 28, 1918 in the northern part of Azerbaijan. The declaration of independence stated that immediate measures were to be taken to establish friendly relations with bordering nations. Contrary to the government of Azerbaijan's attempt to establish normal diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, Iran very soon demonstrated its anxiety concerning the creation of a state with the name "Azerbaijan." The Iranian side predicted that the Azerbaijan Republic sooner or later would have influence in South Azerbaijan. In July 1918, the Azerbaijan delegation in Istanbul presented a copy of the declaration of independence to all foreign representatives and diplomats, including the consulate of Iran. The consul of Iran returned the declaration to the delegates from Azerbaijan stating that they did not recognize the sovereign country under the name of "Azerbaijan."<sup>5</sup>

Progressive circles of Iranian Azerbaijanis (Turks) were happy with the creation of the Azerbaijan Republic. The head of the Azerbaijan delegation to Istanbul in July 1918, M. A. Rasulzade, wrote: "I met Iranian Azerbaijanis here. They are my old friends. I felt their secret love and passion for the sovereignty of Azerbaijan... Most of them had lost their hopes concerning Iran and have their own ideas. The Southern Azerbaijanis have created their own society here based on Turkism and Azerbaijanism. They think we are forgetting them."<sup>6</sup>

Acute discussions about the correctness of the name of the newly created state on the north of Aras River were published on various newspapers in Tehran. Some attributed this "misnomer" to Turkey, yet others found nothing to be worried about. The press in Baku actively responded by saying that there was no monopoly on the

word "Azerbaijan" and that Iran should not be concerned with the name of its northern neighbor.<sup>7</sup>

During the Paris Peace Conference at the beginning of 1919, Iran presented an official memorandum full of pretentious statements. In this memorandum Iran laid claim to Baku, Darband, Sheki, Shamakhi, Ganja, Qarabagh, Nakhchivan and Erevan. Iran based its claims on a baseless idea that "most of the people in the above-mentioned territories are of Iranian origin and race."<sup>11</sup> The memorandum was not taken seriously, coming from a country that had played a big role in World War I.<sup>8</sup>

Azerbaijan-Iranian relations took a sharp turn some time later. Iranian officials suggested the advisability of a single united state for the two countries.<sup>9</sup> Initially, this thesis was presented by the Iranian delegation in Baku on their way to Paris. The head of delegation, the minister of foreign affairs, attempted to substantiate that the creation of a single state was beneficial to both countries. However, some powerful statesmen in Azerbaijan gave a hostile reception to this offer and considered it an insidious act of Iranian diplomacy.<sup>10</sup>

The foreign minister of Iran discussed this issue with the Azerbaijan representatives in Paris and signed a preliminary draft of an agreement that contained statements of hopes of uniting foreign affairs activities in future and establishing close political and commercial ties.

The offer to create a confederation with Iran came when Azerbaijan was going through difficult times. The Paris conference was delaying the recognition of Azerbaijan's independence; Russia was still threatening military invasion; Iran itself was turning into a British protectorate. At the same time, the Azerbaijan delegation took into consideration that while protecting Azerbaijan's sovereignty, the creation of a confederation with Iran could finally unite the long-separated Azerbaijan people and remove the sword of Damocles (the Russian threat) hanging over the people of North Azerbaijan.

Negotiations continued with the Iranian delegation that was sent to Baku. However, in January 1920 the Paris Peace Conference

acknowledged the independence of Azerbaijan, and the talks about confederation were forgotten. Relations with Iran were still developing. In March 1920 there were several agreements signed by both countries. The first clause of the Friendship Agreement established the "solemn recognition of the independence of the Azerbaijan Republic (Caucasus)"; the second clause made agreements on improving political and economic relations between two countries; the third clause agreed to establish diplomatic relations and embassies<sup>11</sup>

The ambassador of the Azerbaijan Republic in his letter dated March 1920 wrote: "Though weak at the moment, propaganda in Iranian Azerbaijan for secession from Iran and joining the Azerbaijan Republic is growing. The Azerbaijan Republic must be ready for the events that are developing in Iran and use these to the Republic's advantage."<sup>12</sup> In a letter dated April 11 the ambassador wrote: "The Persian people have no sympathy for our Republic at all; in contrast, the Turks of Iranian Azerbaijan are showing signs of brotherly friendship. Iranian Azerbaijan is hoping to gain autonomy, independence and secession from Farsistan."<sup>13</sup>

The letters of the Azerbaijan ambassador reflected the growing movement in Tabriz. This city had already fallen into the hands of revolutionary forces under the leadership of Khiyabani. The main purpose of the uprising was to end British dominance in Iran and to bring down the oppressive rule of the Shah. Khiyabani considered that the establishment of local councils, as provided for in the Constitution, was the means to achieve local autonomy for South Azerbaijan and the democratization of the whole country.<sup>14</sup>

After the second occupation of North Azerbaijan in late April 1920, the Russian Army launched its intervention in the northern part of Iran. Soviet Azerbaijan was effectively used in the establishment of a Soviet regime and in the military operations in Gilan. This occupation was one of the main causes that later contributed to less than friendly relations between North Azerbaijan and Iran. M. A. Rasulzade wrote about these events: "The Bolsheviks... wanted to

create an animosity between two Muslim nations by using the Azerbaijanis in the events of Rasht and Enzeli."<sup>15</sup>

The Gilan events further stimulated Iranian political circles, fairly represented by the local Azerbaijanis, to extend their efforts to ensure the territorial integrity and internal unity of Iran. These events played a key role in the creation of Reza Shah's dictatorship. The pan-Iranism ideology that began to appear in the latter part of the 19th century became the cornerstone of state policy. If in the beginning of the 20th century pan-Iranism had been directed against foreign pressure and produced some positive sides, under the rule of Reza Shah pan-Iranism acquired a reactionary form, Perso-centrism. There appeared the trend called Kasravism, casting doubt on the national entity of the Azerbaijani Turks. According to the founder of the trend, Seyyid Ahmad Kasravi, the people of Azerbaijan had to be persianized to prevent the separation of South Azerbaijan from Iran in the future.

The political methods used by the Soviet Union to deal with Azerbaijan were similar to those of Tehran.<sup>16</sup> In some areas the Soviets even "improved" these abusive methods. The ethnonym in North Azerbaijan had changed from "Azerbaijani Turks" to "Azerbaijanis"; the alphabet changed twice, from Arabic to Latin and a while later from Latin to Cyrillic; the borders were closed between the two parts of the nation; the Southern theme was forbidden; the centuries-long cultural ties were severed, and so on. It is noteworthy that the official stand of the Soviets on the question of the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani Turks was based on pan-Iranism - Perso-centrism. According to this concept, Azerbaijan was populated by people of Persian origin, who lost their language, rather than by Turks...<sup>17</sup> It is necessary to add that, after the national-democratic movement in South Azerbaijan in 1945-46, from time to time the popularization of the Southern theme was allowed in the Azerbaijan SSR. Some "Government patriots," who monopolized the Southern theme, took hatred of Iran to extremes. They called for the liberation of South Azerbaijan and tried to create an enemy image of Iran. The efforts of the national intellectuals, who tried to inculcate in their

readers the consciousness of United Azerbaijan, and to reveal the real situation (in the Azerbaijan SSR) by "symmetrical criticism," in effect caused an attitude of grieving over South Azerbaijan.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, we can note that on the eve of the restoration of relations as independent countries a patently negative stereotype of Iran was created in North Azerbaijan. This stereotype was induced on Tehran's discriminatory policy towards South Azerbaijan. At the same time, consideration of North Azerbaijan as "part of Iranian soil" was widespread in Iran.

### **III. Destruction of the "Iron Curtain"**

During the national-democratic movement in North Azerbaijan after 1988 the slogan "Tabriz, Tabriz!" became particularly popular. It was the people's protest of the taboo, that had been declared against the essential theme, and its symbolic address for help, required in the difficult circumstances. The appeal to unite with the South Azerbaijan for a time was heard more loudly even than the slogan of independence.

In 1989 diplomatic contacts between Moscow and Tehran were intensified. During his visit to Moscow, the speaker of Iran's parliament (a little later the president of the country), Mr. Rafsanjani, discussed the possibility of obtaining weapons and new military technology from the Soviet Union. One of the results of the discussion was the development of trade, including the border trade. These discussions were closely followed in Azerbaijan. The last stop on Rafsanjani's visit was Baku, where relations between Iran and the Azerbaijan SSR were discussed. The local media actively followed events, and it was widely hoped that an opportunity for normal cross-border movement (between two Azerbaijanians) would be provided. In spite of intensive negotiations between the representatives of Soviet Azerbaijan and Iran on the border trade and the softening of cross-border movement requirements, there was no serious change until the end of 1989.



Late 1989 was a period of increased development in the national-democratic movement. The newly created Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) and other political organizations had already become the main attributes of Azerbaijan's political life. The lack of response to people's demands from official circles had been aggravating tensions. At the beginning of December the Nakhchivan branch of the APF has launched to maintain mass meetings on the bank of Aras River agitating for economic, cultural and humanitarian relations with South Azerbaijan. On December 12 meetings were held on both sides of the river to commemorate the anniversary of the national-democratic movement in South Azerbaijan (1945-46). On the following days continuous meetings were held during the day, and solidarity fires were lit at night on the both sides from Nakhchivan to Astara. At several parts of the border people from both sides crossed the river and joined each other after decades of separation. During these days the Nakhchivan branch of the APF presented an ultimatum to the local government, demanding the distribution of a fertile swath of land, situated between the border fence and the Aras River among local residents by December 31, or the border fence would be brought down by the people. Due to non-acceptance of the ultimatum by the Soviet authorities, the Soviet-Iranian border fences were destroyed in various parts from Nakhchivan to Astara on December 31.<sup>19</sup> Soon after, the Soviet deputy minister of foreign affairs and his Iranian counterpart came to Baku to discuss softening of the border regime.<sup>20</sup>

The beginning of the destruction of the "Berlin Wall" between the two Azerbaijanans influenced the rising of a national movement, especially in North Azerbaijan. As a result, in early January 1990 some local Soviet executive branches begun to disintegrate in several districts of Soviet Azerbaijan. The speed and direction of events alarmed Moscow. The Soviet government, by arranging pogroms of Armenian residents of Baku, gained a cause to send the Soviet Army to the capital and other parts of Azerbaijan. The Soviet Army killed more than 131 and wounded hundreds of citizens. In addition, thousands of national movement activists were arrested. The West was disturbed by the pogroms of Armenians, but did not pay much

attention to the massacre of other citizens of Azerbaijan by the Soviet Army. The Foreign Minister of Iran stated that "Black January" was an internal affair of the USSR and expressed his regrets over the events.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to the dramatic nature of the situation, the South Azerbaijan question remained very present in political thought. Provisions for the idea of United Azerbaijan existed in the programs of nearly every political organization, appearing at this time one after another. Ties between the two Azerbaijanians were considered especially in the program of the APF, which had become the largest opposition organization by then. Among the objectives of the organization was "removing obstacles to the development of cultural and economic relations with South Azerbaijan."<sup>22</sup> The main theses of the United Azerbaijan ideal in Musavat Party's program, which officially renewed its activity in Azerbaijan, were as follows:

- That the historical division of Azerbaijan was unjust and its unity is inevitable sooner or later.

- Likewise with respect to the principle of non-violation of borders by force, support for human and ethnic rights in Iran as in other countries.

- Determination of the destiny of South Azerbaijan solely by the Iranian Azerbaijanis.

- Ensuring of ethnic and cultural unity on the bases of expanding all possible ties between the two parts of Azerbaijan.

The collapse of the USSR, and restoration of independence in North Azerbaijan concerned the Iranian government seriously. It was not in a hurry to acknowledge the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Ironically, on his visit to the USSR, Mr. Velayati, the Foreign Minister of Iran, advocated the formation of a strong Soviet confederation in Baku on November 1991. In his opinion, this would prevent the West from influencing the newly independent states.<sup>23</sup>

The declaration of the Republic of Azerbaijan's sovereignty (October 1991) caused confusion in Tehran. Some in the Iranian leadership supported the idea of integrating the Republic of Azerbaijan, "part of ancient Iran," with the Islamic Republic.

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However, the majority of the political establishment did not perceive this idea as realistic. They also argued that the increased weight of the Turkic elements and their political activity in Iran could result in the Turkification of the country. Therefore, the theocratic regime sought to attract the Republic of Azerbaijan into its political orbit, and tried to reduce the Republic of Azerbaijan's influence on the Turkic people of Iran (especially in South Azerbaijan).

Iran was also concerned by the national-cultural renaissance to the north of the Aras River. Iran did not hide its partisan attitude toward discussions on switching from the Cyrillic alphabet, and launched an all-out campaign in favor of the Arabic alphabet in the upcoming decision. With that end in mind the Iranian government did not hesitate to publish numerous propagandist materials in Cyrillic, and distributed them in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The decision to restore a Latin-based alphabet in Azerbaijan became the target of angry criticism by Iran.

The Islamic revolution and form of government were the main subjects of increasing Iranian propaganda. Iranian ulama often traveled to Azerbaijan and promoted Iranian values in their propaganda. The newspapers, books and other materials advocating export of the Islamic revolution were published in Tehran and freely distributed in the newly independent Republic of Azerbaijan. In addition, Iran founded and established some newspapers and magazines in Baku to broaden its propaganda.

Seeking to attract the Republic of Azerbaijan into its orbit of influence, Iran tried to ensure the following geopolitical interests:

- To protect the territorial integrity and internal stability of Iran by creating obstacles for the independent Republic of Azerbaijan, and decrease its influence on South Azerbaijan.

- To prevent the increase of the American and Turkish influence in the Republic of Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

- To prevent solidarity and political intimacy in the Turkic world.

- To gain a base to influence the Muslims of the North Caucasus, Central Asia and the Volga region.

- To have access to Azerbaijan's market and its natural resources.

-In accordance with the doctrine of exporting the Islamic revolution to create a pro-Iranian and Islamic regime in North Azerbaijan.

#### **IV. Tensions in Official Relations**

The first state visit of Ayaz Mutallibov, the first communist president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was to Iran in late 1991. Baku had great expectations from broadening its ties with Iran. Tehran negotiations resulted in consent to use the territory of Iran to maintain links with Nakhchivan, which was blockaded by the Armenians. In addition, agreements were signed on the expansion of economic ties between the two countries and the declaration of Nakhchivan region as a free economic zone in the near future. During the visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister to Baku in early 1992, new agreements were signed on the development of economic and political relations between Iran and Azerbaijan. Heading a large delegation to commemorate the anniversary of the Islamic revolution, President Mutallibov took another step towards establishing closer ties with neighboring Iran. Through its minister the leadership of Azerbaijan stated that it had no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of Iran and that "there is no basis for the creation of a state of united Azerbaijan."<sup>24</sup>

The next step in creating closer relations between Baku and Tehran was the latter's assumption of a mediating mission on the Mountainous ("Nagorno") Qarabagh conflict and expanding its activity in this respect in the first part of 1992. During this period Tehran was apprehensive of a big war, which could destabilize the Caucasus and neighboring regions. At the same time Iran did not wish a complete end to the conflict, but rather preferred a permanent smoldering of the situation to keep Azerbaijan occupied. In addition, through the mediation mission Iran intended to keep the processes in the Caucasus under its control and to exercise influence there.

Iran's mediation mission ended with a tragedy for Azerbaijan. Late in February 1992, with the participation of Iran's leader, the

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presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a cease-fire agreement. Before the ink was dry, an important Azerbaijani settlement in Qarabagh, Khojaly, was surrounded and the majority of its population was massacred. This tragedy resulted in Mutallibov's resignation. Following the signing of a second cease-fire on May 7-8, again in Tehran, by leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the last and most strategic Azerbaijani city, Shusha, was captured by the Armenians.

Russia was behind events that established the beginning of new stage in the course of the war. By actively involving its local military units, Russia severely punished Azerbaijan for seeking others' help to end the conflict instead of Moscow's. At the same time Russia showed Iran who is the master in the region and demonstrated that it could not tolerate increased Iranian influence. Iran's mediation, which resulted in Armenian military superiority in the course of the conflict, created a very negative image of Iran in Azerbaijan. Various materials claiming connivance between the Armenians and the Iranians were published in Baku.

Abulfaz Elchibey, the chairman of the APF, was elected president of Azerbaijan at this critical time. As the leader of the APF, Mr. Elchibey, criticized the Iranians' lack of respect to the rights of non-Persians in multinational Iran, especially the prohibition of their native languages in schools. He predicted that oppression of non-Persians could cause the disintegration of Iran in the future. Iran took offense at Mr. Elchibey's comments and its mass media exaggerated and distorted his stance.

Contrary to widespread opinion, relations between two countries were expanding. A joint commission on economic links was established. Very soon Iran became number one trade partner of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Any dissatisfaction on the part of Iranian officials and adepts of the Islamic regime was based mainly on Elchibey's internal and foreign policies, especially on achieving parity in relations with other countries. By mid-1992 it was realized that the majority of the more than 700 different agreements signed with Iran were not being implemented; the Iranian side only executed the agreements, or parts of agreements, which benefited them unilaterally.

The other direction of Iran's policy toward Azerbaijan was its aspiration to play the role of "big brother." Iran's efforts to seek close ties between citizens of two countries were not sincere. In early 1993 the Iranian government adopted a new policy aimed at creating obstacles to marriages between citizens of the two countries. This policy was directed against the broadening of interethnic ties between the two Azerbaijanis, and was an anachronism in modern times. It violated a basic human right. However, the Iranian side did not even consider it necessary to answer official protests from the Republic of Azerbaijan in this matter.

One of the main objectives of Azerbaijan's policy towards Iran was to create an opportunity for reunion of long-divided families and relatives, and to facilitate cross-border movement of their respective citizens. The Azerbaijan side pursued relations on the principle of equality. Nevertheless, the Iranian side did not react warmly to Azerbaijan's suggestion to sign a broad agreement on mutual recognition of each others' independence and national borders, non-interference in internal affairs and other significant provisions (a similar agreement had already been signed between Azerbaijan and Russia). Azerbaijan's repeated suggestions for rebroadcasting of entire TV programs from Baku to Iran and from Tehran to the Republic of Azerbaijan, and on bilateral cultural festivities, remained unanswered. By continuing the tradition of the Pahlavis, Tehran tried to prevent the promotion of the national and independent existence of Azerbaijan. The Iranian government tried to restrict the activities of the embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and to this date has prevented the opening of a consulate in Tabriz (whereas an Iranian consulate-general was open in Nakhchivan for a long time).

The Iranian government, unhappy with Elchibey's policy of expanding relations on the principle of parity, supported opposition in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and was encouraging anti-government forces to commit illegal acts. Significant in this regard were two visits by Heydar Aliyev, the chairman of Nakhchivan Autonomy Supreme Majlis, to Iran (August 1992, March 1993) and the subsequent

negotiations. It was also proved that the Iranians were involved in espionage activities in Azerbaijan.

Iran was pleased with the military coup d'etat against the Elchibey government in June 1993. Tehran did not hide its ostentatious links with the rebels. For instance, the Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan presented a copy of the Holy Koran to Suret Huseynov, the leader of the rebellion, during his standoff against the government in Ganja.

After Elchibey's overthrow the Iranian side was much relieved and began to help Heydar Aliyev to strengthen his power. Iran strongly warned the Republic of Armenia against further military advances, while Azerbaijan's resistance was weakened as a direct result of the coup d'etat. Renewed Armenian offensives pushed thousands of refugees to cross the border river to Iran. These events angered the local population of South Azerbaijan and increased their sympathy for their northern brothers. To prevent possible internal unrest in its territory and to help the victims of war, Iran financed and constructed a refugee camp in Azerbaijan together with other forms of humanitarian relief. Iranian officials paid numerous visits to Baku. Various agreements were signed.

The parity of relations between the two countries began to fade again. Iran was granted new concessions. Especially-prepared ninety-minute TV programs from Tehran were broadcast daily via the Azerbaijan state TV network promoting Islamic and Iranian values. A representative of Velayati-faqih (the spiritual leader of the Iranian revolution), such as is usually sent to each ostan (province) in Iran, was also appointed to Baku.

Nevertheless, starting from late 1993, President Heydar Aliyev, as an experienced politician, carried out a change in the external orientation of the country from the Russian-Iranian axis to the Turkish-Western one. This was a return to President Elchibey's foreign policy. With the signing of the "contract of the century" in September 1994, to produce oil in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea with the participation of Western companies, Azerbaijan-Iranian relations took a new turn. The Iranian attitude towards

President Heydar Aliyev and the Azerbaijan government changed. Heydar Aliyev's statements on united Azerbaijan in the 1980s were remembered. The label "servant of America and Zionism" which had often been given to President Elchibey was now stamped on President Aliyev's forehead by the Iranian media. Iranian officials repeatedly demanded that Azerbaijan should sever its ties with the U.S. and Israel.<sup>25</sup> The Iranian government ostentatiously began to ameliorate its relations with Armenia, which was still engaged in a war with Azerbaijan. The Iranian press began to publish alleged "numerous requests" from the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the accession of "seventeen historically Iranian cities" to contemporary Iran.<sup>26</sup>

The Iranian government began to support the Russian stance on the status of the Caspian Sea (Iranian officials earlier had promised to support Azerbaijan's stance). In spite of its partnership with Azerbaijan on the "Shah-Deniz" oil field contract in Azerbaijan's sector of the Caspian Sea, and its intent to explore the Iranian sector, the Iranian government tried to create obstacles to Azerbaijan's oil explorations in the Caspian Sea.

Trials of the leaders of the so-called Azerbaijan Islamic Party proved the organization was spying for Iran. These trials revealed numerous facts indicating the broad scope of subversive activities by Iran in the Republic of Azerbaijan.<sup>27</sup>

These events greatly angered Iran.

## **V. Conclusions**

In sharp contradistinction to the claims of some Perso-centrists, their so-called "historical determinism" does not apply to present-day Azerbaijan-Iran relations. Many factors have changed within the last 200 years. Above all, Azerbaijan is not the old Azerbaijan, its northern part is already independent, and this inevitably affects South Azerbaijan. Iran itself is not the old Qajar Iran either; it has been converted to an obviously Persian state during the Pahlavi period.



The experiences of recent years prove that Azerbaijan-Iranian relations do not depend on politicians' personal wishes. Individuals can play a significant role in the mitigation, even in the solution, of certain contradictions (for instance, the Caspian's status and the oil problem, different economic problems). Nevertheless, the main contradiction between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran has a fundamental character: to resolve the question of the *modus vivendi* between these two countries, either the Republic of Azerbaijan must enter into the political orbit of Iran and to form a pro-Iran Islamic regime, or Iran must change the character of its regime and to respect the ethnic rights of non-Persian peoples.

### NOTES

1. The pan-Iranist (Perso-centrist) concept of the Iranian academic lobby on the Azerbaijan question in Iran predominates in the West. Nevertheless, sometimes objective views can be seen. For more information on Kasravism see: Nisib Nisibzadeh, "Iranizm və Azərbaycan məsələsi", *Bekir Ay-Ulduz*, 1997, pp. 81-92.
2. See, for example, Enayollah Reza, "Azərbaycan və İranın yarı Albaniyyə-Qafqaz" (Tehran, 1360).
3. Shireen Hunter, "Azerbaijan: Search for Identity and New Partners"<sup>11</sup>, in I. Bremmer and R. Taras, Ed., *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); same author, "Transcaucasia and the Middle East: Patterns of Mutual Impact", *Armenian review*, vol.45, no 1-4/181-184 (1993); same author, "The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-building and Conflict", (Washington, DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994).
4. See, for the non-communist, non-pan-Iranist concept on ethnogenesis: Süleyman Mirzəyev, ed. "Azərbaycan tarixi" (Baki, 1996), p. 156-203.
5. On the ethnic homogeneity of the two Azerbaijanis see: Şövkət Tağıyeva "Müasir İran burjuva tarixşünaslığında Azərbaycan xalqının etnik birliyinin inkar edilməsi haqqında", in *Azərbaycanın tarixi və müasirliyinin burjuva saxtalaşdırıcılarına qarşı*, (bakı: Elm, 1978), pp. 114-124. Azərbaycan Respublikasının Dövlət Arxivi, fond 894, siyahı 10, iş 31, v r q 17.
6. Azərbaycan Respublikasının Dövlət Arxivi, fond 894, siyahı 10, iş 31, v r q 7; fond 894, siyahı 10, iş 153, v r q 7-8; The above-mentioned

- Ms. Shireen Hunter, not based on the facts, alleges the contrary. See: Shireen Hunter, "Azerbaijan: Search for Identity and New Partners"<sup>11</sup>, p.230.
7. See: *Azerbaijan* (in Russian), July 1, 1919.
8. For more information see N.N. Sibzad , "Azərbaycanın xarici siyasəti (1918-1920)", (Bakı: Ay-Ulduz, 1996), pp.192-193.
9. Ms. Hunter's claim that the Azerbaijan Republic made this suggestion is groundless. Shireen Hunter, *Azerbaijan: Search for Identity and New Partners*, p.229.
10. Azərbaycan Respublikasının Dövlət Arxivində, fond 894, siyahı 10, iş 139, v r q 40-41.
11. Ibid, fond 970, siyahı 1, iş 101, v r q 2-3.
12. Ibid, fond 970, siyahı 1, iş 162, v r q 18.
13. Ibid, fond 970, siyahı 1, iş 94, v r q 37.
14. For more information, see, Ş. Tağıyeva, N.N. Sibzad , "Azərbaycan-İran münasibətləri və "Azadistan" məsələsi", in *Azərbaycan Demokratik Respublikası L M qalın rəptplusu* (Bakı: Elm, 1992). Referring to Kasravi, Ms. Hunter asserts that Kheyabani's decision to accept the name "Azadistan" is related to the Musavatists' claims on South Azerbaijan (Transcaucasus and the Middle East: Patterns of Mutual Impact, p.55). But it is known to specialists that Kasravi was expelled from Azerbaijan by Kheyabani due to his rejection of the autonomous movement in Tabriz, and interestingly enough during the name-changing period the Musavat government no longer existed.
15. N.N. Sibzad , "Bölünmüş Azərbaycan, bütöv Azərbaycan", (Bakı: Ay-Ulduz, 1997), p.231.
16. Ms. Hunter claims the contrary. In her opinion, nationalism in Azerbaijan did not exist, but was created by Stalin to pressure Iran. Another thesis of this writer is not based on facts either. She claims that the notions of "South Azerbaijan" and "North Azerbaijan" appeared during Stalin's rule. (Shireen Hunter, "Azerbaijan: Search for Identity and New Partners", p.230). It is sufficient to look at the well-known writer J. Mammadquluzade's article "Azerbaijan" in 1917, describing the external borders of historical Azerbaijan.
17. The same baseless opinion is repeated with pleasure by Ms. Hunter. For example, see, Shireen T. Hunter, "The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-building and Conflict", pp. 10-11. %
18. See, David Nissman, "The Soviet Union and Iranian Azerbaijan: The Use of Nationalism for Political Penetration", (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987).

19. December 31 was officially announced as National Solidarity Day of Azerbaijanis Around The World.
20. For more information about these events, see David Nissman. The Two Azerbaijanis: A Common Past and A Common Future, *Caspian Crossroads*, No2, 1995, pp.23-24.
21. Gareth M. Winrow, Azerbaijan and Iran, in A. Rubinshtein and O. Smolanski (ed.) *Regional Power Rivalries in the New Eurasia. Russia, Turkey, and Iran*. (M.E.Sharp: Armonk, New York, London, England, 1995), p.96.
22. See Tadeusz Swietochowski, Azerbaijan: Between Ethnic Conflict and Irredentism, *Armenian Review*, vol. 43, no 2-3, 1990, p.45
23. Gareth M. Winrow, Azerbaijan and Iran, p.96.
- IAAvrasya Dosyasi*, vol. 2, no 1, 1995, p. 128
25. See, *Millət*, July 10, 1995; *Ayna/Zerkalo*, November 7, 1995, March 8, 1996; *Azərbaycan*, March 5, 1996; Svante Cornell, "Iran and the Caucasus", *Middle East Policy*, vol.V, no 4, January 1998.
26. *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, 20 dey 1374.
27. See, *Ayna/Zerkalo*, April 18, 1997; May 17, 1997; May 24, 1997; May 31, 1997; also *Azadlıq*, January 11, 1997; February 1, 1997; *Müxalifət*, May 3, 1997.

## X ü I a s ə

### AZ RBAYCAN - IRAN MÜNASİB TL Rİ: KEÇMİŞD V İNDİ

#### N s i b N S İ B L İ

(X z r Universit si, Bakı, Az rbaycan)

Sovet İttifaqının dağılmasından sonra onun c nusunda yaranmış boşluq sür tl yeni münasib tl r sistemi il dolmaqdadır. "D mir p rd " qalxanda SSRİ-nin c nusunda yaranan yeni dövl tl rl s rh din o taymdakı " ski" dövl tl r yaxlaşmış, bir-birini öyr nm y çalışdılar. Bir çoxlarına m lum oldu ki, az qala iki sr q d r ç k n aynlıqdan sonra çox şey d yişib. Odur ki, "d mir p rd "nin götürülm si onlann mexaniki

qaynayıb-qanşmasına s b b olmadı. Bölg d stabillik v sülhün t min edilm si baxımından Az rbaycan Respublikası il İran İslam Respublikası arasmdaki münasib tl r, ortaya çıxan ziddiy tl r diqq ti c lb edir.

Az rbaycan-İran münasib tl rinin tarixi haqqında bir-birin zidd iki konsepsiya özünü açıq göstərir. Birincinin ideolqji bazasında paniranizm v onun Azərbaycana münasib td spesfik forması olan *k sr viçilik* durur. Panir nistl r Az rbaycan-İran münasib tl rinin bugününü araşdıranda "tarixi determanizm" d n imdad umurlar. Onlara gör Az rbaycan bir vaxtlar tranm t rkibind olduğu üçün bu gün d "tarixi dalet" b rpa edilm lidir.

Az rbaycan Respublikasında, el c d İranm özünd iki ölk arasındakı münasib tl r haqqmdakı türkçü konsepsiya Az rbaycan türkl rinin etnik tarixi haqqmda paniranist baxışlara tam ziddir.

1918-ci il maym 28-d Az rbaycanın şimalmda Az rbaycan Demokratik Respublikası adlı müst qıl dövl t yarandı. İran t r fi Arazm şimalında "Az rbaycan" adlı dövl t yaranması v onun gec-tez C nubi Azərbaycana t sir ed c yind n teşviş düşdüyünü tezlikl biruz verdi.

Bir q d r sonra İranm Az rbaycan Respublikasına münasib tind k skin dönüş yarandı. İran r smi nümay nd l ri İranla Az rbaycanın vahid dövl t t şkil etm sinin h r iki ölk üçün m qs d uyğun olduğu tezisini ortaya atır. İlk d f h min tezis Sülh konfransında iştirak üçün Paris s f ri zamanı Bakıda olmuş İran nümay nd hey ti t r find n ir li sürüldü. Nümay nd hey tinin başçısı İran xarici iş l r naziri İranla Az rbaycanın birl şm sinin h r iki ölk üçün faydah olacağını saslandırmağa çalışmışdı. İran xarici iş l r naziri bu m s l ni Parisd olan Az rbaycan nümay nd hey ti il müzakir etmiş, nümay nd hey tl ri arasmda müqavil layih si imzalanmışdı. Bu s n d sas n, iki ölk arasında six siyasi-iqtisadi laq yaranır, iki dövl tin xarici siyas t f aliyy tinin birl şdirilm si arzu edilirdi.

Şimali Az baycanda 1988-ci ild başlanmış milli-demokratik h r kat zamanı "T briz, T briz!" şüan populyarlığı il seçilirdi. Bu, onill rl h ssas mövzu üz rin qoyulmuş tabuya çtiraz v ç tin v ziy t düşmüş xalqın köm k üçün simvolik müraci ti idi- C nubla birl şm k çağınşlan bir müdd t h tta istiqlal şüanndan da gur s sl nirdi.

Dekabr ayım 12-d C nubi Az rbaycanda milli-demokratik h r katm (1945-1946) ildönümü münasib ti il Arazm h r iki sahilind mitinql r oldu dekabr ayının 31-d Naxçıvandan başlayaraq Astaraya q d r Sovet-İran s rh di söküldü.

Bir para paniranist yazıçılann ist yinin ksin , üz d niraq "tarixi determinizm"<sup>1</sup> prinsipi Az rbaycan-İran münasib tl rinin bugününü izah etm ye yaramır. Çünki son 200 ild çox şey d yişib, h r şeyd n w l

## AZERBAIJAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS..

Azərbaycan w lki Azərbaycan deyil, onun şimalı artıq müstəqildir və labüd olaraq Cənubi Azərbaycana fəaliyyət göstərmişdir. İran özü də Qacarlar dövrünün İrani deyil, Pahlavi dövründə qatı-fars dövlətinə çevrilmişdir.

Son illərin təcrübəsi göstərir ki, Azərbaycan-İran münasibətində siyasi şəxslərin istəyindən asılı deyil. Şəxsiyyət amili ayn-aytı ziddiyyətlərin (məsələn, Xəzər nefti, iqtisadi problemlər) yumşaldılmasında, həətə tam həllində mühüm rol oynaya bilər. Lakin Azərbaycan Respublikası ilə İran İslam Respublikası arasındakı əsas ziddiyyət fundamental xarakter daşıyır: bu iki dövlətin *modus vivendi* probleminin həlli üçün ya Azərbaycan Respublikası İranın siyasi orbitinə daxil olmalı, burada islamçı-irançı rejim yaradılmalı, ya da İranda islamçı rejim xarakterini dəyişdirməli, buradakı qeyri-farsların milli haqlarına hörmət edilməlidir.