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The Formation of The Iran-Russia Boundaries in The Caucasus

Bahram Amirahmadian 

Assistant Professor, Department of Russian Studies, Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: bahram1329@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the formation of the Iran-Russia border. Historically, Iran and Russia, despite a long shared history, maintained an often-unfriendly relationship. The border between them was defined by the Greater Caucasus mountain range, specifically near the Terek River, before the treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828). Before the 16th century, the two nations were separated by a flexible and undefined frontier region, rather than a fixed boundary. The modern Iran-Russia border was established following two wars initiated by Russia, which ended in Iran's defeat and led to the formalization of territorial divisions. Today, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Iran and Russia no longer share a land border; they are now separated by the Caspian Sea, the legal status of which remains under discussion.

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Introduction

Historically, the borders of Iran have expanded and contracted as a result of military successes and defeats. This is particularly true for the country's boundaries in the Caucasus, Mesopotamia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, which were shaped by a combination of expansionary conflicts and defensive wars. Consequently, Iranian culture and civilization extend beyond the modern nation-state's borders. These historical boundaries once stretched from Asia Minor to the Indian subcontinent and from the steppes of Central Asia to Mesopotamia, signifying the vastness of the former Iranian empires.

The modern-day Iran-Russia border is the product of a complex and often adversarial relationship that began in the 8th century. This dynamic intensified at the end of the Safavid dynasty, a period coinciding with the rise of the Russian Empire under Peter the Great. While Russia was strengthening its power, the Ottoman Empire was in decline, weakened by internal conflicts and wars on multiple fronts. This geopolitical shift created a power vacuum that would significantly influence the region.

This paper argues that the modern boundaries between Iran and Russia were not formed through mutual agreement, but were instead imposed through military force and treaties that served the colonial interests of major powers at the time, particularly Russia and Britain. These boundaries tragically separated nations and peoples who had no desire to be part of the Russian Empire. This history of imposed borders is evident in the treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828), which formalized Iran's territorial losses.

The study will analyze the process of the formation of the Iran-Russia boundaries in the Caucasus region. It will consider the historical, economic, and geopolitical factors that were fundamental in shaping these borders. Today, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Iran and Russia no longer share a land border but are "borderless neighbors" separated by the Caspian Sea. This paper will focus on the historical process that led to the creation of the boundary line in the Caucasus, a line that has largely remained consistent from the time of the Russian Empire through the Soviet era.

Early Russian-Iranian Relations and the Rise of Moscow

Early historical studies of Iran's northern and northwestern boundaries show that its territory was neighbored by **Slavic tribes**, which unified to form Kievan Rus' in the 8th and 9th centuries. Kievan Rus' developed extensive commercial ties with eastern countries, with major trade routes, particularly the Volga-Caspian waterways, facilitating not only commerce but also cultural and political exchange with Iranian cities like Tabriz, Gilan, and Darband. Evidence of this historical connection remains, as some families in Tabriz still bear surnames, such as Moskochi and Badkubeyi, that are linked to their ancestors' trade with Russian cities.

While trade flourished between the 11th and 12th centuries, the Mongol invasions of the 13th and 14th centuries severely disrupted these relations. Following Russia's liberation from Mongol (Tatar) rule and the consolidation of its territories under Moscow, its political and economic engagement with Islamic countries, including Iran, intensified.

A pivotal moment occurred with the Russian conquest of the Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan (1556) khanates, which granted Russia direct access to the northern coast of the Caspian Sea. This marked the beginning of Russian influence in the Caucasus region and, consequently, the starting point for the formation of the modern Iran-Russia boundaries. By securing control of the politically and economically significant Volga River, Russia was able to project power southwards and directly confront the Golden Horde, Crimean Khanate, and Ottoman Empire.

The flourishing of formal relations between Iran and Russia coincided with the establishment of the Safavid dynasty (1500-1722). As the two empires grew closer, local Caucasian rulers played a significant role in shaping the political landscape. The Kabardian nobles, for instance,

voluntarily annexed their territory to Russia in 1557, strengthening Russian ties with regions like Daghestan. Russia's construction of a strategic stronghold at the confluence of the Sunzha and Terek rivers further enhanced its influence in the Caucasus, particularly with Georgia.

During this period, the Caucasus became a major battleground between the Safavids and the Ottomans. In the late 16th century, Shah Khoda Bande and later Shah Abbas of Iran sought a military alliance with Russia against their mutual Ottoman enemy. They even offered to cede cities like Darband, Baku, and Shamakhi in exchange for military assistance. Although a formal military alliance never materialized, the shared concern over Ottoman expansion on the Caspian Sea coast motivated continued political and economic cooperation.

By the 17th century, military clashes between Iran and Russia intensified, particularly over Russian fortifications along the Terek River, which encroached on Iran's northern frontiers. Shah Abbas demanded the closure of these outposts. Despite these disputes, Shah Abbas successfully reclaimed all territories occupied by the Ottomans by 1607, while a domestically weakened Russia maintained only small pockets of control in the region.

The rivalry for control of the Caucasus between Iran and the Ottomans continued until the Treaty of Zuhab in 1639, which divided the disputed areas, ceding Eastern Georgia, Armenia, Shirvan, and Daghestan to Iran, and parts of Western Georgia and Armenia to the Ottomans. This period of intermittent conflict left the local population seeking stability from a more powerful state, and an internally revitalized Russia soon re-entered the scene.

The final phase of border formation began with the collapse of the Safavid state. When Shah Sultan Hussein was overthrown and Iran fell into chaos, Peter the Great exploited the instability by launching a campaign to occupy the Iranian coast of the Caspian Sea.

The formation of the Iran-Russia border is fundamentally a story of geopolitical expansion. Russian leaders, from the Tsars to the Soviet Union, have historically pursued access to warm waters, viewing the Caucasus and Central Asia as vital to their security. The mountainous terrain of the Caucasus serves as a natural defense for the Russian heartland, making regions like Chechnya of immense strategic importance. Russia's historical and ongoing sensitivity to this region stems from its desire to maintain a unified and secure geographical defense.

This paper's objective is to analyze the causes of the wars between Iran and Russia and the subsequent shaping of their borders in the Caucasus. It will explore Russia's historical interest in the region, the process through which the boundaries were militarily imposed, the factors behind Iran's defeat, and the eventual expulsion of both Iranian and Ottoman influence from the Caucasus. The two centuries of Russian dominance in the region and the roles of key political and military figures will also be highlighted.

Caucasus and its situation at the end of 18th and beginning of 19th centuries

Caucasus enjoyed special importance for both Iran and Ottoman, for two reasons. First for its strategic situation and secondly, its geographical locations, crossroad and point of intersection for the connection between North-South and East-West. In addition to that, Caucasus was an Islamic domain, so it was under consideration of both governments. From strategic and geographical point of view, Caucasus was a buffer region situated between Russian Empire, Iran and Ottoman. This was the region that was against this expansion, because they used to consider it as a Christian aggression on their domains. So that is, why they become an obstacle in the Russian way to the south (wars of North Caucasian Muslims against Russia in late 18th century and first half of 19th century).

Caspian Sea was a very important region for Iran, Ottomans, and especially for Russia, because of being important trade routes of that time (Volga-Caspian). At that time khans of the Crimea were considered to be the ally of Ottoman Empire. With the union of khans of Crimea, Ottomans wanted the geographical connection with Muslims of Caucasus and then khan of

Crimea, the only way to achieve this goal was to possess southern Caucasus and then North. Since Ottomans didn't have any territorial connection with khanate of Crimea via the coast and water ways of Black sea, Russia was the lord of the Black Sea waters, used to hinder in their way, and held northern coast, didn't allow Ottomans to succeed in their aims. Therefore, Ottomans looked for an alternative i.e. to access southern Caucasus from east and hence access Daghistan, then Northern Caucasus and afterwards khanate of Crimea from western coast of Caspian Sea. In this way they could behold Caspian Sea and could make contacts with their allies in the east of Caspian Sea (Uzbeks and other Sunni Muslim nations) and could possess the trade routes. In this process, there were two basic obstacles in the Ottoman's way. First, two Christian principalities of Georgia and Armenia, second, khanates of the north of Arax River, which the inhabitants of it, were Shiite Muslims and were believers of Iranian religious leaders. They used to attribute themselves with Iran in the religious aspect; and because of Shiite and Sunni differences, they had no inclination towards Ottomans. But in northern Caucasus there was Sunni Muslim, who considered them to be the followers of the "Muftis" of Ottoman court. In addition to that, southern Caucasus was in Iranian domain, and every advancing move of Ottomans towards east, could be considered as an offence over Iranian domain. Although the weakness of Central government of Iran and the corruption in the court, prevented Iran's authorities in this region.

In the advancement of Ottomans towards Caucasus, Iranian borders were vulnerable and this became the reason of a few encounters known as "300 years wars". The first of these wars (1514) was occurred between sultan Salim of Ottoman and Shah Ismail Safavid, and ended upon Iran's defeat. The last battle of this series of wars was fought between Nadir Shah and Sultan Mahmood of Ottoman in 1736, led Iran to won the war and ending the wars between the two countries forever. Presence of Ottomans in Caucasus was an alarming sign for the Russian Empire towards the vulnerability of their southern borders, that is, why they started advancing towards South. On the other hand, Armenia and Georgia celled upon for help from Russia to get rid of Muslim's oppression (Ottomans and Iranians) with the annexation of Georgia with Russia in 1801, that was criticized by Iranians. Russia stabilized its presence in southern Caucasus, however Muslims were at war with Russia in the Northern Caucasus.

A Review on the History of Presence of Russia in Caucasus.

Advancement of Russia towards warm waters began in the middle of 16th century, from the banks of Terek River (Benigson, et al. ,1991: 19). Ivan the Terrible in the year 1552 captured Kazan khanate and then in 1556 occupied khanate of Astrakhan/Hajitarkhan. At the same time, Russian borders reached to Terek river . In 18th century the Islamic boundaries (in Russia) were situated along the Terek River in North Caucasus and Syr Darya in Turkistan (Benigson et al. , 1991: 99).

In 1587, Russians had reached the Northern Caucasian plains, and constructed a castle in Tersky Godorok that served as their military base for their further attacks, later (Benigson et al. , 1991: 34). In 1604 the Tzar, Boris Godonov started a huge raid on north Caucasus. His aim was the conquest of Daghistan so that they can receive the way to Iran. But Daghistanis with the help of Ottomans stood against Russians and defeated the Russian force and made all their castles along river Terek plain with the soil and pushed them back to Astrakhan (Benigson et al. , 1991: 35,36). During the Iranian rule on Caucasus in the period of Shah Abbas I in 1652, Shah Abbas ordered to demolish all the Russian castle and fortifications along the rivers "Ghui Su" and "Terek". "Khosrokhan Beiglerbeigi" of Shirvan and Surkhay Khan, the shamkhal of Daghistan along with some other leaders of Shirvan and Daghistan in compliance in the orders of Shah Abbas II, started their military expeditions towards Caucasus and after several

encounters and clashes with Russian soldiers. They succeeded in possessing Russian castles and fortes and then destroyed them all .

Twelve years after the reign of Peter the Great (1682) the fourth king of Romanov dynasty, in Russia, the reign of Shah Sultan Hussain (1694) in Iran, started. In the reign of Peter I, Iran and Russia ties, that were friendly before that, took a new shape. At that time Russians were generally needed Iran's help, and their ambassadors and ordinary positions visited Iranian court. The battle of power happened to be in the favor of Russia.

After the fall of Safavids (1722) and weakening of Iranian government, Russia expanded its southern possessions and became neighbors with Georgia, and when Georgian kings have been threatened from Iranian court, they started seeking Russia's backup (Nafisi, vol. 1. 2004: 66).

One of the most important aims of Peter I was to establish the relationship with India, through Iran, and we must say that his predecessors also had taken few steps in this regard. When famous Michael Romanov in 1621 established relations with khan of Khiva and after him his successor Alexi, in 1646 and 1675 was sent to India for the initiation of trade ties with India (king Aurangzeb). But he couldn't succeed and no intimate trade ties were established. In 1759 few Russian businessmen were seen in India (Jamal-Zadeh, 1993: 170).

Peter's aim also was the broadening of business ties, speedy progress of Russia and hold of free waters, had no other option but to be friendly with Iran in order to reach his goals. That is why in 1711 he sent his representative to the court of Shah Sultan Hussain. So those negotiations about business agreements could be done and implicitly he could gather enough information about coastal cities of Caspian Sea. Shah Sultan Hussein welcomed this ambassador warmly. The ambassador on behalf of his government resulted the king to issue the orders to Armenian merchants to take their products from Petersburg to Europe, instead of Izmir and Trabzon routes, specially the silk of Iran that was highly appreciated in Europe of that time. Iranian products were exported to Europe via sea routes, Indian Ocean, or via Turkey and Aleppo at that time. Peter who had the intentions of occupying southern states of Caspian Sea since long, in 1715 he sent another ambassador named Artmi Volinsky to Safavid court in Isfahan. This man was highly intelligent and wise and Peter I, had given him the whole rights for this business agreements. Peter I wanted to perform researches on southern Caspian states and every thing related to them, from deltas to the harbors of the rivers, and also about the state of Gilan. That is why Volinsky was asked to gather and bring information about geographical and military conditions, state of harbors, and to notice that whether these ports have posts or not, and the state of mountainous routes and passes, and what could be the barriers in military expeditions. Peter wanted the comprehensive information about the situation of Iran and of the strategic ways, before executing his plans so as to reach his destination as soon as possible (Taj Bakhsh, 1983:60).

In addition to that duty, Volinsky had another assignment too, that was, to request Iranian king to allow the Armenian Merchants (silk merchants) to export their product to Petersburg via Russian trade routes instead of Izmir and Aleppo. He had also the responsibility to inform Iranian higher authorities that their real enemies are Ottomans, not the Russians. Russian ambassador arrived Isfahan in March 1716. During his stay in Isfahan, and his travels along countryside, he studied carefully the socio-economic situation of the country at that time, and then presented a report to Peter I, that how they can conquer Iran easily with a lesser force. He spent his winter in Shamakhi, after his duty was over in 1718. While his travels to Isfahan, as well as in his way back to Russia, he spent some days in Shamakhi (that used to be the part of Northern Iranian domain at that time) and studied the geography of Caucasus during his stay and gathered some important information about the region. He reported to Russian court that these Caucasian states bear a weak relationship with Iran and Christian states, particularly

Georgia, are more inclined towards Russia and it was inevitable for Peter to take this point into account.

Peter I evaluated Volinsky's reports and due to engaging at war with Sweden, Russian did not give up the idea of getting hold of Iran. That's why in fall 1719, Baskakov, one of the Russian military generals, was given the responsibility of the gathering information starting from delta of river Terek till the coasts of Gilan, via land and send this report to higher bodies of Russian military.

After treaty of 1720, Peter got the opportunity to reach his old goal. In spring 1720, Davud Khan of Daghistan laid a conspiracy in Lezgia and Daghistan, and gave a lot of damage to Russian inhabitants of these areas. On the other hand, due to Afghan's attack on Isfahan, Peter found an excellent opportunity to implement his war plan in Iran.

Peter I in 1722, under the pretext of the revenge of innocent blood of prince, who was killed by Iranian nationality Uzbeks, advanced with 30,000 soldiers and many guerrillas, under his own command, from Astrakhan intending to head towards south via the Volga River route. Before moving, he published his explanation in both in Persian and Turkish languages in Shawwal month. He arrived Caspian sea and thirteen days later he arrived to the delta of Terek river, and after occupying Lazia and crossing the passes of Caucasus mountains, captured Darband, Center of Daghistan, that was the gate way to Iran (Jamal-Zadeh, 1993: 174-175). Peter, Before arriving Darband, ordered his representative in Iran named Simon Oramov, to express that his aim of military expedition in Caucasus is the destruction of rebels and if Iranian government needs any help for the internal stability against the revolts, he is ready to deploy his troops for helps.

Because Capturing of Baku wasn't easy, food was not available too, and winter was also getting severe the city could not been conquered. Peter I started heading towards Astrakhan to reach Petersburg and in his way at the bank of Sulak river in north, Tamir Khan Shura constructed the fortress that become famous by the name "sacred cross" holy cross, later (Jamal Zadeh, 1993:147).

In 1724, Peter with exploiting of the chaos of Iran, succeeded to get the attention of Ottoman Empire by the confrontations upon the possession of Northern and western provinces of Iran by them and Russian forces. Ottoman forces who could not have had ever succeeded occupying Iranian territories in Safavid period, due to their sovereignty and strong military force, got an excellent opportunity to compensate its defeats, hence accepted this Russian offer. In 1724 an agreement was signed between the two governments, according to that Russia will get hold of Shirvan, Daghistan, Azarbaijan, Gilan and Mazandaran where as Ottomans hold Tabriz, Hamedan, Kermanshah and the suburbs adjacent to that (Taj Bakhsh, 1983: 8).

After the death of Peter in 1725, Anna Ivanova [1730-1740] got into the power. She ordered Russian Army to retreat from the borders of Caspian Sea to prevent the forthcoming possible problems. The main reasons of pulling back her troops was the outbreak of epidemic disease among soldiers causing many casualties, for e.g. from 61090 soldiers only 26644 survived. Russian retreat from this fertile region never meant that they were ignoring it, but they were engaged in other important domestic affairs and tensions of the borders with their neighbors, Sweden and Ottomans.

In the reign of king Tahmasb II, and his military command in 1732 in the out skirts of Iran, part of Iranian provinces that was transferred by Ashraf Afghan, was still under Russia control.

Tahmasb Qoli Khan, who was strong enough at that time, proposed Russia to transfer the possessed provinces back to Iran. Russian government who was well aware of the strength of this king, under the agreement of 1732 transferred all of the occupied provinces back to Iran except Baku and Darband.

Tahmash Qoli, who had reached his peak strength at that time, started his operation to clean up Iranian land from its enemies and those who offended it during the instability. First he found out Russians and advanced till Ganje and according to the agreement signed by Russian representative at Ganjeh, Russia evacuate all of the occupied territory of Iran (Taj Bakhsh , 1983: 8-9).

The testament of Peter I, after his death, had become important for Tzar and was followed seriously in the strategies of Russian Empire (even USSR). In the testament it was indicated that India is a source of world's wealth and every obstacle should be removed in its way and with the decline and abolishment of Iran, we must advance towards Persian Gulf.

Russia was at war with Tatars of Crimea and Ottomans in 1735-1739, then with Sweden during 1741-1743, and during 1768-1774 again with Ottoman and from 1788 till 1790 again with Sweden.

Katherine II, in her letter to Putumkin, at 22, January 1791, wrote that "It's easy to go to America or Siberia, but going to Caucasus would never be this easy" (Asadov and Karimova, 1993: 19-20). By the orders of Putumkin, Russian army started its military expedition towards Caspian Sea under the name of military group. Commandership of this Army was on the shoulders of Graf Vinovich, since this military group was on a special duty, therefore every military facility and equipment was considered and provided before. He had a confidential meeting with Aqa Mohammad Khan of Qajar and informed him that, in the case of Iranian military expedition on Caucasus, Russia will not resist at all. In order to this decision Graf Vinovich in April 1791 formed a new alliance between Iran and Russia to fulfil the revival of old relations. This was another trick of Russia on the execution of which Caucasus turned out to be a bloody battlefield.

At the time of military expedition of Aqa Mohammad Khan of Qajar in southern Caucasus, Russia being faithful to its promise, played the role of a spectator. They were waiting for the proper moment for their plans, this way by the defeat of khans of the region they could execute their plan of broadening the borders of their Empire (Asadov and Karimova, 1993: 19-20)

Aqa Mohammed Khan spent winter of 1796 in Mughan. As soon as he returned Iran, Russian Tzar deviated from his promise. Special military squad under the commandment of general Zubov, entered southern Caucasus. He, in the context of his meeting with khans of that region deceived and encouraged them to be disobedient with Iran and get them united with Russia. The khans of the region one after another, under the pressure of general, become part of Russian domain. This is how Russia accelerated its occupation of the region in 19th century. Even the unity proposal of Fath'Ali Khan the ruler of Quba, it was rejected by few khans, and some of them for the sake of security of themselves and their families voluntarily signed the agreements and became the part of Russia and got Russian nationality. Annexation of Georgia with Russia in 1801 had no effect in it (Asadov and Karimova, 1993: 21). In 1795 preparations of attack on Iran got started. Katherine II, who was the Empress of Russia at that time, paid special attention to this attack. Zubov had an army of 30,000 soldiers. The attack started from the church where some priests offered special prayers for security and success of the commander and his forces.

The news of this attack reached Caucasus. Christians inhabitants (Armenians and Georgians) and the Armenian priests, hurried with gifts and presents for the reception of Zubov. They arrived Daghestan before the arrival of the commander, where they asked help from him to get themselves free from Muslims oppressions, as soon as possible. Armenian priests got success in making Armenians of Daghestan as their allies. On 2nd of May 1796 Darband was surrendered to general Zubov without any resistance. Katherine become delighted with the news of the conquest of Darband and arranged a magnificent celebration. Russia got the key of Darband after 74 years. Zubov conquered Quba afterwards again without facing any resistance. Similarly

Shamakhi conquered without resistance and Zubov reached Caucasus without encountering any obstacles, and conquest of one city after another surprised him. He sent messages to all of the khans to surrender one after another. Khans of Ghara Bagh, Ganjeh, Talish and Shaki sent their messengers to Zubov announced their surrender. In August, Zubov entered Baku and near the encamped city, he called upon Khan of Baku (Asadov and Karimova, 1993: 23-25).

After ten years of the bloody wars of Caucasus, upon the orders of Qazi Mulla with Russia, in 1832 Lermantov who was on his way to Caucasus via Daryal passage, from "Georgian military highway" through Tbilisi to Caucasus, named River Terek as "Death River". At times, defense castles of Russians along the northern bank of Terek river, were attacked by Muslim warriors, especially by the followers of Iranian upon the Iranian's borders (Lesley Blanch, p. 249).

To take control of warm waters, Russia was advancing from two directions towards the south, one from Central Asia, from khanates of Kharezm towards Afghanistan, Indian subcontinent and then Oman Sea. Other, from Caucasus to Iran or Anatolia and then towards Persian Gulf. This progress of Russia towards south was a threat to British colonies in subcontinent. That is why British Empire was against the war between Iran and Ottoman, and was against the power imbalance in Caucasus region and wanted Safavids to stand against Russia in their time, and gave political and military support to Iran. In this regard (training of army personnel, manufacturing and supply of arms). Because the above mentioned Islamic domains were always intervening military campaign and balance of power and a buffer between Russian and British Empire. That is why Erzurum Conference and Pact of 1847 between Iran and Ottoman brought these expeditions to end and the borders between Iran and Ottomans got settled for ever. Although afterwards Iraq claimed the borders of Shat-UL-Arab fought with Iran over this.

Russian encountered two obstacles in accessing south. First the Muslim warriors of Caucasus, particularly the northern Caucasus (their warriors stood against Russia for 50 years, including the Imam Shamil of Daghistan and his "Imamistan" system in northern Caucasus), then, after the military expedition in southern Caucasus and Iran's defeat in its two wars and the annexation of this land with Iran from the treaties of Gulistan (12 Oct. 1813) and Tukmenchay (10 Feb. 1828), Russia stabilized its presence in northern Caucasus.

Construction of "Vaenno Gruzinskaya Doruga" (the Georgian military Highway) made Russia's southern fields in contact with the narrow valley of Terek river towards Tbilisi, so that Russia could be present in southern Caucasus.

During this time, although both Iran and Ottoman, were Islamic governments, but they never had unity and their differences resulted in the weakening of both and paved a way for colonial states of the time to get benefits. In addition to that Iranian and Ottomans never allied against their common enemy Russia as a result. Russia entered the political scenario of Caucasus and due to the weakness of both Iranian and Ottomans, they both lost Caucasus.

Because of the border of 1002 km with Caucasus Russia is considered to be the biggest and at the same time the most powerful player of the region. The geographical location of Caucasus has historical importance for Russia. The expansion of Russian Empire was started from 1552 after the possession of Kazan and then in 1556 the defeat of Astrakhan from Ivan the Terrible. In 1561 Ivan the terrible, the strong emperor of Russia and the first Russian Tzar married the daughter of Kabardian prince, Maria Tamirukora as his second wife. At this tie Ivan proceeded from southern borders of Russia till Terek, and the imprisoned villagers who escaped from Russia and resided in Cossacks settlements.

Russia was exploiting every single opportunity of getting hold of Caucasus, but its repeated efforts want in vain not only because of the resistance offered by Caucasus locals in 16-18 centuries, but because of strategic interest, clashes of Iranian and Ottomans for the security of

the region. Due to the two Christian dominated regions in Caucasus, one Armenia (under Iran) and the other Georgia disputed between Iran and Ottomans) situation of the region become more complicated.

These two Christian principalities occupied regions used to call help from Russia against the Muslims, and Russia under the pretext of helping them, started advancing towards the South.

It was inevitable for Russia to pass through the northern Caucasian plains and the high mountain Range of north Caucasus, where there were nomadic tribes of northern Caucasus, which they didn't allow it to reach southern Caucasus. These tribes were mostly Muslims who used to consider Russians as pagans. That's why to prevent Russian further advancement towards South, "Sheikh Mansur" the sheikh (leader) of Chechens, declared Jihad (the holy Islamic war), and this Jihad lasted for 6 years blocking Russia from further advancement.

In addition to provide help to the Christian principalities of Caucasus, Russia had the aim of holding the natural borders of Caucasus. When encountered the high mountain to pass through, and the resistance of the locals, had no more intentions of passing through the above mentioned Mountains. In 1784, in the passage of Caucasus Mountains. Russian government constructed a military fortress named "Valdikavkaz"(lord of Caucasus) in the passage of Terek valley and natural gateway to Caucasus "Daryal Passage"(Bab-al-Allan) was constructed after that Russia's military command took hold of the construction of military road of Georgia itself. The road was finished in 1799 and "Paul I" emperor of Russia (son of Katherine II) sent Russian army to Tbilisi and this was the first Russian Attack on South. And after that Heraclius II the king of Georgia signed a treaty with Russia, according to that Georgia got freedom from Iran and annexed to Russia.

After these invasions, two periods of war took place between Iran and Russia. As a result of first period of these wars (1803-1813), Gulistan treaty (Oct. 1813) was imposed, and according to that, the whole region situated to the north of river Arax comprising the provinces of Qara Bagh and Ganjeh, khanate of Shaki, Shirvan, Quba, Darband, Badkube, Talish, Daghistan regions, Georgia, Shuregul mahals (districts), Guria, Mengrelia, Abzhazia and Achuq Bash, given to Russia .

The border lines between Iran and Russia in Caucasus from the north-west to the south-east of Iran according to 2nd. Article of Gulistan treaty were as follow:

From the beginnig of Adineh Bazar lands by right direction to Mughan plain to the passage of Yeddi Boluk of Aras (Arax) River, and from the above of Aras bank to the confluence and junction of Kapanak Chayi and from there, beyond [Saman] of Qarabagh and Nakhchivan and Iravan [Yerevan] velayats [provinces], and also the bondaries of Ganjeh collected and connected and from mentioned limits that distinguish and divid the Velayats of Iravan, Ganjeh and also the limits of Qazagh and Shamseddinlu to the Eshak Meydan, and also from Eshak Meydan from the watersheds of right side mountains the routes and rivers Hamzeh Chaman and Palang mountains till the corner of Mahal [disrict] of Shureh Goul and from the corner of Shureh Goul passed from the above of the mentioned snow covered mountainsand, from frontier of the Mahal of Shureh Goul and the middle of border of Mesdareh and Artik villages and then connect and join to the Arpachay river. And because of the condition of the Khanate of Talish which was changed hands to hands during the enmity , therefore for the reasons to show the truth and honesty the borders of mentioned Velayat of Talish from Ardebil and Anzali sides after ratification of this peace pact behalf of great kings, relables and engineers by using the knowledge of both sides of mountains, rivers and lakes and places, the borders should be limited.

Also as a result of second period of wars (1825-1828), in addition to above mentioned domains, the complete domain of khanate areas of Nakhchivan and Yerevan were also given to Russia. According to **Turkmenchay** treaty (Feb. 1828), almost the current borders of Iran in

north-west, took their final shape. The border lines between Iran and Russia according to the article 4th. of **Turkmenchay** treaty was drawn as follow:

“From the beginning of Iran Ottoman frontier which by direct line is near to the Lesser Aghri [Ararat] mountain, this line continues to the peak of this mountain and from there to the fountainhead of the river known as **Qarasu-ye-Payin**[Lower Qarasu] which flows from the lesser Aghri mountain, comes down and following the current of this river continues to the confluence of it till the Aras river, opposite **Sharur**. When this line reaches here, by following Aras conduit, reaches to the **Qal’e** [castle] Abbas Abad, and follows around its external building and appurtenances, which are located in the right bank of Aras, will draw by a half diameter line with the measure of half **farsakh** which is equal with three and a half Russian **veres**. This half diameter continues around all area and buildings situated within this half individually all will belong to the Russia, and from this date it will be defined correctly and accurately within two months. And after that from the point that the eastern side of this half diameter joints to Aras river the border line starts to follow the waterbed of Aras till reaching to the Yeddi Boluk passage, and from there the territory of Iran continues along the path of Aras three **farsakh** which is equal with twenty one Russian **veres**. After reaching this point the border directly pass the Mughan plain till the current of Balharud in the place located at three **farsakhs** distance which is equal with twenty veres under the confluence of two small rivers named Adineh Bazar and Sari Qamish. From there this line from the left bank of Balharud to the confluence of mentioned rivers Adineh Bazar and ari Qamish goes up and along right bank of eastern Adieh Bazar till the source of the river and from there to the top of Jakir heights continues as all waters which current to Caspian Sea will belong to Russia and those waters which their slopes and current are towards Iran, will be belonged to Iran. From the peak of Jakir heights, to the peak of Kamar Ghou’i the border line follow the mountains which separate the Talish from Mahal of Arshagh, because the peaks of the mountains from both side divide the waters, therefore here it defines the border line as mentioned about the distances between the source of Adineh Bazar and the peaks of Jakir. After that the border line from the peak of Kamar Ghuo’i to the heights of the mountains which separate Mahal of Zund from the Mahal of Arshagh and follow till the bourder of Mahal of Vilgich. Always the according to the measures that defined about the conduit of waters, the Mahal of zund except of that part which located on opposite side of mentioned mountains according to this will belong to Russia from the beginning of the border of Mahal of Vilgich the border line between the two states [Iran-Russia] follows the peaks of Klupughi mountains and the great mountains that passes through Vilgich and join with the northern source of the river named Astara, and according to those measures that mentioned before about the conduits of waters, and from there the border line will follow the conduit of this river to its confluence and mouth in the Caspian Sea, which divides the boundaries of Russian and Iranian possessions will accomplish.”

The documents of the limitation of border line between Iran and Russia in Caucasus which was signed between the state commissaries in Bahram Tappeh in Mughanin 18th. Jan. 1829 was revised in agreement of both side in 1954. According to the agreement between Iran and Soviet Union in 2 Dec. 1954 which was signed in Tehran, Ghal’e Abbas Abad the only Russian building and novelties which was an exception in natural border line along the Aras River(which passed the width of the river and come down to the left bank), rectified and the above mentioned castle and its area was given to Iran and instead of that, the Firuze village in north eastern border of Iran with Soviet Union left to Soviets. In 1954 agreement the border lines between the two countries whit a changes in a few cases, according to Bahram Tappeh, laid on a map with the scale of 1:100,000.

Causes of Iran's Defeat and Defining Borders

The consolidation of the Safavid and Ottoman empires in the 16th century was perceived as a threat to the political and economic interests of Western European nations (Dunayeva, p. 7). Great Britain, having expanded its colonies in the Indian subcontinent, viewed the southward expansion of Russia and the Ottomans with alarm. Consequently, a policy was adopted to engage these empires in regional wars, thereby preventing them from advancing toward the south. The Caucasus, a region with historical ties to Iran, became a crucial buffer zone and a point of intersection for these competing imperial ambitions. The wars between Iran and the Ottomans, though often framed as sectarian conflicts, were, in reality, driven by political and economic motives. The British, in particular, used Iran as a pawn in a larger game to maintain a favorable balance of power and safeguard their colonial holdings.

The primary cause of Iran's military defeats was the fundamental difference in the military and political strength of the two empires. Russian forces, led by experienced and well-trained generals like Zubov, Tsitsianov, and Yermolov, benefited from a centralized, modern military structure. In stark contrast, the Iranian army under Abbas Mirza suffered from a lack of military discipline, modern equipment, and strategic knowledge (Taj Bakhsh, p. 310). The Qajar court was also plagued by political disunity and economic crises, and many regional khans in the Caucasus sought independence and aligned with Russia, further weakening Iran's position.

Furthermore, Iran's leadership, including Fath-Ali Shah, suffered from a profound ignorance of international relations. They naively trusted in unfulfilled promises of support from European powers, unaware of secret agreements like the Treaty of Tilsit (1807) between France and Russia, which invalidated any hope of French assistance (Taj Bakhsh, 1983: 310-312). Similarly, Iran's reliance on British support proved to be a critical misjudgment, as Britain was solely focused on using the war to prevent Russia's advance toward India, a threat to its most valuable colony. This lack of strategic awareness, combined with military and political weaknesses, made Iran a battlefield for the competing ambitions of Russia, Britain, and France. These factors led to the irreversible loss of valuable territories and the permanent redrawing of Iran's northern borders through imposed treaties.

Factors Influencing the Integration of Georgia and Armenia with the Russian Empire

The inclination of Christian populations in the Caucasus, particularly Georgians and Armenians, to align with the Russian Empire was driven by a complex interplay of security concerns, political ambition, and religious affinity.

At the time, Christian communities in the region often faced raids and oppression by both Iranian and Ottoman forces. This shared vulnerability led to a desire for protection from an external, powerful, and fellow Christian state. For them, Russia represented a Christian superpower that could act as a counterweight to the powerful Muslim empires of Iran and the Ottomans.

This strategic alignment was promoted by influential groups within the Christian communities. The Georgian and Armenian clergy, local rulers, and a powerful merchant class—known as the bourgeoisie—actively supported a partnership with Russia. These groups saw in Russia a promise of security that neither Iran nor the Ottomans could provide. While the ruling classes sought to protect their own wealth and power from the turmoil of constant feudal wars, the general population hoped that Russian intervention would end the chronic instability and oppression they faced.

The political desire for a Russian alliance was formalized through a series of treaties. In 1783, King Heraclius II of Kartli-Kakheti signed the Treaty of Georgievsk with Russia, severing all ties with Iran and any other foreign power and officially placing his kingdom under Russian protection. This agreement declared that he and his successors would recognize no

other sovereign but the Russian Emperor (Fatolayev, pp. 46-47). Following this precedent, King Solomon II also sought a similar arrangement, writing to Catherine the Great to ask for the same favor granted to Heraclius (Fatolayev, p. 47). These treaties underscored the deep-seated desire among the Georgian and Armenian leadership to exchange nominal allegiance to Iran for the security and protection offered by the burgeoning Russian Empire. The lack of unity among the small feudal states in the region made it easy for both Iran and the Ottomans to exploit them, which made the stability promised by Russia even more attractive.

Causes of Russia's Presence in the Caucasus and the Shaping of Modern Boundaries with Iran

Several key factors motivated Russia's presence in the Caucasus and its aggressive expansion that led to the formation of modern boundaries with Iran.

Russia's primary motivation was its inherent geostrategic weakness. Its vast, open southern plains made it vulnerable to external threats. To compensate for this, Russia sought to expand its borders southward and use the Caucasus mountain range as a natural fortification against potential rivals. This expansion was a core component of a long-standing Russian ideal: gaining access to warm water ports, a goal that could be realized by reaching the Black Sea and Caspian Sea.

Furthermore, Russia aimed to eliminate its main rivals in the region, Iran and the Ottoman Empire. The defeat of the Ottomans in the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the subsequent Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) significantly weakened their influence, creating an opportunity for Russia to assert its dominance. Russia also leveraged support from Christian populations in Georgia and Armenia, who sought protection from the Muslim empires, to justify its territorial expansion.

Russia's internal policies and social dynamics also fueled its expansion. The flight of Russian peasants from serfdom to the southern plains led to the formation of Cossack colonies. The Tsarist government exploited these communities, using them as a border defense force in exchange for land and freedom from feudal obligations. These settlements became an integral part of Russia's advancing frontier, providing a military and demographic presence in the contested territories.

The expansionist drive also involved subduing local resistance. The "Great War of the Caucasus" was a prolonged series of conflicts fought to overcome the resistance of Muslim tribes in the northern Caucasus. This was exacerbated by Ottoman support for Sunni liberation movements in the area. Russia's successful defeat of these groups was essential for stabilizing its southern border.

Ultimately, the formation of the modern Iran-Russia boundary was a direct consequence of Iran's comprehensive defeat in two major wars between 1804 and 1828. These military victories allowed Russia to impose treaties that formalized its territorial gains, solidifying its position in the Caucasus and establishing the boundaries that exist today.

References and Conclusions on the Iran-Russia Wars

Russian and Soviet historical sources have consistently portrayed Russia's expansion into the Caucasus as a "liberation" of Christian nations from the oppression of Muslim empires like Iran and the Ottomans. This one-sided narrative, however, often ignores the accounts and perspectives of local populations. Contemporary analyses of historical documents, travelogues, and neutral observers reveal a different reality. Contrary to the idea of liberation, local populations frequently expressed dissatisfaction with Russian rule and revolted, demanding to return to their previous status or be under Iranian jurisdiction.

The wars between Iran and Russia were a result of several factors, including:

- The aggressive behavior of Russian commanders and officials in the occupied territories.

- The seizure of Iranian border regions by military force.
- Widespread oppression and injustice by Tsarist authorities in the Southern Caucasus.
- The strategic interests and political manipulations of European powers like Britain and the Ottoman Empire, which fueled local resistance.

Ultimately, Iran's defeat was a result of both internal and external factors. Internally, Iran's government was weak and its military was poorly equipped and lacked modern training. Externally, the Iranian leadership's naive reliance on empty promises from European nations, particularly France and Britain, proved to be a critical mistake. These powers were not interested in helping Iran but rather in using the country as a battleground to advance their own colonial interests. Iran was an uninformed participant in a larger geopolitical game, and its failure to recognize this led to the loss of its Caucasian territories forever. The immense political, military, and economic importance of the Caucasus to Russia meant that a peaceful resolution was never a likely outcome.

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