

The Main Stages of the Russian Expansion on Azerbaijan at the XVIII and Beginning of the XIX Centuries

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Abstract During practically its entire history Azerbaijan was objective involved in processes geopolitical and, foremost military and political expansion. In this article we consider the main stages of the military expansion of Russian empire in northern Azerbaijan during of the XVIII and beginning of the XIX centuries. It was in the XVIII century military-political situation on South Caucasus characterized by strengthening of activity in the region of three regional powers - Russia (only starts to gain positions in the region), as well as Iran and the Ottoman Empires (more and more losing its positions). Thus, the main focus of Russia's imperial policy in the Caucasus at the XVIII and beginning of the XIX centuries was to create a «buffer» zone, with a view to establishing a military base for opposition to the dominant in the region neighboring states: Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran. As a result, the main victim of policies carried out by Russia in the Caucasus was, of course, the people of Azerbaijan, which lost part of their historic lands.

During practically its entire history of the Azerbaijan was objective involved in processes geopolitical and, foremost military and political expansion. Throughout history the control of Azerbaijan located on the crossroads of Europe and Asia, had been indispensable for the powers that surrounded it. In this article considered the main stages of the military expansion of Russian empire on South Caucasus during of the XVIII and beginning of the XIX centuries.

From the XVI century South Caucasus was incorporated into the Safavi state. Azerbaijan in Safavi administrative system represented as a single territorial integrity and is administratively divided into 4 beglarbegi: Shirvan centered Shemakha, Garabakh, with the center in Ganja, Azerbaijan with the center of Tabriz, Chukhursaad centered in Irevan. (Tadhkirat al-Muluk, p.100-102; Rakhmani, p.87-89) Because of unity and a significant preponderance of the Azerbaijani Turkish ethnic element within these administrative-territorial units the north-western part of the Safavi Empire named as Azerbaijan. Therefore, in the Safavi Empire, these 4 beglarbegi existed under the general name province of Azerbaijan. A striking proof of this can be modified by Nadir Shah in 1736, the administrative system of north-western part of his empire unit into a single administrative-territorial under the name of Azerbaijan. In the mid of the XVIII century, with the weakening of the Afshar's power over the territory of Azerbaijan, the country disintegrated into some 20 khanates. (Atkin, (1980), p.11) Most of them were virtually independent, although the southern khanates still maintained tenuous links to the ruling dynasty of Iran.

It was in the XVIII century military-political situation on South Caucasus characterized by strengthening of activity in the region of three regional powers - Russia (only starts to gain positions in the region), as well as Iran and the Ottoman Empires (more and more losing its positions).

The first stage (1721-1724) the beginning Russian aggression in the South Caucasus, it is assumed as the so named Caspian campaign of Peter I. The collapse of authority in the Safavi state (in the beginning of the XVIII century), became the signal for the aggression of neighboring empires. After eight months besieged, on October 23, Isfahan (the capital of Safavi State) was capitulated and the Shah abdicated, and three days later the Afghan conqueror Mahmud ascended the throne of Safavi. For several decades Safavi prince, who escaped a massacre of their family perpetrated at Isfahan by Mahmud, continued to figure in political life. After father's abdication Shah's third son Tahmasp to let himself proclaimed Shah at Qazvin on November 17, 1722. (Savory, p.250)

In the result formed "some kind vacuum" in South Caucasus, which was used by Russia and Ottoman Empire, its tried to outstrip one another in striving to fill springing up "vacuum". (Braun, p.199.) Thereby, as said Braun: "this collapse of authority in Iran was a signal for aggression by neighboring empires." The first military move, however came from a power which hadn't previously appeared around Iran's enemies, namely Russia. (Braun, p.199) The result of this Russia military aggression was a considerable territorial acquisition of Russia in the Caspian region.

Tacking advantage of Safavi weakness Russia and Ottoman Empires made active their policy in this region. In 1721 two events occurred which greatly facilitated the carrying out of Peter I's Caspian projects. In the first place the peace negotiations with Sweden reached a successful conclusion on 10 September (it is believed that Peter gave orders for these negotiations to be speeded up in order that he could put his Caspian plan before the Afghans or the Turks could forestall him). (Butkov, p.9) Secondly, during some collisions of 1721 in the town of Shamakha with the rebels had looted

the shops of the Russian merchants there, thus giving Peter a pretext for his invasion. The other important reason was the growing interest shown by Ottomans in Safavi affairs and as soon as news of Mahmud's invasion of Isfahan caused him to put his plan execution in 1722.

In July 1722, Peter marched with more than 100 000 Russian soldiers for the Caspian coast near the northeastern of the Caucasus. The expedition's most significant achievement was the capture of the city of Derbend in September 1722. (Ashurbeyli, p.209) Peter still wanted to acquire more territory along the coast and much inland into South Caucasus. However, a critical shortage of supplies, widespread illness (which accounted for most of the campaign's 33 deaths) and the desire to avoid a direct confrontation with the Ottomans (who were also moving into Safavi territory) persuaded him to reduce the scale of his operations. (Babilev, p.109) Two weeks after the surrender of Derbend, he returned to Russia leaving behind only a small garrison. This marked the end of the first stage of the Russian campaign, although the Russian army took the other important cities of Baku and Gilan in the next few months.

When we examine the results of this campaign we see that its results fell short of Peter's expectations. He had it is true, made a remarkable show of naval strength on the Caspian Sea and more important still, he had occupied the highly important South Caucasus towns of Derbend and Baku before the Turks could get there.

The final stage of Peter's involvement in South Caucasus was treaty with shah Tahmasp II, a son of late Safavi shah on 1723. (Markova, p.29) The Russia-Iranian treaty was invalidated by Tahmasp's refusal to make the extensive concessions desired by Peter. This fact was conveniently overlooked by the Russian authorities. The province that so engaged Tahmasp called for the cession to Russia of the western and southern Caspian coast (over which he had control at that time). The bold advance of Russia in South Caucasus brought the more problem. Russia and Ottomans talked about settling their differences peacefully but prepared for war. Under the circumstances Ottomans decided that it would be easier to prevent further advance by Russia into hand by invading that country itself. Already in the summer of 1723, after the arrival of Russian force, the Sultan had sent an Ottoman governor to Shirvan. To counteract the Russian move, Turkey declaration of war on Tahmasp and by subsequent to invasion of Georgia in South Caucasus and some west provinces of Iran. The Russo-Turkish tension reached a new height and threatened war. Motivated by its desire to keep Ottomans strong against Austria, France mediated and succeeded in averting a war. More important, the French conciliatory efforts produced an agreement between Russia and Turkey in regard to their conflicting interest in Iran and South Caucasus. By the agreement (signed in 1724), Russia and Ottoman empires decided to partition Safavi land. (Braun, p.200) Ottomans was to obtain in addition to the territories already conquered (Kartli and Kakheti), Irevan, Ganja and Nakhchivan, plus large areas in south Azerbaijan such as Tabriz, Marand and Urmiya. In return for this territorial gains Turkey withdrew its previous objection to the cession of territories as contemplated by Russia's agreement with Tahmasp.

Russo-Ottoman treaty of 1724 was unfair and frankly aggressive. Both Russia and Turkey had enforced their claims by armed might on a distracted and particularly defenseless country (Safavi empire), much of which was already in the hands of a cruel usurper. The treaty was in fact, an iniquities one, and it may be regarded as the forerunner of equally wrongful partitions of Poland in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Also in the result of these invasion in South Caucasus its territory become in field of fight and Iran authority in these region declined next 14 years.

After the death of Peter I (1727) Russian interest in Iran waned, while Tahmasp and his able general, Nadir Shah began to reconquer the lost provinces. Finally Tsarista Anna agreed by the treaties of Rasht (1732) and Ganja (1735) (Lockhart, (1938), p. 58, 86) to withdraw all Russian forces stationed in the former Safavi provinces South Caucasus .

Nadir having expelled the Afghans from Safavi empire began his military campaign against Ottomans in 1730 with the objective of recovering former provinces, especially in South Caucasus. (Azərbaycan tarixi, v. III, p.349) In the resumed fighting with the Ottomans, which took place mainly in South Caucasus, Nadir won important victories and Ottomans in 1736 accepted terms for an armistice similar to those agreed at Zohab in 1639. (Lockhart, (1938), p. 107)

Thereby during first half of the XVIII century, South Caucasus became arena of fight between Iran, Turkey and Russia. Antisafavi revolts, Russia and Turkey invasion and reconquer of Nadir brought much suffered to all inhabitants of these lands. In the second half of the XVIII century this region were subdivided into several principalities (Khanates). It were Georgia (Kartli and Kakheti kingdom) with its capital at Tiflis, under the ruler Irali II; and all the rest of the South Caucasus khanates were Azerbaijani and under Azerbaijani rulers, moreover this khanates occupied a large area with a larger total population than Georgia. Russia in the era of Catherine of the Great (1762-1796) activated its expanded politics of expansion in South Caucasus. Of all the areas of Russia expansion during Catherine's involvement in South Caucasus was a traditional strategic one—the strengthening of Russia military position against the Ottoman Empire and uses of the South Caucasus as a commercial center for expanded trade with Asia. Moreover the Russian's concern over the well being of their fellow Christian (Georgians and Armenians) in the South Caucasus played an important role in shaping policy toward that region. Russia had planned united Georgia lands into one state, and creation of an Armenian

state (which hadn't own state in last four centuries) on the base of Azerbaijan-Muslim lands. These two large Christian vassal states would act as a buffer against their Muslim neighbors, and would help Russia extend its influence in South Caucasus .

Therefore at the end of XVIII century Georgia became the central focus of the Russia expansion in the region. For local rulers this period represented the continuation of long-established rivalries in which each participant strove to increase his strength often in alliance with another local rulers or interested larger states. (Atkin, (1979), p.79-80) So Russia compelled Georgia to obtain her protection and the treaty of Georgievsk was signed in 1783 (Avalov, p.51; Dubrovin, p.11; Lang, p.37), which made Georgia a Russia protectorate.

The second stage (1762-1796) the period of activation of Russian policy in the Caucasus related to the reign of Catherine II and the realization of her and Prince Potemkin (who supervising Eastern policy of Russia), plans of the final strengthening on Caucasus. It is from this time, Russian government sought to use the region directly for the military action. The South Caucasus had become, under the plans of Potemkin military and political base of Russia in the region. In reply to the attack of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar in Georgia and some Azerbaijani khanates of South Caucasus (1795), Catherine II, in April 1796, sent General Gudovich with troops in Georgia, and General V. Zubov was ordered to march in the same direction on the shore of the Caspian Sea. The result of the Caucasus policy of Catherine II was a sharp of weakening positions of Qajar Iran and Ottoman Empire, formally destroying their claims to eastern Georgia.

The initial motive for Catherine involvement in South Caucasus in the second half of the XVIII century was a traditional strategic first the strengthening of Russian's military position against the Ottoman Empire. In the early 1770s, during Catherine's first war with Ottomans, the Russian army used Georgia as a base of operations for attacks on Turkish strongholds in the western Caucasus.(Atkin, (1980), p.25) Thereby Russia interest focused mostly on the use of South Caucasus as a base at operations against the Ottoman Empire and as a commercial center for expanded trade with Asia.

The 1796 expedition under the general Zubov (Ramazani, p.44) had two purposes: to establish Russian suzerainty throughout the eastern Caucasus and to overthrow Aga Mohammed. The campaign was incompetently planned and even more incompetently executed. Russian troops met with a host of difficulties but not were campaigning hundreds of miles away in Khorosan that year. The troops were called the day after Catherine's death on November 17, 1796 and were out of the region before Aga Muhammed returned the following year.

The brief Russian presence in the South Caucasus during 1796-1797 did more to alienate local Azerbaijan rulers than to win their support. (Atkin, (1980), p.85) The actions of Russian entourage lent credence of anti-Muslim and anti-Azerbaijan hostility. Basically, all the Azerbaijan khans would have preferred not to submit to any outside power. The foreign policy of Khanates was to play one powerful neighbors off against another. They feared the Qajars, as much as the Russians. Thus a khan might side with Russia if a Qajars treats seemed more pressing or the reverse if Russia seemed bent on controlling Khan's affairs. For some khans, this strategy degenerated into a frantic struggle to appease both sides. Thereby victims of this struggle were peoples of South Caucasus which trying to found some balance between to unreality of keeping independence and needless fight again powerful neighbors states.

Thereby at the end of XVIII and first half of XIX centuries Qajar supreme in this region ended and all region going over Russia protection. However the struggle for supremacy in South Caucasus continued at the beginning of XIX century. The active power in this region was Russia, because Qajar and Ottomans at that time were decline.

The third stage (1801-1804) it is the beginning of open war expansion of the Russian empire in the region. Resistance to Russian occupation was only by the local mainly Muslim- Azerbaijani population, none of the neighboring states decided openly to declare war of Russia to stop its aggression at a region. At the beginning of 1801, it was declared the inclusion , the Kartli-Kakheti kingdom to the Russian Empire, Megrelia was incorporated in 1803, the next year western Georgia (Imeretia), in 1804, were also annexed Ganja khanate and Jara-Belokan area.

The South Caucasus and mostly Azerbaijan were the main arenas of Russia-Iranian war campaigns (1804-1813 and 1826-28). Iran considered many of the northern Azerbaijan khanates and also the Kartle-Kakheti (Eastern Georgia) Christian Kingdom as its traditional domain and did not want to accept the Russian Empire to replace Qajar Iran. Russia Empire had its own vision of the strategic and economic benefits to be derived from controlling the area. Mainstream of Russian imperial politics focused mostly on uses of the South Caucasus as the base of operations against neighbor Muslim states, and as commercial center for expansion trade with Asia.

So the fourth stage began with declared the first Russian-Iranian (1804-1813). In 1805 Russia occupied - Garabagh, Shirvan and Sheki khanates, in 1806 - Derbend, Quba, Baku, Lankaran khanates. In 1810 was occupied Abkhazia. The first Russian-Iranian War was completed with the conclusion of Gulistan treaty in 1813. (Sobraniye dokumentov, p.72-73.) Thus, in a short period of time - the first decade of the XIX century - the Russian Empire annexed South Caucasus's entire territory, with the exception of Ahaltshy pashalik and some districts of Black Sea areas, being in the hands of Ottomans, and Irevan and Nakhchivan khanates, still remain under the power of Qajar Iran.

Fifth stage (1826-1828) second Russian-Iranian war was declared. The treaty of Gulistan had left a number of vague points in terms of territorial division of the Caucasus; both sides were dissatisfied with the status quo and negotiations did not solve the problem; leading ulama and top government officials pressured the shah for holy war (jihad) against the Russians; Iran opened the new round of hostility in 1826 and was decisively defeated. In 1827, Russian troops occupied Irevan and Nakhchivan khanate. According to the terms of the treaty of Turkamanchay (1828), the Khanates of Irevan and Nakhichevan (i.e., Northern Azerbaijan) passed to Russia.

According to the Gulistan (1813) and Turkamanchay Treaties (1828) Qajar Iran finally gave up South Caucasus in favor of the Russian Empire. All war campaigns (1804-1813 and 1826-28) carried out in South Caucasus ended dramatically for its people, especially Azerbaijani. Thus, Azerbaijan lands were division along the Araz river, which separates the two parts as a political boundary to this day. The land north of the Araz river is now the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the land south of the Araz is referred to as Iranian Azerbaijan and is under the administration of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Sixth stage (1828-1829) of successful completion of the war with Qajar Iran allowed to Nikolay I start a war against the Ottoman Empire (1828-1829), not to recognize the inclusion of South Caucasus lands to Russia. Despite the fact that the major fighting occurred in the Balkan theater of war, the Caucasus issue also played important role. Under the terms of a peace treaty of Adrianopol (1829), the entire Caucasus, Black Sea coast from the mouth of the Kuban to the post of St. Nicholas (near Poti) finally passed to Russia. Ottomans recognized the inclusion of South Caucasus lands to Russia in accordance with Gulistan and Turkamanchay treaties. So formally and actually complete approved Russia in the Caucasus.

Seventh, the final stage was the creation by the Russian empire on the lands of Azerbaijan (Nakhchivan and Irevan khanates) new Armenian oblast (district) (March, 1828) (AKAK, v.VII, №437, p.487), a month after the conclusion of Turkamanchay treaty. The policy of the Russian empire was that, based on the Christian population (Armenians and Georgians), to oust the Muslim (Azerbaijanis), regarding them as unreliable element, considering that the creation of a new Christian state on South Caucasus will help to it's strengthen in region.

Thus, the main focus of Russia's imperial policy in the Caucasus at the XVIII and beginning of the XIX centuries was to create a «buffer» zone, with a view to establishing a military base for opposition to the dominant in the region neighboring states: Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran. As a result, the main victim of policies carried out by Russia in the Caucasus was, of course, the people of Azerbaijan, which lost part of their historic lands.

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