

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

**IRANIAN—ARMENIAN FOREIGN RELATIONS
SINCE INDEPENDENCE OF ARMENIA**

**A MASTERS ESSAY SUBMITTED TO
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Abstract

The Master's Essay has a purpose to illustrate Iranian-Armenian foreign relations since independence of Armenia. Armenia-Iran relations were affected by different factors. Some of them were in favor for Armenian-Iranian relations. Iran sought to improve relations with Christian Armenia, fearing the Azerbaijani irredentism and also was against to have strong oil-rich Azerbaijan on its northern border. Iran also sought to contain Turkish influence in the Caucasus and found Armenia as an ally in this. At the same time, domestic factors in Iran also favor support for Armenia.

Meanwhile, during the last years such international factors as strained US-Iranian relations affected on Iran-Armenia ties. We can not ignore Russia's factor analyzing relations between these two countries.

So, the Master's Thesis at first briefly discusses the major trends of Iranian foreign policy toward Caucasus after the breakdown of Soviet Union. Then the paper concentrate on the common strategic and security concerns of Iran and Armenia. The major focus is Azerbaijani factor in the relations between Armenia and Iran. The paper analyze Iran's role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabagh crisis; its motives for mediation in the conflict; the consequences of the mediation. My discussion include the reasons for West's antagonistic attitude toward Iran and how it affect on Armenia from expanding ties with Iran. Also the paper examine Russian factor in Iran-Armenia relations.

After all Essay comes up with the policy suggestions, which will further improve relations between these neighboring countries.

Introduction

Becoming independent Armenia faced a difficult task as it tried to develop an independent foreign policy, because it suffers from some geopolitical disadvantages and limited natural resources. It suffers from some geopolitical disadvantages and limited natural resources, but it also has advantages that other Transcaucasian states lack.

Iran was among the first countries, which formally recognized the Armenian Republic and opened its embassy in Yerevan.

Armenia is a small country bounded on the west by Turkey, on the east by Azerbaijan, on the north by Georgia, and on south by Iran and Azerbaijan. This makes Armenia a landlocked country, dependent on the benevolence of its neighbors for access to the outside world, with all the political inconveniences that such a situation implies.

Armenia's relations with Iran, which go back three millennia, have not always been ideal or free from tension. Yet neither have they been marked by traumatic events. On the contrary, there have been long periods of close and friendly interaction between the two peoples, who share a considerable degree of cultural and ethnic affinity.

Theoretically, nothing stands in the way of better Armenian-Iranian relations, and many factors argue in favor of more expanded ties. Moreover, there are no memories harsh enough to stand in the way. Despite a rather short border between the two countries, Iran theoretically could provide Armenia with viable outlets to the outside world. On the other hand Armenia's importance for Iran stems from the fact that this country acts as a bridge to Russia and East Europe.

Yet Armenian Iranian relations have not realized their full potential, largely for the following reasons:

Because of regional and international factors, in reality the Iranian option may not always be available to Armenia. In fact during the last years, such international factors as

strained U.S.-Iranian relations and U.S. policy of containing Iran have effectively deprived Armenia of this option. Under certain circumstances, the character of Iran's relations with Azerbaijan, coupled with the nature of Armenian- Azerbaijan relations, also adversely affected on Armenian-Iranian ties. Russian sensitivities and priorities have also always limited Armenia's options.

The many enemies surrounding Armenia, however, leads that country to consider Iran as its only safe corridor for communicating with the outside world.

Research Questions:

- * What are the major trends of Iranian foreign policy toward Caucasus after the breakdown of Soviet Union?
- * What are the common strategic and security concerns of Iran and Armenia?
- * How relations between Azerbaijan and Iran influence the relations between Armenia and Iran?
- * What was the role of Iran as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabagh crisis? What were the motives for mediation in the conflict? How Iran mediated in the conflict and what are the consequences?
- * How strained US-Iran relations affected on Iran-Armenia relations?
- * How Russian-Iranian relations affect on Iranian-Armenian Relations?

Methodology

In the first phase of the study I collected the relevant data applying all available literature. This included also visits to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Iranian-Armenian Friendship Center, and interviews with the persons who are experts in the sphere of Armenian-Iranian relations. Following that I conducted analysis of the collected information.

Chapter I

The Major Trends of Iranian Foreign Policy Toward the Caucasus

As the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, Iran and Turkey entered into a rivalry for influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. In particular, the Turko-Iranian struggle has taken the form of a struggle between "models" — Turkey presenting a secular, Western-oriented democratic model, while Iran proposes an Islamic, anti-Western outlook. In this respect, and perhaps except for Tajikistan, Turkey currently seemingly had the upper hand, as most Caucasian and Central Asian leaders had expressed sympathy for the Turkish model but have been very hostile to political Islam, and therefore have refrained from too-close relations with Iran. (4) So, after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Iranian political circles discussed the possibility of the emergence of a new region. The new region and Iran's position in it may be characterized as follows:

1. The region's economic importance cannot be compared to that of the "Old Middle East", especially in regard to raw materials or strategic goods. From this perspective, it is of less interest to the United States than the former Middle East was.

2. From a linguistic and cultural point of view, the region is very heterogeneous. The only common cultural link between the countries - except Armenia – is Islam.

3. Iran is located at the center of the new region. It borders on Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey and, for most of the landlocked countries in the region, it constitutes their most viable access to the open sea.

4. Iran shares a common language with some countries and a common religion with all except Armenia. On the religious level, Iran has greatest affinity with Azerbaijan, as both countries are Shiite. Throughout history, Persia had a major cultural influence on all of these newly independent states.

Before the breakdown of Soviet Union, Iran's foreign policy has constantly been affected by the nearness of Russia/the Soviet Union and by Iran's position in the confrontation between its neighbor and the West. (3)

With the appearance of the newly independent states in place of the southern republics of the USSR, the strategic situation to the north of Iran's borders has changed considerably. First of all, a buffer zone was installed between Iran and Russia, removing the most immediate threat to Iran's security and territorial integrity. Iran has ended up with five different neighboring states instead of one superpower. Secondly, Iran and its new neighbors share a similar cultural background and none of them can be considered a major threat. The first ground for concern from the point of view in Tehran is the lack of political stability in the newly independent republics. (17) These lacked experienced political elites capable of managing ethnic and regional conflicts. Their foreign policy was highly uncertain and unpredictable. For example, relations between Iran and Azerbaijan deteriorated after the installation of a pan-Turkic government in Baku. The policy of the Elcibey government (1992-93), threatened Iran's territorial integrity. The fall of this government, as a result of major defeats in the war with Armenia, reversed this process at the expense of Turkey and in favour of Iran. (3) Moreover, Iran faced the danger of a spill-over of ethnic conflicts from neighbouring countries onto its own territory. Iran's Azeris and Turkmens, who live mainly in border areas, may become the target of the policies of irredentist groups, or even of the governments of Turkmenistan or Azerbaijan, as happened with Elcibey. (3) The unstable conditions in those republics could be serious causes of insecurity along the lengthy borders (over 2000 kilometers) Iran shares with those countries. Already foreign hands could be felt at work in those republics, Iranian Azeris and Turkmen by instigating ethnic and nationalistic sentiments. (17) Meanwhile, relations between Iran's newly independent neighbours are highly unstable and could seriously deteriorate at any time. In a conflict between any of them, Iran

may be accused of favouring one side over the other, or even of trying to export its militant and revolutionary ideology. (3)

But Iran's policy in the region is largely guided by geo-political state interests and less by Islamic ideological goals. (17) Dr Edmund Herzig, a researcher at Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs, said: "With partial and only short-lived exceptions, the propagation of radical Islam and the export of revolution have had little or no place in official Iranian policy." He added: "Indeed, Iran has been criticized internally and externally for its ideological passivity and failure to support Central Asian, Caucasian and Russian political radicals." A leading analyst of Iranian affairs stated that Teheran has made little attempt to export revolution to its neighbors in Central Asia and the Caucasus, but has tried to promote stability, cooperation and the resolution of conflict. (16)

Iran's policy makers' main purpose was to preserve the status quo on its northern borders. Maintaining the status quo implies preserving newly independent states economic and political sovereignty. (3) Edmund Herzig stated that "Regional cooperation has been a key concept, perhaps the defining buzzword, in Iran's policy toward Caucasus." Iran's policy "on the whole" has been to try to promote stability and cooperation in the Caucasus. (16)

Iran's good relations with its neighbors to the north, east and northeast are in marked contrast with relations with its southern Persian Gulf neighbors, characterized by isolation and confrontation. On the other hand, Iranian foreign policy has been dictated, since the 1991 break up of the Soviet Union, by a fear that the U.S. might gain a powerful voice in Central Asia, either directly, or through what Teheran sees as U.S. proxies in the region, Turkey and Israel. (16)

Anxiety about Western intentions is not the only element dictating Iranian foreign policy. Edmund Herzig stated, the break-up of the Soviet Union convinced Teheran that it faced "serious security threats," because conflict and instability in Central Asia and the

Caucasus could potentially threaten Iran's own security, unity and territorial integrity. The danger was reinforced during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, when refugees fled into Iran. (16) So, one of the Iran's foreign policy trends was to attempt to play a constructive and positive role in conflict resolution. (16) Iran has at various times mediated in regional disputes, such as between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabagh dispute (see Chapter III, "Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis). (8) In the Caucasus region "Iran has sided with the principles of territorial integrity, non-intervention in other states' internal affairs, and preached the virtue of tolerance and cooperation in conflicts." (16)

Iran's policy is dictated also by economic interests. (2) Thanks to its geostrategic position at the centre of the new region, Iran has been presented with a variety of economic opportunities. The significance of these cannot be overlooked in any analysis of Iranian foreign policy, especially when the existing political barriers to normal trade relations with Western partners are taken into account. (3) According to Edmund Herzig, "The northern neighbors, cut off as they are from the world economy, seem to offer good potential," said Herzig. (16)

First, whereas all the Central Asian republics - along with Armenia and Azerbaijan - are landlocked, Iran possesses the longest shoreline on the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. For most of these newly independent countries, the most feasible route to free seas, and the only overland route to the rich Arab world, pass through Iran. (3) Iran is favorably located as a transit route for the landlocked Central Asian countries since it offers access to the Persian Gulf, and hence potentially to world markets, via its roads and ports. According to Edmund Herzig Iran also hopes to promote and invest directly in mutually beneficial economic projects in the Caucasus - especially in oil-and-gas exploration.(16) It can provide with energy-poor countries with oil and gas – something that turkey can not do. (9)

Secondly, Iran now has easier access to China and the Far East via Central Asia - which readily brings to mind the historical "Silk Road". Thirdly, alternative routes from Iran to Europe have appeared on the map, and Europe is still the principal source of Iran's imports. In recent decades, nearly all trade over land had to pass through Turkey, which gave the latter the upper hand in bilateral negotiations with Iran. (3) This was especially important during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War. The present map of the region shows a completely different situation, with Turkey now dependent on Iran for its access to Central Asia and Azerbaijan.

Moreover, Iran has a relatively large market that can easily absorb certain of their industrial and other exports. Iran regards the newly independent states as important targets for its new export-oriented economy. According to the former Iranian Minister for Economy and Finance, Iran views the region as a potential market for 8-10 billion of Iranian exports. Agricultural and industrial goods from these countries have also been acquired by Iran at much cheaper prices than those which its traditional European partners can offer. In 1992, Iran signed a series of bilateral agreements with Armenia, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan for building oil refineries and supplying these countries with oil. There were other important bilateral economic agreements between Iran and these states on transport, infrastructure, shipping in the Caspian Sea, education, the banking system, the gas pipeline and other areas of mutual interest. (3) On the other hand Iran's economic problems, including one-million young people coming on the job market each year, and its desire to develop non-oil exports, have made the search for new markets a priority. However, as an economic partner, Iran is severely constrained because of the difficulties it faces in raising international finance. (16)

The Iranian foreign policy establishment is "working to develop a new set of revolutionary principles that are more appropriate to today's realities." (2) Edmund Herzig stated that Iranian officials continually emphasize the benefits of regional cooperation in

promoting economic growth, safeguarding common interests and preventing external domination. The two clear examples of regionalism in Iranian policy were the 1992 expansion of the Economic Cooperation Organisation, an attempt to build a form of Common Market, largely at the initiative of the Teheran government; and the proposal, which so far has got nowhere, for a Caspian Sea Cooperation Organisation." (16)

Iran further develop links with its northern neighbors profiling itself as a regional power and reducing the isolation imposed on it by the U.S. sanctions. (2) The London source says Iran has been nurturing good-neighborly ties with its neighbors on more than one level. (16) For Iran, the economic links within neighbors are useful in the first line as steps towards regional leadership. To boost its own economy significantly, Iran needs more investment than can be found in Central Asia or the Caucasus. (2)

So, it is important to notice that Iran did not take any major initiative in Transcaucasia involving. It continued to shape policy in response to what occurred across the frontier, and this would probably continue to be the case. However, some broader policy lines are clear and would endure, whatever the particular turn of events take place.

* Within Transcaucasia itself, Iran was opposed to a policy of revision of frontiers, unless this was by mutual, peaceful, agreement of all parties concerned.

* Iran was not in favour of Azerbaijani unification, be this by the incorporation of northern Azerbaijan into Iran, or the secession of Iranian Azerbaijan to join its now independent neighbour.

* Iran's main concern in Transcaucasia was the growth of Turkish, and therefore American influence. . . . The stage was certainly set for a long-run competition for influence in the Caucasus.

* In the end, Tehran's main concern in this region, after 1991 was stability: regular and beneficial economic agreement, secure frontiers, absence of destabilizing political

influences. Iran had an economic interest in developing areas of concern in continuing forms of trade, especially gas pipelines. This rather than the shaping of the new regimes within its three former dominions across the Arax River, was the dominant consideration in Iranian policy towards Transcaucasia. (8)

In conclusion, according to Edmund Herzig many in Central Asia and the Caucasus felt fear and suspicion when Iran embarked on its bid to build bridges. He said, "Subsequently the Central Asian and Caucasus governments, whatever their hesitations or suspicions regarding Iran, have come around, one by one, into believing that at least normal and positive relations with Iran are to their benefit." (16)

Chapter II

Azerbaijani Factor In Iranian-Armenian Relations

As the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, based on ethnolinguistic and religious affinities but also on strategic considerations, it was expected that building its foreign policy towards Caucasus and seeking to be the regional power Iran would give priority to Azerbaijan, in order to gain influence in the Caucasus (4). Azeris also share many elements of Persian culture and, more important, like the Iranians predominantly are Shia Muslims. Moreover Azerbaijan has for most of its history been a part of the Persian empire. Besides being overwhelmingly Muslim, in contrast to Armenia, Azerbaijan is rich in natural resources, primarily oil. It seemed logical that "relationship between these two countries would be deep and close, something like a relation between father and son," (1) and the Azerbaijani leadership hoped that it would use these relations to its own benefit.

Unfortunately for the Azeris, nothing of this sort happened. Whereas Iran declared itself ready to mediate in the conflict, it did not in any way support the Azerbaijani side. Quite to the contrary, Iran has constantly sought to cultivate and improve its relations with Armenia. Whereas Turkey joined Azerbaijan's blockade of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Iran is one of Armenia's main trading partners, and according to recent reports it is also very active in trading with the Karabakh Armenians as well, being the major supplier of foodstuffs and other commodities to the enclave. (4) In fact, Iranian-Armenian relations are mostly defined by the Iran-Azerbaijan relations. Iranian policy is heavily colored by what can be termed an "Azerbaijan factor."

If Iranian policy towards the newly established Azerbaijani state seemed illogical at

first, it can be explained by domestic considerations. With a constant fear of irredentism in its multiethnic society, the Iranian government was less than pleased by the emergence of an Azerbaijani state to its immediate north. Matters were not made easier by the fact that this Azerbaijani republic was endowed with large resources of oil and natural gas. The existence of a large Azeri minority in Iran could have been an incentive for the Iranian rulers to support the Azerbaijani republic, in order to preempt criticism from its own Azeri minority. The Iranian leadership, however, does not seem to have reasoned along these lines, instead, they saw fit to counteract the interests of the Baku government in every possible way. This, despite the fact that not only the Azeris in Iran, but overwhelming public opinion, demanded that the government openly take the Azerbaijani side against the Armenian "infidels." (see Chapter III, Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis).

This circumstance can be explained by the perception of the threat that Azerbaijan posed to the Iranian regime. In fact, the leaders of the Islamic Republic seem to have seen the emergence of an Azerbaijani republic as a long-term threat to the integrity of the Iranian state. What they feared was not an immediate upheaval of the Azeri population in solidarity with their brethren, urging Tehran to intervene in Karabakh. The Azeris in Iran are, after all, quite well-integrated into the Iranian society, and for the most part feel themselves at least as much Iranians as Azeris. There were even Azeri movements in South Azerbaijan that urge the integration of the Azerbaijani republic into Iran. Cornell stated, that however, it is difficult to assess whether these movements are genuine or a mere fabrication of the Tehran regime.

The high level of integration of the Azeris is also a reason why the Iranian government saw no imminent danger in pursuing an anti-Azerbaijani policy. The actual threat that Azerbaijan was perceived as posing to the regime was that, if Iran's economic condition deteriorated, the national identity of the Azeri minority in northern Iran would grow in

proportion to popular dissatisfaction with Tehran's policies. This would be all the more dangerous if the Azerbaijani republic simultaneously prospered thanks to its oil revenues.

An illustration of the degree of Iranian fear of Azeri irredentism occurred in the summer of 1993. At this point, the Azeri military performance in Karabakh was plainly a disaster, and Armenian forces conquered territories of Azerbaijan proper east and south of Karabakh. In October, the situation became critical for Iran, as the Armenians pushed towards the Iranian border, threatening to send a massive refugee flow into the country. Indeed, a number of Azeri refugees did swim across the Araxes, where they were welcomed by their ethnic kin on the other side. The Iranian regime reacted quickly and moved to set up refugee camps for the fleeing Azeris — but on Azeri territory. Hence the refugees were forcibly moved back to Azerbaijan, where Iran already by November claimed to harbor over 40,000 people, according to BBC Summary of Broadcasts. Perhaps the main reason for this move seems to have been a fear on the part of the Iranians that allowing Azeri refugees to stay in Iran and fraternize with the Iranian Azeris could pose a danger. If the Iranian Azeri community became aware of the atrocities suffered by their kin in the war, there would be a high risk of increased pressure on the regime to intervene on Azerbaijan's side; even more dangerous would be the risk of heightened Azeri ethnic mobilization in Iran in solidarity with the northern Azeris in their struggle against the Armenians.

The perception of threat, then, was so strong that Iran saw fit to set up expensive refugee camps outside its own territory. The action cannot be explained by simple humanitarian concern, as the easiest solution then would have been to set up camps on the Iranian side, where they presumably would be safer from Armenian attack. One should not, nevertheless, neglect the importance of economic factors in the decision. Iran, after all, already harbors over two million refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq. The prospect of additional thousands of refugees must have been an incentive to try to keep them outside Iran.

However, these economic considerations as a whole seem to be secondary as far as the refugee issue is concerned. The speed with which the refugees were relocated indicates the perception in Tehran of a potentially explosive situation. (4)

In fact, the Iranian leader Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani recognized this problem. As Dilip Hiro has stated, Rafsanjani realized that in the long run, Azeri nationalism would prove as problematic for the Islamic regime in Tehran as it was proving then for the Communist administration in Moscow....The emergence of a strong, independent Azerbaijani republic — whether Islamic or not — would fan the flames of Azeri nationalism within Iran. (5)

Thus since Azerbaijan's independence, Iran had a wary attitude towards the Azeri republic. Nevertheless, until mid-1992, strong currents in Iran were highly supportive of Azerbaijan. Iran attempted serious mediation efforts, not without success, as will be discussed in Chapter III. Furthermore, Iranian nationalists have pressured the regime to side with Azerbaijan, reasoning that the Azeris of Azerbaijan are actually Iran's own citizens, as the entire Azerbaijan belongs to Iran. Several radical newspapers have also urged the government to condemn Armenia. When Armenia first became independent in late 1991, Iran was concerned that its relations with Azerbaijan might be affected if it developed too close a relationship with Armenia. Indeed it was even hesitant about establishing diplomatic ties. (10) The early developments in Baku, prompted by the war, were only instrumental in turning Iran's wariness into outright enmity. (4)

As the leader of the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF), the historian Abulfaz Elcibey, came to power in June 1992, Azerbaijan turned increasingly towards Turkey. Indeed, Elcibey was pro-Turkish, secularly oriented and anti-Iranian. This meant that Tehran had exactly the kind of government in Baku that it did not wish to have. President Elcibey did not show any diplomatic tact either. (4) On certain occasions, he stated that Iranian state was doomed and that within five years Azerbaijan would be reunited. (5) This policy was hardly the most

effective way of allaying Iran's suspicions. Nevertheless, the Elcibey period turned out to be very short in Baku, as the government proved incapable of dealing with the Karabakh war and attracted at least as much enmity from Moscow as from Iran. Moscow's direct involvement on the Armenian side has been proven by accounts of individual Russian soldiers. (4) Moreover, during 1992 and 1993, anti-Iranian posture of the Azerbaijani government of President Elcibey created negative sentiments in Iran – including among significant segments of Iran's Azerbaijani population.

This development in turn greatly reduced popular pressure on the Iranian government to favor Azerbaijan, eliminated its hesitations toward forging ties with Armenia, and thus facilitated rapprochement between the two countries. (10) It was clear that during Elcibey's rule, Iran drifted towards close contacts with Armenia. Iran became Armenia's largest trading partner. (4) From mid-1992 to mid-1993, relations between the two countries seemed to be promising. (10) Armenia has built a floating bridge spanning the two shores of the Arax River which was a safe passage to survive, when its economy suffered critically from an economic blockade. (1) Moreover, a loan of US \$62 million was provided by Tehran. (15) Iran even gave some help to Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and declared its willingness to expand relations with Armenia in every respect. (10) In April 1993 during an Armenian offensive inside Azerbaijan, Rafsanjani warned both sides that they should find a settlement, but did not condemn the Armenian attack. In August of the same year, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati came to Baku for mediation, at the height of the ultimate Armenian offensive. (15)

Iran's support fell short of any military involvement of the Russian type. Rather, Iran supplied Armenia with necessary goods and energy, hence counteracting the Turco-Azeri embargo on the country. (4) Meanwhile, the lack of progress on Iran-Armenia relations has resulted from Armenian ambivalence – itself a function of the Armenian National

Movement's earlier Turkey-first strategy and its concern over Western reaction. This attitude prompted the first secretary of the Iranian embassy in Yerevan to comment that "Armenian-Iranian relations cannot develop in the shadow of a Third Power." (10)

In June 1993 the regime of Elcibey was ousted in a military uprising led to the return of Aliev as president. Although Iran had to some extent been able to normalize relations with Elchibey's regime, matters had not gone far, and the Popular Front government continued to repeat charges that Tehran was siding not just diplomatically but also militarily with Yerevan, by supplying weapons and training forces. In general, Elcibey's government appealed for help from the West. Iran reacted cautiously at the official level, but there was evidence that it continued its support for Islamic elements in Azerbaijan, and that it encouraged opposition among the Talish manority in the southern part of the country, near the Iranian frontier. It is not known whether Iran played any role in the return of Aliev to power, but there can be little doubt that it welcomed. (8)

Aliyev quickly moved to restore some kind of balance in Azerbaijan's foreign relations, in order to diversify international contacts. His first step was to normalize relations with Russia, by acceding to the CIS. Further, Aliyev also brought his policy more into line with Tehran's. Previously, Aliyev had not refrained from anti-Iranian statements. However, he was aware that Iran is important for Azerbaijan's security. In fact, immediately before acceding to power, Aliyev had been the leader of Nakhichevan, the Azerbaijani enclave encircled by Armenia, Iran and Turkey, lacking any land connection with Azerbaijan proper. During the war, Aliyev had ruled Nakhichevan autonomously from Baku and had built good personal relations with Iranian leaders, unilaterally concluding several trade and energy deals with Iran without seeking Elcibey's approval. (4) So, as ruler of Nachichevan Aliyev had maintained separate, bilateral relations with Tehran and had been careful not to antagonize the Islamic Republic. (8) In fact, Iran gave financial aid to Nakhichevan and put pressure on

Armenia to refrain from attacking the enclave — something which clearly could have led to an escalation of the conflict, as Turkey considers itself a guarantor of Nakhichevan's security by its 1921 treaties with the Soviet Union. (4)

Under different circumstances the coming to power of a less pro-Turkish government in Azerbaijan that is willing to have closer and more open ties with Iran — pressure on the Tehran government to forge closer relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan increased. Such a change would inevitably antagonize Armenia. In fact, Iran's tone toward Armenia hardened following military advances by the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh against Azerbaijan and the fall of the Elcibey government in summer 1993. Iran has also been concerned about Armenia's military operations near its borders. (10) On September 7 1993 Velayati called for an Armenian withdrawal. (15) Iran's fears have been exacerbated by the fact that Armenia is party to the CIS collective security schemes that were developed in the context of the May 1992 CIS agreement. Armenia's receptivity to an expanded Russian military role in the region, notably in the context of a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, is also worrying to Iran, which fears that Russia could use Armenia to pressure Iran. (10) Tensions in the region were also heightened in March 1994, when an Iranian military plane (a Hercules-130) was shot down over Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh. It had been flying from Moscow to Tehran carrying the relatives of a number of Iranian diplomats in Moscow. Initially the cause of the crash was attributed to technical failure. But further investigation indicated that the plane had been hit by a missile fired by Armenian forces. The Armenian government set up an inquiry in order to find out the cause of the incident. To soothe Iranian feelings, a number of high Armenian officials traveled to Iran. In short, the incident did not derail bilateral relations. Moreover, with the Iranian assistance work on the construction of a permanent bridge between Armenia and Iran has started and the volume of bilateral trade is expected to reach \$100 million in 1994. The reason for this situation is that even under the

best of circumstances, some suspicion toward Azerbaijan and its intentions will remain in Iran. In view of its own internal political and cultural realities, as well as Iran's international problems, Azerbaijan's ability to move too close to Iran is very limited. Indeed, after an initial thaw in late 1993, Iranian-Azerbaijani relations cooled sensibly and Turkish-Azerbaijani relations improved. (10)

As the leader of Azerbaijan, Aliyev continued to try to bring Azerbaijan closer to the Islamic world. He traveled repeatedly to Tehran and Riyadh, and even tried to enhance his Islamic credentials in spite of his having been in the forefront of Soviet atheist campaigns of the 1970s, when he was chairman of Azerbaijan's Communist party. (13)

Despite these developments, the relations between Azerbaijan and Iran have not improved significantly, and the basic guidelines of Iranian policy towards Azerbaijan do not seem to have changed. When Azerbaijan concluded the so-called "deal of the century" in 1994 with a consortium led by Western oil companies, Iran was initially given a 5-percent share of the deal. In April 1995, the United States forced Azerbaijan to exclude Iran from the deal, which naturally made the Iranians furious, accusing Aliyev of being a tool of the "great Satan." Iran immediately retaliated by cutting off power supplies to Nakhichevan, claiming non-payment of debts as a reason. (4)

In May 1995, less than a month after Iran had been excluded from the Azerbaijani oil consortium, Armenian Prime Minister Bagratyan, on a visit to Tehran, concluded a number of agreements on economic and political cooperation. During this visit were planned major economic projects in such fields as transportation, industry and banking. Most important Iran agreed to supply Armenia with natural gas and electricity for a period of 20 years. (20) This agreement is especially interesting, as Iran cut electricity supplies to Nakhichevan only three weeks after the deal, indicating that there was more than just an economic side to the growing relations between Armenia and Iran. (4)

Since then, Iran has been counteracting all Azeri aims to produce and export its oil. One way to do this has been to refuse to cooperate in a planned pipeline route between Baku and the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. This route was intended to stretch from Baku into Iran, then follow the Araxes River and enter Nakhichevan and from there to Turkey, where it would reach the Mediterranean. (4) Such a route was drawn due to the impossibility of involving Armenia in any pipeline project, a route which would have been the most logical one geographically. Iranian officials clearly stated that if a pipeline went through Iran, it would go to the Persian Gulf and not to Turkey; this solution would give Iran more royalties and control over the outlet of Azeri oil — and hence important leverage on Baku.

As the exclusion of Iran from the international oil consortium had been a debacle in bilateral relations, Aliyev felt obliged to do something to save his relations with the Islamic Republic. In late 1995, Azerbaijan offered Iran a 10-percent share in the extraction from another oilfield, Shah-Deniz, an offer Iran initially rejected as unserious. In May 1996, however, Iran finally accepted the offer. (1)

Although a certain degree of cooperation exists between Iran and Azerbaijan, encouraged by Aliyev, the regime in Tehran still maintains a relatively hostile attitude to its northern neighbor. (4) On the contrary Iran-Armenia cooperation expanded and “now Iran is the second largest trade partner of Armenia, after Russia. Dozens of Iranian trucks cross the border daily, where customs checking is minimum, in contrast to the heavy control on the Iranian-Azeri border. (15) The Azeri are very bitter concerning Iranian help to Armenia. Velayati’s visit in March 1996 ended in a diplomatic incident: while his counterpart Gusseynov criticized Iranian support for Armenia, Velayati openly condemned the relations between Baku and Tel Aviv. (15) Aliev in his turn condemned Khamenei that Iran maintain good trade links with Armenia -- which as Aliev put it -- had carried on a war with Azerbaijan. (2)

Economic relations for Armenia wield strategic significance and are vital. For various reasons, Iran's role in meeting Armenia's energy and food needs is irreplaceable. Projects for the development of the transportation, construction of tunnels and gas pipeline, power and utilities network, all have increasing significance. Iran already supplies Armenia with electricity, reducing Yerevan's energy dependency on a local nuclear power plant and a natural gas pipeline through Georgia. Tehran gas officials this year announced plans to export one billion cubic feet (28 million cubic meters) a day of gas to Armenia from the year 2000. (31) Thus far economic considerations have played an important role in the Iran-Armenia relations. The expansion of economic ties has brought about a closer relationship in a political arena.

Chapter III

Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis

1. Introduction

For more than three centuries, the main threat to the stability and territorial integrity of Iran has come from its northern neighbour, first Russia and then the Soviet Union. Before and during the whole period of the Cold War, it had to define its foreign policy within the framework of the confrontation between Russia/the Soviet Union and the West. The fall of the Soviet empire had crucial consequences for Iran's security interests. Iran has had to secure stability along its borders, in a situation where the significance of regional and interstate conflicts had increased dramatically.

Out of the 15 new, independent states which have been established on the territory of the former Soviet Union, eight have a political or cultural history in common with Iran. Some of them were even integral parts of its territory for long periods. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan share a common border with Iran. Any major event in these countries affects Iran's interests directly. (3)

As Edmund Herzig has noted, the Karabakh war has been the most direct threat to Iran's national security emanating from the north since the 1940s. Indeed, the conflict has been the worst – and from Iran's perspective the closest – among a plethora of conflicts that have plagued the Caucasus since the late 1980s. Besides ethnic strife, both Azerbaijan and Georgia have been characterized by chronic political instability as well. Arms of all kinds and calibers have proliferated throughout the region, controlled not by the governments of the

respective countries but by semiofficial or private paramilitary formations. Hence the Caucasus as a whole is a source of instability for all regional powers. For Iran, from its beginning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became a major challenge for Iran's foreign and domestic policies and has had a special importance for a number of different reasons, (4) which will be discussed below.

The following analysis starts with a description of Iran's attitude towards Nagorno-Karabakh and probes into the motives for and consequences of Tehran's attempts to mediate between the warring parties. Then, the policies Iran has adopted to deal with the new situation will be assessed. Finally, the motives for and effects of Iran's role as mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan will be analyzed.

2. Iran and the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis

The Qajar dynasty ruled Iran from the last decade of the 18th century until 1920. The Iranian public remembers this dynasty with hatred, holding it responsible for major defeats at the hands of the Russian army in 1813 and 1828, which led to the loss of vast areas of Iran's territory in the northwest of the country. These areas included the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan and parts of Armenia and Georgia. (3) The loss of these territories did nothing to lessen concern for the fate of their populations, especially the Azeris from the Republic of Azerbaijan. (4)

From its beginning in 1988, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh took on even more importance after the independence of Azerbaijan in 1991. The Iranian government had to face pressure from the population as a whole, but especially from its Azeri community. Public opinion demanded that Iran should take the side of its kindred Shiite Muslims against the "Armenian fidels." This pressure has been decreasing over the years, but it resurfaces

whenever the Azerbaijani army is defeated by the Armenians. (3) Iranian nationalist groups also exerted pressure on the government. They claimed that most of the Caucasian region once belonged to Iran and that the loss of this territory was due to Russian imperialistic expansion. They therefore urged the government to show as much concern for the Azeris as for its own citizens. The following quotation illustrates the nationalists' ideas in this regard: "When the Armenians of the Caucasus, Georgians, and also Arranis and Azeris and other Muslims of that region understand correctly that their separation [from Iran] is the result of enemy deeds, they will undoubtedly find out (as many of their scholars have already found out) that no cultural or (internal) political, economic or religious factor or feature has led to their separation from Iran. This separation can only be explained by the imperialist nature of Czarist Russia, which has occupied the northern parts of Iran after constant wars. Russia managed to maintain her power by the imposition of a series of treaties". The Iranian Azeris exerted stronger pressure on government policies on the war over Nagorno-Karabakh than do the Iranian nationalists. Some Azeri youth groups have even crossed the Azeri border illegally in order to help their brethren in the conflict. After the occupation of Lachin by Armenian troops, pamphlets were distributed clandestinely in Tabriz, the biggest city in Iranian Azerbaijan, inviting people to support their brothers from the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the same period, police were protecting the Iranian Armenians living in Iranian Azerbaijan from possible attack.

3. Motives for Mediation in the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

Iran's role as mediator in the crisis of Nagorno-Karabakh should be seen as part of its North-West Asia strategy. Iran is the only regional power to border both Armenia and Azerbaijan. (4) Iran emphasizes the inviolability of recognized international borders. It does

not accept territorial claims based on historical arguments as legitimate: such claims and arguments would lead to endless conflicts in the region. (7)

Iran's involvement in the conflict since the demise of the Soviet Union can also be explained by other factors, such as Iran's attempts to prevent any kind of "spillover" of the conflict across its borders - this would pose a potential threat to the security of the northern part of the country (3) - or its effort to prove its ability, as a regional power, to pursue a foreign policy dealing successfully with the new threats and challenges. (3)

Iranian diplomats consider that their country's mediating role in the conflict is the obvious response to a "natural" request from the belligerents to a neighbouring state.

Ali Akbar Velayati in his speech declared that even the political opposition in both republics demonstrate confidence in Iran's policies in the region.

In regard to Nagorno-Karabakh, Iran's main concerns has been:

1. Iran is aiming at a rapid solution to the conflict, for obvious security reasons.

Iran is worried about a Russian military presence too close to its borders. (10) The military operations along its borders represent an immediate danger to Iran's security. A prolongation would lead to a strengthening of the role of Russia, which might be tempted to settle the conflict on its own terms and contrary to Iran's security interests.

2. According to Shireen Hunter the continuation of the conflict could pave the way for a Western – including NATO – intervention. (10)

3. A prolongation of the conflict would lead to an even greater flight of refugees from the war-torn neighbouring areas. According to the UNHCF data in 1993 Iran was already hosting about 4 million refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq. The Iranian authorities made major efforts to prevent the flight of Azeri refugees onto its territory in September 1993, when fighting broke out in Nakhichevan and about 200,000 people were approaching Iran's borders. (24) After his return from a visit to Central Asia and the Caucasus

region, President Rafsanjani made the following declaration in an interview with the Iranian press: "We regard the refugees [from the Republic of Azerbaijan] in the same way as our own refugees [who were displaced as a result of the Iraqi invasion], but we prefer them to remain on the territory of Azerbaijan so that they can achieve their aims sooner." (3)

4. A balance of power between Armenia and Azerbaijan is the second goal of Iran's mediating policy. Iran is in favour of neither a powerful Christian Armenia (3) nor a powerful Azerbaijan which might cherish territorial claims on Iranian Azeri regions. Both countries have to be kept in balance by means of pressure on the stronger side. This explains why Iran has always welcomed any initiative aiming at a settlement of the conflict without any changes in recognized international borders. Ali Akbar Velayati, Iran's Foreign Minister, has announced that Iran "will defend the territorial integrity of (its) ... neighbours." (32)

5. The Azeri-Armenian conflict is preventing Iran from making full use of its acquired access to Europe. (3)

6. Iran needs to contain Turkish influence in the region. The rivalry between Iran and Turkey goes back to ancient history and has never been reconciled. Turkey has been considered by the US administration as a "model" with a "leading role in the region's politics", which all the newly independent states in the region were encouraged to follow. With the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Iranian leadership had the opportunity to take advantage of Turkey's "Achilles' heel". The enmity between the Turks and the Armenians may indeed give Iran an opportunity to oppose Turkish and US policies in the region. In taking advantage of this enmity, and of the inconsistencies in Russian policies, Iran is the only regional player which has both incentives and the opportunity to play a mediating role by taking a visibly impartial stand in the conflict. Even the short-lived pro-Turkish government in Azerbaijan - which did serious damage

to Irano-Azeri relations and increased the difficulties for Iran's mediation policies - had the advantage of strengthening the impartiality of Iran's position in Armenian eyes. (3)

So, these factors led Tehran at an early stage to offer its good officers to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict. (4)

4. Iran's Mediation

Iran started its mediation initiatives in March 1992, when it invited high-ranking delegations from Armenia and Azerbaijan to Tehran for negotiations. A temporary cease-fire, a lifting of the blockade of Armenia by the Azeri side, the deployment of observer forces and an exchange of prisoners of war and bodies were discussed. A declaration on the resolution of the conflict was signed by the delegations in Tehran on 15 March. A seven-day cease-fire was announced as a first step in the peace process. On 19 March, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali sent a message to the Iranian Foreign Minister expressing the UN's appreciation of Iran's efforts at mediation and its support for Iran's attempts to reach a peaceful settlement. (3)

The violation of the cease-fire did not halt Iran's mediating initiatives. On 10 May, President Rafsanjani met the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia in Tehran. The Russian ambassador to Iran took part in the meeting. Despite the signing of a common declaration on restoring stability in the region, based on international law and the principles of the UN Charter, the war continued and even intensified. Armenian forces captured Shusha and took over the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh. (4)

This victory was followed by the capture of Lachin, which opened a corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Iran's Foreign Ministry voiced its concern at the events in Shusha, denounced the occupation of new territories - without referring to any particular side

- and invited both sides to act in accordance with the Tehran Declaration. The Foreign Ministry added that "Iran demands that its neighbours, Armenia and Azerbaijan... should refrain from any military action which could aggravate the crisis." (3)

Armenian military actions prevented Iran's mediation efforts. The government had to take into account public opinion at home, which was calling for a firmer stand on Armenia. The fact that the Armenian aggression occurred simultaneously with the cease-fire agreement was severely criticized in Iran. The Iranian daily Salam wrote: "The Armenians have proved that they do not keep any promises and that they took advantage of the opportunities (prepared for them by our diplomacy) for rearmament".

After the victory of the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) in the presidential elections of June 1992, Iran's conciliatory role was effectively interrupted, as the new president, Elcibey, rejected any mediation or other political initiatives coming from Iran. Following internal political pressures, the Iranian government apparently did take a firmer stand against Armenia, denouncing its attack on Nakhichevan. Despite this official criticism, a further deterioration in Iran's relations with Azerbaijan led to a rapprochement with Armenia. The Armenian authorities acknowledged Iran's concern at the widening of the conflict. They announced that they appreciated Iran's peacemaking efforts, and that they would even accept the deployment of Iranian observers on their border with Nakhichevan - an option which never materialized, however. (3)

In spite of the deterioration in its relations with Azerbaijan, Iran established a good relationship with Aliyev, then leader of Nakhichevan. Despite his communist past and his closeness to Russia, Iran supported his efforts to preserve peace in the autonomous region by giving financial aid to Nakhichevan and by pressurizing Armenia. Visiting Tehran, Aliyev said (referring to the APF leadership) that "no Satan can damage our relations with Iran".

Between July 1992 and June 1993, Iran concentrated its efforts on containing the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and on preventing it from spilling over into Nakhichevan. It attributed all the defeats suffered by the Azeri troops to poor leadership on the part of the APF and to the role of Turkey. An Iranian semi-official daily even accused the APF leadership of surrendering Shusha in order to prevent Iran from mediating in the conflict. (21)

In June 1993, the APF was ousted from power in Baku. Elcibey was replaced by Aliyev, who had become increasingly popular thanks to his ability to keep the peace in Nakhichevan. Aliyev was considered to be clever and experienced enough to understand Iran's concerns in the region and not to challenge its interests.

In April 1993 Majlis deputies condemned Armenian offensive against Azerbaijan republic and called for immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from occupied muslim territory. They also appealed to the Iranian government to reconsider its relations with Yerevan and to increase its material and moral support for Azerbaijan republic. (22)

Moreover, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, visited Tabriz - the largest and most important Iranian Azeri city - at the end of July 1993. In order to demonstrate Iran's clear support for the new Azeri leadership, he declared that Iran would not remain indifferent in the face of any further encroachments on Azeri territories, and he attacked Armenian policies: "The government of Armenia and the Armenians of Karabakh are oppressing the Muslims of the region, and we denounce the recent actions by the Armenians of Karabakh who acted with the support of the government of Armenia. We also expect the Armenians in our country to denounce these actions." (25)

At the same time, in July 31 1993 Armenian foreign minister Vahan Papazyan, in a written message to his Iranian counterpart, Ali Akbar Velayati, praised Iran's significant role in consolidating peace and security in the region. The message has coincided with the ongoing military operations of Karabakh armenians against Azerbaijan republic. (26)

Iran made it clear that it would not accept any significant changes in the balance of power in the region. In August 1993 the Islamic Republic of Iran condemned the fresh Armenian attacks on the Azerbaijan republic and Mahmoud Vaezi called for speedy evacuation of the Azeri occupied lands by the Armenian forces. (27) After few days in September 1993, the Armenians made a new attack on Nakhichevan. Foreign Ali Akbar Velayati warned that the Islamic Republic would not remain silent vis –a-vis the Armenian aggression on Azerbaijan and growing of unrest across the Iranian border. He also reminded Papazyan that ongoing Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan has forced tens of thousands of people in southern Azerbaijan to flee their ohms. Meanwhile he noted that Iran is ready as before to help settle the issue. (28) At this point, Iranian troops crossed the border with the aim of securing the "jointly managed" dams over the RAS river and establishing several camps for Azure refugees. (29) Russia immediately responded to this military action. It warned Iran not to intervene in the conflict. The Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Grigori Karasin, affirmed in an interview with the press that "special actions by Iran, no matter what the grounds given for them, would not be tolerated by Russia". (3) The Iranian intervention was followed by an expansion of Russia's presence in the Caucasus. Nevertheless, Iran's action was enough to intimidate Armenia. Armenia took the Iranian stand into account: the Armenian Foreign Minister assured Tehran that there would be no more attacks on Nakhichevan. (4)

At that time Iran, confronted with the problem of having to deal with 200,000 Azeri refugees, continued its mediation efforts. In October 13, Armenian Ambassador to Tehran Vahan Baybourdian stated that Iran plays a major role in restoration of peace in the critical Caucasian region. Also he rejected the western sponsored plan in this regard, which ignores the Iranian role. (30) During a visit by the Iranian President to Azerbaijan, a new cease-fire between the parties was announced on 31 October 1993. Armenia and the Armenians of

Karabakh, however, affirmed that they had only agreed to this at Iran's insistence and the cease-fire lasted only a few days.

5. Consequences

Although Iran's mediation attempts did not bring about a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, they did nevertheless lead to the first cease-fire between the belligerents, in March 1992. At that time, the CSCE was not yet directly involved in the mediation process. The UN, for its part, sent a fact-finding mission only when this was facilitated by the first Iranian-sponsored cease-fire. Iran's mediation initiatives may be regarded as a foreign policy success. They contributed to international efforts to stabilize the region. Despite the attempts by the US and its regional allies to isolate Tehran, Iran's positive role was recognized by the UN Secretary-General and by regional and international bodies. (3)

The difficulties encountered by Iran in its mediation efforts, and its failure to achieve a settlement of the conflict, may be explained by various factors: In the first place, Iran was accused - by both regional and non-regional countries - of having strategic ambitions of its own in the region.

Secondly, it did not receive the necessary support from other countries or institutions. Despite Iran's success in brokering the first cease-fire, the CSCE did not think it appropriate either to consult Tehran or to support its efforts. This attitude may have resulted from an apprehension that any support for Iran's initiatives would weaken Turkey's position in the region.

The third factor which added to Iran's difficulties in mediating was Azerbaijan's policy during the tenure of the APF government. It accused Iran of delivering arms to the

Armenian side and made an overt appeal to Iranian Azerbaijan to secede from Iran and unite with Azerbaijan. (34)

The fourth factor was the inability of the belligerents to reach a compromise on the issues at the root of the conflict. The Armenians remained confident of their military strength, and demanded either the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia or a recognition of the independence of the unilaterally proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). The Azeri side refused even to consider these options. Although, under Aliyev, they may have shown some willingness to compromise, (3) any departure from the principle of territorial integrity leads inevitably to a severe loss of prestige and legitimacy by any Azeri government.

Finally, Iran lacked the necessary means or leverage to force the belligerents to make a compromise. Even though both countries understood Iran's concerns and accepted its role as mediator, they never felt compelled to accept its negotiation proposals.

6. Conclusion

Ethnic conflicts are based on opposing definitions of interests and identities. Compromises are difficult in a situation where the parties involved define their identity through violent conflict. Mediators must obtain the confidence of both parties, which means adopting a position of strict neutrality in the conflict. Most states have direct interests in the conflict, which makes it difficult for them to take such an impartial stand. Only states whose neutral position is dictated by their own interests may have sufficient incentive to play the role of mediator effectively. Most of the players who expected to mediate in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis had serious handicaps which prevented them from doing so: Russia did not demonstrate a clear policy towards the

region until mid-1993, and was not accepted by other states as being impartial. The US did not pursue a policy of its own in Transcaucasia, implicitly accepting that the region was in Russia's sphere of influence and interests. (3) The CSCE failed to play an effective role, and the UN, following the policies of the major Western powers and Russia, did not become seriously involved. Armenia rejected Turkey's mediation for obvious reasons. This left Iran as the only mediator which had at the same time sufficient incentive to take an impartial stand and opportunities for gaining the confidence of both sides. To the Iranian government, the conflict offered a chance to strengthen its role on the international scene. Gaining recognition as a regional power has been its major concern. Iran has not only extended its influence in the region, displaying its ability to perform as a powerful player, but it has also prevented the conflict from spilling over across its own borders. By giving considerable assistance to Azeri refugees, Iranian policy-makers have increased their legitimacy among their own Azeri community.

7. Prospects for the Future

Russia's re-emergence as an arbiter of the conflicts in what it terms its "near abroad" may not be enough to put an end to the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh. A solution to conflicts involving identity cannot be imposed by force. The deployment of peace-keeping forces serves only to make ethnic conflicts latent - they always remain on the verge of new and violent eruptions. A lasting settlement of an ethnic conflict requires not only an international process of negotiation between the warring parties, but also thoroughgoing political changes internally.

The Iranian government seems to be aware of the limits on its ability to deal with the conflict. It is therefore seeking to co-ordinate its efforts with other regional or non-regional players. The first priority seems to be co-operation with Russia in order to prevent the spread of Turkey's influence to the region (and, indirectly, NATO's). But Iran may also choose another alternative: it may try to co-ordinate its efforts with Turkey. This policy alternative does indeed have some advocates among the ruling elite in Iran, but it would be difficult to implement. Any co-ordination of Iranian-Turkish policies in the region would certainly depend to a large extent on the attitude of the US, and on Turkey's dependence on the American government. Iran is also striving for closer co-operation with the European Union on the issues of the Caucasus and Central Asia. (3)

The Caucasus has always been the scene of rivalry between Russia, Turkey and Iran. Co-ordination between these three states would facilitate a long-term solution for Nagorno-Karabakh. The exclusion of any one of these regional powers from the mediation process, on the other hand, could delay the settlement of the conflict or could even make any peace impossible. (4)

Chapter IV

Western Influence on Iranian-Armenian Relations

Iran-Armenia ties were greatly influenced by the policies and activities of other countries, especially the USA and other western countries. Moreover, domestic changes and events occurring in Armenia also have effect on the nature of Iran's relationship with this country.

The most damaging aspects of Iran's foreign policy in terms of impact on its relations with the Transcaucasus have been Iran's strained relations with the West, especially the United States, and with key Arab states and Israel. (10)

The west's policies in connection with Iran, Central Asia and the Caucasus has had an important and preventive effect on Iran's ties with this region. Between 1988 and 1991 the west i.e. the U.S.A. and her European and Asian allies have clearly expressed their concern over the possibility of the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism in the ex-USSR. And it was rather for this reason that the west did not want Iran to become one of the influential role players in the region. And it was in order to prevent Iran's influence that the west decided to strengthen Turkey. In 1992, when James Baker the then Foreign Minister of the United states of America traveled to Central Asia, preventing the influence of Iran and Islamic fundamentalism was announced as one of the pillars of the USA's policy in the region.

In the course of the following few years, the USA and her allies continued their efforts aimed at halting Iran's political and economic plans in the region. In addition they took preventive measures to stop Iran from cooperating with utilizing and transporting energy resources in the region. Moreover, they prevented Iran from her possible role in bringing peace to the Caucasus.

Western policy is one of the main hurdles set up against Iran's capabilities in expanding her ties with the Central Asian countries and the Caucasus. For example, western countries and companies do not provide the required expenses for projects which include Iran. They also oppose with Iran's participation in important energy plans. In future too, the continuation of western opposition will prevent Iran from fully benefiting from her potential possibilities in the Caucasus. (11)

Moreover, Iran and the U.S. remain at loggerheads with Washington refusing to lift sanctions, charging that Teheran supports international terrorism and is pursuing weapons of mass destruction and the deliver them beyond Iran's borders. These sanctions act, which was passed by the congress and signed by President Clinton on August 5,1996, is a clear statement of United States policy toward Iran.

In turn, Iran charges that the U.S. sanctions are illegal under international law. According to Edmund Herzig Teheran is anxious about investment by Western firms, especially U.S. companies, in the Caucasian region, and also by the development of economic and political relations with the West, especially if there is any security dimension. (16)

Iran's growing importance as a regional power is creating a dilemma for its northern neighbors in the Caucasus. The dilemma is how to reap the benefits of increased trade with Iran while not alienating the United States. The dilemma for Iran's neighbors is well illustrated by the Armenia. This has links with the United States, links which it consider essential to preserve. Armenia receives substantial foreign aid from the United States, ranging up to about \$100 million annually. (11)

Moreover, it is true that Western countries have imposed economic restrictions on Azerbaijan because its blockade against Armenia. (10) That is true that the United States policy towards the Armenia has been heavily influenced by its domestic politics and notably

the powerful Armenian lobby in the congress. (5) The U.S. Senate on June 29, 1992, passed the Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets Support Act of 1992. Under this provisions, the U.S. government must refrain from giving Azerbaijan any assistance until it is determined that Azerbaijan (1) has ended the blockade and other offensive acts against the Republic of Armenia and the autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh; (2) is respecting the internationally recognizes human rights of Armenians and other minorities living within its borders; and (3) is participating constructively in international efforts to resolve peacefully and permanently the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. (10) In October 1992, the Freedom Supports Act 907a was passed by the US congress. (5) Azerbaijan is the only former Soviet republic that is denied U.S. aid, whereas Armenia is the highest per capita recipient among these states. To the 1997 Armenia, has received a total of between 300 and 350 million US\$ in aid. By contrast, the aid that has reached Azerbaijan through non-governmental U.S. organizations in spite of the act amount to less than 25 million US\$. (5)

The fact is that, despite cultural and religious affinities in several areas, the interests of Armenia and of the West do not always coincide. Armenia and West hold different views of Iran and its strategic role in the region. Even in the absence of close ties, Iran is important to Armenia as a strategic counterweight to Turkey and even to some degree Russia, and as a buffer against a potentially irredentist greater Azerbaijan. Thus retaining a common border with Iran is vital to its security. (10)

For the West, especially the United States, Turkey is a key ally and a vital link in an overall strategy of containing Iran and Islamic fundamentalism in the Transcaucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East. Consequently, the West does not share most Armenians' views of Turkey or pan-Turkism. Moreover, West has sizable economic and commercial interests in Azerbaijan, notably in its oil and gas reserves. The West would also like to see Azerbaijan

stay aloof from Iran and close to Turkey. But the West cannot achieve these goals if it adopts an entirely pro-Armenian posture.

By contrast, most Western states - especially United States - view Iran as a spoiler in the region and even an active enemy. Some Western commentators have been suggested a territorial swap to resolve the Karabakh conflict that would deprive Armenia of its border with Iran. (10)

As Hunter explained this situation quite understandably, if not always wisely, has prompted all of these countries to block Iran's activities in the area. In fact in many instances, excessive preoccupation with Iran's exclusion has had adverse consequences both for the region and for Western interests. For example, despite strong pro-Iranian feelings in Armenia and a desire to expand economic and other ties with Iran as part of efforts to find a counterweight to Russia, Western opposition has prevented these countries from realizing the full potential of such relations. This situation has had economic and political costs for as Armenia as all Transcaucasian states. (11)

Chapter V

How Russian-Iranian Relations Affect on Iran-Armenia Relations

During the initial couple of years after the fall of the USSR, the group of Russians known as the Euro-Atlantic group (the group which wanted Russia to align with the west) were stronger than the rest. All the same, in spite of the tendency of this group to have closer ties with the west, and also in spite of the views of some foreign analysts, they were against the theory of leaving the ex-USSR republics to themselves for determining their foreign policy. In fact, even the extreme Euro-Atlantists like Koziroff who believed in the full unity of Russia with the west, held the opinion that these republics should remain under the Russian domain, and Moscow should be the main connection between this region and the west, besides acting as the focal point of progress as far as these republics were concerned.

Thus, in the same period, in May 1992 Serguei Stankovich, one of the famous Russian liberals and advisor to Yeltsin announced that the ex-USSR republics-which the Russians called "Close Foreigners" - must remain under the economic, political and cultural influence of Russia. (11)

All the same, in spite of Russia's tendencies to have closer relations with the west, from the very beginning their viewpoints on the region clashed. For instance, the west wanted Turkey to serve as an example for these republics where as Russia wanted them to remain in her own domain. As for the Euro-Atlantists' point of view in connection with Russia's relations with Iran and the latter's political role in the region, the Russian leadership neither wanted to have close ties with Iran nor wanted Iran to have a more role in the southern republics of the ex-USSR. However, even then, not all the policy makers of Russia agreed

with the Euro-Atlantists' foreign policy including ties with Iran. For example, from the very beginning, i.e. in 1992, Andranik Migranian said that as the west endeavored to strengthen Turkey's influence in the Caucasus, Russia must support Iran and Armenia. (10)

According to Shireen Hunter Russia would cooperate with Iran as far as her interest are concerned and as soon as her need is fulfilled, another policy would be adopted. For example, it can be said that Russia can use Iran for getting more privileges from the West. Thus it can theoretically be said that this situation would weaken Iran against Moscow and the latter would be in a position to take advantage of Iran. This is especially true if we keep in mind Iran's difficulties in her ties with the west and the latter' allies in the region, leaving Iran with hardly any choice in her foreign policy. (11)

All the same, Iran and Russia have common strategic interests:

- 1- The formation of a Turkish front is a political threat for both Iran and Russia.
- 2- Both countries are concerned about domestic movements as a result of which they strive to safeguard the regional borders.
- 3- Iran and Russia are both worried about the increasing western influence in the ex-USSR and the consequences it might have on their own countries.

During the past year, spectacular changes have improved Iran-Russia ties. (11)

Iran has found an ally in Azerbaijan's other foe — Russia. American attempts to isolate Iran and promote its image as a regional pariah have fallen short of coercing Russia to limit its relations with Iran. (4) There are several convergent interests between these countries. Despite American warnings of hostile Iranian intentions, Russia has sold large quantities of arms and a nuclear reactor to Tehran. (14) Russia wants to increase its hard current export earnings, but has few opportunities for doing so. Iran wants to buy arms and nuclear reactors, but is unable to get these from the West due to American pressure on its allies. It is not

surprising, then, that Russia has been eager to sell Iran - a country which can pay in hard currency-goods which Iran cannot obtain from the West. (12)

But in addition to the economic realm, Russian and Iranian interests converge in a number of broader political areas. Since its 1979 Islamic revolution Iran has pursued an anti-American foreign policy. With the rise of nationalist sentiment in Russia, Moscow's foreign policy has also grown increasingly anti-American. While Russian-American relations have not become nearly as hostile as Iranian-American relations have. Moscow and Tehran do share one important common interest vis-à-vis the US: neither wishes to see American influence grow in the Caucasus. Nor do Russia and Iran wish to see the influence of Turkey. (12) These convergent interests have led Russia and Iran to pursue mutually supportive policies in several areas. Supporting actions applied in other former Soviet republics in the Caucasus, Moscow has sought to keep Azerbaijan dependent on it by pressing Baku to accept a Russian troop presence, and preventing Azerbaijan from exporting oil unless Russia receives a large share of the revenue. (12) In the ongoing Azeri-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and during Elchibey's presidency, Moscow has tilted toward Armenia-which has accepted a Russian troop presence and, also because of Elchibey's excessively anti-Russian and pro-Turkish stand. (10) The possibility that Moscow could increase its support for Armenia-which already occupied a significant portion of Azeri territory - provided an additional means for Moscow to deter Baku from pursuing policies which Russia does not favor. Russia's policy of keeping Azerbaijan weak and impoverished serves Iranian interests perfectly. (12)

Russian and Iranian interests converge in the energy field as well; they both would be largely devoid of oil and gas resources if the Caspian were delimited and divided into territorial waters. (4)

In June 1995, Iran and Russia agreed to coordinate their oil and gas policies, in a wider context of improving relations. Iran was particularly eager to cooperate with Russia as it is under the pressure of U.S. isolation. Both for economic and political reasons, Iran therefore wants to prove that it can stand up against the United States. And given the present character of Russia's domestic politics, anything that proves that Russia is not dependent on the United States is likely to be in the government's interest. Cooperation with Iran, in addition to other factors, also serves this purpose. In the summer of 1995, Iran and Russia agreed to cooperate in offshore drilling and platform construction in the Caspian. (9)

On the other hand, the increased cooperation between Russia, Iran and Armenia has led to speculation regarding an emerging set of regional alignments. This has been strengthened by recent Russian complaints of an anti-Russian coalition of former Soviet republics. The foremost among these alignments is indeed the growing regional cooperation between Russia, Iran and Armenia.

Russo-Iranian cooperation has been examined above, and the cooperation in the military, economic and political fields between Russia and Armenia is well known. Events in recent years, moreover, tend to show that Armenia and Iran are developing ties in many fields and that their cooperation amounts to more than just the struggle against the common foe, Baku. As early as February 1992, the Armenian foreign minister visited Tehran and discussed the Karabakh conflict and purchases of natural gas, among other agreements on economic and technical cooperation. After this, open contacts were more rare until Azeri-Iranian relations deteriorated in 1995. (4)

In May 1995 had been concluded a number of agreements on economic and political cooperation (see Chapter II, Azerbaijani Factor in Iranian-Armenian Relations). Other high-level meetings discussing further bilateral cooperation were held in Yerevan in December

1996 and in Tehran in February 1997. The Iranian leadership also reiterated its readiness to mediate in Karabakh, something Azerbaijan is outspokenly against.

From an Azeri point of view, it is natural to see these accords and gestures of friendship as a threat to its security and as an attempt to corner Azerbaijan. However, the scope of this emerging triangle does not limit itself to Azerbaijan. One strong reason for the existence of this regional triangle seems to be a common wish to reduce and prevent a further increase of Turkey's influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which troubles both Iran and Russia. From Yerevan's perspective, Turkey remains perhaps the greatest threat to Armenia's existence, and in any case a more powerful one than Azerbaijan. (4)

In 29 August 1997 Russia and Armenia signed treaty on defending the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of both countries. According to the treaty Armenia and Russia had to expand military cooperation between their armed forces. Each had to immediately contact the other in case there is a threat of military invasion. The Armenian and Russian presidents also agreed to coordinate military-technical policy, and to coordinate defense industries. (8)

Meanwhile, Russia does not wish to see close relations between Iran and its northern neighbours, notably with Armenia. So, according to Shiteen Hunter, should Russia fully reestablish its hegemony in the area, Armenia could find that it was not a favorite ally but only, once again, a client state among many others. (10)

Russian-Iranian economic and military relations continued to develop with reports of Russian plans to sell Iran \$4 billion of military and other equipment between 1997 and 2007 if Iran met its financial obligations. (6)

According to Robert Freedman, despite some areas of tension, the Russian-Iranian relationship proved beneficial to both countries during the 1991-2000 period, though the future relations is an open question. From Russia's standpoint, Iran is an excellent arms client

and market for nuclear reactors. It has also been an ally against what Moscow has called "U.S. hegemony" as Russian-American relations deteriorated. From Iran's point of view, Russia is a secure source of sophisticated arms, a diplomatic ally at a time when the United States has sought to isolate it; an ally in helping to curb Azerbaijan's possible irredentist threat. (6)

However, in 17 February 2000 Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister stated that Iran preferred "multi-polar" in the Caspian region, which "should envisage cooperation with the West and East." The statement comes at a time when Russia is expanding its influence into the southern republics of the former Soviet Union. It indicates that Iran opposes future Russian advances and does not view the rest of the region as part of the Russian Federation. As Iran tries to break its international isolation, it may move closer to the West in order to counterbalance Russian influence in the Caspian region.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Sayed Sadek Kharrazi pointed out that some countries in the Caspian basin seek closer association with the West. Kharrazi support for the countries' orientation toward the West implies that Iran would prefer Western influence on its northern border. His statement marks the first time in a long time that Iran has publicly stated its opposition to Russia asserting its control over the southern Caucasus. Kharrazi's comments imply two possible motivations: Either Iran prefers the West in the South Caucasus or it prefers that Russia to be there at all. Iranian reformist President Mohammad Khatami's desire to improve relations with the West explains Iran's desire for a Western presence in the region.

Iran doesn't want Russia dominating the southern Caucasus, because Russian influence on Iran's northern borders threatens its security. Although Moscow and Tehran currently have warm ties, Russia's President Putin has stirred up and capitalized upon

Russian nationalism. So, the country has expanded its influence southward into the Caucasus, and it is unclear how far this expansion will go.

In the short-term, Iran and Russia will continue to cooperate. Iran purchases a significant number of Russian arms, and Moscow is helping Tehran construct a nuclear facility. Russia needs money and Iran needs Russian arms and technology. In the long-term, however, as reformist politics prevail in Tehran and as Iran breaks its isolation, it will eventually move closer to Western nations.

Iran so opposes Russian influence returning to the Caucasus that it actually prefers Western influence. However, Putin's new policies directly challenge Western influence in the Caucasus. So, Iran will soon find itself trying to balance its relations with both sides. However, Tehran has made clear its preference. Iran will not sit idly by while Russian influence creeps closer to its borders. (19)

Conclusion

Iran at first sight seems demonstrated illogical policy towards Armenia supporting for Armenia in the conflict and expanding cooperation with Yerevan. But this policy was, as the following analysis illustrates, against the potential Azerbaijani irredentism. Moreover, Iran and Armenia have a common interest that they are pursuing to lessen Turkish influence in the region and to prevent the rise of an oil rich Azerbaijani state.

On the other side, there were domestic factors favouring support for Armenia, or at least consistent neutrality. One was the desire not to encourage an Azeri nationalism that could have a demonstration effect on Iran. The other was the desire to maintain good relations with the Armenian community in Iran; estimated at 120,000 in the early 1990s, down from around 170,000 at the time of the revolution, it remained a significant commercial element in the country that the leadership of Islamic Republic did not want to lose, as they had already lost the majority of the Jews. (8) As Armenian Ambassador to Tehran, Vahan Baybourdian told, Armenians are playing active part in implementation of infrastructure projects on reconstruction of Iran. He emphasized, that the Iranian government is aware of the minorities' influential roles in effecting the country's industrial and economic boom. On their turn Armenians appreciate efforts by the Iranian government to provide equal facilities for them. (35) 400-year Armenian community still preserved its own culture, customs, language and religion, a fact which proves Iran's friendly attitude towards minorities. Armenians enjoy full rights in Iran, and there has been no example of discrimination against this group by the Iranian government. (36)

Meanwhile, Armenia views Iran as a country that safeguards the security of Armenia's southern borders. Hence, Yerevan has no military bases or forces on the borders of two countries. Also, Tehran had a major role in prolonging the cease-fire between Armenia

and Azerbaijan.

On the other hand, Iran realized that by economic links it could get a leading role and get much more profit than through the appeals of “Islam”. Armenian Ambassador to Tehran expressed confidence that Iranian-Armenian relations have progressed beyond mere mutual coordination and expanded into regional co-operation. There are vast amount of agreements and contracts concluded between two countries. Iran is the number one exporter to Armenia, mainly in food, manufactured goods and machinery, while Iran is Armenia’s second biggest export market, mainly in metals and building materials. Iran also supplies some 10 per cent of Armenia’s electricity demands.

First Vice President Hassan Habibi declared that friendly relations between Iran and Armenia would serve peace and security in the region. (37)

Meanwhile, on April 24 of each year, Armenia stages a rally in Iran against the Ottoman Turks, which really prove that Armenian Iranian relations exceeded the mere relations of economic sphere. (1)

Despite its small size and population and its limited resource base, Armenia has demonstrated -- as Shireen Hunter noted -- “a far better capacity than its two Transcaucasian neighbors to create a stable foreign relations base.” Armenia has managed its foreign relations quite well. Armenia has maintained good ties and balance in its relations with Iran.

Policy Suggestions:

- In order to progress Iranian-Armenian relations there is need to separate Iranian Department from the Middle East Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to pay much heed on relations concerning Iran.
- Although there is Joint Armenian-Iranian Commission, there is need to expand activity

of this Commission creating joint economic, agricultural, business, communication, cultural subcommissions, attaching experts to this commission. This would serve a purpose to establish vast relations in the field of cultural and tourism; expand ties in agriculture, inn road and transport, energy and telecommunication spheres; promote bilateral cooperation in health and medical affairs. There could be exchange of information, students and production of medical equipment.

- Iran has considerable potentials in production of construction materials, heavy and food industries. Iranian Minister of Commerce Yahya Al-e-Eshaq, said that Iran is ready to cooperate with Armenia. Joint ventures could be in profit to these two countries. In these deals could be used the potential of Armenian Diaspora in Iran.
- In Iran development of the petrochemical industry necessitates the creation of communication networks to Europe and Russia. The initial agreements between Iran, Russia and Armenia on road development plans can help prevent the entrance of NATO members into the region.

So, as Rafsanjani said, there are “enormous” possibilities for cooperation between Iran and Armenia. (Iran News, 05/07/ 95)

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