Russo-Persian Relations and Russian Imperialism in Qajar Iran
1800–1906
by
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Abstract

Inspired by the approaches developed in the new fields of "Borderland Studies," "Entangled History," and the revisionist approaches to the study of imperialism, this thesis provides a fresh analysis of Russo-Persian relations and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran from 1800 to 1906. This thesis pays particular attention to the Russo-Persian cross-border social, cultural, economic, and military interactions and the interconnectedness of the two neighbouring polities. This study demonstrates the great extent of these interactions and the significant role that they played in developing Russia's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. The cases of the Persian Cossack Brigade, the Russian Loan and Discount Bank of Iran, Russian deserters to Qajar Iran, Russo-Persian cooperation in subjugating the Turkmen, and the large Persian communities in the Russian Empire demonstrate how Russia developed and expanded its imperialist policies in Qajar Iran by building upon pre-existing social, cultural, and economic structures. Deserted soldiers, private businessmen, bankers, Persian labour migrants, students, and noble families were all significant players shaping Russo-Persian relations, and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran. This thesis demonstrates how St. Petersburg's imperial expansion in Qajar Iran was a complex and contradictory process accomplished mostly through Russo-Persian social, economic, cultural, and military interactions. Moreover, by examining the mentioned case studies, this work casts light on the significance of Russo-Persian interconnectedness for the understanding of the two neighbours' histories.

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Dedication

To my parents and friends for all the invaluable support they have given in ways that are impossible for me to adequately acknowledge.

And to all those everywhere

Who strive for a better world for all people.

Introduction

Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran is understudied in Western academia in comparison with Russian imperialism in the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Far East, and Western Europe's colonization of North America, South America, Africa and other parts of the world.[1] This thesis is inspired by new approaches, such as "Borderland Studies", and "Entangled History", to focus on the social, cultural, economic, and military interactions in the border region between the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran throughout the nineteenth century and the early 1900s. I aim to develop a better understanding of Russo-Persian relations and of the notions of "empire" and "imperialism" within the Russian context. In other words, I am going to demonstrate how drawing inspiration from these new approaches and incorporating the Persian viewpoints into the Russo-Persian context permit us to rethink the nature of Russian imperialism. This study argues that evolving Russo-Persian interactions on the ground in this period played a decisive role in shaping and developing St. Petersburg's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. This demonstrates that the development of Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran was significantly more complex in its manifestations than previously suggested in prior works on this subject.

This introduction will first survey the topics of "empire", imperialism", the Russian variant of Orientalism, and the Western historiography of Russo-Persian relations in Qajar Iran. It will then elaborate on the scope and structure of the thesis, showing how it draws inspiration

[1] The Qajar dynasty ruled Iran from 1789 to 1925.
For me as an Iranian, Persia and Iran are interchangeable. Before the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (r.1925–1941) Iran was officially known as "Persia" worldwide. Nevertheless, inside of Iran, Iranians already called their homeland "Iran" for centuries. Reza Shah's profound interest in Iran's ancient past and the Arian race led to the Iranian government's 1935 request from the international community to refer to the country by its native name "Iran". In this thesis, I use Iran and Persia interchangeably with no specific reason.

from theories of "Borderland Studies" and "Entangled History". Finally, it will provide a roadmap of each chapter in the thesis, and the sources that will be used in this study.

"Empire" and "Imperialism"

The history of the word "empire" goes back to the ancient Roman Republic. Stemming from the Latin word "*imperium*", which means "command", the term "empire" was initially clear and well-defined. It was attributed to the rights of a Roman magistrate who could give orders and demand obedience from those subjected to his rule.[2] Later these rights were transferred to the Roman Emperor (*imperator*). The medieval age witnessed the breakup of a unanimous definition of empire. The Byzantine Empire in the east and what later evolved into the Holy Roman Empire in the west had very different conceptions of "empire". While the Byzantines saw autocracy as an indispensable part of empire, what was later called as the "Holy Roman Empire" in the west was a loose confederation of multiple and overlapping sovereignties, preserving maximum autonomy for local communities.[3] Nevertheless, by the sixteenth century, "empire" acquired the meaning of a state in which political relationships that held different groups of people together in an extended system.[4] This was the dominant definition of "empire" well into the eighteenth century. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the growing power of the British Empire as a maritime superpower possessing vast and rich colonies overseas. This vast empire along with its advanced industrialized economy overshadowed the power of land empires such as

[2] Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 30.
[3] Dominic Lieven, *Empire Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 14.
[4] Valerie A. Kivelson & Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

Russia and Austrian-Hungry. The growing might of the British Empire also introduced new concepts, such as "imperialism", and "colonialism" into the discourse of "empire".[5]

Although being a highly emotionally charged term, "imperialism" does not share the complexity and old history of "empire". It appeared for the very first time in nineteenth century France to mark the ideas of partisans of the Napoleonic empire.[6] However, it was mostly the increasing power of maritime colonizing empires, especially the British Empire throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that shaped the definition of "imperialism". The new notion of "imperialism" referenced "the colonization of maritime powers."[7] Such a definition gave birth to the fierce debates of liberal and Marxist thinkers discussing the nature of "imperialism" throughout the twentieth century.

For both liberal and Marxist thinkers, the terms "imperialism" and "empire" were identified mostly by a metropolitan polity ruling and exploiting overseas colonies and peripheries. John Hobson (b.1858–1940) and Joseph Schumpeter (b.1883–1950) are the prominent scholars of the liberal camp. In the other camp, Vladimir Lenin (b.1870–1924) and Rudolf Hilferding (b.1877–1941) established the conceptual foundations of the Marxist-Leninist camp. These two camps dominated the debates on "imperialism" throughout most of the twentieth century, until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. For them "empire" and "imperialism" were identical, the product of internal, metropolitan drives to external expansion.[8] They also both challenged the narratives and conceptions of the conservative camp of empire-builders, those who supported Europeans' overseas colonial expansion. Moreover, they both defined imperialism through its relations with capitalism. The liberal camp mostly saw

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[5] Lieven, *Empire,* 17.
[6] Ariel Cohen, *Russian Imperialism Development and Crisis* (London: Praeger, 1996), 1.
[7] Lieven, *Empire*, 17.
[8] Cohen, *Russian Imperialism*, 2.

"imperialism" and "empire" as the main obstacles to free trade and capitalism, while the Marxist-Leninist camp saw capitalism as the main driver behind the emergence of "imperialism". Both approaches fiercely condemn imperialism but for very different reasons. One of the major flaws of both is their dismissal of the existence of empires based on social and economic formations other than capitalism. Nevertheless, the decades following the Second World War witnessed the emergence of other approaches studying "empire" and "imperialism". These new approaches became even more popular after the collapse of the Soviet Union and shaped what we know today as the conventional understandings of empire.

Among these post-war approaches two schools stand out. One of these schools focuses on the early modern and modern Western European maritime empires. The practitioners of this school focus either on the metropole or its colonial peripheries. Michael Doyle is a well-known practitioner of this school. He defines "empire" as "relationships of political control imposed by some political societies over the effective sovereignty of other political societies."[9] The other school focuses on the absolutist land empires, which existed from the ancient times to the twentieth century. The traditional understandings of Russian, Ottoman and Austrian-Hungry Empires have been mainly within the framework of this second school. Samuel Eisenstadt, Robert Wesson, and Maurice Duverger are three leading practitioners of this school. By 2000, these two schools dominated the scholarship on "empire" and "imperialism".

It is significant to mention here that except for the Marxist-Leninist approach, almost all other theories presuppose the emergence of nation-states as a natural condition. These theories are unanimous in believing that empires' proper place is and will be in the dustbin of history, and empires were helplessly doomed to fall and give their place to nation-states. Moreover, for most

[9] Cohen, *Russian Imperialism*, 1.

of these approaches, empire is seen as a metropolitan state that politically and culturally dominates, and economically exploits its colonial periphery. These conventional characteristics that different approaches share of "empire" were soon challenged by revisionist approaches. These new approaches, first and foremost, try to undermine the idea that the emergence of the nation-state was the inevitable culmination of empire. Rather, they see empires as naturally hybrid polities accepting and allowing different ethnic groups to function within them. Among these revisionists are scholars of Russian history: Dominic Lieven, Jane Burbank, Valerie Kivelson, and Ronald Grigor Suny are historians of Russia who have contributed to the expansion of this revisionist literature.[10]

In his book *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* Dominic Lieven challenges the common characteristics shared by the existing theories of "empire", "imperialism", and the natural condition of "nation-states". Lieven stresses that the definition of "empire" cannot be confined to "the political and cultural domination, and the economic exploitation, of the colonial periphery by the metropolitan state and nation."[11] He defines "empire" as "a very great power that has left its mark on the international relations of an era" and "a polity that rules over wide territories and many people."[12] He rejects the general assumption of empires' inferiority to nation-states and the latter's inevitable triumph over empires. He clearly states that "the tale of empire's wickedness and redundancy, contrasted to the morality and modernity of the

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[10] In this thesis, I am focusing on Russian imperialism. Nevertheless, it is significant to mention here that these revisionisms do not apply just to the Russian Empire, but they can also apply to other empires, and there is a growing body of revisionism within the scholars of other empires. For instance, look at John Darwin's books on the British Empire and the other global empires:
John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013) & John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London: Penguin, 2008).

[11] Lieven, *Empire*, xii.

[12] Ibid., xi.

democratic nation, is much too simple."[13] He believes that empires were often a force of peace, prosperity and the exchange of ideas across much of the globe.[14] He argues that "in the era of multiculturalism, globalization and the European Union, aspects of the Holy Roman Empire or of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1900 actually appear more appropriate than the Jacobin nation or the frenzied ethnic nationalism that devastated Europe in the first half of the twentieth century."[15]

Lieven sees hybridity as the main characteristic of the Russian Empire. According to Lieven, empire in Russia contained aspects of modern European empire and of the tradition of autocratic land empire which stretches back to antiquity.[16] The Russian Empire was in some respects modern and capitalist and, in others, a military, dynastic land empire based on very traditional principles.[17] "Tsarist empire was in fact many empires. Its various regions differed greatly. In some regions comparison with European overseas empire makes sense, in other cases it is entirely inappropriate."[18] Therefore, Lieven argues that there were very different types of empire in Russia's various borderlands and regions. There was no single Russian imperialist policy, Russia acted differently in every single borderland. For instance, Russia's imperialist policy in the Baltic states or Finland dramatically varied from Central Asia. Lieven sees this hybridity partly because of empire's flexibility in facing constant and differing challenges, but also partly due to Russia's unique geopolitical position, culture, and origins of statehood. Lieven himself argues that the international context was of immense importance to the rise and fall of

[13] Lieven, *Empire,* 414.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 419.
[17] Ibid., XVI.
[18] Ibid., 419.

the Russian and Soviet empires.[19] He discusses how the intense pressure of geopolitical rivalry gave birth to Russia's empire, shaped its imperial policies, and finally contributed to its disintegration.

In their book *Empires in World History,* Jane Burbank, who again is a historian of Russia, and her colleague Frederick Cooper follow Lieven's discourse of "empire" and push some ideas even more strongly. They clearly describe many existing theories of empire as relying on "the false dichotomies of continuity or change, contingency or determinism"[20] and emphasise that they do not "follow the conventional narratives that leads inexorably from empire to nation-state."[21]They also incorporate Lieven's argument of external power and international relations as determining factors in shaping the fate of empires by stressing that the conflicts among empires weakened and challenged imperial control not the inevitability of the emergence of nation-states.[22]

Burbank and Cooper define empire as "large political units, expansionist or with a memory of power extended over space, polities that maintain distinction and hierarchy as they incorporate new people."[23] In other words, they believe that empires devised different strategies "as they incorporated diverse peoples into their polity while sustaining or making distinctions among them."[24] They expand Lieven's argument of the hybrid nature of the Russian Empire to a fundamental characteristic of empires throughout history, and call it "politics of difference". They try to retell the history of empires from antiquity to the twentieth century through this lens.

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[19] Lieven, *Empire,* 419.
[20] Jane Burbank & Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3.
[21] Ibid., 2.
[22] Ibid., 450.
[23] Ibid., 8.
[24] Ibid., 2.

Burbank and Cooper define "politics of difference" as "recognizing the multiplicity of peoples and their varied customs as an ordinary fact of life" or "drawing a strict boundary between undifferentiated insiders and barbarian outsiders."[25] They argue that all empires were to some degree reliant on both incorporation and differentiation.[26] Moreover, Burbank and Cooper regard empires as flexible polities because of their ability to mix, match, and transform their ways of rule.

The variations in the politics of difference deployed by empires constitute the core argument of Burbank and Cooper's work. They regard empires' ability to apply different tactics to different segments of their population as a clue to empires' political endurance throughout history.[27] According to Burbank and Cooper, the ability to redefine allocations of power and privilege, makes empires as politically flexible as possible.[28] This is antithetical to the nature of nation-states. Therefore, they conclude that empires have not "given way to a stable, functioning world of nation-states."[29] Moreover, "the inequalities of power and resources that led to empires are still with us."[30] They point to the disruptive effects of imperial breakdown, and the destructiveness of making nation conform to state in many regions of the world throughout the whole twentieth and even into twentieth-first century.

Valerie Kivelson and Ronald Suny are the most recent scholars of Russia to study the nature of empire and imperialism. Their definition of empire is based on Lieven's arguments and very close to Burbank and Cooper. They define empire as a structure of governance that manifests some or all the following characteristics: "supreme power of the ruler; sovereignty

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[25] Burbank & Cooper, *Empires at World History,* 12.
[26] Ibid.*,* 13.
[27] Ibid., 458.
[28] Ibid., 16.
[29] Ibid., 443.
[30] Ibid., 453.

over subordinated lesser rulers; a vast domain encompassing a diversity of lands and peoples; unequal distribution of power between center and periphery; and rule through differences" rather than integration or assimilation.[31] They also do not see nation-states as the inevitable fate of empires. Nevertheless, what primarily distinguishes their work from their predecessors is introducing the concept of "reciprocity between ruler and ruled" into the discourse of empire.

Kivelson and Suny argue that throughout history no single polity, empires included, could rule exclusively through only the raw exercise of coercive power.[32] Empires had to come up with measures to legitimize the rule of few over the many. People had to feel that they too benefited from otherwise inequitable, often repressive, imperial arrangements and that these arrangements were both right and natural.[33] By arguing that for most of its history Russian rule was structured imperially, Kievelson and Suny characterize Russian governance by the label of "authoritarianism with the consent of the governed."[34] They restudy the history of the Russian Empire within this context by regarding elements, such as palace coups, peasant petitioners, assemblies of lands, and *Zemstvos*[35] as examples of the imperial subjects' political participation. In the end, they conclude that political participation and inclusion come in many forms and electoral democracy and legislative parliaments are simply one form.[36] Therefore, according to

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[31] Kivelson & Suny, *Russia's Empires,* 15.
[32] Ibid., 6.
[33] Ibid., 7.
[34] Ibid., 8.
[35] Derived from the Russian word for land *zemlia*, Zemstvos were assemblies in the Russian Empire's provinces elected by landowners, urban dwellers, and peasants. Zemstvos functioned as a sort of representative government at an intermediate administrative level. It was during the great reforms of Emperor Alexander II (r.1855–1881) that zemstvos were founded. Significantly, the zemstvos were introduced only in provinces where Russians constituted both the elites and most of the population. For more information look at: Geoffrey Hosking, Hosking, *Russia and the Russians from Earliest Times to the Present*, 2nd ed, (London: Penguin, 2012), 293–4.
[36] Kivelson & Suny, *Russia's Empires,* 400.

Kievelson and Suny, not only were imperial subjects and rulers tied together in meaningful ways, but also empires had to find ways to involve their subjects in the work of governing.[37]

Kivelson and Suny expand Lieven's argument on the diversity of Russian imperial policies. They argue that rule through difference was the dominant form of governance in the Russian Empire, and "hierarchal subordination, division, and governance through categories of difference defined the experience of all Russian subjects without exception."[38] However, they believe that various regions, both imperial peripheries and Russian heartland, are indivisible and should be studied together. "The story of imperial peripheries cannot be told as separate stories, but from a single, multifaceted narrative."[39]

The Russian Variant of Orientalism

Historians of Russia are also among those group of scholars challenging the universal applicability of Edward Said's definition of "Orientalism". A careful analysis of Russian imperialism in Iran over the years 1800 to 1906 needs to include the discussion of Russian Orientalism. Russia presents not only a unique form of "empire" and "imperialism", but also of "Orientalism". The conventional understanding of "Orientalism" had been mostly developed by Said. Under the strong influence of Michel Foucault's theories of power and knowledge, Said emphasizes that any knowledge is socially and politically charged and is interconnected with power. He argues that this power has been used to subjugate the Orient.[40] Therefore, for Said,

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[37] Kivelson & Suny, *Russia's Empires,* 400.
[38] Ibid., 12.
[39] Ibid., 14.
[40] Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 8.

Orientalism is an important weapon in the hands of Western imperialism, an intellectual tool for ensuring the West's dominion over the East.[41] According to Said, Western self-identity is defined in its opposition to the Oriental "Other". This Oriental "Other" is inferior to the Western "Self". Though he focuses solely on Western traditions of writing, the world is dichotomized into "us" versus "them". [42]

Elena Andreeva and David Schimmelpenninck Van dear Oye are both historians of Russia who emphasize the unique form of Russian Orientalism. In her book *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism*, Andreeva defines Russian Orientalism as "the complex of preconceived ideas and prejudices about the people of the Orient and the colonial practices these engendered."[43] She builds her argument upon Said's ideas, and points to the parallels of Russian Orientalism with those of Western European powers. She states that the "Russian geographical position, her diplomatic and economic connections, the system of education and culture of her intellectual elite, her Christian religion, dynastic kinship, colonization of the Orient and "civilizing mission" there - all pointed to her being part of Europe."[44] Nevertheless, Andreeva also emphasizes Russian Orientalism's unique form which distinguishes it from its Western European counterparts. According to Andreeva, the unique nature of Russian Orientalism stems from the complexity of Russian national identity, which combines both Western and Asian elements.[45] She argues that Asian people had been always part of the Russian Empire, and for a Russian the Orient was both self and other.[46] Andreeva

[41] David Schimmelpenninck Van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), 5.
[42] Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game,* 8.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 9.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

believes that the profound effect of the Mongol rule on Russia's political structure, its absolute monarchy, the absence of basic civil rights and delayed development of capitalism, are all indicators of Asian elements in Russians' national identity.[47]

Russian travelogues on Iran written in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries serve as the basis of Andreeva's argument. She points to the common characteristics of these Russian travelogues and their divergence from Western European travelogues on Iran. She argues that by reading these Russian travelogues one can easily recognize the Russian travelers' distinctive sense of inferiority to their Western European rivals. Therefore, for these Russian travelers the most significant concept to be proved was that Russia was a great and civilized empire. [48] According to Andreeva, the Russian travelers strived to overemphasize their Europeanness by trying to prove the perceived inferiority of the Persians in every imaginable area.[49] This is in sharp contrast with, for instance, British travelogues on Iran in the same period, which not only present a more positive image of Iran, but also contains many elements of romanticization of Persians and their lifestyle. According to Adrreeva, this sharp contrast stems from Russians' ambivalent national identity. Russians' innate feeling of affinity with Asia intensified their sense of inferiority and the desire to hide it.[50] In short, Andreeva accepts some parallels between the Russian variant of Orientalism and its Western European counterparts. Nevertheless, she sees it as an exaggerated or grotesque version of Western European Orientalism.[51]

Like Elena Andreeva, Schimmelpenninck Van der Oye challenges the universal applicability of Said's Orientalism. Nevertheless, his study of Orientalism within the Russian

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[47] Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game,* 9.
[48] Ibid.*,* 34.
[49] Ibid., 35.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 12.

context differs from Adreeva's work in two significant aspects. Firstly, in his criticism of Said's ideas he is bolder than Andreeva, and secondly, unlike Andreeva, he does not provide a single definition for the peculiar form of Orientalism within the Russian context. Van dear Oye argues that "Russians have never been of one mind about Asia."[52] He sees the Russian Empire's bicontinental geography, its ambivalent relationship with Western Europe, and the complicated nature of its encounters with Asia as main reasons behind the Russians' fragmentary understanding of the East.[53] Van der Oye points to many Russian Orientalists who were sympathetic and respectful of the nations they studied, and tended to be relatively nonjudgmental, especially when compared to their nineteenth-century Western European contemporaries.[54]

Overall, both Elena Andreeva and Van dear Oye's arguments play a significant role in my own thesis. This thesis draws on many factors of this peculiar form of Russian Orientalism for studying Russian imperialism in Iran over the years 1800 to 1906. Moreover, as the Russian foreign ministry during the last decades of Romanov rule employed many university graduates of Oriental studies for the Empire's diplomatic missionaries in Asia, Van der Oye's argument can be specifically beneficial within the context of Russo-Persian relations.

The Existing Literature on Russian Imperialism in Qajar Iran

There are a good number of scholarly works on Russia's imperialist policies in the Ottoman Empire, the Far East, Caucasus, and Central Asia. Nevertheless, not much scholarly attention has been devoted to the Russian Empire's imperialist policies and influence in its southern neighbor

[52] Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism,* 11.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 9.

Iran, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of the existing literature on Russian imperialism in Iran has been confined to the framework of the "Great Game". The "Great Game" points to the intense rivalry of Britain and Russia for dominance in the Middle East and Central Asia starting in the early nineteenth century and ending with the collapse of the Tsarist state in February 1917. This framework sees the history of Russo-Persian relations as largely determined by the geopolitical competition between Russia and Britain in Central Asia. Iran is seen here as a mere buffer state between Russia and Great Britain, "a playing field for the politics of the "great powers,"[55] and "a helpless victim of great power politics."[56]

Firuz Kazemzadeh's book *Russia and Britain in Persia: Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran* published in 1968 initiated this conventional understanding of Russo-Persian relations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the framework of the "Great Game". Since then, most existing studies on Russo-Persian relations focus on the Russo-British relationship and see developments in Iran itself as determined by this inter-imperial relationship.[57] Even recent scholarly work, such as a collection of essays written by Russian, Persian, and Western scholars, titled *Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond* studies Russia's involvements in Iran within the framework of "Great Game." The editors of the book seek to "open a window into the power and influence in Iran not just by "Russian government" through its representatives, but by Russian nationals, state and non-state actors, who operated in Iran in a

[55] Moritz Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism: The Ideal Anarchists 1800-1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 6.
[56] Rudi Matthee and Elena Andreeva, eds., *Russians in Iran: Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2018), 1.
[57] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 4.

variety of capacities."[58] Nevertheless, they clearly state that this new window intends to thicken the narrative of Russo-Persian relations constructed through the lens of the "Great Game."[59]

Moritz Deutschmann's work *Iran and Russian Imperialism: The Ideal anarchists, 1800-1914* challenges the conventional analysis of Russo-Persian relations. Deutschmann argues that "the actual effects of Russian foreign policy in Iran were shaped much more by local arrangements and the dynamics of Qajar society than by grand geopolitical schemes."[60] He states that those who study Russo-Persian relations through the lens of the "Great Game" take the dominance of the Russian and British Empires in Iran for granted. In reality British and Russian state power in the region was indeed fragile, insular, and constantly reliant on indigenous agents.[61] For the very first time in studying Russo-Persian relations, Deutschmann introduces factors such as Russians' perceptions of Iran's "unruliness" and "anarchic social order".

Deutschmann argues that Iran in the Qajar period (1789–1925) was not a centralized state with a modern bureaucracy and army, and the political power was based on a delicate balance between tribal groups, urban merchant communities, and the monarchy.[62] Therefore, the Tsarist state saw the weakness of the Iranian centralized state as a serious threat to its economic and strategic interests in Iran, as well as the security of Russo-Persian borders. Deutschmann argues that the "seeming unruliness" of Iranian society was the major factor that determined the Russian Empire's policies toward Iran in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[63] He states that there were three social settings that were crucial to Russo-Persian relations. First, the Persian monarchy, which became closely associated with the Romanovs. Second, the world of merchant

[58] Matthee and Andreeva, *Russians in Iran,* 2.
[59] Ibid., 1-2.
[60] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 5.
[61] Ibid., 6.
[62] Ibid., 3.
[63] Ibid., 214.

networks and their communities, which connected both countries. And third, the delicate equilibrium between nomadic and sedentary population groups in Russo-Persian borders. [64] Studying Russian imperialism in Iran through the lens of these three social settings, Deutschmann argues that "Russian diplomats dealing with Iran were concerned with a much wider range of issues than just their relationship with Britain."[65]

Deutschmann's analysis is indeed beneficial to this thesis. Nevertheless, this thesis does not confine itself to Deutschmann's argument, which sees the lens of "unruliness of Iran" as the most determining factor in shaping Russia's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. Moreover, Deutschmann's very limited knowledge of the Persian language confines him to base his argument solely on Russian and English sources. This thesis argues that a careful analysis of Russo-Persian relations is impossible without incorporating Persian viewpoints.

The Scope and Structure of Thesis

This thesis does not reject the idea of different policies in every borderland. Furthermore, it does not ignore the significance of Russo-British rivalry in shaping Russia's imperialist policies in Iran. Nevertheless, the complexity of Russo-Persian relations and the many layers of Russian imperialism in Iran before 1906 prevents this thesis from confining its analysis to a single framework. This thesis demonstrates that Russian imperialism in Iran was multifaceted and more complex than many theories of imperialism suggest. Therefore, I believe that theories of imperialism cannot capture everything in relation to Russo-Persian relations in Qajar Iran. To gain a better understanding of Tsarist Russia's imperialist policies in Iran between the years 1800 and 1906, this thesis draws inspiration from theories of "Borderland Studies" and "Entangled

[64] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 9.
[65] Ibid., 5.

History." This permits this dissertation to focus on Russo-Persian cultural, military, social, and economic interactions. This thesis demonstrates that these interactions were significant in that they played a decisive role in developing and implementing St. Petersburg's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. This thesis divides the scope of its analysis into three different spheres of Russo-Persian interactions: military, economic, and social. This division does not imply that a clear-cut line neatly separated these three spheres from each other. On the contrary, this thesis shows the overlapping and entangled nature of these three spheres. Nevertheless, before elaborating more on the content of this study, it is significant to carefully consider the theories of "Borderland Studies" and "Entangled History".

Borderlands are complex spaces that can involve military, religious, economic, political, and cultural interactions- all of which may vary by region and over time.[66] John W.I. Lee and Michael North define borderlands as spaces of interaction both physical and conceptual which can encompass a wide range of processes, ranging from military conflict at the peripheries of states or empires to hierarchical dependency patterns to zones of overlapping religious belief or cultural practice to economic activity across modern nation-state political boundaries.[67] Lee and North's definition of borderlands defies the conventional interpretation of borders as fixed demarcation lines. In contrast, borderlands are seen as socially dynamic spaces as well as process-driven practices of spatial differentiation.[68] "Borderland Studies" focuses on the political, social, and historical richness of borderlands and reflects on their unique geopolitical and cultural significance in the different contexts of colonial rule, nation-building, and

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[66] James W. Scott and Ilkka Liikannen, "Routledge Borderland Studies," *Routledge Taylor & Francis Group,* accessed January 11, 2023, https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Borderlands-Studies/book-series/BORDERLAND.
[67] John W.I. Lee and Michael North, *Globalizing Borderlands Studies in Europe, and North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 1-2.
[68] Ibid., 5.

integration.[69] It also questions what happens when distant societies rub against each other or contest lands in between, and what do these situations tell us about both the core societies and the spaces in between.[70]

Many of the studies using this definition of borderlands focus on the US-Mexican border.[71] This is mainly because the US-Mexican border is perceived as an exceptional space demonstrating a strong inequality in power, economics, and human conditions. Moreover, there are many interesting interactions between both sides of the US-Mexican border that have been attracting the attention of many scholars.[72] I believe the same circumstances can be attributed to Russo-Persian borderland regions throughout the nineteenth century. This thesis shows that not only did great inequity in power, economics, and human conditions exist between the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran in that period, but that there were also numerous cultural, social, intellectual, and economic interactions between both sides of the border. The advantage of drawing inspiration from Borderland Studies rather than just working within the framework of theories of imperialism permits this study to focus attention on the Russo-Persian border regions. This is necessary as this thesis demonstrates to what great extent the interactions across the Russo-Persian border contributed to the development and implementation of Tsarist Russia's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. This thesis, therefore, presents a careful analysis of Russo-Persian relations and Russian imperialism in Iran over the course of the nineteenth century until 1906 by drawing inspiration from borderland studies. I chose this time span as before the

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[69] Scott and Liikannen, "Routledge Borderland Studies."
[70] Kathleen Duval, "Borderlands," *Oxford Bibliographies,* accessed May 12, 2023, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0010.xml.
[71] Paul-Matthias Tyrell, "Borderlands," *InterAmerican Wiki: Terms-Concepts-Critical Perspectives,* accessed January 12, 2023, https://www.unibielefeld.de/einrichtungen/cias/publikationen/wiki/b/borderlands.xml.
[72] Ibid.

nineteenth century, the Russian Empire did not pursue a serious imperialist policy in Iran. Moreover, in 1906 the Persian constitutional Revolution erupted, followed by years of internal turmoil. Examining this turbulent era was beyond the scope of this master's thesis. Nevertheless, in an Epilogue, I will explain how the processes that I analyze in this thesis contributed to the course of events in post-1906 Persian history.

Entangled History, or *historie croisée,* as a historical perspective, is another useful framework for understanding several aspects of Russo-Persian relations and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran. Entangled History resonates with "Borderland Histories".[73] Entangled History examines dependencies, interferences, interdependencies, and entanglements between different polities and emphasizes the multidirectional characters of transfers as well.[74] In other words, by taking a trans-cultural perspective as the main point of departure, Entangled History focuses on the interconnectedness of different polities. It also analyzes historical processes that interact simultaneously on the global and local level.[75] Rather than emphasizing bilateral transfers alone, *historie croisée* examines multilateral entanglements in a temporal and special framework where many actors interact together on various levels, in various directions.[76] The main endeavor of the practitioners of Entangled History has been to question "the monumentality of nationally defined borders" and their "entailed influences."[77] Entangled History intends to overcome the challenges and pitfalls of comparative history. It offers a more flexible approach to examine multiple points of overlap, intersection, and crossover between polities, in relation to each other rather than to a

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[73] Bauck Sönke, and Thomas Maier. 2015. "Entangled History*," InterAmerican Wiki: Terms - Concepts - Critical Perspectives*, Accessed January 14, 2023, https://uni-bielefeld.de/einrichtungen/cias/wiki/e/entangled-history.xml
[74] Ibid.
[75] Lee and North, *Globalizing Borderlands,* 4.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

fixed eternal model, which is more proper for capturing process and transformation of practices and entities.[78]

Russo-Persian relations throughout the nineteenth century until 1906 offer a fertile ground for an analysis incorporating the "spaces of entanglements" between the two neighbors. This thesis argues that the history of Iran over this period, let alone Russian imperialism in Iran, cannot be properly analyzed without incorporating the history of Tsarist Russia and Russo-Persian interactions. Entangled History draws our attention to the interconnections between the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran. Inspired by Entangled History, this thesis looks at the Russo-Persian interconnections that are not otherwise foregrounded in the binary oppositions presented by conventional imperial history. It is significant to mention here that Entangled History would also point to the many entanglements between Qajar Iran, the Ottoman Empire, British Empire in India, and other European empires. Nevertheless, the focus of this thesis are the entanglements at the Russo-Persian borderlands. Therefore, inspired by theories of Entangled History and Borderland Studies alongside the study of imperialism, this thesis provides a careful analysis of Russo-Persian relations and Russian imperialism in Iran over the years 1800 to 1906. This thesis contains three chapters. Chapter One provides a brief examination of Russo-Persian relations prior to 1800. It also emphasizes the extent to which the foundation and activities of the Persian Cossack Brigade demonstrates the significance of Russo-Persian interactions in shaping and developing St. Petersburg's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. Chapter Two develops this argument with reference to Russo-Persian economic relations, especially the foundation and activities of the Russian Loan and Discount Bank in late Qajar Iran. Chapter Three focuses on cross-border Russo-Persian social interactions, dividing the scope of these interactions into the

[78] Julia Leikin, "From Comparative to Entangled Histories." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 22, no. 1 (2021): 173–182, doi:10.1353/kri.2021.0006.

three spheres of Russian deserters to Iran, nomadic tribes living in the Russo-Persian borderlands, and the existence of large Persian communities in the Russian Empire. In these three chapters, I specifically argue that Russo-Persian interactions and their decisive role in the development of Russia's imperialism in Qajar Iran challenge conventional notions of a binary between the metropole and the colonial periphery.

This thesis draws on many valuable primary and secondary sources in Persian which deal directly or indirectly with Russo-Persian interactions and St. Petersburg's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. For primary sources, this study draws on the memoirs of several Persian diplomats and statesmen between the years 1800 and 1906. I also use several Persian newspapers from this period that covered Russo-Persian relations and Russian activities in Iran. Moreover, there are several significant documentary collections published in recent years in Iran compiling valuable historic documents from Qajar Iran. One of these collections that this thesis draws on frequently, especially in chapter two, is *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazie Rus dar Iran: Negahi Gozara be Raveabeteh Hamkarihayeh Iran va Rus* published by the Persian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2002. This book contains valuable records from the archives of the Persian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that document the Russian Empire's economic activities in Iran, especially the activities of the Russian Loan and Discount Bank of Iran. Another significant documentary collection is *Yeksad Sanadeh Tarikhi* edited by Ebrahim Safaie which contains valuable documents from the Qajar era collected over the years by Safaie from several private archives. For secondary sources, I also draw on several valuable monographs by Persian historians, such as *Tarikhcheye Brigade va Divisioneh Qazagh* written by Mohsen Mirzaie, which focuses primarily on the activities of the Persian Cossack Brigade in the final decades of Romanov rule. This dissertation also makes use of several Russian and English primary and secondary sources. The Russian primary sources

consist mostly of Russian newspapers and journals published in the second half of the nineteenth century and memoirs of several Russian diplomats in Qajar Iran. Several significant secondary sources like Ludmila Kulagina's scholarly work *Rossia i Iran XIX- Nachalo XX Beka* were instrumental for understanding the Russians' viewpoint on Russo-Persian interactions in late Qajar Iran. The English secondary sources also helped me significantly to develop a better understanding of several aspects of St. Petersburg's imperialism in Iran as some of these authors used archives located in the Russian Federation for their studies. Russian, Persian, and English sources are all necessary for producing a careful analysis of Russo-Persian relations and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran.

Chapter One
Russo-Persian Relations Before 1800 and the Foundation of the Persian Cossack Brigade

A careful analysis of Russo-Persian relations over the course of the nineteenth century until the Persian constitutional Revolution in 1906 requires a brief overview of the relationship between Tsarist Russia and Iran prior to that period. This chapter provides this overview by examining the background of Russo-Persian relations, especially in the eighteenth century. Moreover, this chapter will demonstrate how the two Russo-Persian wars in the early nineteenth century, and the formation of Russo-Persian borders in the Southeastern Caucasus, led to the flow of ideas from the Russian Empire to Iran and made Persians frame modernity through the lens of the Russian Empire. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire became a model of modernity and progress for Persian authorities to emulate. As we shall see, such an admiration for Tsarist Russia significantly contributed to the development and implementation of Russia's imperialist policies in Iran, a factor that makes Russia's imperialism in late Qajar Iran a unique case. For instance, this chapter will show how this admiration led to the formation of the Persian Cossack Brigade in 1878 which itself became a valuable tool at the disposal of Russian authorities to pursue their imperialist ambitions in Iran. Moreover, this chapter will show that the activities of the Persian Cossack Brigade were not confined only to the military sphere. The Brigade's activities were indeed multifaceted and contributed to the economic, cultural, and political influence of the Russian Empire in Iran.

Russo-Persian contacts before 1800

Scholars unanimously agree that the Treaty of Turkmanchay (1828), which ended the second Russo-Persian War (1826–8) is a turning point in the histories of Tsarist Russia and Qajar Iran. This treaty established a pattern of Russia's political and commercial involvement in Iran that

would grow for the remainder of the Tsarist era.[79] A brief overview of the background of Russo-Persian relations prior to the Treaty of Turkmanchay is required for broadening our understanding of the significance of this treaty in shaping the two neighbors' relations.

According to the Persian and Arabic sources, the history of Russo-Persian relations goes back to the time of the Samanid Empire (819–999), when this Persian Empire had regular trade relations with the Eastern Slavonic people.[80] The main trade route was along the Volga River and the Caspian Sea.[81] The Mongol invasion of both Persia and Russian lands in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries disrupted Russo-Persian commercial relations.[82] These relations revived in the late fifteenth century as the rise of the Safavids to power in Iran coincided with the rise of Muscovy to power in Russia.[83] Muscovy's acquisition of the Volga River's full course in the mid sixteenth century during the reign of Ivan IV (r.1533–1584) facilitated Russo-Persian trade.[84] Over this period we also witness the first series of diplomatic and trade mission exchanges between Ivan IV and the Persian Shah Tahmasp I (r.1524–1576).[85] However, it was during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I (r.1588–1629) that Russo-Persian relations were expanded significantly. Over this period, Iran sent fifteen diplomatic and trade missions to Russia and received ten such Russian missions.[86] Apart from trade, the two powers' constant rivalry with the Ottoman Empire

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[79] Muriel Atkin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian Relations," in *Russians in Iran Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond,* ed. Rudi Matthee & Elena Andreeva (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 11.
[80] Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, *Tarikhe Ravabeteh Rus va Iran* (Tehran: Entesharateh Dr. Mahmoud Afshar, 1993), 42.
[81] Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalsim* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 13.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Jamalzadeh, *Tarikhe Ravabeteh Rus,* 109.
[84] Atkin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 12.
[85] Jamalzadeh, *Tarikhe Ravabeteh Rus,* 110.
[86] Afshin Matin-asgari, "The Impact of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union on Qajar and Pahlavi Iran," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 14.

contributed to their own increasing diplomatic contacts, although a formal alliance against the Ottomans was never produced.[87] After the rule of Shah 'Abbas I, and throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century, Russo-Persian relations declined.[88] It is significant to note here that over this period, until the reforms of Peter the Great (r.1682–1725), Russia and Iran treated each other as equals, since they were at approximately the same level of military and political development.[89]

The reign of Peter the Great, his Westernization reforms and the growing power of Russia, coincided with the decline of the Safavids. Initially Peter saw Iran as a useful ally against the Ottoman Empire.[90] For this reason, in 1715 he sent a young officer, Artemii Volynskii, to Iran to gather strategic information and explore the possibilities of an alliance against the Ottoman Empire.[91] Peter also hoped to establish a trading presence in the southeastern Caucasus and on the southern coast of the Caspian as a way to make Russia a significant player in the East-West trade.[92] However, the Safavids' decline did not lead to an alliance between the two countries. Volynskii informed Peter of the rapid decline of the Safavids and their possible imminent demise.[93] This encouraged Peter to use the deteriorating situation of the Safavids to his advantage and expand his empire. As a result, weeks before the fall of the Persian capital Isfahan to the Afghans, Russian troops invaded the western and southern coast of the Caspian, which were parts of the Safavids' realm.[94] This marks the beginning of Russia's aggressive expansionist policies towards Iran. Nevertheless, the outcome of this invasion was not what Peter

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[87] Atkin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 12.
[88] Matin-asgari, "The Impact of Imperial Russia," 14.
[89] Adreeva, *Russia and Iran,* 13.
[90] Atkin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 12.
[91] Andreeva, *Russia and Iran,* 13.
[92] Aktin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 12.
[93] Jamalzadeh, *Tarikhe Ravabeteh Rus,* 172.
[94]Andreeva, *Russia and Iran,* 13.

had hoped. The promised economic gains were not realized and Russian troops occupying the southern Caspian coast died in large numbers from disease. [95] Peter's successors did not follow up on his ambitious plans in Iran and, by 1753, the last of the Russian troops had left the area.[96]

For most of the eighteenth-century Iran suffered from internal turmoil and political fragmentation. Over this same period, Russia's foreign relations were dominated by her western neighbors and the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, for most of the eighteenth century, relations between Russia and Iran remained minimal. Catherine the Great's (r.1762–96) reforms and military victories asserted Russia's status as a major European power, obviously much more powerful than Iran. Furthermore, it was only in the last decade of her reign that Russia resumed the expansionist policies of Peter the Great in Iran.[97] It was King Erekle (r.1762–98) of Georgia, whose appeal for an alliance with Russia provided Catherine with a golden opportunity to pursue her imperialist policies in the southeastern Caucasus and southern Caspian coast.[98] Since the foundation of the Safavid dynasty in 1501, for three hundred years, the southeastern Caucasus had been under the command of Persian shahs.[99] Nevertheless, the fall of the Safavids and the constant threat of the Ottomans made the Georgian King seek Russia's protection.[100]

Catherine's policy toward King Erekle's appeal was in line with her expansionist policies. In general, Catherine's expansionist policy toward Iran contained both commercial and military interests. Commercially, like Peter the Great, Catherine saw the southeastern Caucasus

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[95]Atkin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 13.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Andreeva, *Russia and Iran,* 14.
[98] An Orthodox Christian Kingdom, King Erekle's domains constituted of the principalities of Kartlo and Kakheti.
[99] Maziar Behrooz, "From Confidence to Apprehension: Early Iranian Interaction with Russia," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 50.
[100] Aktin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 13.

and southern Caspian coast presenting Russia with a golden opportunity to dominate trade with Iran and extend it beyond, into India.[101] Militarily, Russia's presence in southeastern Caucasus and southern Caspian coast could give Russia a superior position for confronting the Ottoman Empire.[102] Moreover, Catherine was strongly influenced by the Enlightenment concepts of European cultural superiority over non-European states as well as by the practical example of Western European powers' expansion through trade companies.[103] Therefore, Russia's expansion into these regions was perfectly in accordance with Catherine's empire-building ambitions and also her determination to assert that Russia was a civilized European country. Finally, in 1783, the Treaty of Georgievsk between Russia and the Kingdom of Georgia officially ended Georgia's four hundred years relations with Iran and put it under Russian protection.[104]

The Treaty of Georgievsk was soon to be challenged by the emergence of a centralized state in Iran in the last decade of the eighteenth century. After decades of power struggle in the Safavid lands, a new dynasty was found by Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (r.1789–97). Agha Mohammad Khan tried to establish this new state as the legitimate successor to the Safavid dynasty.[105] For achieving this end, he embarked on several campaigns to consolidate his power over former Safavid realms. He successfully managed to bring most of the former Safavid lands in the Persian plateau under his control. Nevertheless, it was only with the annexation of Georgia and several khanates in southeastern Caucasus that his claim as the legitimate successor of the Safavids could be seen as valid. Therefore, in 1795, Agha Mohammad Khan launched an attack

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[101] Behrooz, "From Confidence to Apprehension," 50.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Moritz Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism: The Ideal Anarchists 1800-1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 21.
[104] Behrooz, "From Confidence to Apprehension," 50.
[105] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 21.

on Georgia, which refused to recognize him as its overlord.[106] His successful campaign led to the conquest of Tbilisi by a Persian army in the same year.[107] It was only after Georgia's defeat that Agha Mohammad Khan crowned himself as the new Shah of Iran in 1796.[108] Agha Mohammad Khan's victory over the King Erekle of Georgia, then under Russian Empire's protection, and the plunder of Tbilisi by Persian troops were a major blow to the self-esteem of Russia's imperial prestige. Catherine responded by sending Russian troops to the area in 1796. She intended to not only secure the Georgian Kingdom but also to annex khanates between it and the Caspian Sea and depose Agha Mohammad Khan.[109] However, after Catherine's sudden death in November 1796, her successor Pavel (r.1796–1801) immediately canceled the campaign.[110] With Agha Mohamad Khan's assassination in 1797 and his successor's preoccupation with securing his own claim to the throne, Russo-Persian relations became less strained for a few years.

A New Era: Early Nineteenth Century and the Two Russo-Persian Wars

Russia entered the nineteenth century as a European great power. A century of Westernization reforms, major military victories and immense expansion asserted her status as a major player of Euro-Asian affairs. Expansion into new lands had been one of the most important political agendas of the Romanov dynasty (r.1613–1917) since its foundation in 1613. Nevertheless, Russia's expansion in the nineteenth century had new dimensions. As Elena Andreeva puts it "the emergence of imperialism created a colonial outlook on expansion. Territorial aggrandizement came to be combined with the extension of political sovereignty over conquered

[106] Aktin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 14.
[107] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 21.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Aktin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 14.
[110] Ibid.

peoples in the belief that the colonies would make the empire rich, and that the empire could in turn benefit subject peoples by introducing them to civilization and Christianity."[111]As mentioned earlier, unlike Western European empires Russia was expanding overland rather than overseas. For the Russian elite, these expansions were also necessary to confirm Russia's status as a major European power. Therefore, in accordance with all these factors, with the hope of using the southeastern Caucasus territories against foes in other conflicts, and despite the Treaty of Georgievsk Russia annexed the Georgian Kingdom in late 1800.[112] This made Russia's war with the Qajar Iran inevitable especially because Pavel's successor Alexander I (r.1801–1825) saw the annexation of the khanates up to the Aras and Kura rivers necessary as buffers for Georgia's security.[113] Moreover, St Petersburg's conception of Iran as a conglomerate of local rulers, rather than as a unified state, further legitimized and supported Russia's expansionist goals.[114] On the Persian side, Agha Mohmmad's Khan's successor Fath' Ali Shah (r.1797–1834) saw this as a direct threat to the Qajar's claim to rule the realm of the former Safavid Empire. As a result, the first Russo-Persian War (1804–1813) erupted in 1804.

After nine years of intensive fighting, the Persian army, which was led by the Persian crown prince 'Abbas Mirza, suffered humiliating defeats and the war ended with the Treaty of Golestan in 1813.[115] Under the Treaty of Golestan, Iran lost most of her Caucasian possessions, including Baku, Darband, Ganjeh, and Georgia. Fath' Ali Shah gave up his right to maintain a navy in the Caspian Sea, and Tehran had to accept unfavourable arrangements in regard to tariffs.[116] Nevertheless, specific details about various parts of the border were vague or were left

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[111] Andreeva, *Russia and Iran,* 14.
[112] Aktin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 14.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 22.
[115] Andreeva, *Russia and Iran,* 14.
[116] Ibid.

for future definition.[117] This led to the second Russo-Persian War (1826–8) and the further crushing defeats of the Persian army. As mentioned earlier, the Treaty of Turkmanchay, which ended the war in 1828, was a turning point in Russo-Persian relations. It shaped Russo-Persian relations for the remainder of the Tsarist era. Furthermore, it paved the way for the Russian Empire's increasing influence over all aspects of Persians' lives and became the fundamental document regulating Russo-Persian relations until the fall of the Russian monarchy in February 1917.

Under the Treaty of Turkmanchay, Iran handed the khanates of Erevan and Nakhchivean to Russia and had to pay 20 million rubles as indemnity to St. Petersburg.[118] Such considerable reparation debt gave Russia useful means to exert pressure on Iran. The treaty gave Russia permission to open consulates wherever she wanted in Iran.[119] As we will see later, these consulates would play a significant role in consolidating Russia's influence in Iran. This can explain why Fath'Ali Shah for a long time opposed this concession.[120] Nevertheless, Iran's humiliating defeats and the imminent fall of Tehran forced the shah to accept this article of the Treaty. Fath'Ali Shah's resistance to this article can be regarded as an anti-imperial act. The treaty also contained a guarantee for succession within the Qajar dynasty, and this drew Russia into one of the core questions of the Persian monarchy.[121] This obviously gave St. Petersburg another effective tool with which to intervene in Iran's internal affairs.

Commercial agreements were yet another significant part of the treaty. These agreements secured trading privileges and extraterritorial rights for Russian subjects in Iran.[122] Tehran was

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[117] Aktin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 17.
[118] Andreeva, *Russia and Iran,* 15.
[119] Aktin, "The Early Stages of Russo-Persian," 21.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 23.
[122] Ibid., 41.

also forced to accept the capitulation system for all Russian subjects in Iran.[123] Under the capitulation system, Tehran permitted St. Petersburg to exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction over Russian subjects in Iran. The political, cultural, military, and economic consequences of the Treaty of Turkmanchay were felt in Iran until the collapse of the Tsarist state in February 1917. The rest of this chapter examines an important aspect of the long-term consequences of the two Russo-Persians Wars and the Turkmanchay Treaty. As a result of the treaty, the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran started sharing a new border in the southeastern Caucasus. All this led to close interactions between Persians and the subjects of the Russian Empire. Russo-Persian interactions in the early nineteenth century played a key role in changing many Persians' conceptions of the Russian Empire, and informed their ideas of progress, reform, and modernity. As we shall see, many Persians saw modernity through Tsarist Russia. For these Persians, Russia became the perfect model of progress to emulate. A major factor that makes Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran unique in this way is the Persian Cossack Brigade, and the story behind its foundation.

A Russian Kind of Modernity and the Foundation of the Persian Cossack Brigade

The Persian Cossack Brigade led by Tsarist army officials in Tehran was one of the most effective tools at the disposal of St Petersburg for maintaining Russia's dominant influence in northern and central Iran. The brigade contributed significantly to the expansion of Russia's imperialist policies in Iran. It played a decisive role not only as the sole effective military force in Iran, but it also provided Russian authorities with valuable information on Iran's internal affairs. The brigade deepened Iran's financial dependence on St Petersburg and encouraged the shah to grant concessions to Russian subjects. What makes the case of the Persian Cossack

[123] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 41.

Brigade particularly fascinating is that its foundation was not the result of an intentional imperialist policy of St Petersburg. Rather, it was the result of the Persian elite's fascination with the Russian Empire over decades. Since the early nineteenth century, Russia's emergence as a great power thanks to the reforms of Peter the Great and his successors inspired the Persian ruling class and intellectuals.

Prior to the two Russo-Persian wars, many Persians saw Russians as primitive and uncultured.[124] For instance, Jean Chardin who travelled to Safavid Iran in 1670s recorded that Persians saw Russians as the "Uzbeks of Europe".[125] But the rise of Peter the Great to power and Russia's transformation to a major European power over the course of the eighteenth century coincided with the demise of the Safavids and decades of internal turmoil in Iran. Still, Russo-Persian interactions remained minimal throughout the eighteenth century, and Persians' conception of Russia did not change significantly. It was only the two Russo-Persian wars in early nineteenth century and Iran's humiliating defeats at the hands of the Russians that changed many Persians' conceptions of Russia. Nevertheless, even during the first Russo-Persian war we have evidence of the great extent to which Persian statesmen underestimated the power of the Russian Empire and lacked proper knowledge of Russia's recent progresses.[126] The crushing of the Persian army radically changed Persians' conception of Russia and led Persians to simultaneously fear and admire their powerful northern neighbour. [127]

This radical change is clearly reflected in the travelogue of Mirza Salih Shirazi, a young Qajar elite member who travelled to Russia in 1815. He wrote in his travelogue that "Russia is one

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[124] Matin-asgari, "The Impact of Imperial Russia," 14.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Behrooz, "From Confidence to Apprehension," 54.
[127] Firuza I. Melville, "Khosrow Mirza's Mission to St Petersburg in 1829," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 70.

of the world's largest countries and the most powerful one in all of Europe."[128] Mirza Salih was deeply impressed by Russia's quick transformation to a major power as a result of Peter the Great and his successors' reforms and stated: "Peter realized that, compared to Europeans, his Russian subjects were less than human, while he himself fell short in comparison to Europe's monarchs. Europe excelled due to the prevalence of science, industry, and orderliness, things which Peter's realm utterly lacked. Moreover, European monarchs were great because they tried to better their subjects and establish rules and regulations for their state and country."[129] It made sense then to Persians that Russia and not Europe could be the best model of success for them to emulate, as pre-Petrine Russia shared many similarities with early nineteenth century Iran in terms of perceived backwardness.

'Abbas Mirza, the heir to the throne and governor of Azerbaijan who led Persian troops in both wars against Russia (1804–13, 1826–8), personally experienced the military might of the Russian Empire. 'Abbas Mirza is known to have shown great esteem for Peter the Great, who 'Abbas Mirza believed turned backward Russia into a mighty superpower through his reforms of the government and army.[130] For 'Abbas Mirza, Russia's autocratic system was closer to the autocratic Persian monarchy than a parliamentary Britain or a revolutionary France.[131] This can be regarded as another important reason for Persians to admire Tsarist Russia and see it as the best model of progress for Iran to emulate. Therefore, 'Abbas Mirza and many among the Persian elite concluded that to reverse Iran's decline the best model for Persians to emulate is

[128] Matin-asgari, "The Impact of Imperial Russia," 15.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Melville, "Khosrow Mirza's Mission," 71.
[131] Stephanie Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks and Revolutionaries: Russians in Iranian Military Service, 1800-1920," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 147.

that of the Russian Tsars'. [132] In other words, Persians saw the road to modernity and progress through Russia rather than Western Europe. The two countries' geographical proximity and their close cultural and political resemblance contributed to the formation of this conception. The elements of borderland studies and entangled history are at work here. Therefore, the Persian elite's admiration for apparent successes of Tsarist reform in general and of the very evident successes of the Tsarist army made Russia a natural model for Persian reformers and shaped Iranians' conception of modernity, progress, and reform.

The evolution of Persian intellectual thought over the course of the nineteenth century cannot be understood without considering the history of Tsarist Russia and Russo-Persian relations. This itself shows the significance of Entangled History for understanding the history of Iran in the nineteenth century. It was this conception and admiration for Russia that led to the emergence of the Persian Cossack Brigade in the second half of the nineteenth century. As we shall see, this admiration is not only reflected through several military and administrative reforms attempted by Persian statesmen over the course of the nineteenth century but also through the pages of Persian statesmen's memoirs. For instance, the first series of military reforms conducted by Qajar authorities in the first quarter of the nineteenth century called *nizam-i-jadid* were based on Tsarist Army's conscription system.[133]

By imitating Peter the Great's system of conscription, which involved recruiting for life a small proportion of the population from the agricultural sector, *nizam-i-jadid* incorporated from Russia a uniquely reactionary and outdated method of recruitment that was below the standard of Western Europe.[134] Another highlight of *nizam-i-jadid* was the emergence of the Russian

[132] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 147.
[133] Ibid., 158.
[134] Ibid., 159.

battalion consisting of Russian Army deserters in Iran. What makes this battalion even more important for our argument is that these Russian deserters were also responsible for training Persian troops in modern tactics.[135] Therefore, long before the arrival of any Western European military advisors to Iran, deserters from the Russian armed forces (a subject to which we will return) in the Persian army were already employed by Persian authorities. As Stephanie Cronin states "unlike later French and British advisors, whose stay in Iran was short-lived and whose impact relatively superficial, the Russian deserters played a significant military role within the *nizam-i-jadid* for several decades."[136] The presence of these Russian deserters in the Persian army in the first half of the nineteenth century reveals the significance of Russo-Persian cross-border interactions for understanding Russia's influence in Qajar Iran. Chapter Three focuses specifically on the role of these cross-border interactions in the development of St. Petersburg's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran.

The Persian elite's admiration for the Russian Empire is clearly reflected in the memoirs of numerous members of the Persian ruling class in the nineteenth century. For instance, Mirza Mustafa Afshar who visited St Petersburg in 1830 on an official diplomatic mission stated: "A group of people who used to be like savages and wild animals, in a matter of 120 years have mastered all the arts and sciences, and a state which was perpetually unstable has found lasting order and stability, and every day shows progress and improvement."[137] Afshar refers then to the necessity of his country's adoption of the Russian model of progress and reproaches his countrymen for not immediately following Tsarist Russia's path of reform: "It is regrettable that

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[135] Elena Andreeva, "Russian Government Action against Russian Deserters in Iran in the Nineteenth Century: Russian Orientalism at the State Level," in *Russians in Iran Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond,* ed. Rudi Matthee & Elena Andreeva (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 77.
[136] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 148.
[137] Matin-asgari, "The Impact of Imperial Russia," 15.

we clearly see the progress of our neighbor [Russia], which has been attained in a short time, but we are not thinking about doing the same so that we would not always be defeated by our neighbor."[138] In that same year Fath' Ali Shah's chief minister wrote in his diary that: "The Russians, whom we previously considered inferior due to their extreme lack of wit, today are in many ways ahead of us ... the Russians have extended their sphere of influence from the Neman to the Danube to the Aras to the steppes of Crimea to the mountains of Gorjestan . . . their gradual domination can to some extent show us as to what we need to do. Our resistance against this flood is futile."[139]

It is no surprise then that the ideas of almost all pro-reform Persian officials throughout the nineteenth century who attempted to implement some minor administerial reforms were modelled after the bureaucratic and professional ethos of Tsarist Russia's administration.[140] For instance, in the early 1870s an associate of the Persian minister of justice corresponded with the famous writer Mirza Fath 'Ali Akhundzadeh (b.1812–1878). Akhundzadeh was an official and a translator in the Russian administration in the Caucasus, and the Persians sought his advice for reforming the Persian judicial system according to the Russian model.[141] However, the Qajar state did not possess the coercive power of Petrine Russia, and the Persian shahs neither had the determination nor the fiscal and administrative resources of the Russian Tsars to emulate their reforms. Therefore, Iran was not successful in following the steps of Russian Tsars until 1920s. Nevertheless, the fascination with the Russian Empire remained intact.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Iranians also witnessed the rapid modernization of the southeastern Caucasus, lands that they lost to St Petersburg earlier that

[138] Behrooz, "From Confidence to Apprehension," 65.
[139] Ibid., 57.
[140] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 32.
[141] Ibid.

century because of the two Russo-Persian wars. For instance, by the early 1880s, only half a century after its annexation by Russia, Baku transformed from a half ruined Persian city into a modern European city with railways, telephone, hospitals, urban trams, and one of the world's biggest centers for petroleum extraction.[142] Significant progress in these former Persian territories over just a few decades captivated Iranian travelers and this fascination is reflected in their memoirs and travelogues. For example, a Persian poet called Yahya Dolatabadi (b.1862-1940) who traveled to southeastern Caucasus as a young man in the 1880s recorded the transformation of these regions under Russian rule in his diary. Dolatabadi reflects that

> Under our rule [Persian rule] Baku's few streets were in devastating situation. All streets were dirt roads. There was no single brick road in the city. When the wind used to blow, the whole city was covered with thick clouds of dust for at least ten consecutive days. During this time, it was almost impossible to see anything in the city. Almost eighty percent of the city's population were suffering from trachoma. During rainy days, the height of mud on the streets could reach a person's knee. It was not possible to walk on the streets. Therefore, there were special workers who used to carry the pedestrians on their back.[143]

He then continues by saying that

> Of course, I am sad that we [Persians] lost these lands [former Persian territories in southeastern Caucasus]. Nevertheless, while travelling through the prosperous cities and villages of this region, I had this feeling that these lands were smiling at me and telling me that if we were still part of Iran how could we witness such an amazing development. We were like the rest of the Iranian lands backward and in a miserable condition. We had to endure for long years the passage of camels and mules. However, nowadays railways and brick roads like vessels connect the different parts of our body with each other and have given us a new life. Why do you [Iranians] wish for our misery?[144]

The significance of Russo-Persian borders in southeastern Caucasus and the constant movement across these borders by both Russian and Persian subjects are clear in shaping many Persians' conceptions of Russia.

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[142] Quoted in Rasoul Poorzamani, *Baku va Enghelabeh Mashrooteyeh Irani* (Tehran: Safirardehal, 2016), 29-31.
[143] Ibid., 27.
[144] Ibid., 31-2.

Even the Persian Shah Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (r.1848-1896) on his early trips to former Persian held territory in Caucasus could not hide his admiration for the development in this region and acknowledged the effects of Russian rule in his diary. For instance, he wrote about Tbilisi in his first trip to the Caucasus in 1873 that "fifty years ago, this town was very wretched and filthy; now, by degree, private houses and public buildings, schools and colleges, broad streets paved with stone, are being constructed."[145] In 1889, the Governor General of Warsaw recorded in his diaries that during the visit of Naser al-Din Shah, the shah asked him for a complete edition of all laws of the Russian Empire clarifying that "republican and constitutional states in their forms of administration do not fit him."[146] Like many other Persians at that time Naser al-Din Shah simultaneously feared and admired Tsarist Russia's power and saw her as the best model of progress for Iran to emulate. The Russians were aware of their country's high status in Persians' imaginations. For instance, during Naser al-Din Shah's visit to Russia, Russian newspapers emphasized their country's role in Iran as that of giving well-meaning and generous guidance on the acquisition of European civilization.[147] In its edition of May 12, 1873 reporting on the Naser al-Din Shah's first trip to Russia and Europe, the Russian journal *Vsemirnaia Illiustratsiia* states that during the shah's visits to Western European capitals: " he [Naser al-Din Shah] would maybe see more outward brilliance of civilization, but hardly more sincerity in the feelings."[148] According to the journal, Russia alone due to its geographical proximity with Persia, was sincerely interested in Persia's development while the other

[145] Quoted in Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 84-5.
[146] Ibid., 32-3.
[147] Ibid., 85.
[148] Ibid., 86.

Europeans simply saw Iran as an object for reasoning, of purely political possession and as a weapon for their intrigues.[149]

There is no coincidence then that during his second trip abroad in 1878, despite visiting Austrian-Hungry, Germany, France, and Britain, Naser al-Din Shah was most of all impressed by the parades of the Tsarist Army, especially the Russian Cossack force. On that trip the shah decided to establish a Cossack brigade in Tehran with the help of Russian officers.[150] By using new technology and institutions the Persian shah wanted to consolidate his power. For Naser al-Din Shah no other means seemed as promising in this regard as a modernized military, which became the centerpiece of the Qajars' reform attempts.[151] To them, Tsarist Russia was obviously the best model for the Persian shah to emulate.

St Petersburg was more than delighted to form a Cossack brigade under the command of Russian officers at the heart of the Persian capital, and in January 1878 the first group of Russian officers under the command of colonel Aleksei Ivanovich Domontovich (b.1846-1908) arrived in Tehran.[152] By July 1878, the brigade was officially formed consisting of Persian soldiers but was commanded by Colonel Domontovich and other Russian officers.[153] The Persian Cossack Brigade became a useful tool in the hands of Russian authorities to further Russia's influence in Iran. The commander and the high-ranking officers of the brigade were all professional Tsarist Army colonels and staff officers. These officers and their period of service in Iran were determined solely by the Russian authorities in Caucasus. Neither the shah nor his ministers were able to exercise any sort of influence over these appointments or the scope of these officers'

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[149] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 86.
[150] Mohsen Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigade va Divisioneh Qazaq az Colonel Domontovich ta Reza Khan Savad Koohi* (Tehran: Nashr-e-Elm, 2015), 64.
[151] Deustchmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 89.
[152] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigade,* 65.
[153] Ibid, 74.

duties.[154] The commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade had to consult with the Russian ambassador in Tehran for every single decision.[155] The commander of the brigade also had to report on a regular basis all details of the brigade's affairs to the Russian authorities in Caucasus.[156] This demonstrates to what extent St Petersburg saw the brigade as a useful tool to implement Russia's imperial ambitions in Iran. The brigade, therefore, was of great significance to the success of Russian imperialist policies in Iran. For instance, when the Russian ambassador in Tehran noticed that Colonel Domontovich had become too close to Persian authorities, and was attending important state meetings that the Russian ambassador was not invited to, and even resisted giving the ambassador any kind of information about these meetings, the ambassador asked St Petersburg to immediately dismiss him and send a new commander.[157] Thus, when Colonel Domontovich went for a short vacation to Russia, the Russian authorities prevented him from ever returning to Iran.[158] Naser al-Din Shah officially asked the Russian government for the return of Colonel Domontovich. Nevertheless, his request was firmly denied by St. Petersburg.[159]

After the dismissal of Colonel Domontovich, the Persian Cossack Brigade also became a useful tool at the disposal of St Petersburg to spy on Iran. The brigade started gathering valuable strategic information in Iran and sent it regularly to Russia.[160] This became possible after the appointment of Colonel Vladimir Andreevich Kosogovskii (b.1857–1918) in 1894 as the commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade. Kosogovskii built up a substantial information network, in which Persian officers reported to him on current political developments in Iranian

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[154] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 160.
[155] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigade,* 81.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid., 87.
[158] Ibid., 88.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 92.

provinces and provided him with geographical and strategic information.[161] Kosogovskii naturally passed all the information to Russian authorities. Kosogovskii also provided Russian authorities with detailed reports on the personalities and secret affairs of Persian statesmen.[162] Kosogovskii, who commanded the Persian Cossack Brigade until 1903, managed to turn the brigade into the most effective and powerful military unit in all of Iran.[163] The brigade's power and dominance in the Persian capital offered an effective way to control the succession in Qajar family, another significant tool in the hands of St Petersburg. For instance, when Naser al-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896, it was the Cossack Brigade that kept Tehran quiet and secured a smooth transition to Mozaffer al-Din Shah (r.1896-1907).[164] The reign of Mozaffer al-Din Shah saw the growing influence of the Cossack Brigade in Iran. For example, in 1899, the shah granted a relocation of the brigade to the new barracks in the city center. Kosogovskii noted in a report to Russia that "the possession of these barracks gives the commander of the brigade control over the capital and allows him to threaten the citadel or to act in accordance with it against the population, depending on the circumstances."[165]

As mentioned earlier, the Russian Cossacks in Iran had direct access to the shah, ministers, and the state secrets. The brigade also enhanced Russian influence in Iran in several other ways. For instance, many of the brigade's elite Persian officers were given the opportunity to continue their education at prestigious Russian military institutions in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Tbilisi.[166] Furthermore, the Russian embassy and consulates in Iran granted Russian

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[161] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 92.
[162] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigade,* 321.
[163] Ibid., 356.
[164] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 93.
[165] Ibid.*,* 92.
[166] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 162.

diplomatic protection to all Persian members of the brigade.[167] Much like the nature of Tsarist Russia's imperialism in Iran, the Persian Cossack Brigade possessed a multifaceted nature in developing, implementing, and following Tsarist Russia's imperialist policies in Iran. For instance, Colonel Kosogovskii played a key role in securing a large Russian loan for the Persian government in 1900. In July 1900 in a report that he wrote to the Governor of the Caucasus, Kosogovskii states:

> The Persian government has no money and lost all hope in earning money by collecting taxes from the provinces. Therefore, the Shah is desperate to acquire money no matter what. Britain has cleverly grasped the urgency of this matter and is doing her best to not lose this golden opportunity and burdens Iran mercilessly with heavy debts. I am astonished by Russia's inaction and passivity in this critical situation. The British are conducting the loan negotiations with Persian authorities at a great speed. However, the members of the Russian delegation in Tehran are spending all their time having picnics in the countryside. This imminent colonial contract imposed by Britain would be the beginning of the end for Iran.[168]

Therefore, it was the commander of the Cossack Brigade who informed the Russian authorities about the British loan to Iran and used his influence and close connections with the Persian first minister to convince him to obtain a loan from Russia.[169] The shah ended up receiving a large loan from St Petersburg instead of London. This loan dramatically increased the Russian Empire's influence in Iran as it secured Persian customs revenue in both northern and southern Persian borders for the Russian Empire.[170] In Chapter Two we will talk more about this loan. The nature and function of the Persian Cossack Brigade was multifaceted. The brigade was the sole effective and powerful military force in Iran and possessed a large spy network throughout the

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[167] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 162.
[168] Vladimir Andreevich Kosogovskii, *Khaterateh Colonel Kosogovskii,* trans. 'Abbasgholi Jeli (Tehran: Ketabhay-e-Simorgh, 1977), 233.
[169] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigade,* 302.
[170] Ibid., 302-3.

entire country. The brigade exerted a profound influence on the Shah and his ministers and facilitated Russia's economic dominance in Iran.

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The Persian Cossack Brigade served as a projection of Russian imperial power into Iran. As Stephanie Cronin puts it, the formation of the Persian Cossack Brigade in Iran resembled "more closely the dynamic between empire and periphery typical of the nineteenth century, whereby an apparent and formal equality concealed a deepening subordination, a progressive loss of sovereignty often symbolized by the arrival of official military advisors."[171] However, what is unique about the Persian Cossack Brigade is its multifaceted nature in pursuing Russia's imperialist ambitions in Iran and the story behind its formation. As we have seen, the foundation of the Persian Cossack Brigade was the result of Persian statesmen's decades long admiration for the Russian Empire as the best symbol of progress, glory, power, and civilization. Since the two Russo-Persian wars in the early nineteenth century many members of the Persian elite were deeply impressed by Russia's successful transformation into a major European power over a short period of time and saw it as the best model for Iran to emulate. The Persian Cossack Brigade was established at the request of the Persians who wanted to learn the techniques of a modern army. Geographical proximity, the cultural exchange of Russian and Persian subjects, and a mixture of fear and admiration among Persians for their northern neighbor provided St Petersburg with golden opportunities to further its imperial ambitions in Iran. These elements distinguish the nature of Russian imperialism from that of other imperial powers in Iran over the

[171] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 160.

course of the nineteenth century until the fall of the Tsarist state in 1917. In the following chapters we examine the other facets of Russian imperialism in Iran in the course of the nineteenth century right before the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906.

Chapter Two
Russo-Persian Economic Relations and The Russian Loan and Discount Bank of Iran

The last decades of the nineteenth century have been regarded as the high age of European imperialism.[172] As we shall see, it is in this period that one can witness the emergence of familiar elements of economic imperialism[173] exercised by the Tsarist state in Iran. These elements included advantageous concessions for Russian subjects, and the growing dependence of the Persian state on Russian loans. However, what makes Tsarist Russia's economic dominance in Iran a particularly interesting case is that before St. Petersburg's attempts in the last decade of the nineteenth century to dominate Iran's economy, there were already well-stablished economic relations between Iran and the Russian Empire. Not only had Persian merchants for centuries been involved in business with Russia, but the Russian Empire was already Iran's major trading partner by the middle of the nineteenth century. Not only did Iran and the Russian Empire share thousands of kilometres of border, but also Iran's most populous urban areas and trade centres were located in her northern provinces, close to the Russo-Persian frontier. Furthermore, as we shall see, especially in the next chapter, many Russian and Persian subjects were constantly moving back and forth across the border. This chapter shows how the existence of well-established economic, cultural, and social interactions across the Russo-Persian border significantly facilitated the implementation of Tsarist Russia's economic imperialist policies in late Qajar Iran. Therefore, elements of Borderland Studies will be used in this chapter to study the nature of Russia's economic imperialism in late Qajar Iran. Entangled History provides us with the opportunity to look at the interconnectedness between the Russian Empire's internal economic and social circumstances and its imperialist policies toward Qajar Iran. Borderland

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[172] Moritz Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism: The Ideal Anarchists 1800-1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 81.

[173] Economic imperialism refers to the use of economic power to exert control over the countries, regions, or peoples. This can take many forms, including the control of natural resources, the manipulation of trade and investment, giving loans, and the exploitation of labor and markets.

Studies focuses our attention to the cross-border Russo-Persian interactions and their influence on the development and implementation of St. Petersburg's imperialist policies in late Qajar Iran.

Russo-Persian Economic Relations

At least until the early 1890s, the Russo-Persian trade balance was in Iran's favour. Once the Russian Empire started to industrialize and promote its economic development in the second half of the nineteenth century, it required new markets for its newborn industries. Russia's economically backward Asian neighbors, including Iran, could be ideal markets for Russian products. Naturally, it was difficult for Russian products in the beginning to compete with their advanced Western European counterparts. The combination of these factors led Tsarist statesmen to adopt new economic policies towards Qajar Iran. The interconnectedness of the Russian Empire's industrialization program and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran can be examined within the framework of Entangled History. This is because Entangled History pays close attention to the interconnectedness of different polities. This chapter also pays particular attention to the role of the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran and its activities in advancing Russia's economic imperialist ambitions in Iran.

The Russian Empire and Qajar Iran's geographical proximity can be regarded as one of the main reasons behind the two neighbours' long-running economic relations. As seen in the previous chapter, Persians already had well-established economic relations with Eastern Slavonic people for centuries. However, it was during the reign of Peter the Great that European empires' overseas expansion inspired Russian authorities to rethink their economic relations with their Asian neighbours, especially Iran.[174] The establishment of the first Russian consulates in Iran at

[174] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 40.

this time indicates St. Petersburg's desire to stimulate Russia's foreign trade with Iran following the example of Western European powers. Nevertheless, it was only Iran's defeat in the two Russo-Persian Wars in early nineteenth century that provided Russia with the golden opportunity to officially interfere in Iran's economic affairs and secure privileges for Russian merchants trading with Iran. Therefore, for the very first time, the political framework for trade between the Russian Empire and Iran was established under the Treaties of Golestan (1813) and Turkmanchay (1828). Under the Treaty of Turkmanchay, Iran had to accept a special commercial agreement that specified the rights and duties of merchants trading between Russia and Iran. The treaty also defined the legal framework in which this trade could take place.[175] According to the Treaty of Turkmanchay Russia had the right "to appoint consuls and commercial agents wherever the good of commerce will demand it."[176] As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Persian state was also forced to relinquish jurisdiction over Russian subjects in Iran and give its approval for the overall capitulation system.

The Russian consuls, therefore, touched on the economic interest of a broad range of Russian and non-Russian agents and gained a considerable influence on local politics. They registered deeds, sought compensation for Russian subjects and mediated in conflicts between them.[177] Moreover, the treaty permitted Russian merchants to possess property in Iran. Article V of the Turkmanchay Treaty reads: "In awareness that following the existing customs in Persia, it is difficult for foreign subjects to rent houses, shops or appropriate places for storing their merchandise, it is permitted to Russian subjects in Persia not only to rent but to acquire by every

[175] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 46.
[176] Marvin L. Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations, 1828–1914* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1965), 11.
[177] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism*, 46.

right of ownership houses to live in, shops and storage space."[178] The Turkmanchay Treaty also set the customs rates between the two countries at 5 percent ad valorem. Each state should collect the duties once and for all at the border and, according to Article III of the treaty, Russia promised to not increase her Russo-Persian trade customs' rates.[179]

The treaty indeed contributed to the growth of Russo-Persian trade. Nevertheless, as we shall see, for six decades until the early 1890s, it could not fulfill St Petersburg's extensive expectations of dominating the Persian markets with Russian products and guarantee the dependence of Iran's economy to the Russian Empire. On the contrary, Russo-Persian peaceful relations over these six decades (1830–1890), and even some of the articles of the Treaty of Turkmanchay worked in Persian merchants' favour. This may seem odd at the first glance. However, this phenomenon had several significant reasons. Rather than being driven by Russian merchants going abroad, Russian trade with Iran had traditionally been shaped by a community of Persian merchants, especially from the Azerbaijan and Gilan provinces of Iran, and the Muslim and Armenian merchants of southern Caucasus. These merchants held substantial power within urban communities in Iran and even in southern Russia and Caucasus.[180] Unlike Russian merchants in Iran, Persian tradesmen had a long standing in the Russian Empire. For instance, a Persian merchant community from the northern province of Iran, Gilan, had existed in the Russian city of Astrakhan since late sixteenth century.[181] This Persian merchant community had

[178] Morteza Nouraei and Vanessa Martin, "Russian Land Acquisition in Iran from 1828 to 1911," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 95.
[179] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 13.
[180] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism*, 41.
[181] Ibid., 42.

its own trading house (*gostinyi dvor)* in the city and played a key role in Russo-Persian trade for centuries.[182]

The dominance of Persian, South Caucasian Muslim, and Armenian merchants in Russo-Persian trade in the six decades following the Turkmanchay Treaty had major implications for the expansion of Russian imperialist ambitions in Iran. For instance, over this period, due to the residence of very few Russians apart from the diplomatic missionaries in Iran, Article V of the treaty, which gave Russian subjects the right to own property in Iran, was of almost no use to St. Petersburg.[183] The same was true for the capitulation system granted to Russian subjects. Secondly, over these six decades, the merchandise balance of Russo-Persian trade was against Russia. Iran traded both raw and manufactured products with Russia and sold more manufactured goods, such as cotton yarns, woolens, and rugs to Russia than she bought. [184] Even by the mid-nineteenth century, following the Industrial Revolution in Britain and France and the influx of cheap European goods into the Middle East, the relatively less developed and backward Russian economy still offered a profitable outlet for many Persian products.[185] For instance, still in the 1870s, the value of cotton goods exported from Iran to Russia was almost four times higher than that of the reverse trade.[186]

The influx of cheap European goods into the Middle East did not stop the export of Persian raw and manufactured goods to Russia. But it did dramatically decrease the reverse trade. As Russo-Persian trade was mostly in the hands of the Persian merchants, many Persian merchants started to cash large amounts of specie for their products on the Russian markets, then

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[182] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism*, 42.
[183] Nouraei and Martin, "Russian Land Acquisition," 96.
[184] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 10.
[185] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism*, 45.
[186] Ibid.

left Russia to buy European merchandise.[187] Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the Article III of the Turkmanchay Treaty set the customs rates between Russia and Iran at 5 percent. Before the 1880s, this article worked in the favour of Persian merchants. Not only did Persian goods continue entering Russia at the low rate, but now also cheap European goods concealed under a Persian rubric often entered Russia, at the lower Persian customs rate, to compete with Russian manufactures.[188] Furthermore, the special advantages Russian merchants could derive from the 5-percent customs rate were illusory, for soon after 1828 it became the standard rate for all countries doing business with Iran.[189]All these led to the drastic outflow of silver from Russia to Iran, a phenomenon usually associated with the economic decline of non-European empires, like China, in the early nineteenth century.[190] This caused great concern among Russian authorities. Nevertheless, this outflow gradually reduced only after the 1860s with the industrialization of the Russian Empire's economy.

It is fair then to conclude that for six decades following the Treaty of Turkmanchay in 1828, St Petersburg's attempts to expand and control trade relations with Iran struggled to transform the pre-existing networks established by Persian merchants from Iran, and also Muslim and Armenian merchants from South Caucasus. Only with the capitalization and industrialization of the Russian economy in the last three decades of the nineteenth century did a dramatic shift in Russo-Persian trade relations occur. The prominent Persian prince and Qajar diplomat Abdollah Mostofi (1876–1950) clearly points to this dramatic shift in Russo-Persian trade relations in his memoir:

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[187] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism*, 43.
[188] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 13.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism*, 43.

> Before 1890, our domestic products including food, clothing, and all other necessary living tools could satisfy the needs of all our social classes. We used to only import luxurious items, such as fur, china, glass, and Kashmir shawl from abroad. Our merchants in the border cities and provinces oversaw importing these goods… Our merchants used to take our products to the annual Nizhnii Novgorod Trade Fair and exchange them with foreign ones…. Nevertheless, when Russians in imitating Europeans established modern factories throughout their Empire and their railway lines reached our border, our country became an ideal market for their products. Naser al-Din Shah's trips to Russia and other European countries changed the taste and lifestyle of our elite. Naturally, this new lifestyle gradually penetrated lower classes as well.[191]

What is significant here for our argument is that once the Russian Empire embarked on industrialization, there were already well-established trade relations, and economic ties between Iran and Russia. As we shall see, these existing ties and relations, which at first obscured the Russian Empire's economic ambitions, would eventually, following the industrialization of the empire, considerably facilitate St. Petersburg's economic dominance of Iran starting in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The Russian Empire's diplomatic failures in Europe, followed by humiliating defeats in the Crimean War against Britain and France (1853–6), revealed the empire's internal weaknesses. In comparison with Western European powers, which were successfully industrializing, Russia's economy continued to suffer from relative backwardness. The Tsarist government was forced to implement major reforms, including the capitalization and industrialization of the empire's economy, if it wanted to preserve Russia's status as a great power.[192] Following the reforms of Emperor Alexander II (r.1855–81) and his successors, the Russian economy underwent a rapid program of capitalization and industrialization. In fact, economically these reforms proved successful as, over the years 1883 to 1913, Russia's total

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[191] Abdollah Mostofi, *Sharheh Zendeganieyeh Man: Tarikhe Ejtemayii va Edariyeh Doreyeh Qajareyeh* (Tehran: Hermes, 2016), 715-6.
[192] Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians A History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 355.

industrial output rose by an annual average of 4.5 or 5 percent, a rate comparable with that of the United States, Germany, and Japan in their peak periods of continual growth.[193] Nevertheless, despite these successes, Russia had a long way to catch up with the advanced economies of Western European powers, such as Germany, Britain and France. Meanwhile, following the Crimean War, as Russia's influence in European affairs was significantly reduced for the remainder of the Romanov rule, Russia's politics towards her Asian neighbours, including Iran, acquired more significance.[194] In other words, it was easier for Russia to catch up with the Western European powers in regions like Iran, Central Asia, and Far East. Furthermore, Russian officials came to the belief that economic imperialism was required to industrialize Russia herself.[195] Therefore, in accordance with this belief, Tsarist government went to great length to dominate the Persian markets with the products of its newborn industries. As we shall see, all these factors had major implications on the Russo-Persian economic relations in the second half of the nineteenth century and paved the way for Russia's near-exclusive economic dominance over the northern and central regions of Iran by 1906. In the following pages I elaborate on how economic activities became another useful tool at the disposal of the Tsarist government to follow its imperialist ambitions in Iran.

Confined only to the theories of imperialism, Russia and Iran are studied as two separate entities, Russia as the metropole and Iran as the colonized. However, Borderland Studies refocuses our attention on the interactions across the Russo-Persian borderlands. These interactions are important, as they facilitated the implementation of St. Petersburg's economic imperialism in late Qajar Iran. The geographical proximity of the Russian Empire and Iran,

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[193] Hosking, *Russia and the Russians,* 356–7.
[194] Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalsim* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 18.
[195] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism*, 108.

sharing thousands of kilometers of border, the proximity of most prosperous and populated Persian cities to the Russo-Persian borders, and well-established trade routes and economic ties between Iran and the Russian Empire, provided ample opportunities for St. Petersburg to dominate Iran's economy and successfully develop its imperialist ambitions. Moreover, drawing inspiration from Entangled History turns our attention to the dependencies, interferences, and entanglements between Russo-Persian polities. It refocuses our attention to the interconnectedness of the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran. Here, we saw the interconnectedness and overlapping nature of the Russian Empire's internal affairs and the empire's imperialist policies towards Iran. Russian Empire's industrialization, and its necessity for preserving the empire's status as a great power made St. Petersburg to look desperately for new markets for its newborn industries. Russian officials saw Iran as an ideal market for the empire's newborn industries and this affected Russia's imperialist policies in Iran.

The construction of railways connecting different regions of the empire was one of the centerpieces of the Tsarist government's industrialization reforms. As also mentioned by Abdollah Mostofi, this had major consequences on the alleviation of some of the physical obstacles to Russian products' penetration into Iran. During the late 1860s and early 1870s the railroads advanced through the Caucasus to Tbilisi.[196] This naturally made the transfer of Russian products across the Persian border easier and cheaper. Furthermore, in the early 1860s the Caucasus and Mercury steamship line began to make subsidized voyages, postal and passenger, from Baku to Persian Caspian ports.[197] The annexation of Central Asia by Russia and the construction of the Transcaspian railway in late 1880s provided Russian merchants easier access to the northeastern Persian markets. In fact, the annexation of Central Asia by St.

[196] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 17.
[197] Ibid.

Petersburg during the second half of the nineteenth century can be seen as one of the key factors that contributed to the reverse of Russo-Persian trade balance in Russia's favour, and her growing economic influence in northern and central Iran. As early as mid-1884 the flow of trade in Khorasan, which was the northeastern Persian province sharing a border with Russia, after St. Petersburg's annexation of Merv in 1884, was turning north, passing into the Russian Empire by ways of Ashkhabad, Kizyl-Arvat, and Krasnovodsk.[198] For instance, a Russian trading company opened a branch at Barfurush (now known as Babol and located to the north-east of Tehran and southern coast of the Caspian Sea). In 1885 and by 1892 there were only four such firms in Khorasan.[199] The annexation of the Central Asia and the growth of Russia's export to Iran also facilitated the establishment of Russian consulates in northeastern Iran. Apart from commercial agents, Russia placed her consul-general at Mashhad in 1889.[200] Now, at last, St Petersburg could derive benefits from the articles of the Turkmanchay Treaty. Russian consuls all over Iran started acting as sales agents for Russian manufactures. They even displayed samples of Russian goods.[201] This clearly demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of Russian imperialism in Iran.

Moreover, over this period, Russian authorities initiated another significant policy to expand their economic penetration into Iran: they directly subsidized many Russian exports, such as sugar and kerosene, through refunds of the custom fees.[202] Simultaneously, the Russian embassy in Tehran exerted strong pressure on the shah to acquire significant economic concession from the Persian government. For instance, in 1887, the Russian envoy to Tehran, Prince Nikolai Sergeevich Dolgorukov (b.1840–1913), gave the Persian prime minister Mirza

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[198] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 25.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid., 12.
[201] Ibid., 25.
[202] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism*, 108.

Ali Asghar Khan Amin al-Sultan (b.1858–1907) an ultimatum and asked for the following concessions:

> First of all, the right of building and running wharfs and warehouses by the Anzali Lagoon and all the rivers that originate from there. Secondly, the right of constructing and running a carriage road from Anzali to Tehran. Thirdly, Sefid-rud River, the Mashhad River, and all the other rivers that originate from the Caspian Sea should be controlled by Russia. Fourthly, the maintenance of the road from Astarabad to Ardabil. Finally, the Persian government should guarantee that for five years only Russia has the right to build railroads in Iran. After five years, if Russia did not want to build any railroads, only then the Persian government has the right to assign anyone for railway construction.[203]

The shah's government was helpless in opposing its powerful neighbour and immediately granted Russia her requests.[204] By the early the 1890s, the combination of all these factors paid off and Iran's northern borders were completely closed to non-Russian commerce. Russia started dominating the northern and central Iranian markets. For instance, from 3.6 million rubles in 1883, Russian exports to Iran rose to 10.9 million in 1900.[205] In its November 9, 1890, edition, a special report in the Persian newspaper *Akhtar* pointed to Russia's growing economic influence in Iran:

> It has been a while that the Russian government has been trying very hard to dominate our markets. To achieve this goal, the Russians do not hesitate to adopt all sorts of different strategies. Their main goal has been closing our [Persian] market to all non-Russian products. Especially, over the last two years, the Russians have indeed facilitated the transportation of their products to our country. For instance, their Transcaspian railway is now only few kilometers away from Mashhad. They have also received guarantee from our government that only a Russian company has the right to construct railways in Iran. The Russians have also opened consulates in the provinces that they never had an envoy before. These newly established consulates are doing their best to fill our local markets with Russian products.[206]

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[203] Ebrahim Teymouri, *Asr-E- Bikhabari ya Tarikheh Emtyazat dar Iran,* 3rd ed. (Tehran: Entesharateh Eghbal, 1978), 317.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 25.
[206] Akhtar, "Eghdamate Rus" *Akhtar,* November 9, 1890.

The growing presence of St Petersburg in Iran's economic affairs led to the emergence of several Russian private companies in Iran. By 1890, a number of private joint stock companies appeared in Iran, investing their capital in various activities, including finance, road construction, the development of the Anzali port, telegraph networks, and fisheries.[207] Among these private joint companies was the Poliakov Brothers Loan Society which was established by Iakov Poliakov (b.1832-1909) in 1891.[208] In few years, Poliakov Brothers Loan Society was bought by the Russian Finance Ministry and became the Russian Loan and Discount Bank of Iran. As we shall see, this bank became one of the other effective tools for implementing Tsarist government's imperialist policies in Iran.

The Russian Loan and Discount Bank of Iran

Most scholars studying Russian imperialism in Iran between the mid-nineteenth century and 1917 pay close attention to the activities of the Russian Loan and Discount Bank of Iran. Their studies, however, are mainly limited within the framework of the Great Game. They see the foundation of the Loan and Discount Bank as St Petersburg's direct response to the establishment of the Imperial Bank of Iran by the British citizen Baron Julius Reuter in 1889.[209] The Imperial Bank of Iran monopolized the printing of paper money and served as the state

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[207] Irina Pavlova, "The Loan and Discount Bank as an Agent of Russian Interests in Iran," in *Russians in Iran Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond,* ed. Rudi Matthee & Elena Andreeva (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 123.

[208] Ibid.

[209] The prominent Persian historian Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh sees Russo-British rivalry in Iran as the main motive behind the establishment of the Loan and Discount Bank. Jamalzadeh emphasizes that the main task of the Loan and Discount Bank was to counter the British influence in Iran's economy. Irina Pavlova states that the Loan and Discount Bank began to operate because of the rivalry between Russia and Great Britain for influence in Iran. Firuz Kazemzadeh also states that rivalry with the Great Britain was the main derive behind the establishment of the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran. The same is true for Elena Adreeva.

depository.[210] I believe that the establishment of the Russian Loan and Discount Bank of Iran cannot be analyzed exclusively within the framework of the Great Game. As we have seen, Russo-Persian economic relations were long-standing and more complex in nature. First, as we have seen, Russo-Persian economic relations predated British-Persian trade. Moreover, even before the industrialization of Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century, Iran had strong economic ties with the Russian Empire. For instance, Jakob Eduard Polak (b.1818–91) an Austrian physician who visited and lived in Iran between the years 1851 to 1861 in his travelogue states that:

> Russian currency can be found specially in abundance in Iranian northern provinces by Caspian Sea. This includes one-Imperial, half Imperial and Russian Ducats. Because of the low gold carat of one Imperial coins, Persians usually melt them and mint Iranian tomans from them. The value of Imperial coins constantly fluctuates depending on supply and demand…… British currency cannot be found in any kind of transaction as Persian-British trade often possesses a negative balance.[211]

The Russian Empire and Iran shared thousands of kilometers of border and were engaged in trade with each other for centuries. As mentioned earlier, Iran's most populated cities and trade centres were in the northern provinces of Gilan, Azerbaijan, Mazandaran, and Khorasan.[212] For instance, the city of Tabriz located in the province of Azerbaijan and close to the Russo-Persian border, in the second half of the nineteenth century had an estimated population of 150,000, being in every respect the most important city of Iran, superior to Isfahan and considerably larger than Tehran.[213] Moreover, throughout the nineteenth century, Tabriz remained Iran's leading

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[210] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 39.
[211] Jacob Edward Polak, *Safarnameyeh Polak: Iran va Iranian 1851-1861,* trans. Keykavous Jahandari (Tehran: Kharazmi, 1981), 376.
[212] Afshin Matin-asgari, "The Impact of Imperial Russian and the Soviet Union on Qajar and Pahlavi Iran," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 13.
[213] Ibid., 13.

commercial centre and largest city, whose population of about 200,000 in the 1890s was surpassed by Tehran only after the turn of the twentieth century.[214] These factors, therefore, question the usefulness of studies that examine the establishment and actions of the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran only within the framework of the Great Game.

As we have seen, over the second half of the nineteenth century, due to the industrialization of the Russian Empire's economy, the construction of railways, and the introduction of policies, such as subsidization of Russian exports to Iran, Russo-Persian trade volume witnessed a boom. The capitalization of Russian economy over this period also led to the arrival of numerous Russian businessmen to Iran, and the foundation of Russian private joint stock companies investing their capitals in various activities. The combination of these factors along with Iran's backward banking system made the establishment of a modern bank facilitating Russo-Persian economic relations necessary. In fact, the initial idea of opening a branch of Russian State Bank in Iran came from Russian merchants and private businessmen, and not the Tsarist government. In quoting several Russian newspapers on its 1 April 1890 edition, the Persian newspaper *Akhtar* reports that:

> As reported in Russian newspapers, a group of Russian merchants petitioned the Russian Minister of Finance Mr. Vyshnegradskii[215] and asked him to not impose custom tariffs on the cotton that they import from Iran to Russia. They have also asked for the construction of carriage roads from Mashhad to the Russo-Persian border in southeastern Central Asia and from the Anzali port to Tehran. These roads can considerably contribute to the facilitation of Russo-Persian trade and transportation of products. Moreover, they asked the finance minister to open branches of the Russian State Bank in Mashhad, Tabriz, and other cities of Iran. The opening of these branches would not only contribute to the growth of Russian trade in Iran, but it would also increase the influence of the Russian government.[216]

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[214] Matin-asgari, "The Impact of Imperial Russian," 13.
[215] Ivan Alekseevich Vyshnegradskii (b. 1832–95) Russian Finance Minister from 1887 to 1892.
[216] Akhtar, "Akhbareh Dakhele" *Akhtar*, April 1, 1890.

Moreover, the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran was initially established by a private Russian businessman Iakov Poliakov. These factors naturally question the validity of confining the history of the bank's foundation within the framework of the Great Game. An analysis confined to the framework of Russo-British rivalry in the Middle East ignores the role of independent businessmen, merchant communities, most importantly Russo-Persian age-old economic relations and geographical proximity. Therefore, by incorporating elements of Entangled History and Borderland studies, one can develop a better understanding of the history of Russia's economic imperialism in Iran and St. Petersburg's resounding success in dominating Iranian economy in the final decades of Romanov rule.

In early 1890, acting independently from the Russian state, due to the recent boom in Russo-Persian trade, and the need of a modern institution facilitating Russo-Persian economic relations, Iakov Poliakov acquired a 75-year concession from Naser al-Din Shah to open a financial institution. A year later, Poliakov organized the Brothers Loan Society with a capital fixed at 1,250,000 rubles.[217] This society functioned from 1891 to 1894 with a special focus on lending money against stocks and holding auction sales.[218] Furthermore, during these three years the Society opened a central branch in Tehran but did not have the chance to expand.[219] It was only with the appointment of Sergei Iul'evich Witte (b.1849–1915) as the finance minister of imperial Russia in 1892 that the Poliakov's Society started to play a significant role in the economic scene of Iran.

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[217] Pavlova, "The Loan and Discount Bank", 123.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Mozaffar Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus dar Iran: Negahi Gozara be Ravabeteh Hamkarihayeh Banki Iran va Rus* (Tehran: Markaze Chap va Entesharateh Vezarateh Omoure Khareje, 2002), 89.

Witte had ambitious plans for speeding up the industrialization and capitalization of the Russian Empire's economy. One of the main principles of his new economic policy was the economic absorption of Russia's borderlands and Asian neighbours to guarantee the growth and expansion of the Russian Empire's newly founded industries.[220] Witte clearly knew that Iran and other Asian neighbours of Russia could be profitable markets for Russian manufactured products. Therefore, in 1893 he initiated a special Senate meeting on Asian trade with the members of the finance ministry and foreign affairs participating.[221] Witte stated that the quick dominance of Russian products in the Persian market would depend on a large credit agency. As, for political reasons, the Imperial Bank of Russia could not directly establish a branch in Tehran, Witte suggested taking over the Poliakov Brothers Loan society and turning it into a state enterprise with the attributes of a private bank.[222] Several days later Emperor Alexander III (r.1881–94) granted his consent to Witte's project and Poliakov Brothers Loan society was procured by the Russian finance ministry.[223] Poliakov's Loan Society was renamed as the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran. The bank's board was formed of members of the Russian imperial government, including Witte himself, and members of the Romanov family. The board held 77 percent of the bank's total shares.[224] The bank, therefore, started to function in reality as a Russian State Bank Branch and became an instrument at the disposal of St. Petersburg for expanding its imperialist policies in Iran. What is significant here for our argument is that Witte and the Russian state exploited the pre-existing and well-established strong economic ties between Iran and Russia. In other words, the existence of these strong and old ties contributed

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[220] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 41.
[221] Pavlova, "The Loan and Discount Bank", 123.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid., 124.

significantly to the success and facilitation of their new imperialist economic policies in Iran. Moreover, Witte's new economic policy and the plan to dominate Russia's Asian neighbours' markets, including Iran, cannot be solely attributed to the Russo-British rivalry in the Middle East. On the contrary, this new economic policy derived more from the domestic concern to guarantee the Russian Empire's successful industrialization. Industrialization was necessary to preserve Russia's status as a great power. As we have seen, drawing on Entangled History and Borderland Studies make us see this interconnectedness. This interconnectedness is significant because it influenced Russia's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran.

The Loan and Discount Bank of Iran proved to be an outstanding success of St. Petersburg for dominating the Persian markets in northern and central parts of the country. The bank also significantly helped to tighten the Russian Empire's economic grip on Iran. Just like Russian imperialism itself, the activities of the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran was also multifaceted. Nevertheless, before examining the bank's activities in more detail, it will be good to look at a report published in the Persian newspaper *Hob al Matin* in May 1897 just three years after Russian Ministry of Finance taking over the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran. This report clearly demonstrates Russian products' dominance over the Persian markets at the turn of the twentieth century:

> Our reporter writes that the sugar factory which has recently been established with the help of Belgians in the Kahrizak village [a village located in the south of Tehran] despite producing good-quality sugars cannot find a market for its products. The same is true for the new glass factory of Tehran near Darvazeh Qazvin. The problem is that Russian products have so successfully dominated our markets for years now that neither foreign nor Iranian products have any kind of chance to compete with them. Today Iranians from an infant child to an elderly in their foods, drinks, clothing, furniture, and many other things are dependent on Russia. Unlike Russian products, British products are gradually disappearing from Iran. Even they import sweets and different kind of beverages from Astrakhan to Iran and they have a very good market here. For instance, they import tons of flour from Astrakhan for a very good price. People with low income can afford this flour and eat it especially during Ramadan. Our clothing is all imported from Russia.

> Sugar and tea come from Russia. Our light instruments all come from Russia as well. Our middle class spends three-fourths of their expenses on buying foreign especially Russian products. The upper classes spend less than one-tenth of their budget on Persian products. If just one day we stop importing kerosene from Russia, all cities in Iran will be covered in darkness. For instance, most of the people in Iran who go to a party or gathering first ask their host whether they serve Russian tea. For the past several years, all the available women's or men's shoes in our market have been imported from Russia, Mumbai, or Istanbul. Our coats and hats all come from Russia. The same is true for the other kinds of clothing. Sweet nuts and salt nuts in our markets all come from Russia…. With such a terrible situation, how can our industries develop? Neither our people nor our statesmen are wise enough to understand our dire situation and do something about it….[225]

Persian newspapers, and statemen's diaries from late 1890s until 1917 are full of reports describing the successful economic dominance of Iran by the Russian Empire at least in the northern and central provinces of the country. The Loan and Discount Bank played a decisive role in the success of this dominance. As mentioned earlier, following the Russian Finance Ministry taking over the Poliakov's Society, the bank's main responsibility was to expand Russia's influence in Iran. In fact, Tsarist government's ownership and management of the bank had immediate major implications. First, it led to the close interaction between the bank and the Russian embassy in Iran. This significantly enhanced the prestige of the bank among Persian people and authorities.[226] In many cases the economic attaché of the Russian embassy in Tehran was also the CEO of the Loan and Discount Bank. [227] The same was true for the head of the bank's different branches in various cities, who often happened to be the Russian Consul in that region.[228] This naturally gave the bank enormous power and influence, as the head of the bank could seriously challenge the power of local Persian authorities. This led to serious conflicts

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[225] Hob al Matin, "Rapport", *Hob al Matin,* May 11, 1897.
[226] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus,* 119.
[227] Mohammad Nasiri, *Tarikhcheyeh 30 Saleyeh Bank Melli Iran 1307–1337* (Tehran: Chapkhane Bank Melli Iran, 1959), 44.
[228] Ibid.

between local Persian authorities and the bank. For instance, in a letter to the Persian Ministry of Foreign Affairs dating December 31, 1912, the governor of Khorasan stated that:

> The CEO of the Loan and Discount Bank who has been reporting its requests and activities to the government of Khorasan claims that it does not feel obliged to do so anymore, as instead of the Khorasan local government, it now reports its activities to the Russian embassy. The bank claims that the Russian consulate has the authority to sanction the bank's activities in Khorasan. What shall be done in this situation?[229]

In face of the threats of the Russian delegation, the shah's government had no power to confront the bank and retreated.[230] In general, as the management and employees of the bank were under the protection of the Russian embassy, and also were protected by the capitulations, the Loan and Discount Bank was empowered to challenge the Persian government's authority and operate virtually without restriction.

One of the other major implications of the tsar's government taking over the bank was the rapid growth of its capital in just few years from 1,250,000 to 30,000,000 rubles.[231] This clearly demonstrates the significance of the bank for St. Petersburg's plan to expand Russia's influence in Iran. Simultaneously the number of the bank's branches and agencies especially in the northern and central provinces of Iran increased. Apart from Tehran, the bank established four other large branches in the cities of Mashhad, Rasht, Tabriz, and Kermanshah. Additionally, nine smaller bank agencies were established in Barforoush, Bandar Gas, Isfahan, Qazvin, Kushan, Sabzavar, Urmia, Hamadan, and Anzali. It also opened six small agencies in the Russian Empire: in Ashgabat, Baku, Yerevan, Julfa, Merv, and Moscow.[232] Soon the bank developed a multi-faceted nature. Apart from promoting the development of Russian trade in

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[229] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus,* 134.
[230] Ibid., 137.
[231] Charles Isavi, *Tarikhe Eghtesadieh Iran Asre Qajar 1215-1332 h.q,* trans. Jacob Azhand (Tehran, Nashr-e-Gostareh, 1983), 542.
[232] Pavlova, "The Loan and Discount Bank", 125.

Iran, the sale of Russian goods, and the distribution of Russian banknotes among the local population, the bank started to give large and small loans mostly secured by real estate to Iranians. For instance, from 1900 to 1905, the Tehran branch gave 16,000,000 rubles in loan to thousands of Iranians.[233] This included merchants, bazaar traders, statesmen, and even the clergy.[234] This at first glance might seem insignificant, but it would make the Tsarist government one of the biggest landowners in Iran, as by 1913 it had acquired 48 million rubles worth of land through the Loan and Discount Bank.[235]

Despite the constant objections of the shah's government, the Loan and Discount Bank was more than happy to give loans to Persian subjects secured by their landholdings. Many of these loans could not be paid back and the bank immediately confiscated all the properties of its customers. This made the bank one of the biggest landholders of Iran especially in the northern provinces close to the Russo-Persian border.[236] The bank's land acquisition was not only limited though to the northern provinces of Iran. For instance, in the province of Isfahan all the lands and properties of the Qajar Princess Lady Uzma the sister of Mass'oud Mirza Zell-e Sultan (b.1850–1918) were confiscated and run by the Russian consulate as the princess owed vast amounts of money to the Loan and Discount Bank. The confiscated properties included 13 villages with the population of 20,000 people.[237] Soon the properties of Zell-e Sultan were confiscated by the Russian consulate in Isfahan due to the vast amounts of money that he owed to the bank. These properties included 80 villages with the population of 120,000 people. All these properties were

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[233] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus,*141.
[234] Ibid., 57.
[235] Nouraei and Martin, "Russian Land Acquisition," 101.
[236] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 295.
[237] B. Nikitin, *Khaterat va Safarnameyeh B. Nikitin Consuleh Sabegheh Rus dar Iran,* trans. Ali Mohammad Fareh Vashi (Tehran: Entesharateh Kanooneh Ma'refat, 1977), 43–4.

run by the Russian consulate in Isfahan.[238] Moreover, separate from the acquisition of property by mortgage, the bank was also commissioned by St. Petersburg to buy up land from the local population in Iran, particularly in the north and along the Caspian shore and organize Russian owned enterprises.[239]

The bank's generous loans to its customers and the confiscation of their properties was indeed a smart plan for the acquisition of land in Iran as Persian law otherwise made it difficult for foreigners to buy large parcels of land in the country. The governor of Gilan in a telegram to the Persian foreign ministry in Tehran dated November 20, 1910, clearly points to the activities of the Russian consulate and the Loan and Discount Bank in the city of Rasht to confiscate as much as land in Gilan as possible:

> The Loan and Discount Bank's branch in Rasht which owns vast amounts of land in Gilan, with the help of the Russian consulate exerts increasing pressure on its debtors to pay back their debt. On the surface, they ask for nothing but their money. However, they all perfectly know that Persians are broke, all-over Iran even one dinar cannot be found, and the customers cannot pay back their debts. All these pressures are for convincing customers to pay back their debts with their properties. There is nothing that we can do about this tragic situation.[240]

Sir Walter Beaupré Townley (b. 1863–1945) the British ambassador in Tehran from 1912 to 1915, in a report to the British Foreign Office in 1913 describes how the Loan and Discount Bank confiscated the lands of three most prominent Gilan landowners Amid al-Saltaneh, Sardar Yahya, and Mirza Ebrahim Khan, as these three owed huge amounts of money to the bank and could not pay them back on time.[241] With the confiscation of these lands, St. Petersburg soon started establishing colonies on them, especially in the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran, and

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[238] Nikitin, *Khaterat va Safarnameyeh,* 44.
[239] Pavlova, "The Loan and Discount Bank", 125.
[240] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 298.
[241] R. M. Burell., ed. *Iran Political Diaries 1881–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5:515.

Astarabad, where thousands of Russians settled on these lands. [242] These settlers received financial support from St. Petersburg. As Elena Andreeva puts it "interestingly, in northern Iran Russian colonization preceded military conquest in most of central Asia and the Caucasus."[243] In the Caucasus and Central Asia, St. Petersburg first occupied these regions, then established colonies by sending Russian settlers. Nevertheless, the situation in northern Iranian provinces was vice versa.

B. Bezsonov, a member of the Council of the Department of Press, who travelled to northern Iran in 1915 on the assignment from the Department of Migration at the Imperial Ministry of Agriculture, published the results of his trip in a work entitled *Russian Migrants in Northern Persia.*[244] In this book he talks about Russian settlements and even gives the population numbers for each settlement. Bezsonov openly talks about settlers as pioneers who will help to annex northern Iran into a Russian border province and further elaborates on the future of this potentially wealthy area which can only be developed and brought to progress and prosperity by Russians. He states that "Hopes for a better future will be fruitless as long as the masters of the whole of northern Persia are not those who are truly interested in using the resources of this area and its progress. Therefore……. It is necessary for Russia to stand strong here."[245]

Apart from giving large loans to Persian subjects, the other significant mission of the bank was to provide the shah's government with huge loans and monopolize the right of financing the Persian government.[246] This meant Russia's de facto control over Iran's national finances. The Loan and Discount Bank successfully fulfilled this mission. The following

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[242] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 297.
[243] Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game*, 73.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Pavlova, "The Loan and Discount Bank", 124.

numbers illustrates the flow of funds to the shah's government. In May and June 1895, the bank lent 100,000 tomans to the Persian treasury. Only a year later, the bank lent 156,390 tomans for six months at the Shah's request, supported by Russian diplomats.[247] In January 1900, the Loan and Discount Bank gave the Shah's government a large loan worth of 22.5 million rubles in gold at five percent repayable within seventy-five years. Payment on this loan was secured with revenues from all Persian Gulf customs.[248] Among the main conditions of these loans was the obligation on the Persian government to pay off all their debts to Britain and not to seek any long-term loans from any third party without St. Petersburg's consent.[249] Furthermore, the bank also gave generous loans to prominent Persian statesmen and influential figures.[250] By doing so the Russian embassy used these people to further Russia's imperialist ambitions in Iran.[251] If these people did not cooperate with Russian embassy, the bank would immediately exert pressure on them to pay back their debts. As the Persian scholar Hossein Jodat (b.1892–1990) puts it "the control of the Persian nobility was in the hands of Russians [the Loan and Discount Bank] … Therefore, if there were to be any kind of disagreements with the Tsarist government's policies in Iran, the bank would have immediately responded and confiscated the properties of that nobleman."[252] For instance, following the final victory of the constitutionalists over Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar (r.1907–1909) and the military governor of Tehran, the Tsarist Lieutenant General Vladimir Platonovich Laikhov (b.1869–1920), through the Loan and Discount Bank, St. Petersburg started exerting increasing pressure on constitutionalist Persian

[247] Pavlova, "The Loan and Discount Bank", 124.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., 125.
[250] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 299.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid., 303.

statesmen.[253] Many of these statesmen owed large amounts of money to the Loan and Discount Bank. As in most cases they could not pay their debts back, the Russian embassy would immediately start acting as a mediator if the debtors agreed to cooperate with the embassy and act in favor of the Russian Empire's interests in Iran. Hassan Taghizadeh (b.1878–1970), a Persian constitutionalist and deputy of the Majlis from 1906 to 1920 writes in his memoir that

> Following the abdication of Mohammad Ali Shah and restoration of the Majlis, the new government was determined to curtail the Russians' influence on the young shah [Ahmad Shah Qajar (r.1909–1925)]. The first step was to dismiss the shah's Russian tutor. Mohammad Ali Shah hired a Tsarist officer called Smirnov as tutor for the crown prince.[254] The Council of Ministers assigned Hakim-ol Molk[255] to fire both Smirnov and the court's Russian physician. This provoked the fierce anger of the Russian embassy. The embassy insisted that Smirnov should maintain his job as the young shah's tutor. The Russian ambassador even insisted stubbornly that the council of ministers should permit Smirnov to at least teach Ahmad Shah Russian language an hour per week. In return, the Russians promised that they would reduce the number of their occupying military forces in Qazvin to half. Nonetheless, the Council of Ministers rejected the Russians' offer. One day later, our statesmen were bombarded by the Loan and Discount Bank's letters asking them to immediately pay back their debts. For instance, it turned out that our prime minister Sepahdar [Mohammad Vali Khan Tonekaboni (b.1846–1926)] owed 800,000 tumans and our minister of post and telegraph Sardar Mansour [Fattollah Khan Akbar (b.1878–1967) owed 350,000 tumans to the Loan and Discount Bank. These letters like a thunder crashed on our statesmen and paralysed them with deep fear and anxiety. On that same day, upon my arrival to the Council of Ministers, which was holding its sessions in the Golestan Palace, the minister of war Sardar Asaad [Ali-Qoli Khan Bakhtiari (b.1856–1917)] shouted to me saying: "Hurry! Come and see for yourself how in a single day our world has been turned upside down." The Loan and Discount Bank's threat proved effective, and Smirnov retained his post as the tutor of the young shah.[256]

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[253] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 303.

[254] Konstantin Nikolaevich Smirnov (b.1878–1938) was a Tsarist army officer and a scholar. Smirnov was graduated from the Tiflis Cadet Corps and Mikhailovskoe Artillery College. In 1903 he completed the Officer's Course of Oriental Languages at the Asian Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg. For seven years 1907–1914, Smirnov was on official mission in Iran as a tutor to the heir of throne, the young Ahmad Shah Qajar. While serving in Tehran, Smirnov regularly sent his reports on the situation in Tehran and at the Qajar court to the Caucasus Military District's headquarters. For more information see: Nugzar K. Ter-Oganov, "A Russian Officer's Letters on Russian and British Activities in Iran During World War I," in *Russians in Iran Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond,* ed. Rudi Matthee and Elena Andreeva (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

[255] Hakim-ol Molk or Ebrahim Hakimi (b.1869–1959) was a Persian statesmen and constitutionalist.

[256] Hassan Taghizadeh, *Se Khatabeh: Tarikhe Avayele Enghelabe Mashroutyateh Iran* (Tehran: Bashgahe Mehregan, 1959), 88–9.

It is clear how the Loan and Discount Bank was successful in indebting both the Persian government and its subjects. All these factors consolidated the dominant Russian position in Iran year by year.

Like the members of the Persian Cossack Brigade, the Loan and Discount Bank's staff also served as informants about events occurring in their cities. They provided information on all sorts of incidents they had witnessed, in their messages to the business manager of the central office of the bank in Tehran and the representatives of the Russian Finance Ministry. The latter, in turn, passed on that information to St. Petersburg, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[257] For instance, E. K. Grube, the bank's CEO in Tehran, drawing upon reports from the bank representative in Tabriz V. Budilovich, reported in his telegram of 22 May 1903 to the Ministry of Foreign affairs in St. Petersburg on a major turmoil in Tabriz: "……..Tabriz, unrest, bazaars are closed, the bank also. The riots are directed against the new tariff on the new road, against the Europeans in Iranian service, against the sale of hard liquor, schools……Absolute chaos in the customs control."[258] Like the Persian Cossack Brigade this demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of the Loan and Discount Bank in pursuing Russia's imperialist ambitions in Qajar Iran.

One of Witte's main purposes for overtaking the Loan and Discount Bank was to secure the Persian markets for Russian products and reverse the Russo-Persian trade balance. As mentioned earlier, up to the early 1890s Russo-Persian trade balance was in Iran's favour. As we shall see, thanks to the successful policies and actions of the Loan and Discount Bank this balance was reversed. For instance, during the years 1905 to 1909 Iran's imports from the

[257] Pavlova, "The Loan and Discount Bank", 126.
[258] Ibid.

Russian Empire were worth 29 million rubles, while in return Iran's exports to Russia netted 21.4 million rubles.[259]

One of the bank's other successful operations was the establishment of several stores across Iran to sell Russian products directly to the local population at very reasonable prices. For instance, in several reports dating April 22 and May 25, 1903 sent from the British embassy in Tehran to London we read that with the establishment of these stores across Iran, the Loan and Discount Bank was directly selling Russian products, such as lamps, glasses, metal machines, cotton products, grain, kerosene, sugar, and china.[260] Moreover, the bank also provided Persian merchants who wanted to import Russian products with generous lines of credit. These generous credit deals included offering large sums with very low interest rates and long deadlines.[261] Moreover, the bank assisted Persian importers in other ways: It advanced the money, at 4 to 6 per cent less than market rate, for payment of customs dues, and cleared goods through customs and warehoused them at only a 2 per cent commission. It also permitted customers to take only partial delivery of their orders, charging lower interest rates on the value of the goods left in its warehouses provided.[262] These policies clearly led to the dominance of Russian products in Persian markets. The bank was even more generous to Russian industrialists who wanted to export their products to Iran.[263] The bank went even further and opened credit in provinces to local landlords, or through intermediaries to peasants, obliging them to give the bank options to purchase their silk, rice, dried fruit, sheep fells, carpets, cotton, or other raw materials.[264] In other words, the bank itself became an exporter of Persian goods to Russia. For instance, in Gilan it

[259] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 435.
[260] Burell, *Iran Political Diaries 1881–1965*, 2:112–3.
[261] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 440.
[262] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 43.
[263] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 441.
[264] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 44.

brought about a revolution by financing the production of raw silk, expelling the French and Greek middlemen, and replacing them with Russians and Armenians.[265]

Simultaneously with the actions of the Loan and Discount Bank, St. Petersburg exerted pressure on Tehran to sign a new customs treaty with Russia. The new Russo-Persian Customs Treaty, which went into effect in 1903, was an enormous economic success for Russia.[266] The tariff revision introduced by this new treaty offered an opportunity to work out set duties that would fall on European goods more heavily than on Russian products. It replaced the five percent ad valorem duty established in the Treaty of Turkmanchay by specific imposts. The new treaty included three schedules. The first was a table of rates against imports levied by weight. This schedule reduced the ad valorem customs rate against Russian sugar to two percent, kerosene to four precent, and matches to 4 percent.[267]Although the treaty damaged the remaining non-Russian enterprise in Iran, this was not necessarily its sole purpose, as it also lowered or abandoned duties on Iran's exports of raw materials and foods to Russia.[268] This reduction tended to significantly benefit Russia, for she received 61 to 70 percent of Iran's exports.

The Loan and Discount Bank also started to mediate all sorts of concessions sought by Russian industrialists from the shah's government, such as in highway construction, fishing, and the building of the port of Anzali.[269] The bank's directors usually held shares in various major projects. For instance, Peter L'vovich Bark (b.1869–1937), who became the board chairman of the bank in 1898, also was appointed as the director of the Anzali-Tehran Road construction project run by Russian firms.[270] Apart from these, the bank itself also organized various

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[265] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 44.
[266] Ibid., 53.
[267] Ibid., 54.
[268] Ibid., 55.
[269] Pavlova, "The Loan and Discount Bank", 125.
[270] Ibid.

enterprises. As we shall see, all these activities contributed significantly to the expansion of Russia's influence in Iran. The Persian Transportation and Insurance company owned and operated by the Loan and Discount Bank was one of the other tools that contributed to the success of St. Petersburg's imperialist policies in Iran. Initially established by Iakov Poliakov in 1891, between 1893 and 1895 the company acquired the rights for constructing and operating the Anzali-Qazvin, Qazvin-Hamedan, and Qazvin-Tehran highways along with dredging and managing the Anazli lagoon.[271] The company soon opened several branches across Iran. This concession granted by the shah gave the company and its partners exclusive rights to provide insurance and transportation services in Iran.[272] In 1901, the Persian Transportation and Insurance Company was bought by the Loan and Discount Bank.[273] Soon the activities of the company expanded significantly and the company became the sole provider of transportation and insurance services in Iran.[274] Therefore, from 1901 until the fall of the Romanovs in 1917 the Russian Empire held a monopoly over transportation and highway administration in Iran, especially in northern and central regions of the country.[275] This was another significant success for St. Petersburg in extending its influence over Iran.

Over the first two decades of the twentieth century almost all the roads in northern and central Iran were built and operated by Russian companies. The Tabriz-Qazvin, Astarta-Ardebil,

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[271] Ahamd Ashraf, *Mavane' Tarikhyieh Roshd Sarmayeh Dari dar Iran Doreyeh Qajaryieh* (Tehran: Enteshareth Zamineh, 1980), 40.
[272] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 483.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Ludmila Kulinga, *Estilayeh Imperialism bar Iran,* trans. Sirus Izadi (Tehran: Entesharateh Elm, 1980), 35.
[275] In contrast with the northern and central regions of Iran, the Russian Empire did not follow a very active policy in the southern Persian provinces. This has been attributed by many scholars to the British Empire's sensitivity to any kind of foreign influence in the Persian southern provinces, especially the southeastern Iran, and close to the Indian border. Nevertheless, the British officials were not as active as their Russians colleagues in Iran, at least not until the discovery of oil in the Persian southern provinces in 1901.

Tehran-Hamedan, Tehran-Babolsar, Ashgabat-Mashhad, and Julfa-Tabriz highways were among the many roads financed by the Loan and Discount Bank that were constructed and operated by Russian firms. For instance, the road from Julfa to Tabriz, which was financed by the Russian Ministry of Finance for 4,690,000 rubles, was an excellent road. It was motorable and provided a direct connection with Julfa, soon to be connected to the Caucasus rail system. From 1910 to 1914 well over 2.5 million poods[276] of goods passed over it a year.[277] Therefore, the existence of these roads not only facilitated the transportation of Russian products to different cities in Iran, but its management and operation by Russians also left a lasting mark on Persians. A British traveller journeying through Iran during this period made a very interesting comment about the Caspian-Tehran Road, declaring that:

> Any fair-minded person cannot help admiring the Russian Government for the insight, enterprise, and sound statesmanship with which it lost no time supporting the scheme…. by supplying capital in hard cash, for the double purpose of enhancing to its fullest extent Russian trade and of gaining the strategic advantages of such an enterprise. The road has major economic value for the region. This infrastructure has strengthened Russia's trading position, lowered transportation costs, increased Russia's prestige, and symbolized her dominance. Russia occupies the place of honour in every document drawn up in connection with transportation on the road. The names of all the stations figure in Russian characters. The barriers at which the Russian company levels its tolls are in the hands of Russian overseers. The Russians have the maintenance of the road, and all gangs employed in repairs are under the orders of Russian overseers. Not only, therefore, is every Persian travelling along the main road from the North to the Capital made to feel that the Russians hold the right of access to it, but the inhabitants of all adjoining districts, who provide the requisite labour, are taught to look up to the Russians as their employers and their masters.[278]

One of the other major investments of the Tsarist government through the Loan and Discount Bank was the railway construction from Julfa to Tabriz. St. Petersburg built 100 kilometers of railway in Iran from 1913 to 1916 costing 16 million rubles.[279] The Russian

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[276] A pood is a traditional Russian unit of measurement equal to 16.38 Kilograms (36.11 pounds).
[277] Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations*, 51.
[278] Ibid., 50.
[279] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 496.

government acquired the rights from the shah's government to run and expand the railway in northern and central Iran for 75 years.[280] The Russian Empire also invested millions of rubles in the expansion of telegraph lines in Iran along with the rights to operate them.[281] All this naturally contributed to the solidification of St. Petersburg's dominance in Iran. For instance, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, many Persians in the northern and central regions of Iran started to learn the Russian language.[282] Knowing Russian was necessary as most of the institutions and administrative offices from banks to telegraph offices, customs houses, railway stations, transportation services, insurance companies, and trade houses were operated by Russians. For instance, the Russian newspaper *Kavkaz* in its July 11, 1916, issue reported from Tabriz that:

> In Tabriz aside from many children schools teaching the Russian language, recently many Iranians have started learning the Russian language. In fact, Russian language is gradually taking the place of Persian here. As most of the administrative work here is done by the Russian consulate and the Loan and Discount Bank, and as telegraph offices, post offices, railway office, transportation services, and insurance offices are all run by Russians and the local population needs to interact with these institutions every day, Iranians have no other choice but to start learning the Russian language. This is also because in the future those Iranians who do not know the Russian language cannot be successful in business, trade, and other professions.[283]

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The conventional elements of economic imperialism exercised by St. Petersburg in Iran were already evident in the late 1890s. These included ensuring the shah government's dependence on

[280] Shahedi, *Tarikhe Bank Esteghrazieh Rus*, 495.
[281] Ibid., 496.
[282] Ibid, 511.
[283] Kavkaz, "Iz Tavriza," *Kavkaz* (Tbilisi, Russian Empire), July 11, 1916.

Russian loans, granting concessions to Russian subjects, securing the dominance of Russian products in Persian markets, and exploiting Iran's natural resources. Nevertheless, the Russian Empire and Iran's geographical proximity, sharing thousands of kilometers of border, the existence of well-established trade routes and economic relations between Russia and Iran for centuries, the proximity of Iran's major urban areas to the Russo-Persian border, and the multi-faceted nature of the Loan and Discount Bank in pursuing St. Petersburg's imperialist ambitions in Iran, all make the Russian Empire's economic imperialism in Iran in the last decades of the Romanov rule a unique case. In other words, this chapter demonstrated how the well-established economic, cultural, and social interactions between both sides of the Russo-Persian borders contributed to the development and implementation of Tsarist Russia's economic imperialist policies in late Qajar Iran. The complexity of the Loan and Discount Bank's activities along with other facets of Russia's imperialism in late Qajar Iran point again to the overlapping and entangled nature of St. Petersburg's imperialist policies in Iran. This also indicates that the study of Russian imperialism in late Qajar Iran cannot be narrowed down to a single analytical framework. As we have seen in this chapter, like the Persian Cossack Brigade, the Loan and Discount Bank's foundation and its activities were indeed complex. We have also seen, how the Russian Empire's industrialization changed St. Petersburg's economic policies towards Iran, a very good example of the entangled nature of St. Petersburg's imperialism in Qajar Iran, and an indicator of the influence of Russia's economic developments over Iran's economy. Therefore, studying Russia's economic imperialism in Iran only through the lens of the Great Game would mean ignoring the role of many significant factors. Nevertheless, with drawing inspiration from Borderland Studies and Entangled History we developed a better understanding of the nature of Russian imperialism in late Qajar Iran.

Chapter Three
Russo-Persian Cross-Border Interactions

The entangled and overlapping nature of the Russo-Persian relations over the course of the nineteenth century until the collapse of the Tsarist state in February 1917 is crucial for the understanding of the formation and the expansion of Russia's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. This chapter will focus on the dynamic nature of Russo-Persian cross- border contacts in southeastern Caucasus and southwestern Central Asia. It draws inspiration from Borderland Studies to examine the Russo-Persian relations in late Qajar Iran. The advantage of drawing inspiration from Borderland Studies rather than working only with the theories of imperialism is that it refocuses the attention of this study on the border. The existence of several nomad tribes in Russo-Persian borderlands, whom both states wanted to control, and the constant movement of thousands of both Russian and Persian subjects across the border were significant factors in shaping and implementing Russia's imperialist policies in Iran. In fact, these factors facilitated the expansion of Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran. This chapter mainly focuses on three case studies related to Russo-Persian borderlands: the Russian deserters to Iran throughout the nineteenth century, the existence of large Persian communities and students in the Russian Empire, and the overlapping interests of both Persian and the Tsarist states in St. Petersburg's expansion in Central Asia. This chapter will explain how each of these three factors facilitated the expansion of Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran.

Russian Deserters to Qajar Iran

The history of the Russian deserters in Iran goes back to the first decade of the nineteenth century. With St. Petersburg's military presence in Southern Caucasus hundreds of Russian soldiers, officers, and peasants started escaping to Iran. The two Russo-Persian wars in 1804–13 and 1826–8, and the establishment of Russo-Persian border in the southeastern Caucasus

substantially increased the number of Russian deserters in Iran.[284] It was only in 1838, following the visit to the Caucasus in the previous year by Emperor Nicholas I (r.1825–1855) and the introduction of harsh disciplinary measures against desertion in the Imperial Army that the number of deserters decreased dramatically.[285]

The harsh conditions of service in the Russian army made desertion a tempting alternative for many Russian soldiers in the first half of the nineteenth century.[286] In fact, before the Great Reforms of Emperor Alexander II (r.1855–1881) the majority of the soldiers serving in the Russian army were drawn from the Russian Orthodox peasantry.[287] These peasants were separated from their families by force and had to serve for twenty-five years under extremely harsh conditions in the army. Moreover, opportunities for advancement were very limited, becoming even more restricted during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[288] For the first three decades of the nineteenth century, as the Russo-Persian border in southeastern Caucasus was porous and Russian authority was still confined to a few garrisons in strategic locations, it was relatively easily for Russians to desert to Iran. This was also because villagers often helped Russian soldiers make their escape.[289] On the Persian side, Iranian officials, especially the Crown Prince ʻAbbas Mirza (the commander of the Persian troops in the two Russo-Persian Wars and the governor of the Persian province of Azerbaijan) readily accepted

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[284] Elena Andreeva, "Russian Government Action Against Russian Deserters in Iran in the Nineteenth Century: Russian Orientalism at the State Level," in *Russians in Iran Diplomacy and Power in the Qajar Era and Beyond,* ed. Rudi Matthee and Elena Andreeva (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 75.
[285] Stephanie Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks and Revolutionaries: Russians in Iranian Military Service, 1800-1920," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 151.
[286] Elise Kimmerling Wirtschafter, *From Serf to Russian Soldier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 6.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid., 4.
[289] Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran 1780–1828* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 106.

Russian deserters as military advisors due to their superior military training and discipline.[290] As mentioned in Chapter One, ‘Abbas Mirza was fascinated with the great reforms of Peter the Great and Russia’s quick transformation into a major European power. The existence of these deserters was, therefore, a great opportunity for the Persian army to learn the techniques of a modern army. Russian deserters serving in the Persian army received far better wages and served and lived under far better conditions in Iran than in Russia.[291] This news soon reached the Russian forces located on the Russian side of the border and contributed to even a larger number of soldiers deserting to Iran.[292]

As mentioned in Chapter One, the first series of military reforms in Qajar Iran called *nizam-i-jadid* introduced by ‘Abbas Mirza was based on the Tsarist army’s conscription system. In the beginning, ‘Abbas Mirza used individual deserters to train *nizam-i-jadid* regiments. Nevertheless, as their numbers grew, he incorporated them into the *nizam* regiments, and finally made them into a separate unit of their own.[293] Russian deserters in Iran not only were training *nizam-i-jadid* regiments but soon became its best and most reliable fighting element.[294] This reinforced Persian officials’ perception of the Russian Empire as the best model of progress for Iran to emulate. One of the outstanding figures among the Russian deserters, who played a significant role in the development of the *nizam-i-jadid* and the Russian soldiers’ service in it was Samson Iakovlevich Makinstev known among Persians as Samson Khan. Makinstsev was born in 1780 and was conscripted into service in the Dragoon regiment in 1799 at the age of

[290] Andreeva, “Russian Government Action,” 77.
[291] Ibid., 76.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Cronin, “Deserters, Converts, Cossacks,” 148.
[294] Ibid., 149.

19.[295] He deserted from the Nizhnii-Novgorod Dragoon Regiment in 1802, just before the start of the first Russo-Persian war.[296] At first, Makintsev, who had been a non-commissioned officer (*Wachtmeister*) in the Russian army, was enlisted by ‘Abbas Mirza into the Erivan Battalion in the rank of ensign. Due to his bravery and loyalty, he was soon promoted first to the rank of captain and then to major.[297] Encouraged by ‘Abbas Mirza, Makintsev dedicated his energy to gathering Russian deserters, mainly in Erivan Khanate. He also recruited several Russian officers from Transcaucasia.[298]All these efforts paid off and the number of Russian deserters grew rapidly, soon making up one half of the Erivan regiment.[299] When, during a military parade, Russian soldiers demanded that ‘Abbas Mirza make Makintsev commander of the battalion, ‘Abbas Mirza formed a separate battalion, which became known as *bahadoran* (“unbeatable” in Persian) under the command of Samson Khan, who was promoted to the rank of colonel.[300] After the regiment suffered heavy losses in the first Russo-Persian war, Samson Khan, who was now promoted to the rank of general, adopted a proactive approach. Not waiting for the deserters to arrive in Iran of their own will, he made every possible effort to encourage the flight of soldiers in the Russian army then occupying parts of the Persian province of Azerbaijan.[301] For instance, he employed a range of methods, such as enticements, money, and cunning, and he even organized efforts to try to attract troops from their Russian units.[302] Samson Khan’s rank, his

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[295] Aleksandr Kibovskii, “Bagaderan: Russian Deserters in the Persian Army” *Markus Russian Military History,* trans. Mark Conrad, accessed April 15, 2023, http://marksrussianmilitaryhistory.info/Persdes2.html.
This article was originally published in the Russian journal: *Tseikhaguz,* no.5, 1996.
[296] AD. P. Berzhe, “Samson-Khan Makintsev i Russkie Begletsy v Persii”, *Russkaia Starina* 7, no.4 (1876): 772.
[297] Kibovskii, “Bagaderan: Russian Deserters in the Persian Army”.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.

reputation as a trusted general of the Persian crown prince and the welcome awaiting those who deserted were by this time well known among the Russian troops stationed at the Russo-Persian border, and generally attractive to them. Therefore, the stream of Russian deserters to Iran was constant. For instance, after the conclusion of the second Russo-Persian war in 1828, the order to Russian troops stationed in the occupied territory of Iran to return home became the signal for a new wave of desertions.[303] By this time the number of the Russians serving in the Persian army had been estimated at 3,000.[304]

What is significant for my argument here is that *bahadaron* was the most reliable and effective fighting element in the *nizam-i-jadid.* The Russian regiment was indeed the fighting core of *nizam-i-jadid* and possessed a considerable military capacity.[305] General Aleksei Ermolov (b.1777–1863), a special envoy to Iran in 1817, quoted Mirza 'Isa Qa'em Magam, Fath 'Ali Shah's prime minster, as saying: "Abbas Mirza really relies on them: he has formed them into his personal guard and entrusted himself to them."[306] The regiment indeed won the trust and admiration of Persians in several campaigns. For instance, it proved itself during the 1821–3 Persian-Ottoman war and in constant tribal campaigning.[307] During the 1830s the regiment participated in campaigns against the Kurds in western Iran and Turkmens in Khorasan.[308] The regiment's military ability and morale were clearly greater than those of native *nizam* regiments, and even became legendary. The Russian regiment soon acquired a reputation of discipline and

[303] John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Army Under Nicholas I 1825–1855* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), 289.
[304] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 149.
[305] Kibovskii, "Bagaderan: Russian Deserters in the Persian Army".
[306] Andreeva, "Russian Government Action," 77.
[307] Berzhe, "Samson-Khan," 775.
[308] J. H. Stocqueler, *Fifteen Months' Pilgrimage Through Untrodden Tracts of Khuzistan and Persia: In A Journey from India to England* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1832), 172–3.

fearlessness among Persians.[309] Sources agree that the Russian regiment constituted by far the best-trained, most disciplined and most effective fighting element in the *nizam-i-jadid.*[310] Even after 'Abbas Mirza's death in 1833, the new crown prince, Mohammad Mirza, took the patronage of the regiment, and it accompanied him from Tabriz to Tehran on his accession to the throne following the death of Fath 'Ali Shah in 1834, acting again as a palace guard and successfully deterring challenges to the throne.[311] All these developments reinforced Persian officials' fascination with the Russian Empire and the reforms of Peter the Great. In Chapter One, we saw how this fascination contributed to the expansion of Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran. The geographical proximity of the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran, the two Russo-Persian wars, and the flow of Russian deserters into Iran all demonstrate the multi-layered nature of Russo-Persian interactions. This case study demonstrates how within the context of Russo-Persian relations in the nineteenth century elements of "Borderland Studies" overlap with the study of imperialism.

As much as *bahadoran* reinforced Persians' fascination with the Russian Empire's might, for Russian authorities it was a major blow to the prestige of the Russian Empire. The existence of a whole regiment of Russian defectors in Iran was indeed a great political embarrassment and a practical inconvenience for Russian officials. It also served as an attraction and inspiration for new desertions from the military units stationed on the border with Iran. Therefore, the presence of thousands of Russian deserters in the Persian army soon became a political issue of importance for St. Petersburg and several high-level attempts were made to bring the deserters back.[312] None of these attempts were successful until Emperor Nicholas I visited the Caucasus in

[309] Kibovskii, "Bagaderan: Russian Deserters in the Persian Army".
[310] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 152.
[311] Kibovskii, "Bagaderan: Russian Deserters in the Persian Army".
[312] Ibid.

1837. During that visit, the emperor met with the Persian prime minister and requested that the Russian regiment be dissolved, and the Russian soldiers returned to Russia. If Mohammad Shah Qajar (r.1834–1848) refused to meet this request within six months, the Russian ambassador in Iran, Count Ivan Osipovich Simonich (b.1792–1851), was to leave Iran together with all the members of the Russian embassy.[313] This clear threat to break off all diplomatic relations demonstrates how serious the emperor considered this issue to be. When a couple of months later Simonich was replaced by Aleksandr Osipovich Diugamel′ (b.1801–1880), Nicholas I stated to him before his departure for Iran:

> There is nothing surprising in the fact that the deserters are able to hide and avoid government control in a country which is as poorly governed as Persia. However, I do not want regularly organized units to be formed out of them next to us, which can serve as an encouragement and enticement for any soldier who decides to desert…. If our deserters are returned to us, in the future we have to take care that similar units are not to be created.[314]

Recognizing the new reality of the Russian Empire's power in Iran, Mohammad Shah dissolved the Russian regiment and allowed the Russian authorities to organize the deserters' repatriation.[315]

Captain Al′brant, a capable and energetic Tsarist officer, was assigned by St. Petersburg to travel to Iran in 1838 and escort the Russian deserters back.[316] Al′brant managed to bring back a total of 1,084 people to Russia, including 597 deserters, 206 wives, and 281 children, as many of these Russian deserters married Iranian women and started families in Iran.[317] Samson Khan pretended to be sick and did not try to prevent Al′brant from encouraging his soldiers to return to

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[313] Andreeva, "Russian Government Action," 79.
[314] Ibid., 79–80.
[315] Kibovskii, "Bagaderan: Russian Deserters in the Persian Army".
[316] Ibid.
[317] Berzhe, "Samson-Khan," 791.

the Russian Empire. He himself stayed behind but even his son-in-law, Colonel Yevstafii Vasilevich Skryplev, who was also a non-commissioned Russian officer deserted a few years back from the Nasheburg infantry regiment and was serving as a colonel in the Russian regiment in Iran and married to Samson Khan's favorite daughter, assisted Al′brant in his mission and then departed together with his family to the Russian Empire.[318] Those who remained in Iran, mostly men who had converted to Islam or who had committed serious crimes in Russia, continued in the military service of the shah but no longer formed an independent unit.[319] In general, St. Petersburg adopted a consistent policy of leniency towards deserters in Iran. Almost all returning deserters escaped punishment. All who had converted to Islam were given a Church dispensation, the older men and the Polish officers were allowed to go home, and those who had remained single were assigned to Finnish Line regiments and the Arkhangelsk garrison, while others returned when their families enrolled in the Caucasian Line Cossack Host and settled in Cossack villages.[320] The settlement of these Russian deserters with their families in the Cossack villages in the Caucasus was to be another significant factor which facilitated Russia's imperial expansion in the southeastern Caucasus and northern Iran.

The settlement of Russian deserters and their families in the Caucasus offered St. Petersburg the opportunity to make further use of them in its project of imperial expansion. As the Russian army conquered the Caucasus, St. Petersburg encountered a very ethnically diverse population that was not always amenable to the Russian presence. One key strategy for St. Petersburg in managing the region was to organize certain elements of this diverse population into military colonies, the Terek and Kuban Cossack *Voiska* (forces) of the north Caucasus.[321]

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[318] Kibovskii, "Bagaderan: Russian Deserters in the Persian Army".
[319] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 151.
[320] Kibovskii, "Bagaderan: Russian Deserters in the Persian Army".
[321] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 157.

These colonies were given land and privileges in return for loyalty and service.[322] The returning deserters from Iran were ideal for this strategy. The married deserters were not asked to abandon their Persian wives, some of whom were Christian, some Muslim. They were likewise not deployed to regular regiments and garrisons in European Russia.[323] They were instead settled in Cossack villages in the Caucasus. In fact, the deserters would have found much that was familiar from their Persian lives when resettled among the Caucasian Cossacks, where identities were fluid, and intercultural realities abounded.[324] Although by the late nineteenth century the Don, Kuban, and Terek Cossacks were widely seen as military representatives of Great Russian nationalism and Orthodoxy, the reality in the Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century was much more complex. During the first half of the nineteenth century the Terek and Kuban Cossacks were both ethnically and religiously mixed. Many were Caucasian in ethnic origin (Chechens or Kabardians), many were the Russian *Starovery*[325] (Old Believers), and some were even Muslims.[326] Even those of Eastern Slavic origin had undergone a degree of nativization, adopting local dress, weapons, fighting techniques and customs of war.[327]

It is fascinating that the deserters were involved in a two-way transfer of knowledge. In Iran they transmitted their knowledge of Russian army tactics and techniques. Once back in the Russian Empire, they transmitted the knowledge they had acquired regarding the irregular

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[322] For more information on the Terek and Kuban Cossacks, see Shane O'Rourke, *The Cossacks* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007) and Thomas M. Barret*, At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier 1700–1860* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999)

[323] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 157.

[324] Ibid.

[325] A schismatic sect that had broken away from the Russian Orthodox Church in protest at the reforms of the seventeenth century.

[326] Thomas M. Barret, *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier 1700–1860* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 148.

[327] Ibid.

warfare tactics practised by local tribal societies in Iran. From the imperial perspective, the experience of the ex-deserters and the valuable knowledge gained thereby of the kind of society that Russia was attempting to colonize and annex made these deserters an asset and ideal element for integration into the Cossack *Voiska* established in Muslim territories. One telling example, which demonstrates this transmission of knowledge, is the life of Skryplev, Samson Khan's son-in-law and his successor as colonel of the Russian regiment in Iran. Once back in the Russian Empire, Skryplev readily entered Cossack military life in one of the Cossack villages in the South Caucasus. He was so successful in his new environment, and so noted for his bravery in military campaigns against Caucasian resistance that he rose to the rank of *esaul* (Captain) and the village *ataman.*[328] Once again within the context of Russo-Persian relations we witness how cultural and social interactions between both sides of the Russo-Persian border contributed to the facilitation of Russian imperialism in the region.

The pattern of desertion from Russian army units to Iran changed dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century. Peaceful relations between Iran and the Russian Empire; the abolition of serfdom in 1861; the military reforms introduced in the Russian Imperial Army in the 1870s; and the growing influence of the Russian Empire in northern and central Iran all contributed to the dramatic decrease in the number of Russian deserters to Iran. In fact, the study of Russian deserters to Iran and their repatriations demonstrates the growing power of the Russian Empire in Iran throughout the nineteenth century until the collapse of the Tsarist state in February 1917. During the second half of the nineteenth century the number of new deserters to Iran dropped to dozens instead of hundreds.[329] These were individual deserters mostly belonging to the military units stationed on the Russian Empire's borders with Iran, including the Georgian

[328] Kibovskii, "Bagaderan: Russian Deserters in the Persian Army".
[329] Andreeva, "Russian Government Action," 87.

Battalion, 65th Battalion in Tbilisi, the Kuban Cossack Army, the Baku Brigade of the Frontier Guards, and the 5th Transcaspian Infantry Battalion.[330] These deserters usually had to convert to Islam in order to receive protection from the Shia clergy since the Persian secular authorities were not strong enough anymore to withstand the pressure from Russian officials in Iran. The growing presence and influence of the Russian Empire in Iran in the second half of the nineteenth century was also evident in the fact that Russian deserters were often captured by the empire's agents in Iran and returned to Russian authorities.[331] For instance, Aleksei Noskov, a young soldier from the 65th Battalion in Tbilisi, who had deserted to Iran in October of 1870, converted to Islam and settled down in Rasht, was arrested by the foreman of the merchants, a Russian subject, under the direct orders of the Russian consul. According to the report of the Persian governor of Rasht to the foreign ministry in Tehran, the foreman broke into the house of a well-known Persian resident of Rasht, where Noskov was hiding, beat up everyone there and dragged Noskov out.[332] Noskov's story is only one of the many other examples of individual Russian deserters captured by Russia's agents in Iran and returned by force to Russia. Unlike the first half of the nineteenth century, Iran was not a safe haven for Russian deserters anymore. Therefore, by studying the pattern of Russian deserters to Iran over the course of the nineteenth century, which is itself an element related to Borderland Studies and Entangled History, one can better understand the growth of Russia's influence in Qajar Iran.

The Nomads and Russian Imperialism in Qajar Iran

[330] Andreeva, "Russian Government Action," 81.
[331] Ibid., 87.
[332] Ibid.

Nomadic tribes were everywhere in the Russo-Persian borderlands. The Shahsevan inhabited the Mugan steppe in the Transcaucasian borderlands, Kurdish tribes constantly travelled across the Russo-Ottoman-Persian triangle, while the Turkmen tribes dominated the lands in Central Asia separating Iran and the Russian Empire.[333] In fact, nomads constituted a third of Qajar Iran's population and therefore were one of the main concerns of the shah's government.[334] Since the two Russo-Persian wars in the first half of the nineteenth century and the demarcation of the Russo-Persian border in the southeastern Caucasus, the power these nomadic groups held in Qajar Iran had become a serious concern for the Russian Empire. This was especially true as the newly established Russo-Persian border cut through the lands of major nomadic tribes such as the Shahsevan.[335] The demarcation of Russian and Persian states with clear boundaries in the southeastern Caucasus conflicted with nomadic demands for mobility and the free use of land for pasture. Therefore, the power of nomadic tribes undermined state rule. It is natural then that over the course of the nineteenth century, Russian and Persian officials, as well as representatives of the nomadic groups, frequently clashed with each other. Nomads were in general a significant factor in shaping Russo-Persian relations. Nevertheless, the focus of this section will be on the Russian Empire's expansion into southwestern Central Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century and the Persian state's contribution to ensuring the success of this expansion. In fact, Tehran's wish for solidifying its authority in northeastern Iran overlapped with St. Petersburg's

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[333] For a study of Ottoman-Persian borderlands and the Kurdish tribes see Sabri Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For more information on the Shahsevan see Richard Tapper, *Frontier Nomads of Iran: A Political and Social History of the Shahsevan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[334] Moritz Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism: The Ideal Anarchists 1800-1914* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 58.
[335] Ibid., 59.

imperialist priorities for expansion into Central Asia. In other words, this section will demonstrate how mutual Russo-Persian interests in southwestern Central Asia facilitated the expansion of Russian imperialism in Central Asia and northeastern Iran.

The Turkmen were the largest tribal group involved in Russo-Persian relations in Central Asia. Moreover, they were also the most formidable obstacle to both Russian and Persian state authority in that region. In fact, since the death of Nader Shah Afshar (r.1736–1747) in the middle of the eighteenth century, who himself had Turkmen origins, the Persian state never again succeeded in regaining control over the lands located in northeastern Khorasan. In other words, due to the weakening of centralized state power in Iran, Turkmen tribes managed to capture large amounts of the Akhal Oasis, as well as adjacent areas of Persian settlement in the northern parts of Khorasan.[336] From the mid-eighteenth century until the Russian campaigns against the Turkmen in the 1870s, raids by different Turkmen tribes had been a major obstacle to the shah's control over the northeastern provinces of Iran. In a telegram to Tehran on August 25, 1867, Masoum Ansari, the Persian Consul in Astrakhan relayed the complaints of Persian merchants about the instability and constant raids of Turkmen tribes on the city of Bojnord, an important Persian city in northeastern Khorasan:

> A group of our merchants trading with Russia have been here today and were asking why our officials despite their knowledge of the Turkmen's constant raids on Bojnord do not send troops or fortify the city, and why the people of Bojnord should always suffer from the constant plunder, and massacre of the Turkmen tribes. Apparently, our government's inaction in confronting the Turkmen led them to siege the city and demand that the governor of Bojnord must give them 10,000 tomans and from now on the governor should only be appointed by them.[337]

[336] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 63.
[337] Ebrahim Safaei, ed., *Yeksad Sanadeh Tarikhi* (Tehran: Babak, 1977), 139.

Several military campaigns were conducted by the Qajar state over the first half of the nineteenth century to subdue the Turkmen tribes and pacify the northeastern provinces of Iran. Nevertheless, most of these military campaigns failed, and the shah's government had almost no control over these regions.[338] Many Persian villages had to be abandoned due to constant Turkmen raids and many Persians were captured by Turkmen tribes and sold on the slave markets in Central Asia. Therefore, it can be stated that both Russian and Persian claims to territory in Central Asia were equally shaped by the presence of the Turkmen tribes and both states also had a mutual interest in subduing those tribes. Russia's interest was for imperialist expansion in Central Asia and the shah hoped to solidify his authority in northeastern Iran.

An early indicator of this mutual interest was Russo-Persian cooperation in subduing the Ioumads, a group of Turkmen tribes who lived partly in the Astarabad region close to the Caspian Sea.[339] Ioumad pirates in southeastern Caspian Sea and Ioumad raids on Astarabad had been devastating Persians for decades.[340] In the 1830s, Persian officials requested the support of their Russian counterparts in attempts to control and subjugate the tribe. Following discussions with Mohammad Shah Qajar, the Russians in the 1830s constructed a naval station close to Astarabad on Persian soil to protect ship traffic against Ioumad pirates.[341] As a result, the increasing Russian military presence in the region allowed the Persian governor in Astarabad to threaten the Ioumads with a joint Russo-Persian military operation. These threats proved effective as the local Persian authorities for the first time in a long period were able to collect

[338] Ali Asghar Shamim, *Iran dar Doreyeh Saltanateh Qajar: Qarne 13 va Nimeye Aval Qarne 14* (Tehran: Entesharateh Behzad, 2008), 235.
[339] Adrianne Edgar, *Tribal Nation, The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 20.
[340] Iusuf N. Abdullaev, *Astarabad i Russko-Iranskie Otnosheniia* (Tashkent: Fan, 1975), 40.
[341] Ibid.

taxes from the tribe.[342] This cooperation demonstrates the interconnectedness of Russo-Persian interests in southeastern Central Asia in relation to Turkmen tribes.

Russo-Persian cooperation against tribal nomads reappeared on a much larger scale during St. Petersburg's campaign against the Turkmen in Central Asia in the 1870s. Due to the weakness of the Persian state, in the east of the Caspian Sea no definite frontiers existed between Iran and her nomadic neighbors. The same was true for various Central Asian khanates, as well as for the border between the khanates and the Russian Empire. Political instability, constant raids, and economic stagnation were common features of the various ephemeral states that periodically sprang up in Central Asia.[343] The existence of this vast power vacuum along with the Russian Empire's concentration on Asia after its humiliating defeat in the Crimean War prompted St. Petersburg to embark on its expansionist campaigns in Central Asia in the 1860s. As a result, in December 1864, the Russian foreign minister Aleksandr Mikhailovich Gorchakov (b.1798–1883) sent a telegram to European powers announcing the Russian Empire's campaigns in Central Asia:

> The position of Russia in Central Asia is that of all civilized states which are brought into contact with half savage, nomad populations, possessing no fixed social organization. In such cases, it always happens that the more civilized state is forced, in the interests of the security of its frontier and its commercial relations, to exercise a certain ascendency over those whom their turbulent and unsettled character make most undesirable neighbors. First there are raids and acts of pillage to put down. To put a stop to them, the tribes on the frontier had to be reduced to a state of more or less perfect submission.[344]

Gorchakov pointed to the presence of nomads along the Russian Empire's borders as the most important reason for the empire's expansionist policies in Central Asia. In another part of his

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[342] Abdullaev, *Astarabad,* 41.
[343] Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persian: Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran,* 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 6.
[344] Ibid., 8.

telegram, Gorchakov also declared that the distinction between "unstable communities, such as the nomad tribes" and "more regularly constituted states" would determine the ultimate limits of Russian imperial expansion.[345] In other words, while the Russian Empire had, according to Gorchakov, no other choice than to subjugate tribal populations, it could hope to progressively build mutually beneficial relations with states in Asia, such as Iran, in spite of their "backward civilization, and the instability of their political conditions."[346]

Although for some Persians the Russian Empire's advance into Central Asia appeared as a threat to Iran, Naser al-Din Shah and many other Persian officials welcomed St. Petersburg's advance as it reduced the power of the Turkmen tribes in the region. As mentioned earlier, constant raids by different Turkman tribes and Tehran's failure in pacifying the region had been devasting Persians in northeastern Iran for decades. During Naser al-Din Shah's visit to St. Petersburg in 1873, and again one year later, he proposed to Emperor Alexander II that Iran and Russia could establish a formal alliance against the Turkmen tribes living between the two states.[347] Naser al-Din Shah's proposal was discussed, but initially rejected by St. Petersburg. In internal discussions on the shah's proposal, the Russian war minister Dmitrii Alekseevich Miliutin (b.1816–1912) claimed that an official agreement with Iran would only serve as a pretext for the shah to intervene in the affairs of the Transcaspian region.[348] Nevertheless, when St. Petersburg resumed its campaigns against the Turkmen in 1877, it became obvious that in the harsh natural conditions of the Transcaspian desert, Russian commanders in many cases had no other choice but to rely on Persian support in their operations against the Turkmen tribes.[349] For

[345] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 61.
[346] Ibid.
[347] L. M. Kulagina, *Rossia i Iran XIX- Nachalo XX Beka* (Moscow: Izd. Kliuch-S, 2010), 58.
[348] Ibid., 58.
[349] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 59.

instance, the British representative Robert Napier stated how during an operation against the Turkmen in 1878 the Russian commander was "advised to a great extent by the Meer-i-Panj, or Brigadier-General, commanding the troops in Khorasan, and through him obtains rapid and reliable information from the border outposts of the Merv tribe, which cannot but be invaluable to the Russian commander."[350] Napier noted how a Russian officer used an official permission, sealed by Naser al-Din Shah, to buy wheat and rice from the local officials in Bojnord for the provision of Russian troops.[351] Moreover, Russian memoirs of the campaigns confirms the extent of Persian cooperation in the Russian campaign. For example, in 1879, the Russian operation's commander Ivan Davidovich Lazarev (b.1820–1879) was at first determined to act without any support from the shah. However, he later realized that this was impossible and requested supplies through the Russian embassy in Tehran.[352]

In the years 1880 to 1881, St. Petersburg conducted its infamous campaign against the Teke, a group of Turkmen tribes mostly settled in the Akhal Oasis.[353] In this campaign Russian troops under the command of General Mikhail Dmitrievich Skobelev (b.1843–1882) destroyed the tribe's political autonomy, stormed the Turkmen fortress Geok Tepe, and massacred several thousand members of the tribe.[354] Tehran did not directly participate in the campaign alongside the Russian forces. Nevertheless, Persia gave its broad support to the Russians. Not only did Persian officials provide the necessary supplies and provision for the Russian troops, but they also handed over Turkmen refugees to the Russians. Moreover, throughout the entire campaign a Persian military officer was always present to observe the battle and learn from the Russians how

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[350] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 65.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians from Earliest Times to the Present*, 2nd ed, (London: Penguin, 2012), 324–5.
[354] Ibid., 325.

to fight against the tribes.[355] The Russian Empire was indeed in many regards a model of success and progress for Persian officials to emulate. Persian cooperation with the Russian troops clearly facilitated the expansion of Russian imperialism in the region.

The Turkmen slave trade of Persian civilians captured in raids on northeastern Iran was a serious problem facing the Qajar state since its foundation in late eighteenth century. Moreover, Tehran tried through several military campaigns to stop the Turkmen raids and the abduction of its subjects, but most of these campaigns were futile.[356] For the shah's government, the Russian Empire's expansion in Central Asia meant the liberation of Persian slaves and for St. Petersburg this could justify Russian imperialism in the region and demonstrate the Russian Empire's cultural and military superiority over both the Persian state and the Turkmen. In fact, the liberation of slaves had a very long history in the Russian Empire as a pretext justifying the empire's expansion. It goes back to the Russian Empire's contacts with the Crimean Tatars and the Ottoman Empire.[357] This has also been the case for the Russian Empire's expansion in the Caucasus, which was accompanied by military operations against the slave trade of the Georgian nobility and Caucasian Mountain tribes with the Ottoman Empire.[358] During the Russian Empire's campaigns in Central Asia, Russian newspapers focused on the disruption of the slave trade as the central motive for St. Petersburg's expansionism.[359]

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[355] Kulagina, *Rossia i Iran*, 59–60.
[356] For more information on Persian campaigns against the Turkmen tribes and the slavery look at: Ali Asghar Shamim, *Iran dar Doreyeh Saltanateh Qajar: Qarne 13 va Nimeye Aval Qarne 14* (Tehran: Entesharateh Behzad, 2008).
[357] For more information look at: Brian J. Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries: Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[358] For more information look at: Bruce Grant, *The Captive, and the Gift: The Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).
[359] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 67.

As most of these slaves were Persian, and the Turkmen slave trade was a very serious problem for Persians living in the northeastern provinces of Iran, Russians were more than happy to focus on the liberation of Persian slaves to justify their campaigns against the Turkmen. Moreover, this way they could also demonstrate their "civilizing mission" in the region. Therefore, stories of liberating Persian slaves frequently appeared in Russian narratives of St. Petersburg's expansion into Central Asia. Elements of Russian Orientalism are quite clear in these stories. For instance, in 1873 a correspondent from the Russian newspaper *Kavkaz* reported a lively discussion among several Persian merchants on a ship on the Caspian Sea. Some of these merchants were returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca, others came from Astrakhan, and they were talking about the ongoing Russian campaign against Khiva:

> More than anyone else, one of them got upset, an inhabitant of Shiraz; he convinced all others that the Russians would never get to Khiva as it was surrounded by impassable steppes, and that Khiva could never be subdued, that all this were lies and deceit. There was loud laughter in the group and then the debaters revealed to the man from Shiraz that they, through God's mercy, were Persian subjects, Shi'a Muslims, born in the region of Khoi [in the western Persian province of Azerbaijan] and that seventeen years ago, they were captured by the Turkmen, when they were on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mashhad … and that they continuously pray for the Russians to conquer Khiva.[360]

In this conversation, the Russians were indeed praised by the Persian merchants as their liberators, stating: "and we ourselves were in slavery far away from Khiva, and from there, the Russians liberated us, and sent us to Orenburg and Astrakhan to our homeland."[361] When the Russian journalist told them the Russian troops had indeed already conquered Khiva, they rejoiced.[362] The significance of this issue for the Persian side was also underlined by the Persian

[360] Kavkaz, "Baku Korrespondentsiia Kavkaza," *Kavkaz* (Tbilisi, Russian Empire), September 14, 1873.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid.

ambassador in St. Petersburg Abdol Rahim Saed al-Molk in his telegram to Tehran on February 21, 1866:

> The troops of his Imperial Majesty Emperor Alexander [II] have recently taken the city of Tashkent. Hundreds of slaves have been liberated by the Russian troops and joy took over the whole city. Most of these slaves are our subjects. Turkmen captured them thorough their raids in northern Khorasan and Astarabad. They were sold in the Khiva and Bukhara slave markets. I have already expressed [to the tsar] his majesty the shah's and his subjects' gratitude for the liberation of our people. Slavery in Central Asia was indeed a heavy burden on our subjects in Khorasan and Astarabad. Now thanks to the might and power of his imperial majesty the Russian emperor, our people in those regions shall live in peace.[363]

Even the British observers were aware of the significance of the liberated Persian slaves in Russo-Persian relations. For instance, the British officer C. E. Steward who in 1881 travelled on an intelligence-gathering mission to northern Khorasan met several former Persian slaves and noted the considerable sympathies towards Russia among Persians due to the liberation of the slaves.[364] The liberation of Persian slaves in Central Asia by St. Petersburg demonstrated the overlapping nature of both Russian and Persian state interests in the Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia. It also reflects the increasing prestige of Russia among the local Persian population. This high prestige naturally facilitated St. Petersburg's further imperialist expansions in northeastern Iran.

Following the battle of Geok Tepe in 1881, Naser al-Din Shah suggested that Tehran and St. Petersburg should sign a treaty demarcating the new Russo-Persian border in southeastern Central Asia. The Russian side accepted this suggestion and the Russo-Persian border agreement for Central Asia was concluded only a few months after the battle.[365] The conclusion of this treaty allowed St. Petersburg to focus its energies and resources on governing and developing the

[363] Safaei, *Yeksad Sanadeh Tarikhi,* 119–20.
[364] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 68.
[365] Shamim, *Iran dar Doreyeh,* 236.

new territories demarcated by the border. Simultaneously to the establishment of the Russian Empire's colonial rule in the Transcaspian region, the defeat of the Turkmen provided Tehran with the opportunity to consolidate its own hold over its northeastern provinces.[366] Both Persia and Russia used the defeat of the Turkmen tribes to bring settlers to the newly captured lands. On their considerable intelligence-gathering mission in northeastern Iran in the 1880s and 1890s, Russian officers were astonished to see how parts of the new Russo-Persian border region such as the area around Sarakhs in the eastern part of the Transcaspian oblast were filled with new Persian settlers.[367] In some cases, Persian settlers could even move back into existing villages which had been given up earlier in the eighteenth century due to constant Turkmen raids. Like the Russian government that had established Cossack settlements close to border, Tehran recruited settlers for military purposes. For instance, some of the newly arrived on the Persian side were granted tax exemptions in return for serving as border guards.[368] Moreover, Naser al-Din Shah also fortified some towns close to the new Russo-Persian border to secure his military presence. Tehran's increasing tax revenues from the area were proof of how Russia's annexation of Central Asia had increased the Persian state's control over Iran's northeastern provinces.[369] Nevertheless, this control was achieved through Russia's imperial power and Tehran's hold on these regions continued to be substantially dependant on the Russian Empire's support.

In the following years, Tehran and St. Petersburg continued and expanded their cooperation against the Turkmen tribes in the region. For instance, the Russian commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade in Tehran, dispatched his Persian officers to the new Russo-Persian border in southwestern Central Asia to support the shah's campaigns against Turkmen rebels.

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[366] Abdullaev, *Astarabad,* 56.
[367] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 134.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid.

These Persian officers reported back to their Russian commander about operations against Turkmen tribes in Astarabad. The officer's reports were written in Russian and were collected by the Russian commander of the brigade as valuable military intelligence. The reports contained extensive ethnographic information about individual tribes among the Turkmen.[370] These reports were naturally sent on to St. Petersburg by the commander of the brigade.

One other example of this cooperation was the border commissariat established at the Russo-Persian border in southwestern Central Asia in 1897.[371] The main task of the border commissars was to resolve legal conflicts connected to the border and tribal migration. One of the main tasks of the border commissars was to preside over the border courts. The border courts usually held two sessions per year, one in spring and another in the fall. The border court functioned in practice as a joint Russo-Persian mediating institution within a Turkman tribal society divided by the border.[372] What is significant here for our argument is the inequality of the Russian and Persian commissars, and the very different degrees to which the authority of Tehran and St. Petersburg were exercised in the border region. For instance, the Persian commissar was generally unable to call Persian defendants to court as he was not respected and feared by the Turkmen population. Indeed local leaders regularly disregarded the authority of the Persian commissar and resented what they saw as Tehran's intervention in their domain. Therefore, soldiers of both commissars usually went together to call individual Turkmens to court. Moreover, the Persian commissar even relied on his Russian colleague to obtain provisions, like firewood and food, from the Turkmen.[373] This demonstrates the fact that the establishment of the shah's authority in the Russo-Persian border in southwestern Central Asia depended heavily on

[370] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 135.
[371] Ibid., 136.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Ibid., 137.

St. Petersburg's support. In other words, the shah's hold over northeastern Persian territory was increasingly depended on Russian Imperial power.

Given the extent to which Tehran relied on Russia's power even in its own relations with the Turkmen, it is hardly astonishing that many Russian officials thought of plans to annex the Persian part of the Russo-Persian border in Central Asia, if not Khorasan as a whole. The high number of Russian geographical surveys and intelligence reports written about the northeastern Persian border provinces point to serious preparations for such a step to be taken by the Russian military. For instance, in one of these reports, the Russian officer Benderev noted the numerous advantages of annexing the border region:

> The Turkmen would be easier to control when living under the rule of one single state, and the fertile agricultural regions of northern Khorasan would provide Russia with resources that its existing possessions in the Transcaspian region does not offer. It is also worth to mention that cutting the connection between the holy city of Mashhad and Tehran would give a final death blow to the Persian state.[374]

Tehran's failure in pacifying its northeastern provinces, its inability to stop the Turkmen raids on Persian villages and prevent the Turkmen slave trade prompted Naser al-Din Shah to welcome Russia's campaigns against the Turkmen in Central Asia. Accordingly, the overlapping interests of Tehran and St. Petersburg in the Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia and the shah's cooperation with the Russian troops in their campaigns against the Turkmen facilitated the implementation of Russia's imperialist policies in the region. Moreover, these circumstances exacerbated the shah's dependence on Russia for projecting his authority in northeastern Iran. Tehran therefore inevitably lost much of its political autonomy in northeastern Iran to the Russian Empire. The Persian population in northeastern Iran viewed the Russian Empire as the only force capable of providing security for the region.

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[374] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 137.

Persian Communities in the Russian Empire

The 1828 Treaty of Turkmanchay and the establishment of a direct border between the Russian Empire and Iran in the southeastern Caucasus significantly contributed to the substantial cooperation between the subjects of both states for the remainder of the Tsarist era. Due to the geographical proximity of Russia and Iran, well-established trade and economic relations had already existed between the two neighbors for centuries. Moreover, there were several Persian merchant communities in cities like Astrakhan since the late sixteenth century.[375] However, the establishment of the direct border between Iran and the Russian Empire greatly expanded these existing relations. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the start of large-scale migration across the Russo-Persian border. In the beginning, a substantial number of Caucasian aristocrats and high-ranking local rulers left for Iran after St. Petersburg's conquest of the South Caucasus. For instance, Prince Alexander, a son of the Georgian King Erekle and his family, who was known in Iran as Eskandar Mirza was one of these immigrants.[376] Furthermore, many wealthy residents of the Persian cities of Derbent, Shirvan, and Ganja that were annexed by the Russian Empire following the Treaty of Turkmanchay decided to cross the Aras River and settle in the Persian territory.[377] They were known as *Mohajerin* (meaning immigrants in Persian) and were highly respected by the Persian shahs and even received salaries from the Persian state.[378]

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[375] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 42.
[376] George A. Bournoutain, *The Khanate of Erevan Under Qajar Rule, 1795–1828* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1992), 8.
[377] Mohsen Mirzaiee, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigade va Divisioneh Qazaq az Colonel Domontovich ta Reza Khan Savad Koohi* (Tehran: Nashr-e-Elm, 2015), 182.
[378] Ibid.

Upon its establishment in 1878, the majority of the local staff of the Persian Cossack Brigade were *Mohajerin*.[379] In a way, they became agents of Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran.

Many other members of the south Caucasian nobility decided to stay and were successfully incorporated into the Russian Empire's nobility. Even many of the Muslim Caucasian aristocrats managed to integrate themselves into the Russian imperial hierarchy. A prominent example was the family of the Khans of Nakhchevan, who were one of the prominent Persian noble families and had a long tradition of military service for Iran.[380] They were even linked through intermarriage with the Qajar ruling dynasty but switched their loyalty to St. Petersburg in 1827.[381] Nevertheless, they preserved their contacts with the Persian side and acted as one of the most significant mediators between the Russian and Persian nobility. For instance, members of the Nakhchevan family used to host Persian shahs (their distant relatives) on their visits to the Russian Empire and contributed to the facilitation of Russo-Persian relations.[382] Many members of the Nakhchevan family held positions in the Russian military and some of them made brilliant careers. For instance, Hossein Khan Nakhchevanskii (b.1863–1919) was appointed as the commander of the imperial guard regiment in St. Petersburg and the general-adjutant of Emperor Nicholas II (r.1894–1917). Following the 1917 October Revolution many members of the Nakhchevan family with the help of their relatives such as the family of the Khan of Maku on the Persian side of the border managed to flee to Iran.[383] In an interview in May 1977 with the Persian newspaper *Rastakhiz* Colonel Jafar Nakhchevan the grandson of

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[379] Mirzaiee, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigade,* 76.
[380] Ibid., 184.
[381] Farkhad Nagdaliev, *Khany Nakhichevanskie v Rossiiskoi Imperii* (Moscow: Novyi Argument, 2006), 133.
[382] "Afsareh Barjesteyeh Guard Imperatouriyeh Russie," *Rastakhiz* (Tehran, Iran), May 25, 1977.
[383] Nagdaliev, *Khany Nakhichevanskie*, 312–3.

Hossein Khan's first cousin, who lived in Iran and served in the Royal Persian Army under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (r.1941–1979), tells the fascinating story of Hossein Khan:

> My relative Hossein Khan Nakhchevanskii entered the service of the Russian Imperial Army at a young age. Due to his hard work and devotion, he was soon promoted to the rank of colonel. During the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) the news of his bravery reached Nicholas II. The emperor soon met Hossein Khan in St. Petersburg and awarded him with the Order of Saint George. The emperor appointed Hossein Khan as the commander of the Imperial Guards Horse Regiment. Nevertheless, Hossein Khan was not happy in the imperial capital, and moreover, he could not handle the prohibitive expenses of living there. Therefore, he asked the emperor to grant him permission to head back to his estate in Nakhchevan. Nevertheless, as the emperor was very affectionate towards Hossein Khan, he immediately ordered that a large estate in the vicinity of the capital should be given to Hossein Khan, so he could have some extra income. However, that extra income did not cover all his expenses and Hossein Khan again asked the emperor to give him the permission to leave the capital. This time Nicholas II decided that all the expenses of Hossein Khan should be paid directly by the imperial court and Hossein Khan was also appointed as the emperor's General-Adjutant. Therefore, Hossein Khan stayed in St. Petersburg. With the outbreak of World War I, Hossein Khan was sent to the front. At the front, he once again proved his bravery and devotion, and in 1916 was promoted to the rank of the General of Cavalry. When the Revolution broke out in the capital in February 1917 and rumours swirled of the emperor's imminent abdication, Hossein Khan sent a telegram to the emperor from the front and asked him not to abdicate. He also promised to rush to the capital with his troops and supress the riots. However, the generals did not show this telegram to the emperor and Nicholas abdicated. It was only after his abdication that Nicholas II found out about the telegram and asked to meet Hossein Khan. Nevertheless, the Provisional Government did not permit it. Hossein Khan quit the Russian army as he did not want to serve the Provisional Government. Following the October Revolution Hossein Khan was arrested and executed by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd in 1919.[384]

From the Persian side, there were several members of the Persian nobility, even from the ruling Qajar family itself who left Iran for the Russian Empire and settled there. One significant example was the emigration of Bahman Mirza (b.1811–1884), a brother of Mohammad Shah Qajar, and his family to the Russian Empire. Following the death of Mohammad Shah Qajar in 1848, Bahman Mirza was one of the main rivals of Mohammad Shah's oldest son Naser al-Din Mirza to the throne. With Naser al-Din Mirza's accession to the throne, Bahman Mirza left Iran

[384] "Afsareh Barjesteyeh Guard." *Rastakhiz.*

with his large family to the Russian Empire and settled in the city of Shusha under the protection of the tsar.[385] Bahman Mirza's family became Russian subjects and were among the highest-ranking Muslim members of the Russian aristocracy. Bahman Mirza's sons were allowed by the tsar to use the title *Kniaz* (prince in Russian), and many of them made brilliant careers in the Russian Imperial Army.[386] For instance, Mahmoud Mirza (b.1853–1939) was a colonel in the Russian Imperial Army. He participated in the Russo-Turkish (1877–8) and Russo-Japanese Wars.[387] He was also a member of the Russian delegation travelling with Sergei Witte to the United States to sign the Treaty of Portsmouth with Japan in 1905. Mahmoud Mirza also was among the Russian Empire's delegation present at the coronation of Emperor Wilhelm II (r.1888–1918) in Berlin.[388] On Naser al-Din Shah's visit to Tbilisi in 1873, he met Bahman Mirza and his sons, and the shah and Bahman Mirza ended their pervious hostility. Naser al-Din Shah took a specific interest in Mahmoud Mirza, and at the request of the shah, he travelled several times to Tehran to give military advise for the modernization of the Persian army. Following the Russian Revolutions in 1917 and the outbreak of the Russian Civil War (1917–1923) Mahmoud Mirza and his brothers joined the White Army and fought the Bolsheviks. With the defeat of the White Army, Mahmoud Mirza along with many other White Russians fled to Iran and died in Tehran in 1939.[389] The example of Hossein Khan and Mahmoud Mirza reflects the significant scale of Russo-Persian collaboration. It also points to the complex multi-layered nature of Russo-Persian relations in Qajar Iran. Figures like Hossein Khan and Mahmoud Mirza strengthened Russo-Persian bonds. They also facilitated the flow of ideas from the Russian

[385] "Majarayeh Sardar Irani dar Gange Rus va Japan," *Rastakhiz* (Tehran, Iran), May 25, 1977.
[386] Nagdaliev, *Khany Nakhichevanskie,* 133.
[387] "Majarayeh Sardar Irani." *Rastakhiz.*
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.

Empire to Iran and vice versa. All this naturally facilitated the expansion of the Russian Empire's influence in Qajar Iran.

Following the two Russo-Persian wars in the early nineteenth century, tens of thousands of Armenians emigrated from Iran to the new Russian territories, especially into the newly formed "Armenian district," which became the core of contemporary Armenia.[390] In spite of this migration, in the second half of the nineteenth century there remained a sizable community of Armenians in Iran who preferred to remain Persian subjects.[391] As mentioned in Chapter Two Armenians played a substantial role in the commercial relations between the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran. Moreover, many of those Armenians who settled in the new Russian territories still had relatives on the Persian side of the border. Therefore, apart from trade, there was a constant movement across the border for visiting relatives. This naturally facilitated the flow of ideas from the Russian side to the Persian side, and vice versa. Iranian Armenians as fellow Christians also enjoyed the protection of Russian missions all over Iran and therefore, many of them could be counted on as loyal allies of the Russian Empire in Iran.[392] This was an asset for Russian officials and this cross-border connection facilitated the implementation of Russian imperialist policies in Qajar Iran.

On July 3rd, 1844, the Russian Empire and Iran concluded a special agreement regulating migration according to which neither Persian nor Russian subjects were allowed to cross the border without explicit written permission of their administrations.[393] The possession of a particular kind of passport for travel abroad also became mandatory for both Russian and Persian

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[390] Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1995), 11.
[391] Esmail Rayin, *Iranian-E-Armani* (Tehran: Moaseseyeh Tahgigh Rayin, 1970), 43.
[392] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 50.
[393] Andreeva, "Russian Government," 84.

subjects.[394] However, it is not clear to what extent these policies were applied, especially because they relied on mechanisms of enforcement that were non-existent in Iran, where it took until the 1890s to create a rudimentary bureaucracy issuing passports and citizenship certificates.[395] Even in 1909, 6,000 Persian subjects per year crossed the border illegally without any passport or visa at the border crossing in Astara.[396] The same was true for Russian subjects. In 1891, a Russian official stated that according to the information from the Russian embassy in Tehran "barely one in ten of all Russian subjects traveling over land into Persia appears to have the foreign passport as prescribed… Many Russian subjects, therefore, arrive in Persia without any written documents and live there for years, without fulfilling any duties, and then returns just as freely to the motherland."[397] Therefore, it can be concluded that over the course of the nineteenth century and until the fall of the Russian Empire in February 1917, the borders between the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran remained fluid, and their control over the cross-border movement of Russian and Persian subjects remained limited.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, many Persian merchants, who were engaged in trade with the Russian Empire, became Russian subjects.[398] By acquiring the citizenship of the Russian Empire, these merchants when back in Iran enjoyed the protection of Russian missions and the capitulation system. Most of these merchants settled their families in the Russian Empire and were travelling back and forth for trade between Iran and Russia.[399] Moreover, Persian merchants who became Russian subjects could successfully integrate into the Russian urban

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[394] Andreeva, "Russian Government," 84.
[395] Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 53–55.
[396] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 47.
[397] Ibid.
[398] Ibid., 45.
[399] Abdollah Mostofi, *Sharheh Zendeganieyeh Man: Tarikhe Ejtemayii va Edariyeh Doreyeh Qajareyeh* (Tehran: Hermes, 2016), 996.

society. For instance, around 1900, several wealthy individuals of Persian origin held prominent positions among the notables of Astrakhan, for example as members of the *Zemstvo*.[400] It is fair to argue that these Russian Persian merchants were more sympathetic to the Russian Empire's policies in Iran over those of any other foreign power. Granting Russian citizenship to many influential Persian merchants also demonstrated the forward-thinking imperialist policies of St. Petersburg in Qajar Iran.

With the industrialization of the South Caucasus in the final decades of the nineteenth century thousands of Persian workers left Iran for the Russian Empire and started working in the newborn industries of places like Baku, Tbilisi, and Batumi. Abdollah Mostofi, a Persian diplomat who worked in the Persian embassy in St. Petersburg between 1904 and 1909 writes in his memoir that:

> There were many Persian subjects living in the Caucasus. Every year many of our subjects left for the Russian Empire to work there. Some of them used to leave Iran in the spring and return in the fall… However, there was another group of our workers who lived for two to three years in the Russian Empire and when their passports were expired, they had to renew them through our consulates…. Persian workers started leaving for the Caucasus during the reign of Mozaffer al-Din Shah when it became easier for our ordinary subjects to travel abroad, and the oil industry started to flourish in Baku. Most of the workers of the Caucasus factories were Persians… Apart from our subjects working in the Caucasus, there were also many Persians who owned shops there. Some of them were Muslim, others were Christian.[401]

Andrei Dimitrievich Kalmykov (b.1870–1941) a Russian diplomat who worked in the Russian consulate in Tabriz in 1895–1896 stated in his memoir that in the Russian consulate in Tabriz alone, "18,000 passports were visaed each year for Persians going to work in Caucasus."[402] This figure on its own reflects the extent of Russo-Persian migration and intercultural interactions in

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[400] Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism,* 45.
[401] Mostofi, *Sharheh Zendeganieyeh Man,* 904–5.
[402] Andrew D. Kalmykow, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), 40.

late Qajar Iran. By travelling to the Russian Empire and working in the Caucasus these Persian workers witnessed the modernization, and development of the Caucasus after only a few decades of Russian rule. Moreover, the revolutionary activities in the Caucasus soon came to involve these Persian workers. Many of these workers established close links to the Baku and Tbilisi branches of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.[403] They also organized several strikes and demonstrations in various factories over the years 1900 to 1906.[404] This trend fully develops in the chronological period not covered in my master's thesis. Nevertheless, it deserves subsequent investigation, and it is a very good example of how Russo-Persian interactions produced political consequences during the next chapter of Persian history.

Between the mid-nineteenth century and 1917, the Russian Empire was the most popular destination for the Persian nobility and wealthy families to send their children for education. The increasing influence of the Russian Empire in Qajar Iran led to a rise in the number of Persian students studying in the Russian Empire. Abdollah Mostofi who as a Persian diplomat working in the Iranian embassy in St. Petersburg had direct experience dealing with these students wrote in his memoir that:

> Lately we had to open a consulate in Moscow. This was mainly due to the increasing number of Persian students in that city. By witnessing the increasing influence of the Russian Empire in Iran, our nobility and many wealthy Persian families started sending their children for studies to Russia. The number of our students in Russia has dramatically increased over the last seven, eight years [before 1904]. Many of our students study especially in Moscow which has many prestigious schools. Our current ambassador in St. Petersburg Moshir-ol-Molk [Hassan Pirnia (b.1871–1935)] has also studied in Moscow.[405]

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[403] Iago Gocheleishvili, "Georgian Sources on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1905–1911: Sergo Gamdlishvili's Memoirs of the Gilan Resistence," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 208.
[404] Ibid., 208–9.
[405] Mostofi, *Sharheh Zendeganieyeh Man,* 907.

Apart from Moscow many prominent Persian families sent their children from a young age to St. Petersburg to study there. Among these students were Mirza Abdol-Hossein Khan Moazer-ol-Molk later known as Teymourtash (b.1883–1933) and Amanullah Mirza Jahanbani (b.1891–1974) who studied at the prestigious Imperial Nicholas Military Academy of the General Staff in St. Petersburg.[406] Some other Persian students studying in the Russian Empire's prestigious schools were Mohammad Hossein Mirza Firuz (b.1891–1983), Fath 'Ali Khaje Nourian (b.1898–1962), Mohammad Ali Nezam Mafi (b.1882–1980), and Hamid Sayah (b.1885-1968).[407] Most of these Persian students were sent by their families to the Russian Empire in their early teenage years, and lived and studied there for at least 10 to 12 years.[408] Upon their return to Iran, they held prominent positions in the Persian state. These former students were indeed more sympathetic to the Russian Empire's policies in Iran. Moreover, following the Russian Revolutions in 1917, these former students helped many Russian White immigrants to settle in Iran.[409] St. Petersburg's policy of accepting these Persian students into the empire's prestigious schools and academies demonstrates another facet of the Russian Empire's imperialist policies in Iran. It further reflects Iran's dependence on the Russian Empire during this period.

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[406] Bagher Agheli, *Teymourtash* (Tehran: Javidan, 2020), 15–18.
[407] Ibid, 18.
For a longer list of these Persian students studied at the Russian Empire look at: Bagher Agheli, *Teymourtash* (Tehran: Javidan, 2020).
[408] Mostofi, *Sharheh Zendeganieyeh Man,* 896–902.
[409] In my personal interviews with the descendants of the White Russian immigrants in Iran, I was told that many of these former Persian students in the Russian Empire, who later became prominent officials in the Iranian government helped these Russian refuges to settle down in Iran. These former students found jobs for many Russian refugees and helped them acquiring the Iranian citizenship.

By focusing on cross-border Russo-Persian interactions in the southeastern Caucasus and southwestern Central Asia over the course of the nineteenth century until February 1917, this chapter demonstrated how these interactions contributed to the expansion of Russia's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. These interactions fall into three specific spheres: Russian deserters to Iran, the attempts to rein in the nomads living in the Russo-Persian borderlands, and the existence of large Persian communities in the Russian Empire. This chapter demonstrated the significance of Russo-Persian borderlands in understanding the two neighbors' relations and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran. It showed how these interactions shaped and facilitated the implementation of Russia's imperialist policies in Iran. In the case of Russian deserters to Qajar Iran, we saw how due to the Russo-Persian cross-border interactions, military and cultural expertise was transferred from the Russian Empire to Iran and vice versa. The case of nomads in the Russo-Persian borderland and Tehran's contribution to the expansion of the Russian Empire into southwestern Central Asia challenges the conventional binary understandings of the metropole and the colony shared by the many theories of imperialism. This is also because both Russian and Persian states were defining themselves in that region in the process of interaction and cooperation to establish control over the nomads. Together they created a border and divided the lands of the Turkmen. This reveals the entangled nature of the Russian and Persian states, and the fact that both states were not static, but they evolved. These interactions played a key role in the process of this division. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the complex nature of St. Petersburg's imperialism in Qajar Iran, as this cooperation expanded Russia's influence not only in Central Asia but also in north-eastern Iran, as Tehran was dependent on the Russian forces to preserve its control over the region, and the local Persians came to see the Russian Empire as the only force capable of providing security for the region. Finally, the great extent of Russo-Persian

interactions and their contribution to the development of St. Petersburg's imperialism in Qajar Iran were demonstrated in the third section of this chapter covering the history of Persian communities in the Russian Empire. Here we saw how the assimilation of prominent Persian noble families into the Russian aristocracy, the granting of Russian citizenship to many wealthy Persian merchants, the existence of thousands of Persian labour migrants in the Caucasus, and a large group of Persian students studying in the prestigious universities, academies, and schools of the Russian Empire worked in the favour of the expansion of St. Petersburg's influence over Qajar Iran. Moreover, these interactions created a shared understanding that the two neighbours' elites needed to support each other in face of threats. It also created a possibility for workers to travel and share ideologies. Therefore, Qajar Iran enters the age of revolution in 1906 very much in step with the Russian Empire.[410] This period is beyond the time span covered in this master's thesis and deserves subsequent investigation. However, in the Epilogue, I will briefly point how this synergy of the Russo-Persian elites and the contacts among the workers and Caucasian revolutionaries contributed to the post-1906 revolutionary events in Iran.

[410] In 1905, the Russian Empire was shaken by a large-scale Revolution which led to the establishment of an elected legislative assembly. Only a year later, in 1906 Qajar Iran witnessed the Persian Constitutional Revolution which led to the establishment of the first Persian parliament. I talk more about these events in the Epilogue.

Conclusion:
A Post-1906 Epilogue

Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the study of Russian imperialism in the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Baltic region, East Asia, Finland, and Poland. Despite the extensive border shared by the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran, and the profound influence St. Petersburg exerted on almost every aspect of Persians' lives over the course of the nineteenth century, few scholars, especially in Western academia, have studied Russo-Persian relations. Furthermore, of this small group of scholars, most confine their analysis to the framework of the "Great Game," which sees Iran as a mere victim caught between the intense rivalry of the Russian and British Empires for dominance in the Middle East. These scholarly works view Russo-British rivalry as the main force determining Russo-Persian relations and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran. The main exception is Moritz Deutschmann, who in 2016 challenged the tradition of interpreting the history of Russo-Persian relations within the framework of the "Great Game." Deutschmann argues that social factors played a decisive role in shaping Russo-Persian relations in Qajar era. He believes that Qajar Iran was not a centralized state with a modern bureaucracy and army, and that the political power in Iran was based on a delicate balance between the tribal groups, urban merchants, and the monarchy. According to Deutschmann, the "unruliness of Iran" was the most significant factor in the development of imperial Russian policies towards Qajar Iran. In this thesis, unlike Duetschmann and scholars of the "Great Game", I did not confine the scope of my analysis into a single framework. Due to the complexity of Russo-Persian relations, research confined to a single framework cannot capture the many factors which influenced St. Petersburg's policies towards Qajar Iran. Moreover, in thesis, I showed that the traditional notions of imperialism cannot make justice to the complexities of Russo-Persian relations.

Therefore, by drawing inspiration from the theories of "Borderland Studies" and "Entangled History", I provided a careful analysis of Russo-Persian relations and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran.

A Borderland Studies' lens showed us the significance of border and cross-border interactions, and my use of Entangled History demonstrated the significance of Russo-Persian interconnectedness for the understanding of the two neighbours' histories. "Entangled History" and "Borderland Studies" showed us that we cannot look at neither Qajar Iran nor the Russian Empire by themselves, without understanding how they were entangled with each other. Therefore, to understand the relations between these two polities, I brought the histories of Russo-Persian interconnectedness, economic, military, social, and cultural interactions into one place. Inspired by these two schools of thought, I focused on the significance of social, cultural, military, and economic cross-border interactions in Russo-Persian borderlands. By discussing these interactions, I demonstrated how they contributed to the development and implementation of St. Petersburg's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. In Chapter One, I examined the story behind the foundation of the Persian Cossack Brigade, one of the valuable tools at the disposal of the Russian Empire to further its imperialist ambitions in Qajar Iran. Yet, the brigade was not founded as a result of an intentional imperialist policy of St. Petersburg. On the contrary, the brigade was founded as a result of the Persian state's 1878 request. For decades, Persian rulers had admired the Russian Empire, viewing it as the best model of progress, glory, and civilization. Following the two Russo-Persian wars in the early nineteenth century, many Persian elites were deeply impressed by Russia's successful transformation into a great power over a short period of time and wanted to emulate it. Geographical proximity as well as cultural and military interactions are key factors in understanding the formation of this admiration and the

establishment of the Persian Cossack Brigade. The complexity of the Persian Cossack brigade case, especially regarding the cultural and military interactions, demonstrates how the study of Russo-Persian relations and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran cannot be only confined to the framework of the "Great Game" nor to Deutschamnn's "unruliness of Iran".

In Chapter Two, I followed up on my argument with reference to Russo-Persian economic relations, paying particular attention to the foundation and activities of the Russian Loan and Discount Bank in Qajar Iran. The Loan and Discount Bank proved to be an outstanding success of St. Petersburg, dominating the Persian markets. The bank also significantly helped to tighten the Russian Empire's economic grip on Iran. The existing historiography of Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran sees the foundation of the Loan and Discount Bank as St. Petersburg's direct response to the establishment of the Imperial Bank of Iran by a British citizen. Scholars also study the Loan and Discount Bank's activities within the framework of Russo-British rivalry in Iran. By contrast, this thesis demonstrated how the existence of well-established trade routes and economic relations between Russia and Iran for centuries, and the proximity of Iran's major urban areas to the Russo-Persian border made the establishment of a bank facilitating and regulating Russo-Persian trade an economic necessity. In the mid-nineteenth century and before the establishment of both the Imperial Bank and the Loan and Discount Bank, the Russian Empire was Iran's major trading partner. That the Loan and Discount Bank was initially established by a private Russian businessman acting independently from the Russian state demonstrates the significant role of independent businessmen, merchant communities, and Russo-Persian age-old economic relations. Following the Russian Empire's industrialization, St. Petersburg desperately sought new markets for the products of its newborn industries, so the

Tsarist state took over the Loan and Discount Bank and started to use it as a tool to pursue its imperialist ambitions in Iran.

Studying the interactions that took place in the Russo-Persian borderland provides a new picture of how the Russian Empire expanded its influence in Qajar Iran. As the cases of both the Persian Cossack Brigade and the Russian Loan and Discount Bank demonstrate, St. Petersburg's imperialist policies were based on pre-existing social, economic, military, and cultural processes. In other words, the Russian Empire took advantage of these existing relations and interactions that had been developing for centuries. St. Petersburg had no plan for founding either the Persian Cossack Brigade or the Loan and Discount Bank. As I presented in this thesis, both were founded independently from the Russian state as a result of Russo-Persian cultural, social, and economic interactions. In both cases, Russia developed and expanded its imperialist policies in Iran by building upon pre-existing structures.

In Chapter Three, I focused on three subjects closely related to Russo-Persian cross-border interactions: Russian deserters to Qajar Iran, the shared perceptions of the need to control the nomads living in the Russo-Persian borderlands, and the large Persian communities in the Russian Empire. The study of Russian deserters to Iran shows how Russo-Persian cross-border interactions transformed military expertise in Iran and vice versa. Tehran's cooperation with St. Petersburg in Imperial Russia's campaigns against the Turkmen challenges the conventional binary understanding of the metropole and colony as two separate polities with conflicting and contrasting interests. The Persian-supported Russian presence which was needed to ensure the security of the new border between the Russian Empire and Iran allowed Russia to expand its influence in north-eastern Iran. St. Petersburg also expanded its influence over Qajar Iran through the assimilation of prominent Persian noble families into the Russian aristocracy, the

granting of Russian citizenship to many wealthy Persian merchants, the existence of thousands of Persian labour migrants in the Caucasus, and a large group of Persian students at the prestigious universities, academies, and schools of the Russian Empire.

Inspired by the approaches developed in the new fields of "Borderland Studies," "Entangled History," and the revisionist approach of imperialism, I demonstrated how St. Petersburg's imperial expansion in Qajar Iran was a complex and contradictory process accomplished mostly through Russo-Persian social, economic, and cultural interactions on the ground rather than solely through imperial decrees, armies, or a Russo-British rivalry. Russian officials in St. Petersburg took advantage of the pre-existing Russo-Persian social, cultural, and economic interactions. Merchants, deserted soldiers, private businessmen, bankers, labour migrants, students, and noble families were all significant players shaping and developing Russo-Persian relations and Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran. In this thesis, I did not try to thoroughly undermine the significance of Russo-British rivalry in the region nor the threat of Iran's unruliness to the Russian Empire. Nevertheless, by drawing inspiration from the theories of "Borderland Studies" and "Entangled History," I have tried to show the great extent of Russo-Persian social, cultural, economic, and military interactions, and what a significant role they played in developing and implementing Russia's imperialist policies in Qajar Iran. At the same time as drawing on recent studies of imperialism to develop a better understanding of Russia's policies toward Qajar Iran, I showed that the study of Russo-Persian relations has something new to offer to the existing studies of "empire" and "imperialism".

By way of conclusion, I will provide a brief overview of Russo-Persian relations following the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906. I will also demonstrate to what great

extent the processes explained in this thesis contributed to the course of events in the following chapter of Persian history.

The significance of Russo-Persian cross-border interactions demonstrated itself clearly in the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and the Persian Civil War of 1908–1909. Due to decades of extensive Russo-Persian cross-border interactions, radical and revolutionary ideas were flowing from the Russian Empire, especially the Caucasus, to Iran. Persian labor migrants working in the Caucasian industrial centres, Russo-Persian merchants' close ties, hundreds of Persians studying at the Russian Empire's universities, and Armenians' constant movement across the border were all key factors in the transmission of new ideas from the Russian Empire to Qajar Iran. These new ideas crossing the border played a significant role in the emergence of the Persian constitutional movement in 1906.[411] There can be no coincidence that shortly after Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and the start of the 1905 Revolution in the Russian Empire that a revolutionary movement emerged in Iran in 1906. Several scholars agree that St. Petersburg's weakness and the internal turmoil, which devastated the Russian Empire, prevented the Tsarist state from curtailing the revolutionary movement in Iran.[412] Indeed, St. Petersburg's preoccupation with its internal crises played a significant role in the success of the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906. We can see here how revolution in one empire prompted

[411] For more information on the significance of the Russian Caucasus on the penetration of revolutionary ideas into Qajar Iran see: Rasoul Poorzamani, *Baku va Enghelabeh Mashrooteyeh Irani* (Tehran: Safirardehal, 2016) and Houri Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911: The Love for Freedom Has no Fatherland* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

[412] For instance, see: Afshin Matin-asgari, "The Impact of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union on Qajar and Pahlavi Iran," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 12; Stephanie Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks and Revolutionaries: Russians in Iranian Military Service, 1800-1920," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 164.

constitutional struggle in the neighboring country that was greatly under the influence of that empire.

What makes this case even more interesting is that following the suppression of the 1905 revolution by the Tsarist state, which happened around 1907, we witness the re-emergence of a conservative monument in Iran in 1908. In an unprecedent coalition between Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar (r.1907–1909) and the commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade Lieutenant General Vladimir Platonovich Liakhov (b.1869–1920) the autocratic power of the Persian monarch was restored in 1908. Liakhov, who played a decisive role in the suppression of the revolutionary movement in the Caucasus in late 1905, was appointed by St. Petersburg as the new commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade in September 1906.[413] Like Liakhov, Mohammad Ali Shah was a staunch supporter of the autocratic rule. The new Qajar shah also saw the defence of Russian interests in Iran as integral to the survival of Qajar dynasty.[414] Both Liakhov and Mohammad Ali Shah were aware of Nicholas II's struggle with the Duma and of its parallels with the conflict being played out in Iran between the shah and the Majlis.[415]

The Persian constitutional Revolution of 1906 clearly owned its initial success to the internal turmoil and weakening of the Russian Empire. It was also evident that the renewed self-

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[413] Mohsen Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigade va Divisioneh Qazaq az Colonel Domontovich ta Reza Khan Savad Koohi* (Tehran: Nashr-e-Elm, 2015), 585.

[414] For more information on Mohammad Ali Shah's Russophile inclinations see: Elena Andreeva, "Russia iv. Russians at the Court of Mohammad-'Ali Shah," *Encyclopedia Iranica,* accessed May 26, 2023, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/russia-iv-russians-at-the-court-of-mohammad-ali-shah.

[415] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 167. *Gosudarstvennaia Duma* (State Assembly in Russian) was one of the main achievements of the 1905 Russian Revolution. Duma was an elected legislative body that along with the State Council constituted the imperial Russian legislature from 1906 until its dissolution in March 1917. *Majlis* (The National Consultative Assembly) was the main achievement of the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906. Majlis was opened in October 1906, and was a representative legislative assembly elected by elections every four yours. The new constitution provided a framework for secular legislation, a new judicial code, and a free press. All these reduced the autocratic power of the shah significantly.

confidence of the reactionary monarchist forces in Qajar Iran was partly because of the successful suppression of the revolutionary upheavals in the Russian Empire. Moreover, due to the great extent of Russo-Persian interactions, St. Petersburg saw the constitutional struggle in Iran as related to the Russian Empire's internal crises. Therefore, in the summer of 1908, the Persian Cossack Brigade under the command of Liakhov bombarded the Majlis, crushed all constitutionalists' activities in Tehran and restored the absolutist monarchy. Martial law was proclaimed, and Mohammad Ali Shah appointed Liakhov as the military governor of Tehran. What demonstrates the entangled nature of Russo-Persian relations even more clearly, is the influx of hundreds of revolutionaries from the Russian Empire to the Persian cities of Rasht and Tabriz. Among these revolutionaries were Russians, Georgians, Armenians, and Azeris who were actively involved in the 1905 revolutionary uprisings in the Caucasus.[416] Liakhov had been actively involved in the suppression of this revolutionary movement in the Caucasus.[417] As Stephanie Cronin puts it, "now the very same elements whom he had so recently been engaged in suppressing were following him to Iran to continue the fight."[418] These revolutionaries from the Russian Empire played a key role in determining the eventual military victory of Persian constitutionalists in July 1909. With the arrival of these revolutionaries, the centre of the struggle moved to the Persian cities of Tabriz and Rasht close to the Russo-Persian border. Most of these Caucasian revolutionaries were militant revolutionary activists and were known as *Qafghazi*

[416] For more information on the role of the Caucasian revolutionaries in the Persian Civil War of 1908–1909 see: Iago Gocheleishvili, "Georgian Sources on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1905–1911: Sergo Gamdlishvili's Memoirs of the Gilan Resistence," in *Iranian- Russian Encounters Empires and Revolutions Since 1800,* ed. Stephanie Cronin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Houri Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911: The Love for Freedom Has no Fatherland* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Rasoul Poorzamani, *Baku va Enghelabeh Mashrooteyeh Irani* (Tehran: Safirardehal, 2016).
[417] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 168.
[418] Ibid.

("Caucasian") among Persians.[419] The *Qafgahzi* reinforced the defenders of Tabriz during the long siege of this city by Mohammad Ali Shah's forces. Under the leadership of these Caucasian revolutionaries, the constitutionalists managed to defeat the shah's forces in Rasht and open a new revolutionary front there.[420] The *Qafghazi* also led the constitutionalist march on Tehran to final victory over Liakhov's forces. Interestingly, following the fall of Tehran in July 1909, Liakhov's responsibility for the security of Tehran was immediately transferred to another subject of the Russian Empire. The revolutionary leader and ethnically Armenian Yiprim Khan Davidian (b.1868–1912) was now appointed as the Persian chief of police.[421] Mohammad Ali Shah abdicated in the favour of his son, and left Iran for the Russian Empire. The reproduction of the Russian Empire's revolutionary conflict on Persian territory, demonstrates the interconnectedness of these two neighbours' polities and the significance of the Russo-Persian interactions that I have analyzed in my thesis for this new chapter of Iran's history.

The reign of the revolutionaries in Tehran proved to be very short. By the end of 1911, imperial Russian armies occupied large parts of northern Iran including the constitutionalist strongholds of Tabriz and Rasht. Hundreds of constitutionalists and revolutionaries were arrested, executed, or deported by the Russian forces.[422] These events in Iran ran in parallel with

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[419] In his article "Georgian Sources on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1905–1911" Iago Gocheleishvili states that several members of these revolutionary Caucasians participating in the Persian Constitutional Revolution, were veterans of the Russo-Japanese War, and many other had participated in the revolution in Russia in 1905. See: Gocheleishvili, "Georgian Sources," 213–4.

[420] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigad,* 824.

[421] Yiprim Khan was one of the most politically significant leaders of the constitutionalists defeating Liakhov and his forcers in 1909. Yiprim Khan was born in Elizabetpol' (Ganja) in the Russian Caucasus. He was an Armenian nationalist and was exiled to Siberia by the Tsarist authorities in 1892. Like many other revolutionaries from the Caucasus, Yiprim Kahn escaped to Iran. In Tabriz, he worked for the Armenian Revolutionary Federation *Dashnaksutiun.* He was one of the main leaders of the Caucasian Revolutionaries in the Iranian Civil War of 1908–1909. For more information on Yiprim Khan see: Houri Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911: The Love for Freedom Has no Fatherland* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

[422] Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian,* 3.

the Duma's power being gradually curtailed by Nicholas II and his supporters, back in St. Petersburg. After receiving an ultimatum by the Russian forces threatening to seize Tehran, the Majlis was dissolved (not to convene again until 1914) and St. Petersburg re-consolidated its influence over Tehran. With the eruption of the World War I in the summer of 1914, and the occupation of southern Iran by the British forces, imperial Russian troops expanded their occupation to other Persian cities, such as Qazvin, Hamedan, and Kermanshah.[423] The survival of Iran as a sovereign state with its contemporary geographical borders seemed unlikely at this stage, as St. Petersburg's colonization of Iran's northern provinces was already in progress for decades, and Russian armies' occupation accelerated this process. In southern Iran, especially with the discovery of oil in the Persian province of Khuzestan, London was determined to strengthen its hold over this region.[424]

The collapse of the Russian monarchy in February 1917, and the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in that same year, are believed by many historians as the key reason behind the survival of Iran as a sovereign state.[425] Following the start of the Russian Civil War in late 1917, the bloody conflict of the Bolsheviks and White forces in the former Russian Empire was reproduced again on the Persian territory. This time a group of revolutionaries supported by the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Mirza Kuchik Khan (b.1880–1921) proclaimed the foundation of the Persian Socialist Soviet Republic and started to clash with the Persian Cossack Brigade under the command of the Colonel Vsevolod Dmitrievich Starosel′skii (b.1875–1935).[426] Starosel′skii was

[423] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Beigad*, 904–5.
[424] For the British activities in southern Iran before and during World War I see: Shahbaz Shahnavaz, *Britain and the Opening Up of South-West Persia 1880–1914: A Study in Imperialism and Economic Dependence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).
[425] Houri Berberian, Stephanie Cronin, Firuz Kazemzadeh, and Elena Andreeva are among scholars who point to the Russian 1917 Revolutions as one of the key reasons behind Iran's survival as an independent sovereign state.
[426] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigad,* 1169.

a devoted supporter of the White forces. Once in command of the brigade in early 1918, he started a recruiting campaign among refugee Tsarist officers in Iran following the disintegration of the imperial Russian armies during 1917. This campaign proved very successful and dozens of former Tsarist officers joined the brigade.[427] With the help of the British, who initially supported the White cause, the Persian Cossack Brigade formed White partisans. These partisans were crossing into the Caucasus and assisting the armies of the White General Anton Ivanovich Denikin (b.1872–1947).[428] With the Bolsheviks supporting the uprising of the Mirza Kuchik Khan in the Persian province of Gilan, and the arrival of the Red Army's fleet in Bandar Anzeli, Starosel'skii had to refocus his attention to Gilan. In the summer of 1920, the Bolsheviks sent additional troops to Gilan and clashed with Starosel′skii and the White officers of the Persian Cossack Brigade.[429] Throughout 1920 as White forces were being defeated by the Bolsheviks, the British support for Starosel′skii also started to wane. In early October 1920, with the arrival of British General Edmund Ironside (b.1880–1959) the fate of Starosel′skii and other Russian officers in Iran was sealed.[430] With the support of the British forces, Tehran managed to crush the Kuchik Khan's uprising, and the Red soldiers evacuated Gilan.[431]

Soon Iranians witnessed the rise to power of Reza Khan Savad Koohi (b.1878–1944), an Iranian officer serving in the Persian Cossack Brigade, to power. Reza Khan served many years in the brigade under the command of Tsarist officers and had grown there to maturity. From his Russian commanders he had absorbed the authoritarianism and hostility to constitutionalism,

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[427] Stephanie Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 173.
[428] Ibid., 174. For more information on these White Partisans formed from the Persian Cossack Brigade, see Sergei Stanislavovich Balmasov, *Ruskii Shtyk na Chuzhoi Voine* (Moscow: Piatyi Rim, 2017).
[429] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigad,* 1222–3.
[430] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 176.
[431] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigad,* 1390. For more information on the Mirza Kuchik Khan's uprising, see Mohammad Kalhor, *Tarikhe Jangal* (Tehran: Shirazeh Ketab Ma, 2021).

elements that later characterized his regime and Pahlavi rule in general.[432] Reza Khan later known as Reza Shah Pahlavi (r.1925–1941) founded the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979) and is known among Iranians as the founder of modern Iran. He embarked on a massive program of Westernization and tried to modernize Iran in a short period of time. After a century of Persian elites' fascination with the reforms of Peter the Great and the Russian Empire, Reza Khan took on the role of an absolutist enlightened monarch and followed Peter's path. Like Peter the Great, the centerpiece of Reza Shah's reforms was the creation of a modern army. Indeed, the needs of military modernization determined both the scope and character of much of the wider program of reform and development.[433] Like Peter the Great, Reza Shah paid particular attention to the expansion and the reorganization of the civil bureaucracy. In just two decades, the new regime reorganized Iran's fiscal system, secularized and centralized the judicial system, built railways, modern roads, established a secular system of national and secondary schools, and founded Iran's first university in 1934. Like Peter the Great, Reza Shah seriously curtailed the power of the clergy, who were against his modernization reforms.[434] Significantly, many Russian White refugees who escaped to Iran following the collapse of the Russian Empire, contributed to Reza Shah's modernization in the interwar period.[435]

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[432] Cronin, "Deserters, Converts, Cossacks," 177.
[433] Afshin Matin-asgari, "The Impact of Imperial Russia," 26.
[434] For more information on the reforms of Reza Shah Pahlavi, see Stephanie Cronin, *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society Under Riza Shah 1921–1941* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003).
[435] In my personal interviews with the descendants of these Russian refugees in Iran, and going through their diaries and documents, I have discovered that a majority of these refugees were highly educated people. Apart from former Tsarist officers, among them were engineers, architects, musicians, and physicians. They all contributed significantly to the modernization of Iran in the interwar periods. For instance, many of the new roads, and railways were designed and built by Russian engineers. Significant buildings in Tehran were designed by prominent Russian architects like Nikolai Lvovich Markov (b.1883–1957).

At the same time, the new regime's disregard for constitutionalism led to the closing of all independent press and political parties. It reduced the Persian parliament to futile impotence and suppressed all independent political and social organizations.[436] Indeed, Pahlavi rule shared many of the characteristics of the Romanov rule. Both polities were autocratic monarchies which embarked on great modernization reforms. Both regimes had a very strong militaristic character and endeavored through enlightened absolutism to bring modernization and civilization to their subjects.[437] Many of the significant statesmen who contributed to the modernization reforms of Reza Shah were former Persian students who had graduated from prestigious schools of the Russian Empire. For instance, Abdol-Hossein Teymourtash and Amanullah Jahanbani were two prominent figures of the Reza Shah's regime who both studied and lived for long years in the Russian Empire. Teymourtash was seen as Iran's second most powerful man until his sudden demise in 1933. He had a crucial role in shaping the policies of the early Pahlavi state.[438] Jahanbani played a crucial role in the unification of Iranian territories and had a renowned career in the Iranian army.[439] Mohammad-Hosseyn Ayrom (b.1882–1948), Reza Shah's notorious chief of police, who played a significant role in the suppression of all independent political and social activities during the interwar period in Iran, had also graduated from a military school in St. Petersburg.[440] Ayrom served for long years in the Persian Cossack Brigade under the command

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[436] Cronin, *The Making of Modern Iran,* 1–2.
[437] For more information on the official ideology of the Romanov dynasty, see Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). For more information on the official ideology of the Pahlavi dynasty, see Ebrahim Safaie, *Reza Shah Kabir dar Ayneyeh Tarikh* (Tehran: Entesharateh Edareyeh Kol Negaresh Vezarateh Farhang o Honar, 1976).
[438] For more information on the life of Teymourtash, see Bagher Agheli, *Teymourtash* (Tehran: Javidan, 2020).
[439] For more information on the life of Amanullah Jahanbani look at his memoir: Amanullah Jahanbani, *Khaterati az Doraneh Derakhshan Reza Shah Kabir* (Tehran: Chapkhane Bank Melli Iran, 1967).
[440] Agheli, *Teymourtash,* 18.

of reactionary Tsarist generals, such as General Liakhov[441]. His devotion to the autocratic monarchy, and his anti-constitutionalist sentiments played a key role in the suppression of political and civil activists by the Reza Shah's police force.

All these processes demonstrate the significance of Russo-Persian interactions in Qajar Iran. These processes were building on the foundation of what happened over the course of the nineteenth century, which I have discussed in this thesis. The history of Iran in the twentieth century cannot be understood properly without understanding the complex nature of Russian imperialism in Qajar Iran, and extensive Russo-Persian interactions.

[441] Mirzaie, *Tarikhcheyeh Brigad,* 898.

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