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Ethnic Diversity and Territorial Integrity of Iran: Domestic Harmony and Regional Challenges¹

This study aims to address concerns over Iranian territorial integrity with respect to ethnic identity by examining three interrelated points of:

- Center and periphery in Iran.
- Territorial attachment and the political borders.
- Ethnic identity and social mobility.

Finally I shall discuss the challenges Iran has been facing throughout the twentieth-century on maintaining her territorial integrity.

Introduction

Throughout history, alongside the development of urban life, pastoral tribes and peasant communities gradually formed on the Iranian plateau. These tribes, with their cohesive social structure, mostly dwelt in the mountains, and often embodied quasi-autonomous entities. The tribesmen were not only in constant contact with peasants and urban dwellers, but many of them were also recruited into army. The Qizilbash formed the main body of the army under the Safavids (1500–1736), guarding the country's borders against the constant threat of the Ottoman Empire. Nadir Afshar (1736–47) was himself from the Turkmen Afshar tribe and enjoyed the support of the tribal communities. Karim Khan Zand (1750–79), the founder of the Zand dynasty, was raised as a Lori tribesman, and the subsequent Qajar dynasty was founded by a Turkic tribal chief, Aqa Muhammad Khan. All these men, Isma'il (the first Safavid monarch), Nadir, Karim Khan, and Aqa Muhammad Khan, who reigned over Iran from 1500 A.D. to 1797 A.D., utilized tribal forces effectively to neutralize their rivals and maintain the boundaries of their kingdom.

The peasant communities, in turn see themselves as direct descendants of a fictitious or real individual who originally founded their community. Such

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a tight, non-segmented social structure contributed greatly to the cohesiveness of the village community, safeguarding it from alien elements in rural areas. Patrilineality and the practice of patrilocal marriages restrained the intrusion of ethnic and linguistic elements. On the other hand, due to repeated foreign invasions, large segments of the rural population were forced to migrate into the arid zones in the interior of the country.²

Cities constituted the most vulnerable components of society. They were the first place to attract and thus the centers of destructive conflicts as well as productive contacts; centers of arbitrary rule, which influenced the political and territorial makeup of the country. Furthermore, the often vast territories governed by Iranians meant the emergence of sophisticated city-based administrative apparatus.³

The network of social interaction in Iran has been articulated and coordinated within a unique characteristic form. Such a pattern of interaction can be found to exist in the institution of, what has been called, arbitrary rule. The framework of arbitrary rule also ensured political unity, despite the heterogeneous nature of Iranian society. Furthermore, as Homa Katouzian puts it the “absence of functional social classes, which was associated with the transitory nature of private ownership and the state’s monopoly of all independent power” increased the potential for high social mobility for every individual regardless of ethnic origin.⁴

Center and Periphery in Iran

Throughout the twentieth century, most of the secessionist movements worldwide, have involved, in one-way or another, the problem of periphery against center. The location of the center in relation to the periphery involves the antagonistic relationship of state to society in Iran, as well as the problem faced by peripheral areas in obtaining greater autonomy from the center or the central government.

Iran has never had a single city as her permanent center of political power for any lengthy period of time, unlike neighboring Constantinople with a rather long history of being the seats of imperial strength. In the four hundred years since 1500 A.D., Iran has had to contend with several capital cities. The inter-changeability of capitals and centers of power has been attributed to the “preconditions of their creation, on similar bases of their social and political structure and on comparable economic foundations of their economy”.⁵

The development of the powerful centralized Safavid state began in the north-western city of Tabriz, on the crossroad of ethnic and cultural blending between

²Nader Afshar Naderi, in: Shahrokh Amirarjomand (Ed), *Iran, Elements of Destiny* (New York, 1978): 230.

³Ibid.

⁴Homa Katouzian, “Arbitrary Rule: a Comparative Theory of State, Politics and Society in Iran”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24 (1997): 53.

⁵Eckart Ehlers, “Capitals and Spatial Organisation in Iran, Esfahan, Shiraz, Tehran” in: C. Adle and B. Hourcade (Eds), *Tèbèran Capitale bicentenaire* (Paris, 1992): 155–156.

Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, Tabriz was—and still is—the capital of Iran's largest ethnic minority community the Azerbaijani Turks. After Tabriz, Qazvin, with a Turco-Persian ethnic composition, in the heart of the Safavid Empire, became the capital city. From Qazvin the capital moved to Isfahan, in the southwest with a Persian-speaking majority.

Following the fall of the Safavid dynasty, under the short-lived rule of Nader, Mashhad, in the northeast Iran, enjoyed a brief status as Iran's capital. However, when Karim Khan Zand founded his dynasty, he chose the central city of Shiraz as power base. Finally, with the rise of the Qajar dynasty, the then insignificant town of Tehran was named as the new capital in 1792.

The immediate consequence of a city being named as the capital was the spectacular rise of its political, social and economic status, followed by a significant rise of the city's population and the complexity of its ethnic composition. In this context, Mashhad might be a noteworthy example, with a population increase of a quarter of a million following of Nader's decision to choose the city as his capital.⁶

A contributing factor to the tremendous and sudden rise of the urban population was firstly

the fact that not only the royal family, but its huge entourage of administration and bureaucrats, military personnel and religious leaders filled the capital cities. Secondly, the majority of the national [nobility and notables] i.e. landlords and tribal chiefs—seemed to have gathered around the crown. Thirdly, the kings themselves ordered the resettlement and sedentarization of large tribal groups as well as that of ethnic and/or religious minorities in neighborhood close to the royal residences. All these had immediate impacts both on capital city development and spatial structures within the empire as a whole.⁷

The policy of population dislocation by means of forced migration and sedentarization of the nomadic groups had a tremendous homogenizing effect on the ethnic as well as the religious composition of the empire's subjects. For example the

Safavids' population policy [of forced migration] included the resettlement of approximately 100,000 [Turkic] nomadic families, not to speak of at least 20,000 Armenians and Georgians in the southern precincts of Isfahan. The short rule of Nader Shah affected about 150,000 families. The Zands finally caused approximately 40,000 tribal families to be removed from their traditional areas closer to Shiraz. . . Resettlement was accompanied by genuine population policy: new villages were founded, existing villages enlarged and cities were transformed by the addition of new *maballehs* (quarters).⁸

⁶Ibid. 156.

⁷Ibid. 161.

⁸Ibid.

Although the inner-urban quarters were separated along ethnic and religion demarcations, the inhabitants of these quarters regularly interacted peacefully with each other across socio-economic barriers. It may be argued that growing cosmopolitan cities which quartered a mixed and fluid population of diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, at times encouraged an individual sense of neighborliness, fidelity, allegiance, and most importantly, attachment to territory. In the history of Iranian cities, dissatisfaction, discord, and bloody episodes between minorities are not uncommon, but not a single city has ever disintegrated because of ethnic or religious diversity. Furthermore, the phenomena of bilingualism (or even multilingualism) checked the spread of linguistic nationalism, with its homogenizing policies.

Although the rise of one city as the new capital would lead to the relative decline of the previous capital, especially its population, the new capital was never capable of causing a “dramatic decay of the predecessor”, as has been perceived by some scholars.⁹ Each former national capital remained the administrative center of its respective province; hence it was able to retain much of its economic role and function. In the Qajar era, Iran was divided into the four large *iyalat* (provinces) of Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Fars and Kerman-Sistan, each with its own *vali* (governor) and numerous *velayat* (districts). Later, with the reshuffling of the old provinces, a new province was formed with Tehran as its center. The nineteenth century saw the prospering of Mashhad and Tabriz, two cities that functioned sometimes more effectively than Tehran. Mashhad with its special role as a Shi'a center of pilgrimage and Tabriz as the gateway for European and Russian economic penetration into the interior of the country. Indeed, during the reign of the Qajar dynasty (1779–1924), Tabriz flourished as the predominant commercial center, as the country's granary, and its second politically important city, the site of the Qajar Crown Prince's court, Dar al-Saltaneh. During this period, Tabriz, proved to be more receptive to outside influences and was a breeding ground for progressive political thinkers, many of whom became leaders of the Iranian constitutional movement of 1905–11.

Territorial Attachment and Political Boundaries

Prior to 1900, Iranian borders were predominantly elastic. The Safavid attempt to introduce greater political unity through centralization and institutionalization of Shi'ism created for the Iranians a new, defensive identity in relation to those who lived beyond their borders. For the subjects of Safavid Persia, defined themselves not by their own “national” characteristics, but rather by local exclusion, i.e. through a negative definition, comparing themselves with their immediate Sunni Muslims neighbors.

Whatever the case may be for the rise in self-identification and dynastic allegiance which arose in Safavid Persia, the emergence of Persia, as a territorial

⁹Ibid.

entity stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf took on a more concrete shape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the production of the first semi-modern European maps of the country. The mapping of Iran as such, mainly based on the Safavid territorial achievements, was different from the ancient design of the Persian Empire. In the pre-modern period, the Ottoman expansionist threat made the European powers concerned about the boundaries of their fervently hated neighbor. Indeed, it was with reference to such mapping that when in 1736, following the fall of the Safavids the Ottomans seized the north and northwest of Iran, Nadir began to demand the return of those territories, insisting on the persistence of Iran's legitimate frontiers. It is noteworthy that it was not only Nadir who referred to Iran's legitimate frontiers in his clash with the Ottomans. The Safavids' territorial Persia indeed turned to become a standard reference for all following rulers. Karim Khan Zand and Aqa Mohammad Khan Qajar also came up with the similar call.

During the early nineteenth century, having been defeated by the Russians in successive wars, and a forced into signing a peace treaty with Britain, Iran lost part of its northern and eastern territories and was squeezed into its present frontiers. The eastern territory later became part of the newborn Afghanistan and the northern part was annexed by the Russian Empire. The fate of the people in the north, most of them Shi'a Muslims, then became far more intimately connected with the Russians and the Muslim peoples of the Russian Empire than with Iran. It was only during the final days of the First World War that the people of Nakhjivan signed a petition urging the Iranian government to reunite them with Iran, a call drowned in the post-War uproar.

The process of territorial demarcation and realization of "international boundaries" through wars and subsequent peace treaties in the nineteenth century helped shape the growing sense of territorial identity for Iranians:

shaping boundaries focused attention on territory as the source of Iranian, as opposed to Persian, identity. It promoted land and geography as compelling criteria for Iranian-ness. The 'closed' frontier assembled peoples from varying ethnic background under the unequivocal rule of sovereignty for the first time. Whereas before, nature had limited the movement of peoples and local rulers had obscured matters of sovereignty, by the end of the [19th] century new treaties and great-power politics had led to a redefinition of geographical authority and, at the same time, an arbitrary delineation of cultural boundaries. The closing of the frontier went hand in hand with an attempt at centralization by the government. The imperial court had finally recognized that the center's survival depended on the cooperation of the periphery. As the monarch's domains diminished, Iranians voiced their calls for nationhood. No longer just a *mulk* belonging to the king, but rather a *millat* with invested citizens.¹⁰

¹⁰Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, "Fragile Frontiers: The Diminishing Domains of Qajar Iran", *IJMES*, 29 (1997): 227.

During World War I, in the absence of a powerful state, one might well have expected that Iran like the Ottoman Empire would disintegrate into a number of smaller states. Yet Iran managed to preserve its territorial integrity after the war, partially thanks to the Bolshevik revolution which not only ceased, albeit temporarily, Russian ambitions in Iran, but also made the West give priority to their agenda of an integrated centralized and powerful Iran as a barrier to the spread of communism in the region.

Ethnicity, Mobility, and Modernization

It was a dominant paradigm in 1950s and 1960s amongst social scientists that modernization breaks down traditional loyalties and confronts the individual with new prerequisite and opportunities, depending on individual achievements in harmony with universal criteria.

As people come to desire the same goals and rewards, they become more similar. Occupational and class differences become the salient social differentiators, displacing traditional solidarities that lose their utility and are reduced to innocuous cultural vestiges, loyalties are transferred from parochial to more encompassing national symbols produced by powerful and irreversible nation-building processes.¹¹

Consequently, “modernization, by socially mobilizing large segments of the population, would increase both the likelihood and tempo of their assimilation”.¹² According to such argument, the urbanization, industrialization, schooling, communication and transportation would lead to ultimate assimilation in the multi ethnic societies.

A decisive factor in national assimilation or differentiation was found to be the process of social mobilization, which accompanies the growth of market, industries, and towns, and eventually of literacy and mass communication. The trends in the underlying process of social mobilization could do much to decide whether existing national trends in particular countries would be continued or reversed.¹³

However, the validity of this doctrine could be challenged if one only examines the lengthy history of practicing modernization in today’s most advanced-industrialized societies. Communal solidarity and ethnic particularism and

¹¹Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, ed., *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East* (Ithaca, 1988): 14–15.

¹²Walker Connor, “Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?,” *World Politics* 14, (1972): 323.

¹³Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication; an Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*. (Cambridge, 1953). Quoted by Walker Connor, *ibid*.

cultural awareness in these societies have not vanished with the high degree of social mobilization, technological and economical integration, but rather have been modernized, articulated and intermingled with individualism and individual autonomy both being indispensable parts of modern man's perception of civility.

The age of modernity in Europe began with a new era when the basic unit in the structures of modern society was the individual rather than, as with agrarian or peasant society, the group or community. Accordingly, the individualism that was embodied in the liberty and autonomy of the individual provided a new definition embracing the new association between the individual and the polity. According to this new association, the individual in a modern society, in principle at least, was not anymore the subject and agent of a particular king or priest, sultan, shah or sheikh, endowed with divine or prescriptive authority. The individual rather acted according to rational and impersonal precepts formulated in laws. The investiture of new juridical and political rights including the right of representation was indeed the conclusion of this new association. The emerging commercial and industrial urban middle class was inextricably linked to this individualism.

However, if in European society the process of modernization was associated with the gradual development and expansion of critical reason compiled by gradual embodiment of individual autonomy, and with the emergence of a civil society, in Iran the reverse was true. There, modernization was embraced by an intelligentsia composed of bureaucrats and military officers, who identified their own interests with those of the state. The rights of the individual and his relationship with the state were of marginal rather than central significance in the eyes of Iranian modernizers and critical reason and individual autonomy seemed to have little relevance. The main reason for such discrepancy lay in the fact that the development of modern European societies was synchronized with and benefited from the age of European colonialism and imperialism and wars against the Orient. Modernization in the Middle East was a defensive reaction.

The practice of authoritarian modernization in post-First World War Iran was embedded in the perceived failure of the earlier attempts at introducing modernization both from below as well from above in the country. After all, the efforts of the Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth Century reformers had not protected the country from occupation by European powers. The setback that the Iranian constitutional movement (1906–11) suffered in the years before the outbreak of the First World War, the political disintegration and partial occupation of Persia during the war, all of these left the middle classes and the intelligentsia in Iran no other option than to look for a *man of order*, who, as an agent of the nation would install a centralized, powerful (though not necessarily despotic) government capable of solving the country's growing economic as well as political problems, while at the same time safeguarding the nation's unity and sovereignty.

Where social egalitarianism, liberalism and romantic territorial nationalism had inspired the earlier generations of intellectuals in their efforts to initiate change and reform throughout the country, for the post-war intelligentsia

more preoccupied with the ideas of modern and centralized state building, political authoritarianism and linguistic and cultural nationalism became the indispensable driving forces for accomplishing their aspirations.

Despite the diversity of their political views, what singled them out from the previous educated or learned individuals was the model of society, which they took for granted. The European model of society presupposed a coherent entity, by definition organized around the distinctive concepts of *nation* and *state*. They were convinced that only a strong centralized government would be capable of implementing reform, while preserving the nation's territorial integrity. Likewise they believed that modernization and modern state building in Iran would require a low degree of cultural diversity and a high degree of ethnic homogeneity. Along with ethnic and linguistic diversity, the existence of classes, too, was rejected.

Only when the country fulfilled the pre-conditions for a nation-state as defined by the nationalists, when “empirically almost all the residents of a state identify with the one subjective idea of the nation, and that nation is virtually contiguous”¹⁴, could they realistically cherish hopes of safeguarding territorial integrity and gaining a respected place in the world. Some even argued that *Emrouzi budan*, literally meaning being contemporary or modernized, would be attainable only when an ‘ideal dictator’ had set up the country for a social revolution by retaining power and concentrating his political authority through “banning the press, dismissing the parliament, and restricting the power of the clerics”.¹⁵ It was no surprise that such calls would soon find adherents in societies with a long record of arbitrary rule, although it has to be said that there were always those among the modernist intelligentsia who rejected this solution. In Iran it was Mosaddeq who during a session of the Iranian parliament in October 1925, warned the deputies in the following words:

Today you Deputies of the Majlis wish to make a Shah of Sardar-e Sepah, Reza Khan. The honorable gentleman is now not only Prime Minister, but also the Minister of War and the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Today after twenty years of widespread bloodshed, our country is about to enter a phase of retrogression. One and the same person as Shah, Prime Minister, Minister of War, and the Commander-in-Chief? Such a thing does not exist even in Zanzibar.¹⁶

Reza Shah's policy of centralizing government power and implementing modernization was in a sense a reaction to this widely felt need for authoritarian reform. The process of political and cultural centralization, flavored with

¹⁴Linz, J.J. and Stepan, A., *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation, Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, (London, 1996): 25

¹⁵*Farangestan*, (1924), nos. 4 and 5.

¹⁶From a speech by Mosaddeq during a session of parliament, concerning the change of dynasty. 31 October 1925.

secularism, westernism and meritocratism, generally enjoyed the support of many members of the intelligentsia, especially those with progressive and left wing leanings. Persian periodicals such as *Kaveh* (1916–22), *Farangestan* (1924–25), *Iranshabr* (1922–27), and *Ayandeh* (1925–26), which dominated the ideological environment of the time, were pioneers in publicizing and promoting these policies. Kazemzadeh argued in an editorial that the society should be liberated from the yoke of the clerics by getting rid of religious superstitions, separation religion from the state, and accepting religious principles in accordance with the parameters of modern times.¹⁷ Taqizadeh, the editor of *Kaveh* believed that salvation from long lasting misery was only possible by blind submission to the Western civilization: “Iran must be westernized outwardly as well as inwardly, physically as well mentally”¹⁸:

By absolute submission to Europe, through adaptation and promotion of European civilization, with no reservation or condition one could hope that our country would eventually become prosperous.¹⁹

The editor of *Ayandeh*, Afshar, in an editorial entitled *Gozashteh–Emruz–Ayandeh* (Past–Present–Future), expresses concern for Iranian unity, before displaying his perception of modernization in the following terms:

What I mean by Iran’s national unity is a political, cultural and social unity of the people who live within Iran’s present day boundaries. This unity includes two other concepts, namely, the maintenance of political independence and the geographical integrity of Iran. However, achieving national unity means that the Persian language must be established throughout the whole country, that regional differences in clothing, customs and such like must disappear, and that *moluk al-tavayef* (the local chieftains) must be eliminated. Kurds, Lors, Qashqa’is, Arabs, Turks, Turkmen, etc., shall not differ from one another by wearing different clothes or by speaking different languages. In my opinion, unless national unity is achieved in Iran, with regard to customs, clothing, and so forth, there will always be the possibility that our political independence and geographical integrity will be endangered.²⁰

And by way of eliminating ethnic divisions and fostering national unity, he adds:

Thousands of low-priced attractive books and treatises in the Persian language must be distributed throughout the country, especially in Azerbaijan and Khuzistan. Little by little, the means of publishing small, inexpensive

¹⁷ *Iranshabr*, (1923), no. 1.

¹⁸ *Kaveh*, (1920), no. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Mahmoud Afshar, “Aghaz-nameh”, *Ayandeh*, (1925) no. 1.

newspapers locally in the national language in the most remote parts of the country must be provided. All this requires assistance from the state and should be carried out according to an orderly plan. Certain Persian speaking tribes could be sent to regions where a foreign language is spoken and be settled there, while the tribes of that region, who speak a foreign language, could be transferred and settled in Persian speaking areas. Geographical names in foreign languages or any souvenirs of the marauding and raids of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane should be replaced by Persian names. The country should be divided from an administrative point of view if the goal of national unity is to be achieved.²¹

Thus, long before Reza Shah attained power, the blueprint for the future execution of reforms and changes throughout the country was already in place.

During his twenty-year rule (1921–41) Reza Shah performed with stupendous consistency the realization of most of the demands voiced by such intellectuals as Kazemzadeh, Taqizadeh and Afshar. His policy of authoritarian modernization gradually changed Iran's traditional social as well as political setting. New institutions were founded, among them a national standing army based on a program of universal male conscription and extensive reserve units, a secular education curriculum and a literacy program, reading and writing in the dominant language, Persian, reducing linguistic differences, and a secularized juridical system and a national monetary system. Moreover, a centralization policy that included such harsh and disruptive measures as forced transfer and settlement of tens of thousands of nomads was pursued to achieve greater national uniformity. However, within a couple of years of his accession, Reza Shah's dictatorship was evolving into autocracy and soon afterward it turned into arbitrary rule. While some intellectuals were forced to accept political retirement, there were others who were imprisoned or executed. Only a few could find shelter in exile, unable to witness the fulfillment of their aspirations.

Reza Shah's policy of authoritarian modernization during the 1920s and 1930s with the motto—'one country, one nation'—was not too dissimilar to attempts by previous monarchs to rewrite the parameters of ethnic identity in Iran. Forced migration and resettlement of nomadic tribes continued with even greater force, this time in order to eradicate the power of tribal chieftains who were perceived as posing a threat to Reza Shah's modernization program. Encouraging a homogeneous urban society was seen as the formula for modeling the image of a modern Iranian citizen. Constructing the modern nation-state was based on the assumption of unity and homogeneity and the nation-state itself turned to become a viable entity.

Furthermore, the well-known enduring social mobility, a characteristic of Iranian social dynamic, remained in place alongside growing anti-ethnic/anti-tribal social policies, contributing to a rapid growth of economic mobility

²¹Ibid.

in society. Therefore a new meritocracy was gradually formed in Iran. Every citizen regardless of his/her ethnic origin enjoyed the right of personal achievement in the newly established administration, as long as he/she appreciated the state definition of Iran as a modern integrated nation-state. There was no dominant ethnic group that held the key positions at the others' expense. The country's cultural unity was considered to be paramount in Reza Shah's brand of nationalism. As a result of the educational reform, the traditional religious *maktab-khaneh* was transformed into the modern primary schools with a curriculum taught in Persian, now Iran's national language.

Meanwhile, it was not permitted to publish books and newspapers in any language other than Persian. Moreover, to achieve greater national uniformity, Reza Shah, at a later date ordered the setting up of a government office called *Sazeman-e Parvaresh-e Afkar* (Department for the Development of Thoughts), with the task of guiding and directing the younger generation toward service to the homeland.²² As a result a new Iranian 'high culture'—to use Gellner's phraseology—was gradually recast. Here too, the influence of economic imperatives determined cultural and national norms. A modern economy depends on mobility and communication between individuals at a level that can only be achieved if these individuals have been socialized into high culture [i.e. the official culture of the state and its ruler], so as to be able to communicate properly. This can only be achieved by a fairly monolithic educational system. Thus, culture, not community, provides the inner sanctions. The requirements of a modern economy inevitably result in the new idea of the mutual relationship of modern culture and state.²³

The Question of Azerbaijan

During the twentieth century, there were three major revolts in Iranian Azerbaijan aimed at demanding change and reform throughout the country, limiting the central government's authority in the region and thereby instituting a new power structure based on a greater measure of local participation. These attempts all ended in complete failure. The first endeavor, Khiyabani's revolt, dates back to the 1920s, the chaotic years following the First World War; the second under the patronage of the Soviet Union, was made by the Azerbaijan Democratic Party led by Ja'far Pishevari in 1945–46; and the third came in the immediate years following the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Khiyabani, a preacher calling for radical reforms, lived for a time under the rule of Tsarist Russia, but he was much more strongly influenced by social ideas, that had originated in the eighteenth century Europe. Although staunchly opposed to Iran's centralized administration, he was also committed preserving the country's territorial integrity and to the establishment of Iranian nation-state, rather than to

²²Hossein Makki, *Tarikh-e Bist Saleh-e Iran*, (Tehran, 1983): 412–13.

²³Ernest Gellner, *Nation and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983), 140.

independent or even autonomous rule in Azerbaijan. In this area, his political demands did not go beyond seeking a fair distribution of executive powers between the central government and local authorities throughout Iran.

Indeed, an undertaking to introduce political reforms throughout the country from the capital, as compared with more regional initiatives, was one of the main issues dividing the Iranian nationalist-reformist camp. If by launching their campaign for reform from Tabriz rather than Tehran, Khiyabani and his comrades were playing down the central government's functions, others in the reformist camp wholeheartedly felt that any initiative which decreased the role of the capital would directly or indirectly weaken and thereby endanger the country's integrity. The two sides were so divided on this issue that even Khiyabani's independent stand and his outright refusal to seek any support from foreign powers did not prove adequate in persuading the entire reformist camp to unite under his banner.

Khiyabani's uncompromising policy not only made it impossible for him to negotiate with the central government but he was unable to coordinate his efforts with other contemporary regional movements in Iran, for example with Mirza Kuckak Khan, the leader of the rebellion in Gilan. When Mirza Kuchak Khan called for the formation of a popular front with the purpose of restoring the Constitution in Iran, Khiyabani went so far as to compare him to Vosuq al-Dowleh:

What is the difference between you and Vosuq al-Dowleh? He wants to rule Iran with the assistance of the British forces and you would do the same with the backing of the Russians.²⁴

Finally the central government put an end to the Khiyabani's days by appointing Mokhber al-Saltaneh Hedayat as governor of Azerbaijan in August 1920. Mokhber al-Saltaneh reached Tabriz in September and within one week of his arrival, on 12 September; the Cossack Brigade²⁵ was deployed to take control of all the strategic points throughout the city. In a short time, the Cossacks had achieved their objectives and fifty Democrats had been killed, including

²⁴Gerigor Yaqikiyan, *Showravi va Jonbesh-e Jangal, Yaddasbt-ba-ye Yek Shabed-e 'Eyni*, (Tehran, 1984): 137.

²⁵For a comprehensive study of Khiyabani's revolt see Homa Katouzian, "The Revolt of Sheikh Mohammad Khiyabani", *Iran*, XXXVII, 1999, reprinted in Katouzian, *Iranian History and Politics* (London and New York, 2003).

The Cossack Brigade formed in 1879, was composed of Iranian troops. Under Russian officers, it soon came to enjoy a reputation for military discipline, rigidity and brutality. The most notorious example of it's the Brigade's intervention occurred in 1907, when under the command of the Russian colonel Liakhov, it bombarded the *Majles*. Russian control over the Cossack Brigade ceased following the collapse of the Tsarist Empire in 1917, but the Brigade continued to exist and, indeed, provided Reza Khan with military support to launch his *coup d'état* in 1921. Reza Khan then merged the Brigade with the Gendarmerie as part of his reorganisation of Iran's national army. F.O. 371/2762, Memorandum on the Persian Army, 1907.

Khiyabani. The central government's authority was unambiguously re-established over the whole region.²⁶

Although Khiyabani's power was short-lived, he exercised an important influence on political thought and attitudes in Iran, especially with regard to reformist trends. His initiative to set up his government as an alternative to the central government's authority in Azerbaijan caused a major split in the reformist camp. While the modern tendency within the *Nabzat-e Melli* (Popular Movement) was towards playing down the central government's functions and granting more autonomy to the provinces, the traditional current in reformist politics was still wholly committed to establishing a strong, centralized (not necessarily despotic) government in Iran. The suppression of Khiyabani's revolt can be taken as a sign of the widespread vigor and legitimacy which this traditional current still enjoyed.

Twenty-five years later, Pishevari, a revolutionary communist, while maintaining that he had learned a lesson from Khiyabani's tragic end, prepared to lead another regionally based movement in Azerbaijan. As a Marxist-Leninist who had spent years in the communist movement, Pishevari not only considered Iranian Azerbaijanis to be a separate nation, but also insisted on championing the Bolsheviks' rallying cry of "the right of nations to self-determination, the right to secede and form an independent state". Pishevari's understanding of autonomy clearly went beyond merely demanding a greater degree of local participation in regional legislation and administration, while remaining within the borders of an established sovereign state. Furthermore, Pishevari belonged to the generation of communists who not only believed in the right of the communist camp to intervene internationally in the internal affairs of associated political parties, but also never hesitated to seek direct assistance from the communist camp. In Pishevari's eyes the Soviet Union, as the leading communist power, was not in the same category as other big powers such as Britain or the United States, who were mistrusted by Iranians because of their interventions in Iran's internal affairs.

Undoubtedly, not everybody within the political spectrum of liberals, not even all communists, shared these attitudes with Pishevari. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, foreign intervention in Iran's internal politics had been a constant threat. To be identified with a foreign power, in the long run at least, worked against a statesman's chances of political success. Thus, it was difficult even for many members and cadres of the Tudeh party to give their unconditional support to the measures taken by Pishevari's Democratic Party. Consequently, in view of what was perceived to be Pishevari's unambiguous involvement with, and dependence on, the Soviet Union, one is obliged to question the extent to

²⁶F.O. 371/4927. In his memoirs, Mokhber al-Saltaneh (*Kbaterat*, 318) says that the Sheikh was found and killed by Cossacks in an exchange of fire, but he also mentions a suicide note by the Sheikh, although he does not vouch for its veracity. According to Bristow, the British Consul in Tabriz: "The Sheykh was discovered in his hiding place and shot by Cossacks". See: F.O. 371/1278, 15 September 1920.

which his movement for autonomy was indigenous. Of course, there were numerous local grievances which have been referred to above, but such grievances alone would never have been an adequate cause for the autonomous government to employ such menacing, provocative language in its dealings with the central government or to adopt such drastic measures as it did—even to the extent of breaking off all ties with Tehran.

Far from what Pishevari had expected, Soviet backing for the Azerbaijani Democrats' call for autonomy had, in the end, rather negative consequences. The existence of the then Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan—bearing the same name as the Iranian province of Azerbaijan—made many Iranians wary that what really lay behind the Soviet policy was nothing less than the desire eventually to annex the Iranian Azerbaijan. In the face of this lurking suspicion, many politically active Iranians who were generally in favor of greater autonomy for the provinces were reluctant to lend their unconditional support to the Azerbaijani Democrats. In their minds, Pishevari's call for regional autonomy was associated with the nightmare scenario of Azerbaijan's secession from Iran. Furthermore, the fact that the Azerbaijani Democrats in many cases adopted an imprecise terminology with regard to autonomy and ethnic issues only added to the confusion and ambiguity which surrounded their policies in the public's eyes.

Similarly, on their home ground in Azerbaijan, the Democrats' policy of relying on Soviet support appears to have gradually alienated the Azerbaijanis from their autonomous government. Here, too, the specter of secession engendered widespread anxiety that for the foreseeable future all ties with Iran would be cut, leading to irreversible economic and cultural losses for Azerbaijan. Consequently, despite the government's implementation of many attractive educational, electoral, and especially the large-scale land reforms, their policy makers clearly did not manage to win and hold onto genuine popular support, as is attested by the autonomous government's swift collapse when challenged militarily by Tehran.

Following Prime Minister Qavam's early diplomacy to settle the 'Azerbaijan Crisis', the central government launched its final attack against Azerbaijan in late November 1946, while Pishevari was still threatening:

Our people have sworn an oath to preserve, at whatever cost, the liberties which they have won . . . We have stood by our word, and those who wish, by force of bayonets, to trample our freedom under foot, whoever they may be, will be pounded by the strength of the people's biceps and driven back. This is my final word: *Ölmək var, dönmək yox!* (Death, yes; retreat, no!)²⁷

Pishevari later changed his tone and called on all "Iranian brothers . . . to stand up and fight to safeguard liberty and democracy in the country". He promised "to crush the attack of the reactionaries" in order to "make it possible for the Iranian

²⁷ *Azerbaijan* (1946), no. 357.

nation to liberate itself". The declaration ended with a series of patriotic exclamations: 'Long live Iran's independence'²⁸

On 12 December 1946, just one year after it had been established, the Democrats' rule in Azerbaijan came to an end. Ironically, this was the date on which anniversary celebrations were set to take place in commemoration of "the glorious day when the government of the province had been placed in the hands of the people". The Iranian army had prepared itself to face stiff resistance from the Democrats over an extended period of time,²⁹ but, to everyone's surprise, the army did not encounter any serious barriers to establishing its authority in the province. There were only a few isolated cases of Azerbaijani armed resistance.³⁰ However, according to some descriptions, what was supposed to be "the army of liberation was a savage army of occupation".³¹ As a result, during the early days of chaos, following the arrival of government troops in Azerbaijan, a great number of lives were lost and a mass migration to Soviet Azerbaijan took place.³²

Islamic Revolution and the Question of Ethnic Minorities

Following the fall of the Azerbaijan Autonomous Government of 1945–46, and in the years following World War II, as Iran's geopolitical location and national resources, made the West become aware of the importance of her territorial integrity, the country went through a major socio-economic transformation. The process of rapid urbanization and industrialization caused some degree of ethnic dislocation throughout Iran. In the capital, Tehran, as in almost all the country's big cities, Azerbaijanis formed a strong community, dominating the local economy. Tehran's Azeri population even exceeded that of Tabriz, the most populous Azerbaijani city.

Furthermore, the expansion of education and communication for the most part contributed to a more homogeneous culture in Iran. This tendency towards homogeneity on the social, political and cultural level may be seen to

²⁸ *Azerbaijan* (1946), no. 366.

²⁹ Wash. Nat. Arch., 891.00/12-2346, 23 December 1946.

³⁰ Among such minor cases was the vague resistance organized by the *Komiteh-ye Enteqam* (Revenge Committee) in a suburb of Tabriz: Mohammad Ruzegar., *Kbaterat* (unpublished memoirs). In an interview with the author, Mohammad Ruzegar described the resistance as 'purely unprompted' and denied any possible link between the above-mentioned group and the Azerbaijan Democratic Party leadership.

³¹ Douglas, W.O., *Strange Land and Friendly People*, (New York, 1951): 45.

³² In accounts of the Democrats, reference is made to more than 10,000 casualties, whereas semi-official reports of the Iranian government estimate the number of dead at 800. On the other hand, a British source cited by the US Embassy in Tehran gives the number of killed Democrats as 421. For the Democrats' account, see: Azerbaijan Demokrat Ferqahsi, *Azadliq Yolunun Mubarizlari*, 2, (Baku, 1969): 5. The Iranian government estimate has been reported in *Kbandani-ba*, no. 36, 24 December 1946. The American Embassy's report has been classified under Wash. Nat. Arch. 891.00/1-1547, 15 January 1947.

have culminated in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Except Kurdistan's calls for regional autonomy within Iranian frontiers, one could not find a serious political challenge with either an ethnic or religious flavor during the revolution. However, the popular consensus during the anti-monarchical movement of 1978–79 by no means was an indicator of the disappearance of provincial resentment in Iran.

The early stance of the Islamic government on the question of ethnicity and ethnic diversity was heard during the vociferous debates over the country's new Constitution in the Assembly of Experts (*Majlis-e Khobregan*). Article 15 of the Constitution acknowledges Iran's ethnic diversity and the ethnic communities' fundamental rights to preserving their distinctive identities and cultures:

The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as textbooks, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.³³

Following the ratification of the Islamic Republic's Constitution, Ayatollah Khomeini in a statement addressed the ethnic minorities' question in Iran in the following words:

Sometimes the word minority is used to refer to people such as the Kurds, Lurs, Turks, Persian, Baluchis, and such. These people should not be called minorities, because this term assumes that there is a difference between these brothers. In Islam, such a difference has no place at all. There is no difference between Muslims who speak different languages, for instance, the Arabs or the Persians. It is very probable that such problems have been created by those who do not wish the Muslim countries to be united. . . They create the issues of nationalism, of pan-Iranism, pan-Turkism, and such isms, which are contrary to Islamic doctrines. Their plan is to destroy Islam and the Islamic philosophy.³⁴

However, if the call for regional autonomy was absent in the revolutionary uproar during the revolution, except for the Kurds, social and political unrest in Iran with an ethnic flavor was often registered in its aftermath. There were revolts in Kurdistan and Turkmensahra in early 1979—which in the Kurdistan case lasted for another six years—and political unrest in Khuzistan and Baluchistan in mid 1979. The most intense political unrest came in regions

³³*The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Tehran, Islamic Consultative Assembly, (no place, no date): 33.

³⁴British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC), Summary of World broadcasts, Middle East and Africa, December 19.

with a majority Sunni Muslim population, one of their main objections aimed at the Constitution's provision that Twelver Shi'ism was to be Iran's official religion. However, when in late 1979 to early 1980 news of uproar from Azerbaijan reached Tehran, the capital reacted to the reports anxiously. With a predominant Shi'ite population, Azerbaijan highly contributed to the revolutionary Islamic leadership. The question that then dominated the central government's mind was the extent to which the political unrest in Azerbaijan had been flavored with ethnic issue.

On 25 February 1979, only days after the seizure of power by the new revolutionary regime, the Muslim People's Republican Party (MPRP) (*Hezb-e Jomburi-ye Kbalq-e Mosalman*) was set up in Tabriz, with Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari's implicit endorsement. In its first declaration the new party announced that its objectives included the establishment of an Islamic, multi-party democracy, and maintaining Iran's territorial integrity. As a tendency outside the mainstream Islamic establishment, the MPRP launched its political campaign with reservation on the plebiscite organized by the government for April 1979 that was to determine the nature of Iran's political system. While the referendum called on the people to choose between the Islam republic and the monarchy, the MPRP argued that the public should be given more choices. The referendum was held in disregard of such reservation and the electorate overwhelmingly voted for the establishment of an Islamic republic.

Following the April referendum, the writing of the country's new Constitution was put on the government's agenda. Although the ruling clerics had already promised a constituent assembly with 500 members, Ayatollah Khomeini opted for a 73-member Assembly of Experts. The MPRP objected at this point, arguing that the Assembly of Experts could not be a broadly based, representative institution replacing the Constituent Assembly, with members representing the MPRP and its sympathizers from Azerbaijan and other parts of Iran, both Ayatollah Shariatmadari and the MPRP boycotted the referendum for the Constitution in December 1979. The main objection raised by the moderate Ayatollah Shariatmadari and the MPRP centered on the adoption of the concept of *Velayat-e Faqih*, or the guardianship of juristconsult, which according to them contradicted the sovereignty of the nation. Here too there was no indication of ethnic issues and the rights of ethnic minorities in Iran.

Following the referendum for the new Constitution, with a dramatic decline in the number of votes cast, compared to the earlier one for the nature of the political system in the country³⁵, the streets of big cities in Azerbaijan, particularly Tabriz, turned into the scene of bloody confrontation between the supporter of Ayatollah Shariatmadari and those of Ayatollah Khomeini, both camps dominated by native Azerbaijanis. The Tabriz unrest lasted for another two months, during which period government offices were intermittently occupied by the

³⁵While in the referendum for the nature of the political system in the country Tabriz contributed with 718,368 votes, in the second referendum the number of cast votes was 389,063.

rival forces. Finally, when the political confrontation reached the military establishment, Ayatollah Shariatmadari intervened personally; issuing a statement that disassociated him from the MPRP, and put an end to the chaos in the city.

Contrary to later political assessment by some academics or political activists³⁶, ethnic dimension was neither absent nor all pervasive in the 1979 Tabriz unrest. Ayatollah Shariatmadari's moderate position, insisting on a clear distance from Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary clericalism, enjoyed adherents not only in Azerbaijan but also throughout Iran. In the early days of the revolution Ayatollah Shariatmadari's stance offered an appropriate shelter to all those who found themselves in an uneasy indenture with Ayatollah Khomeini.

It is interesting to note that during the revolutionary days and in their immediate aftermath, with Azerbaijan and the rest of the country passing through a relatively non-conventional period, one could not any reference to the activities of the old Azerbaijan political societies and organizations such as the Azerbaijan Democratic Party which still had an office across the border, in Baku. There was even no attempt to commemorate historical events such as the formation of the Azerbaijan Autonomous Government (December 1945) or to honor its leader, Ja'far Pishevari. The activities of those advocating the upholding the Azerbaijani cultural awareness was limited to the publication of periodicals such as *Yoldash* (Comrade), *Inqilab Yolunda* (On the Revolution's Path), *Yeni Yol* (New Path), and *Varliq* (Entity) with limited circulation, mainly amongst the veteran Marxists and ex-Marxists. Indeed, it was the latter group who during the same period formed the Azerbaijan Society and attempted to introduce the notion of self-determination in the revolutionary discourse.³⁷

The outbreak of the war with Iraq in 1980, which lasted for eight years, had far reaching consequence for cultural harmony in Iran. Forced migration and population dislocation refashioned the Iranian identity within the national territory. For the Iranian establishment, the dominant ideology of war was Shi'ite Iran against Sunni Iraq. The Azerbaijani Shi'ites, therefore, turned into forerunners of the war. However, by the end of the war in 1988, and the during the period of "reconstruction" and partial liberalization under President Rafsanjani, the notion of ethnic rights gradually entered into the general discourse of individualism, individual autonomy and citizenship which was the preoccupation of the reformist circles. Such contributions became even more transparent during the President Khatami's term, exposing an interconnection between the issues of citizenship and individual rights, including the rights of ethnic minorities in contemporary Iran. However, the most dramatic episode during this period was the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of eight republics on the northern frontier of Iran.

³⁶See for example Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren. Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijan Identity* (Cambridge, 2002): 96–97.

³⁷The Azerbaijani Society was founded among others by Dr Javad Heyat, Hamid Notqi, Hossein-Ali Katebi and Mohammad-Ali Farzaneh.

The End of the Soviet Era

At the turn of the millennium and in a world coming out of the Cold War, the international political setting had dramatically been altered. Across Iran's northern frontiers, instead of a great Tsarist/Soviet power, with which Iran had become accustomed to live over previous two centuries, a number of small independent states had emerged, some of them home to majority population with corresponding ethno-linguistic groups within Iranian territory. Calls for unity of the people who share a common language but live under different national flags are occasionally heard, utilizing the familiar Eurocentric ethno-linguistic discourse where "ethnicity and language become the central, increasingly the decisive or even the only criteria of potential nationhood."³⁸ For example, in the newly formed Republic of Azerbaijan, some political groups and intellectual circles initiated a campaign advocating the establishment of a greater Azerbaijan. To attain this goal, once again the call raised for the province of Iranian Azerbaijan to secede and unite with the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In June 1989, during a congress in Baku that brought together academics, artists and trade unionists, the "*Azerbaijan Khalq Jebbesi*" (The People's Front of Azerbaijan-PFA), was formally established. In a program that was adopted during the party founding congress reference was made to the PFA's chief goal of abolishing all political barriers obstructing the development of cultural and economic ties with the Iranian Azerbaijan:

The People's Front supports the restoration of ethnic unity of Azerbaijanis living on both sides of the border. The Azeri people should be recognized as a united whole. Economic, cultural, and social ties between our divided nations should be restored. All obstacles to the creation of direct human contacts (visits to relatives and friends) should be abolished.³⁹

With ethnic violence spreading throughout the Caucasus and the crisis of Nagorno-Karabakh leaving the Azerbaijanis with a feeling of being ignored or even humiliated by Moscow, the call for solidarity between all Turkic people of the region, particularly the Azerbaijanis, became the main item on the PFA's agenda. Political air was even more exited when Gorbachev decided to send the Soviet Army to the Caucasus to bring back the pieces of the Empire's jigsaw together. In its weekly gatherings in *Maydan* (the largest square in Baku and known as Lenin Square, that once had been the site of official parades), the PFA often invited individual Azerbaijanis from Iran to ascent the stony podium and address the huge crowds about the bitter pages of their history, their division and their heartfelt longing to change the status quo and re-join

³⁸Eric Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism since 1780, Programme, myth, reality*, (Cambridge, 1990), 102.

³⁹*The Caucasus and Central Asian Chronicle*, 8 (1989): 7–10.

each other. During these gatherings, one of the most popular calls was one for repealing the Tukmenchay Treaty of 1828 that had set the Araxes River as the new border between Iran and Tsarist Russia, splitting the northern and southern parts of the Province of Azerbaijan from each other.

The call for unification was somewhat realized during the last days of 1989, when a crowd of Azerbaijanis from the Nakhjivan province dismantled and crossed the frontier posts and installations, that had been dividing them from Iranian Azerbaijan. On the Iranian side of the border, the event was observed cautiously, with enthusiasm and compassion being confined to the frontier settlers who had family ties in the north. Nevertheless, for some circles in Baku, the event provided an analogy with the recent fall of the Berlin wall. The border-crossing episode received wide media coverage in the West and for a few days the whole world became familiar with the euphoric crowds burning the frontiers military installation and clipping barbed wires. In another corner of Azerbaijan, in the Lenkaran region, too the Azerbaijanis adopted the Nakhjivani practice. Free passage across the Iranian border soon became a common exercise. The Iranian government's response was cautious welcome to Shi'ite brothers and sisters from the north, whose experience was seen in a religious, rather an ethnic context. On the other hand, Moscow dispatched some provocateurs and agitators into the region to distribute pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini, in an attempt to provide justification for its march towards Azerbaijan in order to halt the spread of "fundamentalist Islam" within its borders.

The Soviet Army's assault on Baku in January 1990, although successful in halting the rapid political change in Azerbaijan, was unable to turn the clock back. In September 1990, with martial law still in force, an election for a new Supreme Soviet was conducted. During the election campaign, the PFA raised the demand for the two Azerbaijan's unity, albeit more cautiously than before, calling closer cultural and economic contacts with "southern Azerbaijan".

In the Caucasus, the economic hardship of the last year of the Soviet rule was exacerbated with wide-ranging ethnic conflicts. The most momentous of these conflicts erupted between two neighbors, Armenia and Azerbaijan over Azerbaijan's largely Armenian-inhabited autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh, a quarrel that eventually developed into military confrontation. Ill-equipped Azerbaijani troops suffered a chain of humiliating defeats when confronting successive Armenian military offensives against Azerbaijan frontier cities. While Moscow was standing by her historical ally, Armenia, Azerbaijani turned to neighboring countries for help. However, neither Iran nor Turkey was willing to jeopardize its relations with Moscow.

The failure of the August 1991 coup in Moscow left the Azerbaijan's former local communist power elite, led by President Ayaz Mutallibov, in total disarray. A late August call for independence was formally ratified on 18 October 1991, with Mutallibov still acting as president. Nevertheless, the political chaos that was spreading all over the country forced the president to resign and a new presidential election was held in June 1992. Abulfazl Elchibäy, a former

political prisoner, became the first elected president of the independent Azerbaijan Republic.

Although Elchibäy's presidency did not last more than a year, his program that included opposition to Azerbaijan's membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), close relations with Turkey, and ignoring Tehran, while exhibiting a desire for extended links with the Azerbaijanis in Iran, caused some mistrust and power re-alignment in the region. For many Iranians, his pro-Turkish nationalistic stand and his aspiration to form a greater Azerbaijan were nothing less than a replication of the old Soviet-style scenario. Except for some small nationalist circles in the diaspora, Elchibäy's call for a greater Azerbaijan was not enthusiastically received among Iranian Azerbaijanis. Yet, abhorrent as the idea of breaking away from Iran, therefore, being denied access to a potentially huge market may have been, one should not underestimate the effect that a neighboring country might have on a bordering province, especially when the peoples of both regions have a common language and culture. The call for more cultural rights, including the right to have a bilingual national colloquium in Azerbaijani as well as in Persian, has become increasingly prominent in Iranian Azerbaijan.

During Elchibäy's year-long presidency, the newborn Republic of Azerbaijan faced widespread economic as well as military crises. Unable to address the worsening military situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the declining domestic economy in Azerbaijan, Elchibäy was left with no option but to abandon the power and to leave the capital for his birth place, Karaki, a small village in the east of Nakhjivan.

The tragic end of Abulfazl Elchibäy's short rule in Baku was simultaneously marked with the elevation of Heidar Aliev to Presidency in June 1993. Amongst the factors that eased the return of Heidar Aliev to power, one could certainly refer to the disillusionment that the Azerbaijanis observed with Elchibäy's pro-Turkey policy. In the end, Turkey's support for Azerbaijan turned out to be not much more than an emotional liaison.

Contrary to his predecessor, Heidar Aliev unequivocally displayed his displeasure with any 'greater Azerbaijan' scenarios from the early days of holding office. Even before becoming President of Azerbaijan, during his office as President of the Autonomous Republic of Nakhjivan, Aliev made a visit to Iran and paid pilgrimage to the shrine of the Imam Reza in Mashhad. His restrained policy towards Azerbaijan's neighboring countries turned to be more durable and profound than one could expect.

To conclude this paper, I would like to recall the final question that *Newsweek* magazine's Carroll Bogert put to me in an interview in 1997: "Can one expect that one day the dogs of ethnic strife begin to bark in Iran?"⁴⁰ My immediate reaction was that, twentieth-century Iran had so far succeeded in avoiding the fate which had befallen the Ottoman, Tsarist and later the Soviet empires, and its different

⁴⁰Carroll Bogert, "They all Get Along", *Newsweek* (May 26, 1997): 31.

ethnic groups had been getting along. Nonetheless, one should not overlook the fact that the fate of Iran's ethnic compositions and its territorial integrity may depend, more than any other factor, on the introduction of reforms in the country's political structure to secure individual rights as well as collective rights in a "non-discriminatory inclusion and access to economic opportunities, political participation, or cultural status, including language recognition, either on an individual basis or through some pattern of group proportionality".⁴¹ Or else, nothing is eternal.

⁴¹Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, ed., *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East* (Ithaca 1988): 20.