

March 1919

II. The Right to Territorial Restitution

Citation:

"II. The Right to Territorial Restitution", March 1919, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 317, ll. 0040-0045 . Translated by Gary Goldberg.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/209080>

Summary:

This report details Iranian territorial claims, including the Transcaspian District, various oblasts lost to the Russians, Turkish Kurdistan, and other Persian-majority areas the Iranians believe to have been unjustly taken from them.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

II

The right to territorial restitution

Persia is a country having natural borders. In the course of its history, beginning with the time of Cyrus, it turns out that for 25 centuries the numerous empires which have replaced one another in this country have usually achieved its natural boundaries. These boundaries encompass territories located between the Amu Darya, the Caucasus Range, the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates, and the Persian Gulf. Most of the population of this region have always belonged to the Iranian race. The empires which were created in this region have always been considered Iranian empires. If some parts of this territory have sometimes been broken away from Persia, they were again quickly conquered by the Persians. Not desiring to recall the magnitude of the Persian empires of the remote past and considering only modern times, we find that in the period of the Safavids, Nader Shah, and even under the first Qajars, that is, during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, Persia reached its natural boundaries and defended its territory against all invaders.

During the first years of the 19th century, weakened by a long period of civil wars and conflicts with foreigners, it ended up face to face with neighbors who became great and powerful and who did not fail to seize its territory. It could not defend itself as it had done previously. Part of its land was thus taken away from it. Attacks directed against the inviolability of Persia came from the Russians in the north and the Turks in the west.

The Russians began with the Caucasus. During the two wars which they waged against Persia in 1813 and 1818 they seized an important part of Persian territory. Later the Russians made use of it so that Persia was exhausted by these wars, just as from the wars with the Turks, who advanced in the direction of the Caspian region. Finally, in 1881 the Persian government found itself forced to enter into negotiations with the Czarist government with the goal of establishing a border and putting an end to Russian incursions. As a result of this definition of the border much Persian territory was again cut off. It encompassed a region between the Rivers Amu Darya and Atrek.

The severing of these provinces from Persia in itself constituted an act of injustice, but Russia did not stop even at this, and it committed many more other injustices in the course of the territorial negotiations and agreements concluded with Persia. By way of example we will cite the case of defining the border in the Transcaucasus. There was an agreement that the River Aras would divide Russia from Persia in this sector. But in the eastern part of this region the Russians rejected this natural boundary and occupied part of the territory located to the south of the river, thus creating an arbitrary boundary. By this means they acquired a large part of the Mughan and Talysh Provinces, and divided the population, which had been accustomed to live in personal relations and in constant commerce, without legal reasons. By this the Russians created constant difficulties both for themselves and the Persians. On top of that, since it became impossible to establish a natural boundary in these regions they always found the means to infiltrate Persian territory and create border conflicts.

Persia encountered the same difficulties and the same violation of its rights on the shore of the Caspian Sea and in the direction of Khorasan. In addition, the Russians imposed extremely unjust conditions on it. In some regions near the border they prohibited the residents of Persian villages from using the waters of rivers whose sources were in Persia and which then flowed through the territories annexed by Russia. They demanded that Persian peasants not expand the boundaries of lands they cultivated and for all the water not taken by Persian irrigation to flow into

Russian territory. As a result of such coercion the broad and rich land holdings of the Persians were ruined or remained unworked.

The Turkish aggression in the west was no less. Turkey seized considerable territory belonging to Persia and in recent centuries it constantly sought border disputes with Persia. The Persian government always restrained itself in very conciliatory fashion. In 1847 on the basis of the Treaty of Erzurum it ceded the region of Suleymaniye in order to thus halt the claims of this country on Mohammer [Translator's note; present-day Khorramshahr]. Turkey, however, continued to cause difficulties and remained unreasonable, and in 1907 it seized part of the disputed territory which it did not evacuate until 1914, except after this it retained part of the territory, which served as a summer residence for various Persian tribes.

This brief expose clearly shows how Persia has been territorially oppressed by Russia and Turkey. Now, when it has been decided to correct injustices caused peoples and liberate countries subjugated by the Turks and the Russians in order that they might be organized on just and logical foundations, Persia requests in the name of law and justice that the territories unjustly taken from it by force be returned to it. It demands that its borders be established in accordance with the rules of law and nature so that henceforth it be ensured from invasion from its neighbors.

Persia's territorial claims are briefly the following:

□□□ the northeast. The Transcaspien District.

□□

This district has always been part of Persia and is even considered one of the centers of Persian nationality. A considerable number of noted Persian poets, writers, scientists, and philosophers come from this district. The Persian language is widely distributed there: it is spoken even beyond this district, even as far as Bukhara and Samarkand. A considerable part of the inhabitants of this district are Persians (Kurds, Tajiks, and Persian emigrants). The rest of the population consists of Turkmen, that is, they belong to the same tribes which populate the region of Astrabad [Translator's note: present-day Gorgan], that is, of a province now Persian, which maintains the closest ties with its fellow countrymen on the other side of the border. Moreover, when disturbances recently arose soon after the Russian Revolution in Russia the population of the Transcaspien District, in particular the Turkmen of the steppe zone and the residents of Serakhs, who had been subjected to robbery and mass destruction from the Bolsheviks, turned to Persia for help and expressed a desire to unite with the mother country. The Persian government responded to their call and sent troops which defended them, repelling the Bolshevik invasion.

2. In the north. Cities and oblasts torn away from Persia after wars with Russia, We will name Baku, Shirvan, Derbent, [Shakki] [Translator's note: possibly Shaki in Azerbaijan], Shamakhi, Ganja (Yelizavetpol'), Karabakh, Nakhchivan, and Yerevan.

These oblasts should be returned to Persia since they were previously part of it. A considerable majority of the population of these oblasts are Muslim and mainly Persian by origin and race. In reality, from any point of view they are tied to Persia - historical, geographic, economic, commercial, religious, [or] cultural. In addition, a considerable part of the population of these oblasts recently turned to the Tehran government with a request for protection and expressed a desire to be reunited with Persia.

3. In the west. That part of Kurdistan which was part of the Turkish Empire.

Kurdistan is a territory populated by a people who are Persians by language and race, [and] professing Islam. This country was divided between Persia and Turkey. The

Turkish part encompasses:

a) the region of Suleymaniye, torn away from Persia by the aforementioned Treaty of Erzurum and is justly subjected to its return to it;

b) The rest of Turkish Kurdistan, which is tied to Persia by ethnic, geographic, religious, and other reasons and should naturally be joined to this country, especially because its religious leaders and prominent Kurds have declared their desire to be united with Persia.

4. The ties connecting Persia with the Holy Sites located in Mesopotamia, are countless and indisputable. A considerable number of the inhabitants of these places, Karbala, Najaf, Kadhimiya, and Samarra are Persians by origin or are Persian emigrants. These cities are the birthplace of the Shia religion, the official religion of Persia and is professed by all Persians. The great spiritual leaders of Persia live in these cities and many thousands of Persians visit them annually as pilgrims. It can be stated that these cities, whose trade and industry are by and large in Persian hands, live by the means and activity of Persia. Accordingly, the Persian government is extremely interested in decisions relating to these Holy Sites and requests that the important interests of Persia be protected when the time comes to solve the Mesopotamian question.

Translated [by] [signature] (S. Golunsky)

Checked [by] [signatures] (S. Tokarev), (M. Potrubach)