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Bringing democracy into Iran: a Russian project for the separation of Azerbaijan

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A number of substantial works have been written about the Great Game and its influence on the entire Persianate World.¹ Post-colonial theory allowed researchers to look from different angles at the political and military developments of the British-Russian standoff in Iran, Central Asia, Turkey, Afghanistan and even India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² Later, drawing on the post-modernist concepts of the second half of the twentieth century, researchers discerned more nuances in the generally imperialist black-and-white picture, with its binary division into oppressors and oppressed. By the late twentieth century, the generalist case of West European civilisation's encroachment on the Oriental Other had been measured and assessed. Since then, notions such as cultural interaction between the Other and the Self, discourses on national identity, power/knowledge relations, and the role of the intellectual have begun to be applied to the Russian case, which has proved somewhat more nuanced, according to Nathaniel Knight and David Schimmelpenninck.³ In addition, as demonstrated by the most recent scholarship, Russia's relations with its Persianate 'inner'/'own' and 'outer' Orient were central to her Eastern policies throughout the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth century, and the Caspian region remained in focus throughout this period.⁴ Therefore, it is within this methodological framework that Russia's multi-dimensional interaction with Iran, especially the Caspian region, seems of particular epistemological interest.

Although the history of Russian-Iranian relations remains seriously understudied, few students of modern Iranian history would deny the oppressive role played by Imperial Russia in Iran during the nineteenth century and nearly two decades into the twentieth century. The shadow of the 'big northern neighbour' continued to impend during most of the Soviet period. This article mainly focuses on the Russian case and does not address the British imperialist involvement in Persian affairs, which, in many senses, was no less detrimental to Iran's development.⁵ The post-colonial historiography seems to have exhausted the topic already. However, practically nothing has been written about the conceptual shifts in Russia's Persian policy, which began immediately after the February Revolution of 1917. Little is known about the large utopian project whereby Russia was to bring 'its own democracy' to the north of Iran before further proliferation throughout the entire country. Of course, in the spirit of the Great Game, this was meant to facilitate Russia's political and trade expansion down to the Persian Gulf, which had been the eventual goal for many decades.⁶

Drawing on documents from Russian, Georgian, and British archives, this article studies the correspondence of British political and military authorities in the region with London, and the correspondence of the Russian Legation in Tehran with the ministers of the short-lived Provisional and White governments of Russia. It also analyses the private notes of the individuals who conceived the project, firstly the Russian intelligence officer Staff Captain Konstantin Smirnov (1877–1938),⁷ who was Ahmad Shah's private tutor, and secondly, the influential Russian diplomat

and the scholar of the Persianate World, Vladimir Minorsky (1877-1966).⁸ In doing so, this case-study highlights the interplay of power relations, as well as the decisive local agency of these scholars, who were deeply influenced by the discourses of the time. This research is thus situated within the Foucauldian concept of the productive interaction of power/knowledge relations and Bourdieusian notions of symbolic capital.⁹ The article addresses the story of this utopian project within the three main sub-periods: its conceptual inception, 1908-1909; its consideration in Russia and unaccomplished implementation in Iran, February-October 1917; and its unexpected transformation and outcomes, 1917-1919.

Inception, 1908-1909

This project stems from reflection on the developments of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (*mashru'eh*, 1905-11) and the role of Iranian Azeris therein by these two experts on Iran, who operated within the grid of power relations in Iran: Smirnov in the Russian military and Minorsky in the Russian diplomatic establishment. Being of the same age and having started work in Iran under the same Russian Minister Nikolay Hartwig (1857-1914), they were very close, both professionally and personally.¹⁰ While Smirnov remained in Soviet Tiflis after 1919, the two men continued their frequent correspondence even after Minorsky became *beloemigrant* (a member of the White Emigration), as defined by the Soviet OGPU-NKVD-KGB.¹¹ Smirnov and Minorsky remained close friends remotely until January 1938, when Smirnov was arrested by the Georgian branch of the NKDV and executed.¹²

On his arrival in Tehran on 6 June 1907, Smirnov met second dragoman Minorsky for the first time and lived in his Tehran apartment for several months.¹³ During the next few years Russian ministers summoned Smirnov to act as an interpreter during periods of Minorsky's absence, when no one else with the same command of Persian served at the Mission.¹⁴ Both men proved staunch apologists of the Russian Cause (*Russkoe delo*), sincerely believing in the superiority of Russian culture and upholding whatever was in Russia's state interest abroad. They also vigorously counteracted whatever in Iran was in the interests of other states, particularly European powers.¹⁵

In the course of the *mashru'eh*, some Russian diplomats and military officers, in a rather Saidian orientalist mode, concluded that since the areas on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan were significantly more developed in economic and cultural terms than the rest of Iran, the peoples inhabiting these areas were intellectually more capable and politically more active. On the other hand, their national character was allegedly significantly different from the inhabitants of the rest of the country – Persians (*persy*), and they did not feel much affinity with each other.¹⁶ In 1908, Smirnov wrote:

It seems to me that everything should end up with the separation of Azerbaijan. A Persian and an Azeri are too different in spirit, and they have long despised each other. Arrogant and riotous Azeris despise the submissive Persian for his cowardice, and Persians call Azeris *tork-e khar* [donkeys]. After the crack-down on the *majles*, Persians apparently forgot their claims immediately.¹⁷

He then continued, implying that Russia should annex Azerbaijan:

Tagiev's¹⁸ steamers make their way from Baku to Anzali within eighteen hours. It is evident that Azeris are capable of competing with us on the Caspian Sea, and maybe it will turn out that they are no weaker than us on land, in many industrial, technical, and trade affairs. In one word, I want to say that one should take the events in Azerbaijan seriously right now. Until it is late, one should act there vigorously, without any fear to look into the face of foreign powers. After all, nobody will wage war on us because of Azerbaijan.¹⁹

Such controversial observations were not rare at that time and were not characteristic only of Russian military officers. Following the most straightforward features of what was later defined by Edward Said under the notion of Orientalism, practically all students of Iran were preoccupied

with the putative 'Persian character' in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁰ Some Russian tsarist diplomats-scholars, such as Basile Nikitine (1885-1960), interested in the 'psyche of Persians [*psikhika persov*]', continued to work on the topic even after emigration.²¹ Those who pointed out positive Persian characteristics were in a stark minority, mainly university scholars of Iran who tended to romanticize their subject, although not without reasons and proper substantiation. Among them were Professor Edward G. Browne (1862-1926), using epithets such as 'the enormous strength of Persian character', 'the most faithful and devoted friends', 'possessing passive courage' and, finally, 'open-handed, good-natured [...] and extremely human',²² and his Russian counterpart, Professor Valentin Zhukovskii (1858-1818), who always resented the orientalist and condescending approach of his disciples towards Persians.²³

However, the overwhelming majority, European diplomats, military officers, religious missionaries, journalists and others with a varying degree of Oriental studies backgrounds,²⁴ were critical of the putative Persian character and were stigmatised by Browne as 'the exponents of *Welt-Politik*'.²⁵ Geoffrey Nash, in *From Empire to Orient: Travellers to the Middle East 1830-1926*, cites other comments by the British which are opposite to those of Browne and Zhukovskii: 'soft', 'mild', 'effeminate', 'ignorant', and 'cowardly'.²⁶ A French contemporary Victor Bérard in his eye-witness account *Revolutions de la Perse: Les Provinces, Les Peuples Et Le Gouvernement Du Roi Des Rois* also ascribed a 'Persian character' to the events: 'Démonstration toute persane: le Français fait des barricades, l'Anglais, des meetings et des processions, le Russe, des bombes, le Turc, des massacres; le Persan fait des *bast*, des "fuites"'.²⁷

Moreover, the Bolshevik Eastern Section of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, in its report of 1 January 1922 to Lenin on the current state of affairs in Iran also referred to Bérard's pejorative comment. The red *Iranists* concluded that, in addition to other factors undermining the feasibility of a communist revolution in Iran, the 'Persian character' would prove incapable of revolutionary violence.²⁸ Curiously enough, it was the Soviet ambassador Sergei Pastukhov (pseudonym Iranskii) (1887-1940), one of the founders of Soviet *Iranology*, who peacefully²⁹ ended this sacred old tradition of sitting *bast*, a form of protest expressed by protesters taking refuge in a mosque or the foreign embassy of a mighty power. He proudly reported to the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maksim Litvinov (1876-1951) that he had ejected protesters attempting to sit *bast* on the territory of the Soviet Embassy, and had shut its doors, criticising the former plenipotentiaries Fedor Rotshtein (1871-1953) and Boris Shumiatskii (1886-1938) who had kept the Embassy park open for 'Persians'.³⁰ So it is not surprising that Smirnov saw ethnic Persians as lacking not only in determination and courage, but also in the capacity to be a leading ethnic group.³¹

Minorsky echoed Smirnov: 'This national group [the Azeris] personifies the strongest and the healthiest nucleus of the Iranian state organism'.³² He stressed a distinct history of Azerbaijan, ethnographic and linguistic features of its population, and the sharp contrast of the national character of 'decisive and more straightforward Azerbaijani Turks from more sophisticated and finer but softer and weaker Persians'.³³ In the project he sent to the Imperial Ministry for Foreign Affairs in early 1909, he had proposed reorganising the Russian General Consulate in Azerbaijan into a Political Residency, similar to the British one in Bushehr, and making other Russian local consuls subordinate to the Residency. He also proposed allowing Azeris to convene their national assembly with a right to conduct reforms, chiefly in their taxation and judicial systems, albeit under the control of Russian advisers specially seconded to Azerbaijan. Pointing out the current inability to reform all of Iran in one fell swoop, and stressing Azerbaijan's close ties with the significantly more developed Russian Trans-Caucasus, Minorsky suggested transplanting its successful experience onto the soil of Azerbaijan and making it an experimental field for reforms to spread further, all throughout Iran.³⁴

Russian diplomats, however, had thought of initiating reforms in Azerbaijan even before revolutionary unrest broke out in both countries. This Iranian province neighboured the Baku province, the most economically developed region in the Russian Caucasus and Central Asia.

The 'inconspicuous penetration' into Iran, conceived by Russian Finance Minister Serguei Witte (1892-1903) and War Minister Aleksei Kuropatkin (1898-1904), was to start through Azerbaijan and the northern ports of Iran and flow all the way down to the Persian Gulf.³⁵ As early as 1904, Russian Minister in Iran Piotr Vlasov (1850-1904) attempted to put pressure on *vali-ahd* (heir to the throne) Mohammad-Ali, urging him to start reforms in Azerbaijan, albeit with no tangible result.³⁶ However, at that time the Russian government was not considering investing vast human resources. The unleashed unrest made its own corrections to the course of events. Minorsky's reports must have significantly contributed to the Ministry's overall impression, created by the numerous requests from Russian consuls stationed in north and north-west Persia, to bring in Russian troops.³⁷ It was believed that before implementing reforms, Russia should first restore order in the region most troubled by bandits and revolutionaries, altogether designated as *ashrar* (brigands) by both Iranian and Russian officials.³⁸ Russian Minister Nikolay Hartwig (1857-1914) previously stressed: 'Establishing calm in Azerbaijan, which has a general importance for our interests, is only possible under the shadow of employing military force.'³⁹

By spring 1909, the situation had deteriorated to the extent that not only did Russian local consuls advocate for Russian troop deployment, but also the British and the French, even at the highest diplomatic level. The archive of Russia's Ministry for Foreign Affairs retains noteworthy relevant correspondence. On 13 April 1909, Russian Chargé d'affaires in Tehran, Evgenii Sablin (1875-1949) cabled to Foreign Minister Alexander Izvol'skii (1856-1919) that the British Ambassador George Barclay (1862-1921) had visited him, asking 'to immediately send a cable to Tiflis and demand troops' to tackle the catastrophic situation in Tabriz.⁴⁰ Moreover, according to Barclay's reports, on 20 April, the British Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey (1862-1933) cabled to his Ambassador in St Petersburg, Arthur Nicolson (1849-1928), ordering him to appeal to the Russian government and request the urgent deployment of Russian troops in Azerbaijan.⁴¹ The Russian government, traditionally extremely bureaucratic and slow, acted surprisingly swiftly, as if prepared for this move. On 22 April, Izvol'skii notified Sablin that to protect foreign citizens he had ordered the Viceroy in the Caucasus, Count Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov (1837-1916), to 'immediately and forcefully' send troops to Azerbaijan.⁴² So began the Anglo-Russian military intervention in Azerbaijan, as named by *Times* correspondent in Tehran David Fraser, who, in 1910, pointed out that the joint efforts of Britain and Russia had impelled the deployment of Russian troops in April 1909.⁴³ In fact, it proved a prologue to the 1911 full-scale occupation of the north-west and northern provinces of Iran, resulting in the final crack-down on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911.

Efforts to restore order in the region led to an increase in Russian military force, deeper involvement in combat against revolutionaries and eventually to the suppression of the *mashruteh*. The northern parts of Iran continued to remain of vital strategic importance for the Russian Empire. The former Russian Minister to Iran (1876-1883), a scholar of Iran and a member of the State Council Ivan Zinov'ev (1835-1917) stressed in 1910: 'From the view of the interests of Russia, the disorderliness of the northern areas of Iran, and especially Azerbaijan, from wall to wall the neighbour of the Caucasus, whose people are ethnic Turks and famous for their roughness and toughness, is very damaging.'⁴⁴ Thus Russians perceived the north of Iran as possessing a two-vector potential: in the southward direction, as a promising springboard for the transformation of all of Iran, and northward, as possessing dangerous potential for the destabilisation of the Empire's south in the absence of proactive measures on behalf of Russia.

The Russian military force, occupying not only Azerbaijan but the entire north and north-east of Iran, eventually amounted to almost twenty thousand by the outbreak of the First World War.⁴⁵ After the opening of the so-called *Persidskii front* [the Persian front], which became the south flank of the First World War theatre, this number gradually grew to eighty or ninety thousand.⁴⁶ However the restoration of order and the later securing of the Persian front left neither energy nor resources for the continuation of the project in war conditions. In addition, in late 1911, Minorsky had been assigned to supervise the topographical surveillance of the

western border of Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan, i.e. the areas of his scholarly interest, for the Quadripartite Boundary Delimitation Commission.⁴⁷ Thus, he went to the Russian Embassy in Istanbul as a commissar on behalf of Russia, and, as evidenced by his diaries, no longer followed up his report to the Ministry, having suspended his project until 1917.⁴⁸

Revival and setback, February–October 1917

Although it is argued by some established scholars of Iran that the February Revolution and the fall of the Russian monarchy did not bring any changes to Russia's Persian policies,⁴⁹ this assessment is far from the actual developments within the foreign affairs apparatus of the nascent democratic Russian state. In July 1917, the second Minister-Chair of the Provisional Government Alexander Kerensky (1881–1970) ordered the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian expedition forces in Iran, General Nikolai Baratov (1865–1932), to halt his advance into the country.⁵⁰ On 11 May 1917, the Military Commission headed by General Potapov (1871–1946)⁵¹ had even attempted to withdraw all Russian personnel of the Persian Cossack Division, but the decision was later overridden by Kerensky because of the deteriorating situation on the Persian Front.⁵² The Persian Cossack Brigade, which had been deployed into a division of roughly eight thousand men, was an efficient auxiliary to Baratov's forces against the Ottomans and Kurds. Baratov made particularly frequent use of the Tabriz detachment, the largest and the best equipped with machine guns and artillery.⁵³ Therefore, Kerensky opted to replace the Tsarist commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade Major-General Baron von Maydell with Colonel Georgii Clergé – a senior officer of liberal views who later, in December 1917, was even accused of sympathising with Bolsheviks by his Cossacks, as reported by Minorsky.⁵⁴

Sensing the spirit of the moment, the Russian Legation in Tehran, headed by Minorsky in the absence of Nikolai von Etter,⁵⁵ attempted to spearhead the underlying changes to Russia's Persian policy. On 17 May 1917 Acting Head of the Legation Minorsky cabled Petrograd: 'The liberal movement in northern Persia is clearly and steadily developing under the influence of events in Russia. The English attempts to hold it up either have been fruitless or have compromised the English. [...] The press and society treat Russia with great sympathies.'⁵⁶ Moreover, as early as March–April 1917, almost immediately after the collapse of the Russian monarchy, the Russian Legation in Tehran and the new Minister for Foreign Affairs Pavel Miliukov (1859–1943) engaged in an intense cable exchange.⁵⁷ As Acting Head of the Russian Legation, Minorsky reported his proposals for radical changes in Russia's Persian policy intended to swing support from the monarchy to the Iranian democrats, and to promote the image of a new democratic Russia in Iran. He wrote:

Rapprochement with Persia should be mainly through the public. At the same time, we cannot fully ignore the elite in power yet, although they are utter rot in Persia. Rapprochement should be made with the middle class mainly grouping around the *majles*. The majority in the next *majles* will belong to democrats. The programme proposed by them seems very harmless on the current Russian scale, but for Persia which has not left the feudal-serfdom life yet, which has no factories and no convenient communications, it is of a very progressive character and is capable of uniting the best elements.⁵⁸

Later, Minorsky formed a delegation of five members of the *majles* headed by Zoka-ol-Molk (Mohammad-Ali Foroughi),⁵⁹ with whom he had established close relations, and asked Miliukov to have a personal meeting with them in Petrograd.⁶⁰

Minorsky's interaction with the professor of history Miliukov, who became Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Provisional Government in early March 1917, is another impressive manifestation of power/knowledge relations. By the time Minorsky became Acting Head of the Russian Legation in February 1917, he had also become well-known among Russian historians. He had kept in touch with his Lazarev Institute tutor Professor Agafangel Krymskii (1871–1942) who held Minorsky in very high esteem.⁶¹ Krymskii had close academic contacts with Miliukov, and at

Minorsky's request, he drew Miliukov's attention to the situation in Iran and introduced Minorsky to him. On 13 April 1917, he wrote to Miliukov:

Taking this opportunity, I would like to draw your attention to Persia and to the staff in the Legation and consulates [...] As someone who knows well the ins and outs of the Orient (how many of my students are there!), I have to confirm that our diplomatic representatives in Persia, both high-rank and low-rank, are unsatisfactory, to a significant extent. I think, you have already determined the removal of Etter yourself. Indeed, this mediocre and ignorant man, harmful also under the old regime, is more inept under the current one. Meanwhile, I want to draw your attention to someone who not only could replace him but in general could be an excellent informant in the affairs of Persia and the entire Muslim Orient. This is the Tehran Legation Secretary Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky. A widely educated person, extremely talented and richly gifted by nature [...], he speaks all the oriental languages. He has travelled Persia far and wide, knows her, understands her. He is a person of crystal honesty and integrity. In terms of politics, before the revolution, he was a supporter of the English monarchy, now, perhaps, he is also a republican. I consider it my moral duty, now that there are so few people, to draw your special attention to Minorsky.⁶²

Thus, skilfully using his symbolic capital in this interplay of power relations, Minorsky succeeded in gaining attention for his project on behalf of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The direct exchange of cables between Minorsky and Miliukov intensified.⁶³

However, at the same time, Minorsky's cables demonstrate that he remembered Russia's overarching strategic tasks in the south and considered them unshakable. As before, when in 1904 the Russian Foreign Minister Count Vladimir Lamsdorf (1845-1907) instructed the newly appointed ambassador to Tehran Aleksei Speyer (1854-1916),⁶⁴ under whom Minorsky started his career, these tasks were the securing of access to the straits in West Asia and to the Persian Gulf, as well as the consolidation of Russia's political and economic grip even in countries such as 'weak and decrepit Persia', but this time using different methods, as he put it.⁶⁵ In May 1917, he wrote to Petrograd:

The Anglo-Russian Convention should remain unshakeable, however, its Russian part should shift towards liberals. It is desirable to entice the English to follow us. The fact that there was no opposition on our behalf toward the unavoidable convocation of the *majles* made an excellent impression. The reduction of our interference with Persian affairs is necessary, especially with the litigations of our protégés. Rapprochement with middle classes is necessary. Consulates should in every way facilitate the emancipation of peasants and the protection of their rights. The relevant policy conducted by Turks during the occupation gained them a lot of sympathy.

Now, it is not an appropriate moment for taking new big concessions. The main task is the turning of sympathies toward us, which is particularly important in this common danger and the likeliness of a revolution in Persia.⁶⁶

After the reshuffling of the Provisional Government cabinet, Minorsky continued to follow up his project with Miliukov's successor Mikhail Tereshchenko (1888-1956),⁶⁷ arguing that this was exactly the time to take advantage of the growing national self-consciousness of Iranian Turks. However, in addition to Azerbaijan, the project now included the southern coast and some areas to the south-east of the Caspian Sea, in fact those territories under Russian military occupation.⁶⁸ Minorsky thus maintained that the 'separation' of these areas from Iran as autonomous regions would lead to their convergence with Russia's Trans-Caucasus and the Trans-Caspian, whose successful experience could be used for the required reforms and improvements under Russian direct control. Experts on administrative and land reforms were to be seconded to the numerous Russian consulates in those areas. Their activities were to be organised in such a way that the reforms would be perceived as being implemented not from the top but from below, as if they had been undertaken based on the demands of Iranians themselves.⁶⁹

There is still a lot of prejudice toward Russia, and one cannot destroy it at once, but if Persians are convinced that we really stand for reforms, that we know more than them, that we do not want to make a hollow favour but to help, that we are not after profiteering concessions but we want economic growth

for Persians, much will be achieved in a much easier way. I simply repeat my old formula: Azerbaijan must become an experimental field where we can carry out the experiments of our new policy.⁷⁰

Minorsky then concluded that Russia's main interests in Iran were to remain the same, namely land acquisition, colonisation, construction of railways and telegraph lines, as well as access to the waters of the Persian Gulf; but that Russia should learn from the methods of France in Morocco and those of Britain in India and Egypt. According to him, the new democratic Russia was destined to play the role for the Orient that France had played for European peoples.⁷¹

It should be pointed out, nevertheless, that not all of Minorsky's projects were so grand in scale nor his sentiments so altruistic. In addition to the separation of Azerbaijan or, at least, making it autonomous, Minorsky also proposed another minor but no less curious project prompted by the deep ethnographic knowledge and experience gained during the field activities of the Quadripartite Boundary Delimitation Commission in 1913-1914.⁷² Arguing that Sulaymaniyah had always been home of Kurdish writing, he stated that the inhabitants of that area were closely connected to the Kurds of Soujboulagh [modern Mahabad] in language and origin. 'It would deserve our efforts to create a separatist movement, while promising Kurds independence or semi-independence under the sovereignty of Persia [...] Emissaries can be chosen among our captives from Sulaymaniyah. This plan seems efficient, especially in terms of our control over railway access to our Persian zone from Mesopotamia.'⁷³ Minorsky sent this proposal to the Ministry which was still imperial, several days before the February Revolution, and thus complied with the relevant spirit and formerly established practices. The new liberal Ministry paid no attention to this project. However, it is likely that when the USSR began to play the Kurdish card in the late 1920s, its young diplomats and *INO OGPU*⁷⁴ officers were well familiar with Minorsky's proposals, as they were in the habit of reading their predecessors' reports very attentively.⁷⁵

Unexpected transformations, 1917-1919

The Bolsheviks introduced their own corrections into Minorsky's beautiful utopia and did not allow Russia to become a second France. As Aliev, a Russian historian of Iran wrote: 'The political-economic projects devised by late Tsarist Russia and by the Provisional Government after the February Revolution demonstrated the Russian bourgeoisie's increasing interest toward Iran. The oncoming new wave of the Bolshevik revolution turned out the force that in a blink overthrew these claims and the hopes for the imperial legacy.'⁷⁶ However, this did not prevent Minorsky from the partial implementation of his project, but with different driving forces and a surprisingly reverse operative vector. Regional developments in the following years became an intrinsic part of historical continuities so typical for Russo-Iranian interaction throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

As pointed out by Stephanie Cronin: 'Iran between 1908 and 1909 had offered Caucasian revolutionaries and Tsarist officers a new opportunity to continue an existing conflict. Between 1917 and 1920, Iran again constituted an extension and outpost of the mortal class and national struggle taking place across the Russian Empire.'⁷⁷ In addition to those two, there were at least five developments of the same kind during the first half of the twentieth century. First was the Russian occupation of the northern and north-western provinces of Iran, ensuing from the struggle between revolutionaries and Russian state forces and the Great War. Next was the 18 May 1920 landing of Bolshevik forces in Anzali and the subsequent establishment of the short-lived Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, with its capital in Rasht.⁷⁸ After that came the clandestine activities of the *Cheka-OGPU-NKVD* on Iranian territory in pursuit of White emigrants during the 1920s-1930s, with street shootings and quiet poisonings.⁷⁹ Later, Reza Shah's independent foreign policy gave Stalin a pretext to organise the allied occupation of Iran, dividing Iran into zones of influence, similar to those that existed during the First World War. This

eventually resulted in a new attempt by the 'big northern neighbour' to turn Azerbaijan into an 'experimental field', leading to the first episode in the unfolding Cold War, called the 'Iran Crisis of 1946'. However, the events that took place in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan and the Caspian, embracing vast areas both in Iran and the former Russian Empire, within a few years after the Bolshevik coup constituted an essential continuation of the Smirnov-Minorsky project, this time with a diametrically opposite, northward democratising vector of application.

The phenomenal development of the Caucasian Caspian Alliance Government between mid-1918 and early 1919, from dawn to apex and sunset, can only be explained by three main factors. The first was the amalgamation of the Russian diplomatic corps and military in Iran and their development into the most powerful regional force. Brilliantly navigating power/knowledge relations, Minorsky found himself at the head of this force due to his undisputed status as the main expert on the region within the international diplomatic corps. This status, acknowledged even by London's Foreign Office as early as 1913,⁸⁰ proved extremely instrumental. His increased political activism in the Russian Cause (*Russkoe delo*) certainly also contributed to the eventual outcome.⁸¹ The second critical factor was the strategic importance of the Caspian region, with Baku as its centre, in the First World War, as demonstrated by Saul Kelly.⁸² The third factor was the region's crucial influence specifically for Russians. It projected to the west, south and east of the Caspian Sea, with strong civilising/democratising potential, as conceived by Minorsky. After the emergence of the Bolshevik regime, this region acquired similar potential northwards, which Minorsky also understood, as demonstrated in his correspondence with the Supreme Command of the White movement.⁸³

The Caucasian Caspian Alliance Government, with Baku as its centre, was established in September 1918 mainly due to Minorsky's continuous efforts from December 1917.⁸⁴ The origins of this unique political and military enterprise are rooted in the period from December 1917 to August 1918. Acting over the head of the inept Russian Minister von Etter⁸⁵ First Secretary of the Russian Legation Vladimir Minorsky undertook to form a regional anti-Bolshevik resistance hub, supported by the Persian Cossack Division and the British-funded remnants of Baratov's expeditionary forces in Iran. Having struck a deal with Major-General Dunsterville (1865-1946) in close coordination with Minorsky, Lieutenant-Colonel Lazar' Bicherakhov (1882-1952), in command of several hundred Cossacks, constituted the core of Dunsterforce. He made his way from Kermanshah to Baku via Tabriz and Anzali by June 1918, inflicting a decisive defeat on the Jangalis at Manjil on 12 June 1918.⁸⁶ In July, on the other side of the Caspian Sea, the united democratic forces of Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, supported by the British forces stationed in Khorasan, organised an anti-Bolshevik coup in Askhabad (modern Ashghabad), creating the Trans-Caspian Government, applied to Minorsky for further guidance.⁸⁷ As early as September 1918, the alliance of Trans-Caspian and Caucasian political and military authorities was proclaimed with Colonel Bicherakhov as its head.⁸⁸

Shortly afterwards, Bicherakhov's Caucasian Army of thirty thousand men⁸⁹ controlled the entire Trans-Caspian region, embracing Azerbaijan and northern Iran, the larger part of the Caucasus, Dagestan and the territories north of the river Terek, and was preparing to take Astrakhan – the largest Russian port on the river Volga.⁹⁰ Having authored the Government constituent charter, Minorsky received the post of Minister for External Relations (Foreign Affairs), but was the spiritual father to the whole enterprise and guided Bicherakhov in all political affairs.⁹¹ It was Minorsky who negotiated with the Provisional All-Russia Government (headquartered in Ufa and then in Omsk) the official acknowledgement of the Caucasian Caspian Alliance Government and obtained the rank of Major-General for Bicherakhov from the Supreme Command of the White forces in Omsk.⁹²

Among other stipulations, the Government Charter defined its main principles as 'restoration of Russia's statehood and reunification of the divided regions of the Russian Democratic Republic, continuation of the struggle against German-Turkish aggression and the establishment of order and legality on the fundamentals that existed before 25 October 1917'.⁹³ The government proclaimed its ultimate goal after the cleansing of Russia from the 'Bolshevik disease' as the

hand-over of power to the All-Russia Constituent Assembly to decide the further destiny of the country. Bolsheviks were associated with terror, exploitation of international enmity, and conciliation with the external enemy. As conceived by Minorsky, their cooperation with Bicherakhov was to 'support the Russian Cause' in the civil war.⁹⁴ Thus the multi-dimensional importance of the region made it feasible to turn the civilising mission vector of the Russian Cause 180 degrees, targeting the 'wild barbarian hordes of Bolsheviks', as perceived by Bicherakhov and Minorsky.⁹⁵

However, the success of the Caucasian Caspian Alliance Government was not destined to last long. In early 1919, after a series of successful operations against the Bolsheviks, General Denikin's army reached the region.⁹⁶ Bicherakhov's forces were to merge with those of Anton Denikin. Following new priorities, the British switched their attention to Denikin and withdrew their financial support from the Government. They also insisted on the dismissal of the Government.⁹⁷ Another pillar of this Government, the Persian Cossack Division, although funded by the British, was strongly opposed to the increasing British influence in Iran, particularly, to the 'corrupt Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919' that would downgrade Iran to the status of a British protectorate. Thus, the British had to take effective measures aimed at 'getting rid of Starosselsky [Russian Commander-in-Chief of the Division]' and 'weeding out Russian officers' from the Division, as formulated by Sir Percy Cox.⁹⁸ The Division finally lost the remnants of its Russian political autonomy.

By October 1920, the British had dismissed Russian senior officers, installing British and Iranian replacements in their place.⁹⁹ The British also declared Minorsky *persona non grata* in Iran, making their financial support of the Russian Legation conditional on Minorsky not taking over from von Etter who was leaving Iran. This was because Minorsky continued to advocate the restoration of the territorial integrity of Russia within the pre-First World War borders, whereas the British had by then opted to support the newly established independent Caucasian republics.¹⁰⁰ Minorsky was also allegedly 'very actively intriguing'¹⁰¹ against the Anglo-Persian Agreement. The British military and political authorities escalated the issue via Sir Percy Cox up to Earl Curzon who had to ask the Foreign Minister of the White Government Sazonov to have Minorsky transferred to Paris 'in a kindly way'.¹⁰² Eventually, after continuous efforts and lengthy correspondence at the highest level in British, French and Russian diplomatic, military and government circles, specifically regarding 'the Minorsky problem', Cox cabled to Curzon with relief, as if reporting the problem solved: 'Minorsky left 11th Sep. for Paris.'¹⁰³ So perished the last Russian hopes to become a France for the Orient and to bring democracy to both the Other and the Self.

Conclusion

This case-study has presented another curious chapter in Russia's multifaceted presence in Iran. It has for the first time brought to light and critically questioned the story of a utopian political initiative of a significantly unconventional character for Russia at that time. All three episodes were undoubtedly doomed to failure primarily because of Russia's own domestic socio-political developments during the first two decades of the twentieth century. However, they are closely connected by several factors highlighting the following remarkable patterns. First, the project was intellectually rooted in Russian Orientalism, the main discursive component of which was the belief that Russians were bringing the same west-European *mission civilisatrice* to the Orient, but were capable of doing this better than Europeans, since they were spiritually closer to Orientals and understood them better. Secondly, although bringing democracy (in its conventional 'western' understanding) from a country such as Russia sounds ambiguous, this notion – combining imperialist expansion and naive idealism with tinges of Russian messianism – stemmed from intellectuals speaking several languages and closely communicating with the representatives of various governments and societies. They had every opportunity to analytically

juxtapose different cultures and political systems. According to these intellectuals, it was not simply philanthropic idealism but rather straightforward political imperatives that should have been followed in Iran to succeed in the realisation of the Russian Cause. Third, it is also illustrative of the power/knowledge nexus that, in contrast to the Tsarist period, Minorsky was finally heard by the new democratic Russian government, which was significantly closer to academia. Only this development enabled Minorsky to capitalise on his academic relationship with Miliukov, and to receive a green light for such an ambitious project. This is supported even more clearly by the episode with the Caucasian Caspian Alliance Government. In the absence of central power, the regional periphery perceived Russia's Legation under Minorsky's informal leadership as a legitimate hub of central power, due to its symbolic capital accumulated through decades of the Legation's manifold activities in the region. However, this empowering qualitative transformation during the third episode became feasible due to the Caspian itself fusing together the strategic factors, such as oil, trade and logistic communications, multicultural cohesion and the entanglement of global interests with local. During the decade in question (1909–1919), the Caspian formed an extremely dense hub in cultural, political, and military terms, as well as the centre of multi-vector regional and global impact due to its geographical location and geo-political importance.

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Notes

1. See, for example, E. Sergeev, *The Great Game, 1856–1907: Russo-British relations in Central and East Asia* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press) 2013; F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia: Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013); S. Sukhorukov, *Iran mezhdu Britaniei i Rossiei. Ot politiki do ekonomiki* [Iran between Britain and Russia: From politics to economy] (St Petersburg: Aleteia, 2009); O. Bast, “‘Sheer Madness’ or ‘Railway Politics’ Iranian Style? – The Controversy over Railway Development Priorities Within the Persian Government in 1919–1920 and British Railway Imperialism”, *Iran* Vol.55, No.1 (2017), pp.62–72; A. Wynn, *Persia in the Great Game: Sir Percy Sykes: Explorer, Consul, Soldier, Spy* (London: Thistle, 2015); P. Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (London: Kodansha, 1994); G. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London: Spottiswoode and Co., 1892); *Russia in Central Asia and the Anglo-Russian Question* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1889).
2. See D. Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860–1914* (Oxford: Berg, 1987), pp.333–5; S. Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 2013), p.1; D. Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p.93; R. Matthee, *Infidel Aggression: The Russian Assault on the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza, Mashhad, 1912* in R. Matthee and E. Andreeva (eds), *Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond* (London:

- I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp.136–69; E. Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism* (New York: Routledge, 2007); M. Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism: The Ideal Anarchists, 1800–1914* (London: Routledge, 2016).
3. See N. Knight, 'Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851–1862: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?', *Slavic Review*, Vol.59, No.1 (2000), pp.74–100; 'On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol.1, No.4 (2000), pp.701–15; D. Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.65–9; A. Khalid, 'Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol.1, No.4 (2000), pp.691–99; M. Todorova, 'Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate between Nathaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol.1, No.4 (2000), pp.717–27; S. Cronin, 'Introduction: Edward Said, Russian Orientalism and Soviet Iranology', *Iranian Studies*, Vol.48, No.5 (2015), pp.647–62 (648–52); Cronin, *Iranian-Russian Encounters*, pp.1–2.
 4. See Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia* (particularly pp.5–7, 225–31); D. Volkov, 'Persian Studies and the Military in Late Imperial Russia (1863–1917): State Power in the Service of Knowledge?' *Iranian Studies*, Vol.47, No.6 (2014), pp.915–32. See also S. Kelly, 'How far West?: Lord Curzon's Transcaucasian (Mis)Adventure and the Defence of British India, 1918–23', *The International History Review*, Vol.35, No.2 (2011), pp.274–93; V. Genis, *Krasnaia Persiia: Bol'sheviki v Giliane, 1920–1921* [Red Persia: Bolsheviks in Gilan, 1920–1921] (Moscow: NMPI, 2000); V. Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); A. Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011). Also, see Taline Ter Minassian, 'Some Fresh News About the 26 Commissars: Reginald Teague-Jones and the Transcaspian Episode', *Asian Affairs*, Vol.45, No.1 (2014), pp.65–78. In the article, Minassian questions the Soviet version and studies 'how the legend grew and why the involvement of an agent of British Imperialism fitted a propaganda need'. Also see an exhaustive study on Reginald Teague-Jones's persona in Taline Ter Minassian and Tom Rees, *Most Secret Agent of Empire: Reginald Teague-Jones, Master Spy of the Great Game* (London: Hurst, 2014).
 5. See H.L. Stebbins, *British Imperialism in Qajar Iran: Consuls, Agents and Influence in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017); Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*; Sukhorukov, *Iran mezhdū Britanii i Rossii*.
 6. See D. Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–8)' in R. Matthee and E. Andreeva (eds), *Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp.188–216 (p.191).
 7. On Smirnov see Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.166–76. Military orientalist Colonel Smirnov authored a considerable number of works on Persian history, ethnography, geography and economy. Having graduated from the Officers' Courses of Oriental Languages, he served in the Intelligence Unit of the Caucasian Military District Staff and was appointed as Soltan Ahmad Mirza (later Ahmad Shah Qajar)'s personal tutor (1907–1914). He participated in the First World War and after the Russian Civil War he served as an interpreter in the Red Army in the Caucasus. In the 1920–1930s he worked as a research associate in the Academy of Sciences of Georgia before he was executed in 1938. Smirnov's articles were extensively published in military journals and the journal of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (see D. Volkov, 'War and Peace in the Other and the Self: Iran through the eyes of Russian Spies – The case of Konstantin Smirnov (1877–1938) and Leonid Shebarshin (1935–2012)', *Studia Iranica*, Vol.62 (2018), pp.223–58 (p.227)).
 8. On Minorsky see Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)'; Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.183–8; Lang, 'Obituary: Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol.29, No.3 (1966), pp.694–99. A diplomat-vostochnik [orientalist] and an outstanding Russian scholar of Persian history, historical geography, literature and culture. He graduated from the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages. From 1903 he visited Persia on various secondments on behalf of the Russian MID, in 1915–19 worked as Russia's Chargé d'affaires, and he was Acting Head of the Legation after 1916, in the absence of the Russian Minister from Tehran. Having refused to subordinate the Legation to Bolsheviks, he left for France in 1919. In the period 1932–44 he was Professor of Persian studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London (evacuated to Cambridge, 1941–44). He spent his retirement (1944–66) in Cambridge (Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, p.239).
 9. Michel Foucault (1926–1984) offers a concept of the manifold multi-vector relations of power/knowledge nexus where power is exerted by all agents of this interplay towards each other: scholars, experts, institutions, discourses, state and knowledge itself. These relations are characterised by reciprocal productive multi-vector interaction between the knowledge, chasing new resources for self-reproduction and endowing its agents with new capacities, and the state, represented by its own practices, institutions and individuals (Michel Foucault, 'Two Lectures', in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. C. Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p.98; Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.82; Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.33, 58). See also Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); *The Birth of Politics: Lecture at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); *Power, Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980); *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*

- (London: Taylor and Francis, 2005); *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). On the Bourdieusian symbolic capital and habitus see Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp.52–65, 80–121; *Homo Academicus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp.21–35, 62–9, 77–105. On an amazing example of the manifestation of these metaphysical relations interplay see D. Volkov, 'The evil genius of Iranian constitutionalism Bloody Shapshal at the Qajar court', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.56, No.4 (2020), pp.535–48.
10. Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts (henceforth GNCM), f. 39, d. 11, l. 3–4, 16ob., 18 (1907). AV, f. 134, op. 3, d. 799 (Minorsky's correspondence with Smirnov, 1927–1934). See also Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–8)', pp.195–8, 205.
 11. State Archive of the Russian Federation (henceforth GARF), f. 4738, op. 1, d. 401 (before being transferred to the State Archive of the Russian Federation in the 1990s, Minorsky's file had been kept in the KGB Archive; there is still the NKVD stamp on the cover of the file titled '*Beloemigrant Minorsky V.F.*'). OGPU (Ob'edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie) – United State Political Directorate (Soviet secret police in the 1920s).
 12. See Volkov, 'War and Peace in the Other and the Self', pp.244–5.
 13. GNCM, f. 39, d. 11, l. 16ob.
 14. GNCM, f. 39, d. 11, l. 18.
 15. For the detailed deconstruction of the inner Russian discourse on *Russkoe delo* see Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.75, 80, 90. Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–8)', p.202. See also Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, pp.31–46.
 16. GNCM, f. 39, d. 12, l. 74ob.-75 (1908). See also Cronin, *Iranian-Russian Encounters*, p.6. See also H. Berberian, 'Nest of Revolution: The Caucasus, Iran, and Armenians', in R. Matthee and E. Andreeva (eds), *Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp.95–121.
 17. GNCM, f. 39, d. 12, l. 75 (1908).
 18. Zeynalabdin Taghi oglu Taghiyev (1823 or 1838 - 1924), a famous self-made Russian millionaire, industrialist and oil magnate, of Azeri origin who resided in Baku.
 19. GNCM, f. 39, d. 12, l. 75 (1908).
 20. See G. Nash, *From Empire to Orient: Travellers to the Middle East 1830–1926* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p.158.
 21. Columbia University Libraries, BAR Ms Coll/Nikitin (private notes, dated 27/12/1925 and 25/11/1959), as cited in M. Sorokina, 'Vasilii Nikitin: svidetel'skie pokazaniia v dele o russkoi emigratsii' [Vasilii Nikitin: Testimonies for the case about Russian emigration] in O. Korostelev (ed.), *Diaspora: novye materialy* [Diaspora: New Materials] (St Petersburg: Feniks, 2001), pp.587–644 (p.605).
 22. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), pp.vii–viii.
 23. Archive of Orientalists of the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation (henceforth AV), f. 117, op. 1, d. 24, l. 1–19 (Zhukovskii's critique of Belozerskii, 'Pis'ma iz Persii: ot Baku do Isfagani, 1885–1886' [Letters from Persia: from Baku to Isfahan, 1885–1886], pp.1–108). See also Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.65, 151–66.
 24. See Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game*. See also Nash, *From Empire to Orient*.
 25. Browne, *The Persian Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p.viii.
 26. Nash, *From Empire to Orient*, p.158.
 27. V. Bérard, *Revolutions de la Perse: Les Provinces, Les Peuples Et Le Gouvernement Du Roi Des Rois* [Persia's Revolutions: Provinces, Peoples and the King of Kings] (Paris: Colin, 1910), p.352 [A totally Persian demonstration: the French make barricades, the English, meetings and processions, the Russians, bombs, the Turks, massacres; the Persians make bast, 'escapes']. For fresh insightful studies of the practice of *bast* see H. Kamaly, *God and Man in Tehran: Contending Visions of the Divine from the Qajars to the Islamic Republic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp.79–80; P. Eshaghi, 'Quietness beyond Political Power: Politics of Taking Sanctuary (Bast Neshini) in the Shi'ite Shrines of Iran', *Iranian Studies*, Vol.49, No.3, pp.493–514; J. Calmard, 'Bast', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <http://iranica.com/newsite/>, last accessed 1 June 2020.
 28. Russia's State Archive for Socio-Political History (henceforth RGASPI), f. 5, op. 3, d. 609, l. 19–20 (NKID to Lenin, 1 Jan. 1922).
 29. There was another Russian who also was in underlying disagreement with this practice and practised quite different methods (see Matthee, 'Infidel Aggression', pp.136–69).
 30. Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (henceforth AVPRF), f. 94, op. 5a, p. 105, d. 1, l. 272 (to NKID).
 31. GNCM, f. 39, d. 13, l. 123ob. Another curious quotation by Smirnov is that Persians were 'a too-much-peace-loving nation' (f. 39, d. 20, j. 51ob.). Ter-Oganov also points out Smirnov's 'orientalist', in its worst terms, attitude towards Persians at the time (N. Ter-Oganov, 'A Russian Officer's Letters on Russian and British Activities in Iran during World War I', in R. Matthee and E. Andreeva (eds), *Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp.183–84). It is worth mentioning that in 1923 Smirnov, in his private notes, wrote that, based on what he saw in Russia after the 1917 Bolshevik coup, he was sincerely regretting whatever he had written about the 'Persian character',

- 'mentally apologising to Persians' (GNCM, f. 39, d. 12, l. 1ob., 2, 2ob.; for Smirnov's self-reflection, see also Volkov, 'War and Peace in the Other and the Self').
32. S. Aliev, *Istoriia Irana, XX vek* (Moscow: RAN, 2004), p.90.
 33. Ibid.
 34. Ibid.
 35. See Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.62–4.
 36. Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (henceforth AVPI), f. 144 (*Persidskii stol*), op. 488, d. 604 (Vlasov's to Lamsdorf, 7 April 1904).
 37. See A. Shablovskaia, 'Russian Hubris in Iran: Diplomacy, Clientelism, and Intervention (1907–1912)', *Ab Imperio* Vol.1 (2019), pp.79–103 (p.83).
 38. GNCM, f. 39, d. 19, l. 23 (Mohammad-Ali Shah's handwritten note to Smirnov).
 39. J. Clark, 'Constitutionalists and Cossacks: The Constitutional Movement and Russian Intervention in Tabriz, 1907–1911', in S. Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.231–58 (p.235).
 40. AVPRI, f. *Persidskii stol* [Persian desk], d. 924, l. 66 (1909).
 41. See N. Belova and V. Zaitsev, *Novaia istoriia Irana: khrestomatia* [Modern History of Iran] (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), p.237.
 42. *Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov*, vyp. II [Collection of diplomatic documents, edition 2], pp.139–40 (22 April 1909, Izvol'skii to Sablin) as quoted in Belova and Zaitsev, *Novaia istoriia Irana*, p.238. The force consisted of about four thousand men: three battalions of cavalry, four hundred infantry, one company of sappers and two artillery batteries.
 43. D. Fraser, *Persia and Turkey in Revolt* (London: 1910), pp.80–1, 91.
 44. Clark, 'Constitutionalists and Cossacks', p.235.
 45. See Belova and Zaitsev, *Novaia istoriia Irana*, pp.287–9. See also P. Luft, 'The End of Czarist Rule in Iran' in Ch. Melville (ed.), *History and Literature in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.100–11. See also Clark, 'Constitutionalists and Cossacks', pp.231–58.
 46. See Volkov, *Russia's Turn to Persia*, pp.111, 115, 133. Ter-Oganov, 'A Russian Officer's Letters on Russian and British Activities in Iran during World War I', pp.173–85. See also O. Bast, *La Perse et La Grande Guerre: Etudes réunies et présentées; Les Allemands en Perse pendant la Première Guerre mondiale: d'après les sources diplomatiques françaises* [Persia and the Great War: Collected and Presented Studies; Germans in Persia during the First World War: According to French Diplomatic Sources] (Paris: Peeters, 1997); T. Atabaki (ed.), *Iran and First World War: A Battleground of the Great Powers* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); A. Shishov, *Persidskii front (1909–1918)* [The Persian front, 1909–1918] (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Veche, 2010).
 47. See Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–8)', pp.195–96.
 48. AV, f. 134, op. 2, d. 197 (Minorsky's private notes). GARF, f. 589, op. 1, d. 5082 (Minorsky's letters).
 49. See L. Kulagina, *Rossiia i Iran: XIX – nachalo XX v.* [Russia and Iran: Nineteenth to early Twentieth Century] (Moscow: Kliuch-S, 2010), p.194; N. Ter-Oganov, *Persidskaia kazach'ia brigada, 1879–1921 gg.* [The Persian Cossack brigade, 1879–1921] (Moscow: IVRAN, 2012), p.248.
 50. See Ter-Oganov, *Persidskaia kazach'ia brigada*, p.252.
 51. See the memoirs of General Denikin (A. Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty* [Essays on Russian turmoil], vol. 1 (Paris: J.Povolozky & Co. Editeurs, 1921), pp.66–67).
 52. AV, f. 134 (Minorsky's collection), op. 1, d. 212, l. 8 (General Potapov to the Russian Legation, 11 May 1917). In December 1917, General Potapov defected to the Bolsheviks and became Acting Commissar for Military Affairs before Leon Trotsky took over from him a few months later. In the mid-1920s, he played one of the underlying roles in the OGPU large-scale counter-intelligence operation *Trest* that resulted in the arrests and executions of his former brothers-in-arms (see Vladimir Burtsev, 'liul' 1917: "kvartirmeistery" delaiut vybor' [July 1917: The Quartermasters make a choice], *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 15 December 2010 (last accessed 23 February 2021, http://old.redstar.ru/2010/12/15_12/5_01.html)).
 53. See Ter-Oganov, *Persidskaia kazach'ia brigada*, pp.247, 252.
 54. AV, f. 134 (Minorsky's collection), op. 1, d. 212, l. 6–7 (General meeting of Russian officers, Persian Cossack Brigade, Tehran).
 55. Nikolai von Etter (1865–1935), the Russian Minister in Iran (1915–1917), transferred to Portugal after the February Revolution.
 56. AVPRI, f. *Kantseliarii MID* [Office of the Foreign Ministry], 1917, op. 470, d. 52, l. 297.
 57. AV, f. 134, op. 2, d. 197 (Minorsky's correspondence with Miliukov and Tereshenko), l. 1–50. Miliukov was a historian and a liberal politician who founded the Party of Constitutional Democrats (mainly known as the Kadets). He was the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Russian Provisional Government from the day of its establishment to 2 May 1917. On Miliukov see, for example, M. Stockdale, *Paul Miliukov and the quest for a liberal Russia, 1880–1918* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) and M. Sorokina (ed.), *Mysliashie miry rossiiskogo liberalizma* [The thinking worlds of Russian liberalism] (Moscow: Dom Russkogo Zarubezh'ia, 2010). It is noteworthy that Minorsky knew Miliukov as Professor of History long before 1917.

They corresponded on scholarly issues related to history and shared opinions on Russia's foreign policy in the East (GARF, f. 579, op. 1, d. 5082, l. 1–2 (1909)).

58. Aliev, *Istoriia Irana*, p.89.
59. On the activities of this Iranian nationalist politician and intellectual, see A. Amanat, 'Forugi, Mohammad Ali Doka-al-Molk', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1999), pp.108–12; Zoven Arabadzhian, *Iran ot revoliutsii do revoliutsii: istoriia v litsakh* [Iran from Revolution to Revolution: A History in Persons] (Moscow: KMK, 2018), pp.34–51.
60. GARF, f. 579, op. 1, d. 5082, l. 2–4.
61. The Lazarev Institute was established in 1815 with the private financial means of the Armenian Lazarev (Lazarian) family, who originated from the area Julfa, the Armenian settlement in Esfahan. Initially an ordinary secondary school for poor Armenian children with training in Persian and Arabic as its minor activities, by the middle of the nineteenth century it had grown into a full-scale educational institute and one of the main centres of Russian Oriental studies (see A. Vigasin and A. Khokhlov, *Istoriia otechestvennogo vostokovedeniia s serediny XIX veka do 1917 goda* [The History of Russia's Oriental Studies from the Mid-Nineteenth Century To 1917] (Moscow: Institut vostokovedeniia RAN, 1997), pp.27–35).
62. GARF, f. 579 (Miliukov's collection), op. 1, d. 4792, l. 1–2.
63. For the ample list of the correspondence in question, see G. Rashtiani, *Rahavard-i minorski* (Tehran: Hermes, 1396 [2015]), pp.301–2. This book in Persian, full of much detail about Minorsky's life, includes a scrupulous codification of the Minorsky archival collection held in AV, St Petersburg.
64. See A. Popov, 'Tsarskaia Rossiia i Persiia v epokhu russko-iaponskoi voiny' [Tsar's Russia and Persia in the epoch of the Russian-Japanese war], *Krasnyi arkhiv* [Red archive] Vol.4, No.53 (1932), pp.4–38 (pp.15–16).
65. Aliev, *Istoriia Irana*, pp.90–1.
66. AV, f. 134 (Minorsky's collection), op. 2, d. 197, l. 42.
67. Tereshchenko was one of the major Ukrainian landowners, factory owner and a financier. He was Minister for Finance (March-May 1917) and Minister for Foreign Affairs (May-November 1917) in the Russian Provisional Government. On Tereshchenko see S. Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism: Untold Stories of the February 1917 Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
68. AVPRI, f. *Kantseliarii MID* (1917), op. 470, d. 52, l. 297.
69. AV, f. 134, op. 2, d. 211 (April 1917– June 1917), l. 1– 14; d. 197 (Minorsky's correspondence with Miliukov and Tereshchenko), l. 1– 3, 6, 23, 24ob, 43– 4. See also Aliev, *Istoriia Irana*, pp.89–95.
70. Ibid., p.91.
71. AV, f. 134, op. 2, d. 197, l. 23, 23ob., 42ob. Also, see Aliev, *Istoriia Irana*, pp.89, 91.
72. On Minorsky's participation in the Commission for the delimitation of the Iranian-Ottoman border see Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–8)', pp.195–209.
73. Aliev, *Istoriia Irana*, pp.91–2.
74. *INO OGPU* (Inostrannyi otdel gosudarstvennogo politicheskogo upravleniia) – Foreign Department of the United State Political Directorate.
75. On the Soviet Ambassador in Iran Iakov Daftian's correspondence with the Soviet Commissariat for Foreign Affairs see Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–8)', p.208. See also the memoirs of the OGPU Station-Chief in Iran Georgii Agabekov (Agabekov, *OGPU, The Russian Secret Terror; GPU: Zapiski chekista* [GPU: Notes of a Cheka officer] (London: Brentano's, 1931)).
76. Aliev, *Istoriia Irana*, p.92.
77. Cronin, 'Deserters, converts, Cossacks and revolutionaries', p.172.
78. See Genis, *Krasnaia Persiia*; C. Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920–1921: birth of the trauma* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).
79. See T. Atabaki and D. Volkov, 'Flying away from the Bolshevik winter: Soviet refugees across the Southern borders (1917–30)', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol.34, No.2 (2021), pp.1900–22.
80. See Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–8)', p.199. See also A. Wilson, A. Wratislaw and P. Sykes, 'The Demarcation of the Turco-Persian Boundary in 1913 – 1914: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol.66, No.3 (1925), pp.237–242 (pp.238, 241).
81. GARF, f. 579, op. 1, d. 4792, l. 1–2 (Krymsky's letter to Miliukov, 13/04/1917). See also Volkov, 'Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–8)', pp.196–7, 202.
82. See Kelly, 'How far West?', pp.274–93.
83. GARF, f. 5802, op. 1, d. 1869, l. 34–5; f. 200, op. 1, d. 376, l. 1–76.
84. GARF, f. 4704, op. 1, d. 1, l. 95 (on Minorsky and his meeting with Head of the Caucasian Government, 3 December 1917), 127 (Russian Legation to all Russian consuls in Iran, 9 October 1918). On the Caucasian Caspian Alliance Government see A. Bezugol'nyi, *General Bicherakhov i ego Kavkazskaia armia, 1917–1919* [General Bicherakhov and his Caucasian Army, 1917–1919] (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2011), pp.132–50; A. Bagriantsev and A. Elagin, *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsia i grazhdanskaia voina v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane* [International military intervention and civil war in Central Asia and Kazakhstan] (Alma-Ata: AN KSSR, 1963), pp.331–418; L. Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce* (London: Edward Arnold, 1920).

85. For opinions about Etter see, for example, GARF, f. 579, op. 1, d. 4792, l. 1–2 (Krymsky's letter to Miliukov, 13 April 1917).
86. GARF, f. 4738, op. 1, d. 230, l. 54. Later, in his memoirs, Major-General Dunsterville pointed out the strategic importance of his alliance with Bicherakhov, stressing that were it not for Bicherakhov's entering Qazvin on 28 March 1918 and his sequential defeat of the Jangalis at Manjil, Tehran would have gone red, hence destabilising both the whole of Iran and Afghanistan (Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, pp.121, 173–4; Genis, *Krasnaia Persiia*, pp.49–50).
87. GARF, f. 446, op. 2, d. 56, l. 53–4 (Documents of the Trans-Caspian Government); d. 55, l. 1–3 (Report to General Denikin).
88. See Bagriantsev and Elagin, *Inostrannaia voennaia interventsii i grazhdanskaia voina v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane*, pp.345–6.
89. RGVA, f. 39779, op. 2, d. 73, l. 33–4. See also d. 90, l. 1.
90. RGVA, f. 39779, op. 2, d. 64, l. 20–3.
91. GARF, f. 200, op. 1, d. 376, l. 17, 54 (Minorsky's cables to the head of the All-Russia Provisional Government). See also Bezugol'nyi, *General Bicherakhov i ego Kavkazskaia armia*, pp.143–4.
92. GARF, f. 200, op. 1, d. 378 (Minorsky's correspondence with the General Headquarters); f. 200, op. 1, d. 376, l. 17, 54.
93. RGVA, f. 39779, op. 2, d. 51, l. 8, 8ob.
94. RGVA, f. 39779, op. 2, d. 51, l. 9a.
95. GARF, f. 200, op. 1, d. 376, l. 1–2 (Minorsky to the General Headquarters). See also Bezugol'nyi, *General Bicherakhov i ego Kavkazskaia armia*, pp.139–40. On Bicherakhov and Minorsky's devotion to the Russian Cause see RGVA, f. 39779, op. 2, d. 51, l. 2ob.
96. On the advancement of Bolsheviks into Central Asia and northern Iran see O. Bast, 'The Council for International Propaganda and the Establishment of the Iranian Communist Party' in T. Atabaki (ed.), *Iran and the First World War* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp.163–76.
97. GARF, f. 446, op. 2, d. 56, l. 137, 137ob (Intelligence report to Denikin, 13 Sept. 1919). See also Bezugol'nyi, *General Bicherakhov i ego Kavkazskaia armia*, pp.230–31, 253.
98. The National Archives, Kew (henceforth TNA), FO248/1262 (Persia, Cossack Division, b) Disposal of Russian Officers), 16558 (Cox to FO, 13 March 1920). Cox's spelling of Staroselsky's surname is preserved here. See also Brian Pearce, *The Staroselsky Problem 1918–20: An Episode in British-Russian Relations in Persia* (London: Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, 1994).
99. TNA, FO248/1262 (Persia, Cossack Division, a) Payment of Subsidy; b) Disposal of Russian Officers).
100. AV, f. 134 (Minorsky collection), op. 1, d. 212, l. 1–5. See also TNA, FO248/1262 (Russian Officials, 1919), l. 8 (Cox to FO, 13 January 1919).
101. TNA, WO 106/55/26 (Persia, Section 1), l. 86584 (Cox to Curzon, 03/09/1919). See also Bast, 'Duping the British and outwitting the Russians?' pp.261–97.
102. TNA, WO 106/55/26 (Persia, Section 1), l. 86584 (Cox to Curzon, 3 September 1919). See also TNA, FO248/1262 (Russian Officials, 1919), l. 1–10, 16 (Cox to London), 24 (French Minister in Tehran on Minorsky's case), 28 (Curzon to Cox).
103. TNA, FO248/1262 (Russian Officials, 1919), l. 67 (Cox to FO, 15 September 1919).