

Russian-Turkmen Struggle Over Ashuradeh Island in the Caspian Sea
in 19th Century

19. Yüzyılda Hazar Denizi'nde Aşurâde Adası Üzerinden
Rus-Türkmen Mücadelesi

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Abstract

From the 19th century onwards, Tsarist Russia began to dominate a wide area in Turkestan through economic and military incursions. While it carried out commercial activities in the coastal cities and peninsulas in the west and east of the Caspian Sea, it also went on to capture these regions, building military bases at strategic points. One place that the Russians considered of vital importance to capture was Ashuradeh Island. Located in the south of the Caspian Sea, this island, which facilitated access to Iran and Turkestan, was close to many trading ports, as well as being of crucial importance militarily. While the Russians were initially engaged in commercial activities there, they soon seized this region and turned it into a base. From 1838 onwards two distinct developments compounded Russian objectives in the area: on the one hand, conflicts between the Russian naval forces and the Yamut Turkmens,

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the indigenous people of the island; on the other, a diplomatic crisis between the Russian and Iranian governments. This study analyses the process of the occupation of Ashuradeh Island by Tsarist Russia, the conflicts between the Yamut Turkmens and Tsarist Russia from 1836 to 1873, the development of Russian influence on the island vis-à-vis Iran, and the general situation of the Turkmens during this period. Using British archival materials, personal notes of Russian soldiers and ambassadorial reports, this study evaluates the effects of the occupation of Ashuradeh Island, which served as an important base for Tsarist Russia's military activities in Turkestan, on Russia, Iran, Britain and the Turkmens in the region.

Keywords: Russia, Turkmens, Turkestan, Caspian Sea, Ashuradeh.

Öz

Çarlık Rusya 19. yüzyıldan itibaren ekonomik ve askeri saldırılarla Türkistan'da geniş bir alana hâkim olmaya başladı. Bir taraftan Hazar Denizi'nin batı ve doğusunda ki kıyı şehirlerinde ve yarımadalarda ticari faaliyetler yürütürken, diğer taraftan da stratejik noktalarda askerî üsler kurarak bu bölgeleri ele geçirmeye çalıştı. Rusların sahip olmayı mühim olarak gördükleri yerlerden biri de Aşurâde Adası'ydı. Hazar Denizi'nin güneyinde yer alan, İran ve Türkistan'a ulaşımı kolaylaştıran bu ada, birçok ticaret limanına yakın olmasının yanı sıra askerî açıdan da büyük önem taşıyordu. Ruslar başlangıçta burada ticari faaliyetlerde bulunurken, kısa süre sonra bu bölgeyi ele geçirerek bir üs haline getirdiler. 1838'den itibaren meydana gelen gelişmeler Rusların bölgedeki hedeflerini daha da zorlaştırdı. Bir yandan Rus deniz kuvvetleri ile adanın yerli halkı Yamut Türkmenleri arasında çatışmalar yaşanırken diğer yandan Rus ve İran hükümetleri arasında diplomatik kriz meydana geldi. Bu çalışma, Aşurâde Adası'nın Çarlık Rusya tarafından işgal sürecini, 1836'dan 1873'e kadar Yomut Türkmenleri ile Çarlık Rusyası arasındaki çatışmaları, İran'a karşı adadaki Rus nüfuzunun gelişimini ve bu dönemde Türkmenlerin genel durumunu incelemektedir. İngiliz arşiv materyalleri, Rus askerlerin kişisel notları ve elçi raporları kullanılarak hazırlanan bu çalışmada Çarlık Rusya'nın Türkistan'daki askerî faaliyetlerinde önemli bir üs vazifesi gören Aşurâde Adası'nın işgalinin Rusya, İran, İngiltere ve bölgedeki Türkmenler açısından meydana getirdiği etkiler değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya, Türkmenler, Türkistan, Hazar Denizi, Aşurâde.

Introduction

Due to its location, the Caspian Sea was of strategic importance for Tsarist Russia to establish its dominance in Turkestan in the 19th century. Capturing the port cities, peninsulas and islands on the Caspian Sea's eastern shores provided access to Turkestan, and in this context, it was crucial that Russia gained influence in Turkestan both militarily and commercially¹. Gaining power in Turkestan meant that economically important trade routes would come under Russian control². The economic benefits of dominating the region represented only one side of the Russian policy. Capturing the territories of the Turkestan khanates, such as Khiva, Bukhara, and Khokand, was a crucial step for Russia to increase its influence over the neighboring regions. By doing so, Russia could better control Afghanistan, which acted as a buffer zone between India and Turkestan, and Iran, located at a strategic point south of the Caspian Sea. The expansionist policy of the Russians in Turkestan and the southern regions concerned Britain as much as it did the Turkestan khanates, Iran and Afghanistan. In the 19th century, the British were trying to prevent these states -especially Afghanistan and Iran, which they described as buffer zones for the protection of India- from being invaded by Russia or from having their domestic and foreign policies come under Russian control³.

From the early 19th century onwards, the gains made by Tsarist Russia following its invasion attempts in the western Caspian Sea facilitated military activities in the southern and eastern regions of the Caspian Sea. Under the terms of the Treaty of Turkmenchai (February 10, 1828) signed between Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855) and the Shah of Iran, Fath Ali Shah (1797-1834), the khanates of Revan and Nakhchivan were annexed to Russia and all the lands between the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea -and the peoples living there- came under Russian rule⁴. The

- 1 Mikhail Volodarsky, "Persia and the Great Powers, 1856-1869", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 19/ No. 1, Jan. 1983, p. 75; Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Rusya Tarihi Başlangıçtan 1917'ye Kadar*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Second Edition, Ankara 1987, pp. 349-350; Murat Özkan, *Türkistan'ın İşgal Çağı Beyaz General Skobelev (1843-1882)*, Kronik Kitap, İstanbul 2020, p. 116.
- 2 Mikhail Volodarsky, "Persia's Foreign Policy between the Two Herat Crises, 1831-56", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 21/No. 2, Apr. 1985, pp. 120-121; David MacKenzie, "Turkestan's Significance to Russia (1850-1917)", *The Russian Review*, Vol. 33/No. 2, Apr. 1974, p. 168.
- 3 Mehmet Saray, *Rus İşgali Devrinde Osmanlı Devleti ile Türkistan Hanlıkları Arasındaki Siyasi Münasebetler (1775-1875)*, İstanbul Matbaası, İstanbul 1990, pp. 37-43.
- 4 Okan Yeşilot, "Türkmençay Antlaşması ve Sonuçları", *A. Ü. Türkîyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, No. 36, Erzurum, 2008, pp. 189-190; It is known that between 1801-1828, which covers the period

treaty declared that merchant ships of both states could operate in the Caspian Sea, as well as Russian warships⁵. This stipulation gave Russia a clear advantage in establishing dominance, affording their warships access to the Caspian's eastern shores and southern regions. In addition, Iran came to recognize Russia's leverage, and Russian influence increased in the domestic and foreign policy of the Shah⁶.

One of the key points for Tsarist Russia's expansionist aims in the eastern shores and southern regions of the Caspian Sea was Ashuradeh Island⁷. Ashuradeh was an island inhabited by the Yamut Turkmens, one of the Turkmen tribes in the region. It was situated in the southwest of the Khanate of Khiva (1512-1920), which was located in the Khwarezm region in the east of the Caspian Sea, and Mazandaran in northern Iran. It was also located close to Hasankulu Bay and Astrabad (Esterâbâd) Bay, where the Atrek River flows into the sea⁸. In addition to Turkmen merchants, Iranian and Russian merchants were also engaged in commercial activities in this region, where Turkmens would provide security⁹.

of Fath Ali Shah and until the Treaty of Turkmenchai, there was British, Russian and French influence on Iran. In this period of foreign interventions, the Iranian court had to act according to the political influence of the period and followed a policy of balance. See Tahsin Yazıcı, "Feth Ali Şah", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (TDV) İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 12, İstanbul 1995, pp. 451-452. The Treaty of Turkmenchai was a complement to the Treaty of Gulistan (1813) signed in 1813 after the defeat of Iran in the Russo-Iranian War. Having captured strategic cities in the Caucasus such as Shuragel, Imeretye, Mingrilye, Abkhazia, Karabakh, Ganja, Shirvan and Derbend from Iran, the Russians gained supremacy in the Caspian Sea with Turkmenchai. See. Sadokat B. Khujayorova, "The Role of the Governor-General of Turkestan in the Relations Between Russian Empire and Iran", *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, Vol. 6/No. 3, 2022, p. 1606.

- 5 George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, Vol. I, Longmans, Green and Co., London 1892, p. 183; Yeşilot, *ibid.*, p. 190.
- 6 Peter Hopkirk, *Büyük Oyun Orta Asya'da Gizli Savaş*, Translated by Renan Akman, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2022, p. 120.
- 7 India Office Records (IOR), Private Papers (Mss Eur), F112/376, p. 38.
- 8 IOR/Mss Eur/F112/376, p. 23; Great Britain. *Naval Intelligence Division, A manual on the Turanians and Pan-Turanianism*, Naval Staff Intelligence Department, H.M. Stationery Office, London 1920, pp. 172; Zeynep Yıldırım, "Melgunov'a Göre 19. Yüzyılda İran'da Türkmen Boyları", *Bilgi*, No. 103, Güz 2022, p. 154. Mian Kaleh is a peninsula stretching from west to east in the south of the Caspian Sea. Ashuradeh Island is located at the eastern end of this peninsula and is actually a part of the peninsula. However, as a result of the tidal activity in the region, Ashuradeh Island sometimes appeared to be independent of the peninsula, while it was mostly connected to it. See. Guive Mirfendereski, *A Diplomatic History of the Caspian Sea Treaties, Diaries, and Other Stories*, Palgrave, New York 2001, p. 30; Tahsin Yazıcı, "Esterâbâd", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 11, İstanbul 1995, p. 437; In addition to Yamut Turkmens, this island was also inhabited by Iranians and was also known as Potomkin, Urus Kaleh and Mian Kaleh. See Yıldırım, *ibid.*, p. 154.
- 9 Yıldırım, *ibid.*, p. 154. Turkmens in the region established trade relations with both Russians

Ashuradeh Island had the potential to serve as a military base for the Russians to advance to Turkestan and at the same time for them to control the trade in the Caspian Sea. It served as a supply route to Merv, Herat, and Mashad in the northern border regions of Afghanistan and Iran, and provided access to the roads leading to the interior of Turkestan. In the long run, the island played a vital role in facilitating transportation and communication between these regions. The terms of the Turkmenchai Treaty and Iran's agreement not to keep warships on the Caspian Sea paved the way for the occupation of Ashuradeh Island by the Russians¹⁰.

After the treaty, the Iranian government imposed sanctions on the Turkmen because they did not accept Iran's authority in the coastal regions of the Caspian Sea, with Iran fearing that the Russian domination over the sea could lead the Turkmen tribes in the area to adopt a pro-Russian policy. Following the defeat in the Russo-Iranian War of 1826-1828, the Turkmen between Astrabad and the Atrek River were subjected to tribute as a result of the activities of the Governor of Azerbaijan, Abbas Mirza (1789-1833), the son of the Shah of Iran, Fath Ali Shah. He had pursued a policy of expansion on the shores of the Caspian Sea after the defeat in the Russo-Iranian War of 1826-1828 and was preparing an expedition against the lands of the Khiva Khanate in the Khwarezm region in the east of the Caspian Sea. The Yamut Turkmen north of the Atrek River had not paid tribute since the reign of Nadir Shah (1736-1747). The rivalry between the Turkmen in the region and the Shah of Iran continued even after Iran's defeat against Russia and led the Turkmen to revolt against Iran. One year after the Turkmenchai Treaty, in 1829, the Yamut Turkmen around Astrabad and Mazandaran revolted against the Shah of Iran and took up arms. However, this uprising was soon suppressed and Iran's authority over the Yamuts was restored (1832). Nonetheless, the Yamuts living in the coastal areas of the Caspian Sea continued to act independently and continued their trade in the region outside

and Iranians. On Ashuradeh Island, where fishing was at the forefront, Turkmen exported large quantities of fish, especially to Iran and Russia. In addition, handmade products such as carpets, saddles, saddle covers and horse harnesses were also produced on the island. For more information see. Mehmet Saray, *The Turkmen in the Age of Imperialism: A Study of the Turkmen People and Their Incorporation Into the Russian Empire*, Turkish Historical Society Printing House, Ankara 1989, pp. 28-29.

10 G. Curzon, "The Transcaspian Railway", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, New Monthly Series, Vol. 11/No. 5, May. 1889, pp. 291-292.

of Iran's control¹¹. The decline of Iran's influence over the Caspian Sea after Turkmenchai further increased Turkmen power in the region and, as a result, the Yamuts refused to be subordinated to Iran¹².

Unable to prevent the piratical activities of the Turkmens, who plundered the coasts between the Astrabad Bay in the southeast of the Caspian Sea and Hasankulu Bay¹³ in the north of the bay, where the Atrek River flows, taking many Iranian captives, the Shah of Iran had to ask for help from Russia, which paved the way for direct Russian intervention in the region (1838)¹⁴. The strategic importance of the island's location and Iran's loss of military power in the Caspian allowed the Russians to settle on Ashuradeh Island under the pretext of calming the turmoil in the region. This paved the way for the arrival of Russian ships and troops to the southeast of the Caspian Sea and a conflict involving the Iranians and Turkmens.

The permanent occupation of the island by the Russians in 1841 and the subsequent question of whether the island belonged to Iran or Russia triggered a political crisis that would last for many years. The Russians occupied the island and tried to establish a base there. The British government also got involved because they wanted to stop the Russians from advancing towards Turkestan and Afghanistan. Through its envoys in Iran, the British government sought to resolve this issue in favor of British interests. The risk for Britain was that if the Russians managed to turn Ashuradeh Island into a military base, it could facilitate the supply of Russian military operations directed towards Iran and Afghanistan in the south and create a Russian invasion route that would threaten India. This study analyzes the process of the Russian occupation of Ashuradeh Island and the problems it caused among the Russians, Iranians and Yamut Turkmens. The importance of Ashuradeh Island for the Russians and the gradual expulsion of Turkmens from the island (1838-1873) are among the topics covered in the study. At the same time, the process of the island's status from being a political issue between Russia and Iran to a large-scale crisis involving Britain is also explored.

11 Saray, *The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism*, p. 71; Mirfendereski, *ibid.*, p. 67; "Abbas Mirza", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 1, İstanbul 1988, p. 27; Yazıcı, "Feth Ali Şah", p. 452.

12 Saray, *The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism*, p. 71. In addition to trade, Turkmens also took captives from Iranian subjects. Sec. Saray, *The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism*, p. 71.

13 Hasankulu Bay is located to the north of Astrabad Bay, opposite Ashuradeh Island.

14 An Indian Officer, *Russia's March Towards India*, Vol. I, Sampson Low, Marston & Company, London 1894, p. 141; Mirfendereski, *ibid.*, p. 31.

1. The Events Preparing the Ground for the Occupation of Ashuradeh Island by the Russians

The loss of the Shah of Iran's influence over the Caspian Sea after the Turkmenchai Treaty enabled the Russians to play a more active role in the regions south of the Caspian Sea, while the Turkmen gained a wider commercial network in this region. In 1836, Haji Mirza Aqasi¹⁵, the vizier of Shah Mohammad (1834-1848), Shah of Iran, requested Russia's assistance to counter the growing influence of Turkmen in the southern Caspian region. This request was made on behalf of the Iranian government, which wanted to weaken Turkmen power in the area¹⁶. However, while this intervention was being carried out, it was important to how the Russians would behave in the region. Against the Iranian government, which claimed that the Turkmen in the region were subjects of Iran, the Russian government argued that the Turkmen were independent and could not be characterized as subjects of Iran¹⁷. The Russians informed Iranian officials that they would maintain order in the region and would do so with Russian naval power, and that Iran could not claim economic and political sovereignty over the Turkmen¹⁸.

Following the Iranian government's request for assistance, from 1836, Russian cruisers of the Caspian Fleet of Tsarist Russia, stationed on Sara Island near Lenkoran in the western Caspian Sea, began to be sent once a year to the Caspian's eastern shores. These patrols were intended to ensure coastal control of the Hasankulu and Astrabad bays in the southeast¹⁹. In 1836, under the patronage of the Tsarist Russian government, a Russian merchant from Astrakhan established a fishing business in Hasankulu Bay²⁰. The Russian commercial expeditions to

15 Haji Mirza Aqasi was an important statesman who played an important role in the upbringing of the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Shah, from his childhood and to whom he entrusted the administration of state affairs during his reign. See Osman Gazi Özgüdenli, "Muhammed Şah", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 30, Ankara 2020, p. 568.

16 Saray, *The Turkmen in the Age of Imperialism*, p. 31; Özgüdenli, *ibid.*, p. 569.

17 Saray, *The Turkmen in the Age of Imperialism*, p. 71; Mirfendereski, *ibid.*, p. 31.

18 Saray, *The Turkmen in the Age of Imperialism*, pp. 71-72.

19 The National Archives (TNA), Kew., *Asia: Various Papers, 1871-1901*. 1871-1901. (Government Papers), FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal." p. 5; E. Delmar Morgan, "Colonel Stebnitzky's Report on His Journey in 1872 in Central and Southern Turkomania", *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 44, 1874, pp. 221-222.

20 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 5. During the 1830s, the Russian government, and in particular the Minister of Finance, Count Egor Kankrin (1823-1844), made several attempts to increase the value of the currency. The volume of trade with Turkestan and the

the eastern shores of the Caspian since the 1830s had aimed to establish trade and friendship with the coastal Turkmens. The Turkmens in the region were a significant factor in controlling trade in the southern Caspian, independent of the Iranian government²¹. Therefore, it was not only the Iranians but also the Turkmens with whom the Russians had to contend in order to establish their desired presence. For this reason, the Turkmen presence on Ashuradeh Island, in the Mazandaran region and between Astrabad and Hasankulu bays, was an obstacle for both Iran and Russia to establish their patronage in the region²².

During an expedition in 1838, the Russians -who had increased and regularized their military expeditions from 1836 onwards- anchored near Ashuradeh Island and landed troops²³. After this date, Russia further established its military activities on the island, towards the goal of establishing a permanent military base²⁴. Alexander von Medem (1841-1845), the Russian envoy sent to Tehran with full authority, played an important role in taking steps for the occupation of the island²⁵. Medem was firmly convinced of the need for Russia to establish its permanent base²⁶. He raised the idea, citing the safety of Russian merchants trading in the region, who, he claimed to the officials at the Iranian court, were helpless against Turkmen pirates, no matter how much they avoided them. Medem buttressed his arguments with references to Russian-Iranian friendship, declaring that a Russian intervention on the island was also in the interest of security along Iran's coasts, which were being attacked by Turkmen pirates²⁷.

south-east of the Caspian was increased. In 1836, the charter of the Russia-Asia Company, which would work on Turkestan, was approved. See. Gregory L. Bondarevsky, *The Great Game A Russian Perspective*, ChristieBooks; 1st edition, September, Hastings 2002, p. 43.

21 Saray, *The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism*, p. 68.

22 Saray, *The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism*, p. 67.

23 *Russia's March Towards India*, p. 141.

24 After 1828, the influence of Fath Ali Shah, the Shah of Iran, in the administration decreased. In parallel with the increasing Russian-British influence in the Iranian court during this period, Russian sympathies prevailed especially among the rulers. See Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran 1780-1828*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1980, p. 160.

25 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", pp. 5-6; Alexander von Medem (1803-1859) entered the service of Tsarist Russia in 1828. After working at the Russian embassy in Istanbul, he served as a plenipotentiary Russian representative in Alexandria (1838-1841), Tehran (1841-1845), Rio de Janeiro (1848-1854) and Washington (1854-1855). Lastly, he was stationed in Shanghai. See. Böhlau Verlag, *Deutschbaltisches biographisches Lexikon 1710-1960*, Baltische Historische Kommission, 1970, p. 499.

26 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 6.

27 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 6.

The Russians organised an expedition in 1841 with the intention of capturing the island and building a military base there²⁸. During one of the annual Russian expeditions to the region in 1841, commanded by Russian Captain Alennikov, Russian troops encountered a detachment of Iranian troops on Ashuradeh Island²⁹. The presence of Iranian troops on the island was an indication of the Iranian government's intentions of increasing control over the Turkmen. As a matter of fact, there was a possibility of an attack by the Turkmen from the north of Iran. Another reason for the Iranian government to keep troops on the island was the invasive attitude of the Russians towards the island in the past (1838). From the Russian point of view, Iran seemed to have broken its previous commitment not to establish a military presence on the Caspian Sea. Although the Iranian government claimed that the island was part of Iran, from the Russian point of view, this was contrary to the provisions of Turkmenchai. In the same year, 1841, by order of Marshal Prince Bariatinsky³⁰, the "Araxes" ship, under the command of Captain Fofanov, was sent to anchor in the Astrabad Bay to protect Russian merchant ships and the Iranian coast from Turkmen piracy³¹. While there had not been any problems regarding the security of Russian merchants on the island under the administration of Turkmen until then, the Russians occupied Ashuradeh Island in 1841 without any prior warning³². It was decided that the Russian navy on the western shore of the Caspian Sea should move southwards, and in the same year, 1841, the Russian Naval Station was established in Ashuradeh³³. Thus, Russian

28 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 5.

29 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 5.

30 Marshal Prince Bariatinsky had achieved significant military successes in the Caucasus between 1838 and 1856, and in 1856 he was appointed by Alexander II as Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian army and Governor of the Caucasus. Bariatinsky carried out radical reforms in the Russian army in the Caucasus and was a firm supporter of Russian expansionism. See Hugh Chisholm (ed.), "Baryatinsky, Alexander Ivanovich, Prince (1814–1879)", *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Vol. 3 Cambridge University Press, 11th ed., 1911, pp. 455-456; Mehmet Saray, "Türkistan'da Rus-İngiliz Rekabeti", *Tarih Dergisi*, No. 34, 1984, pp. 407-408.

31 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", pp. 5-6; Charles Marvin, *Reconnoitring Central Asia: Pioneering Adventures in the Region Lying Between Russia and India*, Second Edition, W. Swan Sonnenschein & Co., London 1885, p. 59.

32 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 5; Saray, *The Turkmen in the Age of Imperialism*, p. 72; L. P. Morris, "The Subjugation of the Turcomans", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 15/No. 2, May 1979, p. 199; Alfred Rambaud, *The Expansion of Russia*, Second Edition, Scott-Thaw Company, New York 1904, p. 66; *Russia's March Towards India*, p. 142.

33 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 6; Morris, *ibid.*, p. 199; Mohammad Ali Kazembeyki, *Society, Politics and Economics in Māzandarān, Iran, 1848-1914*, Routledge Curzon,

forces approached not only the Iranian coast but also the Turkmen coast in the southeast of the Caspian Sea³⁴.

In the wake of these developments, Russian Admiral Putiatin traveled from Astrabad to Tehran in 1842 to improve relations with the Iranian government. Putiatin, who moved with Medem and laid the foundations of the Russian harbour at Ashuradeh, returned to his ship in the Astrabad Bay after meeting with the Russian envoy in Tehran³⁵. Upon his return to Astrabad, Putiatin attacked one of the largest Turkmen encampments in the Chikishliar, located in the Hasankulu Bay. This move secured the surrender of an influential Turkmen *bey*, Yahshi Mehmed, and finally Putiatin demanded tribal tribute on behalf of Iran. At the same time, he set up a system of control in which no Turkmen would be allowed to enter the Astrabad Bay unsupervised³⁶. Several small Russian warships and steamships were deployed to ensure security in the bay³⁷. It was John McNeill (1836-1842), the British envoy in Iran, who urged the British government to take measures against the Russian activities in the region by reporting the developments that took place in 1841-1842 in Ashuradeh Island and in the Astrabad and Hasankulu bays³⁸.

2. British Support to Iran and Turkmen Revolts after the Occupation of Ashuradeh

During this period, the British closely followed the military activities of the Russians in Turkestan. The invasion meant that Afghanistan credibly came under

London 2003, p. 46; Volodarsky, "Persia and the Great Powers, 1856-1869", p. 90.

34 Saray, *The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism*, p. 72.

35 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 6.

36 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 6. The method of granting entry permits to the Astrabad Bay was as follows. Turkmens wishing to enter the bay for barter purposes had to apply for a permit, which was issued by a mukhtar elected among the Turkmens. The permit was then replaced by a licence issued under the seal of the Russian naval officer commanding the guard ship stationed in the bay. However, all boats were searched and their weapons confiscated, to be handed back to the locals when they returned home from the bay. See TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", pp. 6-7. Chikishliar was located 65 kilometres north of Ashuradeh Island on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. Although Chikishliar, inhabited by Turkmens, had the advantage of its location, the shoal near the coast caused ships to anchor far from the shore. See Morgan, *ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

37 Demetrius Charles Boulger, *England and Russia in Central Asia*, Vol. II, W. H. Allen & Co. London 1879, p. 22.

38 Henry Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East*, John Murray, Second Edition, London 1875, p. 140

threat from Russia, and that India too might become open to a Russian incursion. For this reason, the Government of British India was trying to strengthen its diplomatic ties with Iran and Afghanistan. In the contacts of the British envoys sent to Iran and Afghanistan with the officials of these states, the main issue discussed was the measures to be taken against the Russian advances. Accordingly, the foreign policies of both the Shah of Iran and the Afghan Emirate were of direct interest to the British, with British ambassadors dutifully sending reports on Iranian and Afghan relations with the Russians. All in all, Russia's occupation of Ashuradeh Island, the presence of a Russian harbor there, and the Russians' preparations to establish permanent settlements in Mazandaran to the south and Astrabad to the east of the island, further invested the British government as a party to the politics in the region.

In 1845, the Russians attempted to settle in Mazandaran, the mainland south of Ashuradeh and part of Iran, and asked the Iranian government to allow them to build a hospital there and to surround the building and warehouses with a wall. The Iranian government, however, rejected the offer, a move encouraged by the British envoy, John McNeill, through his contact with the Iranian court. Indeed, McNeill had warned the Iranian government that the Russian building to be constructed would in reality be a fortress³⁹. Despite these warnings from the British, however, the Russians could not be prevented from building permanent structures in the region in the long term. While Russian commercial investments and military sanctions continued, the Russian Consulate was established in Astrabad in 1846⁴⁰. This move increased the scale of the crisis between Russia, Iran and the Turkmen in the region. Although the military and diplomatic activities of the Russians in the region were protested by the Iranian government, but without yielding any results, since a sufficient military counterforce could not be established. As the threat to Turkestan was also against the interests of the British, they too responded to the invasions and in 1849, the British government even notified the Russian government that it was time to return the island to Iran – a warning that was ignored by Russia⁴¹.

39 IOR, Political and Secret Department Records (L/PS), 18/C28, p. 94.

40 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 8.

41 IOR/L/PS/18/C28, p. 94.

Another actor who should be mentioned is Mirza Taqi Khan (1848-1851), the vizier of the Shah of Iran, Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-1896), who held some influence on the increasing pressure on the Russians to return the island to Iran. Nasir al-Din Shah, who ascended the throne at the age of 16, appointed Mirza Taqi Khan as Amir Kabir (vizier/sadrazam) in 1848. From that point onwards he was active in both domestic and foreign policies, where he pursued a centralist policy, acting to produce permanent solutions to problems of state⁴². The diplomatic crisis between Russia and Iran over which state the island of Ashuradeh belonged to came to the agenda again during his reign, and between 1848 and 1851, many correspondences were made with the Russian government on this issue. The Russians recognised Iran's sovereignty over the region but nonetheless refused to evacuate⁴³. While the Russian occupation of the island continued to be protested at the level of state diplomacy, rebellions were also taking place in the region, and the Yamut Turkmens, whose lands had been seized by the Russians, started an uprising in 1850. The Turkmens carried out an unsuccessful expedition against the Russian Naval Station at Ashuradeh, which Russian soldiers stationed on the island managed to fight off⁴⁴. The struggle with the Turkmens led the Russians to take stronger measures for the fortification of the island⁴⁵. Following the quelling of the attack, there was a period of four years without any conflict. However, the Russians accused Mirza Taqi Khan, of being responsible for and supporting the attack. They demanded the dismissal of Mirza Taqi Khan, and threatened reprisals if Iran refused. Meanwhile, the British envoy in Tehran, Justin Sheil (1844-54), urged the vizier to acquiesce to this Russian demand and eventually the vizier was recalled and dismissed by Nasir al-Din Shah (1851)⁴⁶. After four years, the Russians were planning another expedition to increase the pressure on the Yamuts and strengthen their presence on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea. Accordingly, the Russian authorities in Ashuradeh decided to organise a fierce

42 Gökhan Bolat, "Mirzâ Tâki Hân (Emîr Kebîr) ve Reformları (1848-1851)", *Belleten*, Vol. 77/No. 278, 2013, pp. 157-158.

43 J. Qā'em-Maqāmī, "Āšūrāda", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. II, Fasc. 8, December 15, 1987, p. 877.

44 Jeff Eden, *Slavery and Empire in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Great Britain 2018, p. 198.

45 The Turkmens raid took place on Easter eve. They wanted to catch the Russian soldiers unprepared. There are also sources that date this attack to 1851. By 1851 Ashuradeh Island was defended by Russian warships, each carrying between 4 and 8 guns. See. Robert Grant Watson, *A History of Persia*, Smith, Elder and Co., London 1866, p. 397.

46 Suâd Pîrâ-Osman Gazi Özgüdenli, "Nâsirüddîn Şâh", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 32, İstanbul 2006, p. 405; See. Grant, *ibid.*, p. 397.

attack on the Yamuts in 1854. They launched a landing attack on the Yamut village of Hasankulu. During this attack, 28 boats belonging to Turkmen were seized and some prominent Turkmen chieftains were taken prisoner⁴⁷.

Following the conflicts between the Russians and Turkmen on the island, the Iranian government, with the support of the British, asked the Russians to evacuate the island. The Russian Charge d'Affaires in Tehran accepted that Ashuradeh Island belonged to Iran. However, this acceptance was not an official acceptance from the Russian government. Ensuring the security of Russian merchants trading in the region, Iran's insufficient power at sea and their status in the Caspian Sea, which they obtained with Turkmenchai, were the factors that made it difficult for the Russians to evacuate from the region⁴⁸. The Turkmen were trapped between the Russian Tsardom and the Shah of Iran. In 1858, the Iranian Governor of Astrabad, Jafar Kulu Khan, with a force of 10.000 men, forcibly expelled the Turkmen from the vicinity of Karakalah, east of Astrabad, and took some of them back to Astrabad as prisoners. In response, the Turkmen engaged in looting activities in the countryside and took prisoners from the Iranians⁴⁹. The Turkmen were struggling to defend their territory under both Russian and Iranian pressure. While the Turkmen were trying to fend off Iranian attacks, the Russians decided to organise a reconnaissance expedition to the east of the Caspian Sea, where they could build permanent bases. The Russian government's military activities on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea facilitated the strengthening of bases in the region and their establishing of permanent garrisons through the construction of fortresses⁵⁰.

In 1858, General Katenin, who was the Russian Governor-General of Orenburg from 1857 to 1860, along with Marshal Prince Bariatinski, Commander of the Caucasus Army, proposed a plan to invade the Balkhan Bay. Their plan involved attacking the area situated between Krasnovodsk in the east of the Caspian Sea and Ashuradeh Island in the south. In 1859, the Russian government approved the construction of a fortress in this bay. Russian Colonel Dandevil then organised an expedition to the eastern shore of the Caspian⁵¹. The survey started from the town

47 Eden, *ibid*, p. 198.

48 IOR/L/PS/18/C28, p. 94.

49 Eden, *ibid*, p. 198; Rawlinson, *ibid*, p. 140.

50 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 8.

51 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 8. The fortress planned to be built in Krasnovodsk

of Guriyev in the north-east of the Caspian Sea and continued to the Astrabad Bay in the south-east. With the aim of bringing Yamut and other Turkmens from Karagan on the Mangyshlak peninsula in the east of the Caspian Sea to the Gurgan River in the south-east, together with the entire Caspian fleet, land forces and many officers, to the Russian protectorate, negotiations were held with Turkmen chieftains and eventually the support of some of them was obtained⁵². In fact, the Russians continued these attempts to attract the Turkmens to their side up to 1865⁵³.

The Russian authorities in the Caucasus wanted to establish closer relations with the Turkmens so as to obtain general information about the Trans-Caspian (eastern) regions. They therefore organised expeditions with cargoes of various goods to trade with the Turkmen in Krasnovodsk and further south⁵⁴. Russian Captain Galkin, who participated in these expeditions, mentions in his diary that most of the tribes were strongly opposed to the Russians. Adayef Kyrgyz, led by Baimambet Mayev, created obstacles to the supply of camels, while the Turkmens carried out armed resistance to the Russian soldiers accompanying the expedition⁵⁵. Among the Turkmens of Yamut, the majority were opposed to the Russians' presence, and many resorted to armed struggle. Indeed, many Turkmens opposed and resisted both Russia's and Iran's presence in the region⁵⁶.

During the Russian expeditions, anti-Russian sentiment among the Turkmens became a major issue, resulting in more drastic measures on the part of the Russian military authorities. In 1859, Colonel Dandevil, who commanded Ashuradeh, attacked the Turkmens in Chikishliar in the Hasankulu Bay. The Turkmens in the area were heavily bombarded, driven from their homes, their

was also a fortified trading post. Krasnovodsk was in a critical position east of the Caspian Sea for the Russians to bring the economic vitality of the region under their control. This military and commercial base would also serve as a military base that would facilitate the control of Turkmens in the region who attacked the goods of Russian merchants. See: Seymour Becker, *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924*, RoutledgeCurzon Taylor&Francis Group, London and New York 2005, p. 52; Gall Oda Tealakh, *The Russian Advance in Central Asia and the British Response 1834-1884*, A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The University of Durham Department of History, 1991, pp. 37,79.

52 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 8.

53 Rawlinson, *ibid.*, p. 140.

54 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 8.

55 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 8.

56 Eden, *ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

tents and warehouses burnt and more than 50 boats destroyed⁵⁷. Subsequently, under threat of further severe punishment by the Russians, the Turkmen were forced to pay compensation for the camels that had not been supplied during the expeditions and to release the Iranian captives in their possession by sending them to the Russian Colonel Gusef in Astrabad⁵⁸. Some prominent Turkmen chieftains were bribed to serve the Russians. After reports of Russia's now superior position were presented to the naval commander in Ashuradeh and the Russian consul in Astrabad, the expedition was brought to an end. As a result of the mission, it was decided to establish a Russian military base in the Krasnovodsk Bay on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, which could have an impact on the Turkmen and serve as an observation point⁵⁹.

Following the decision to establish a base in Krasnovodsk, the Russian invasions moved further east. The Russian government suspended its activities in Khiva and against the Turkmen in the region until full control was established on the Siberian and Orenburg lines in the east. The government decided to move the Russian occupation route eastwards towards Bukhara and prioritised securing the Turkestan region⁶⁰. When the Russians directed their occupation policy towards the Turkestan region, this set the tone for an enduring atmosphere of conflict between the Turkmen and the Shah of Iran. In 1858, after Jafar Kulu Khan had forcibly expelled the Turkmen from the vicinity of Karakalah and took some of them as captives to Astrabad, the Turkmen retaliated by looting the countryside and taking captives. Just a few years later, in 1861, the Shah of Iran attacked the Tekke Turkmen in Merv in northwestern Afghanistan, this time suffering a heavy defeat. Iran responded by increasing its pressure on the Turkmen. In 1863, it organised two fierce attacks, against the Yamuts in Astrabad and Atrek in the north. In Astrabad, the Turkmen managed to repel the Iranians. However, the subsequent Iranian attack that along the upper reaches of the Atrek River resulted in the capture of 63 Yamut Turkmen, along with 3,000 camels and

57 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", pp. 8-9.

58 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 9. In his diary, Captain Galkin mentions the appearance of a British agent in Ashuradeh in April 1859. Galkin noted that the Englishman was ostensibly negotiating with the Turkmen for the purchase of some land in Atrek, but was secretly trying to obtain information about Russian intentions regarding the Turkmen and the aims of the expedition. See. TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 9.

59 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 9.

60 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", pp. 9-10.

20.000 sheep⁶¹. Again, in 1864, Iran launched an attack, with further heavy losses suffered by the Turkmens. In 1867, there was a Turkmen rebellion against the repressive regime of the Astrabad Governorate, but this ultimately resulted in the expulsion of many Yamuts to the north of the Atrek River, and the killing of Turkmen women and children by Iranian soldiers⁶².

The Atrek River constituted a kind of natural border in terms of its route, and the Iranian government sought to make it an official territorial line. In addition, the mouth of the river was located in Hasankulu Bay and its location close to Ashuradeh Island facilitated contact with the Russian harbour on the island⁶³. In the face of the Turkmen presence in the north and south of the river, the aggressive policy of the Iranian government -which endeavoured to push the Turkmens in the southern parts towards the north- made it necessary to determine a border in the region. This situation could have paved the way for an important gain for Russia, for whom the demarcation of the borders with Iran would also mean the legitimate recognition of the territories they had acquired. Russia made further encroachments in 1869, with the occupation of Krasnovodsk on the Balkhan Bay, helping to open a road from the east of the Caspian to Khiva and Turkestan. The Iranian government objected to the occupation and claimed that the coastal area belonged to Iran. The Russian envoy in Tehran, Nikolai Giers, however, argued that Iran had no territorial rights north of the Caspian Sea. On 13 December 1869, an agreement was reached between Russia and Iran that the Atrek River would be the border between the two states, but that no Russian fortresses would be built on this river. With the Russian and Iranian presence further solidified in the region, for those who had been excluded from these negotiations -the Turkmens- conditions in the region were to become even more difficult⁶⁴.

While the treaty declared that the northern part of the Atrek River was under Russian control, it also stated that Russia was not to carry out any activities to the south, which it recognised belonged to Iran⁶⁵. The Iranian government asked

61 Eden, *ibid*, p. 198.

62 Eden, *ibid*, p. 199.

63 Clement Augustus de Bode, "On the Yamud and Goklan Tribes of Turkomania", *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London (1848-1856)*, Vol. 1, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 1848, p. 61; Nikolaj Nikolaevič Muraviev, *Muraviev's Journey to Khiva Through the Turcoman Country 1819-20*, Tr. Philipp Strahl, Calcutta 1871, p. 13.

64 IOR/L/PS/18/C28, p. 94; Eden, *ibid*, p. 199.

65 IOR/L/PS/18/C18, p. 3; Edward Hertslet, *Treaties, &c. Concluded Between Great Britain and Persia*

the Russian government for information about the purpose of the fortress built in Krasnovodsk and also agreed that no Russian outposts or fortresses would be built at the mouths of the Atrek and Gurgan rivers. The Russians also agreed not to interfere with the Yamut Turkmen and other Turkmen tribes along the rivers. With this treaty, Turkmen living in the region were exposed to the influence of two states. Stuck as they were between the two competing states, Turkmen tribes living in the line along the Atrek and Gurgan rivers could still engage in activities that might trigger the Russian-Iranian conflict, in order to turn the status quo created by the treaty in their favour. In the period between 1869 and 1872, the Turkmen periodically descended south of the Atrek River and carried out small-scale attacks, in attempts to use these attacks as a means of manipulation. The aim here was to confront the army of Tsarist Russia against the Shahdom of Iran, which could not maintain order in the region in the face of the attacks⁶⁶.

The Russian consulate in Astrabad called on the Iranian governor in the region to intervene in the Turkmen rebellions, but the governor refused. Thus, it was up to the Russians to put an end to the Turkmen's activities themselves. In February 1872, Russian Colonel Markozov, commander of the Krasnovodsk garrison, landed south of the Atrek River and intervened against the Turkmen⁶⁷. While these developments were taking place to the south and north of the Atrek River, Colonel Markozov submitted a report to the Russian government. By that time, his expeditions to the Caspian Sea and the eastern coast -which had been continuing since 1828- had concluded. In this report, he stated that the military force in the Chikishliar should cooperate with the naval authorities on Ashuradeh Island, with the intention of making it easier to drive the Yamut Turkmen away from the Atrek⁶⁸. In the same year, 1872, Russian armies advanced further east into the Akhal Valley and occupied the valley where the Akhal Turkmen were located. They captured Kizilarvat, Bami and Burma⁶⁹. With this, Turkmen resistance against the Russian forces was broken and many Turkmen in the region had to

and Between Persia and Other Foreign Powers, Wholly or Partially in Force on the 1st April, 1891, Harrison and Sons, London 1891, pp. 133-134, "Agreement between Russia and Persia, recognizing the River Atrek as forming the Boundary between the two States on the East Coast of the Caspian Sea. 13th December, 1869."

66 Eden, *ibid.*, pp. 200-202.

67 Eden, *ibid.*, p. 202.

68 TNA.FO 539/106, "The Russians in Akhal.", p. 11.

69 IOR/L/PS/18/C28, p. 94.

submit to the Russians. The lands acquired by the Russians on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea became strategically important locations for military bases that would play a crucial role in the occupation of Turkestan.

Considering the entire process of Tsarist Russia's occupation of Turkestan and the routes along which the Russian armies advanced, it must be noted that the southeast of the Caspian was only one of these routes. In this context, Ashuradeh Island was an important centre that prepared the ground for the invasion of Khiva Khanate, which Russia attempted to dominate in Turkestan. Accordingly, Russian armies landed on the mainland to the east of the island and built fortified structures on riverbeds such as Atrek and Gurgan, from where they exerted pressure on the Turkmen tribes in the region. In 1873, the Russians built a fortress north of the Atrek River called Chikishliar. Once again, the Russian armies moved south of the Atrek River and attacked the Yamut Turkmens. When Iran protested against this attack, the Russian armies withdrew, but this time the problem arose as to what was the status of the Atrek River. The river was determined as the natural border between Russia and Iran. However, it was not clear whether this boundary applied only at the mouth of the river or whether it extended along the riverbed⁷⁰.

According to Ronald Thomson, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Tehran, the area specified by Russia was bordering Astrabad. Accordingly, the area from the mouth of the Atrek River to the reaches of the riverbed was defined as the Russian border⁷¹. Russian military activities in the region, however, were not limited to the Atrek River, and the Russians continued to advance in the east and southern regions. Subsequently, Khiva Khanate was occupied by the Russians in 1873 and with the treaty signed on 12 August 1873, Khiva Khanate was annexed to Tsarist Russia⁷². In 1874, the Russians annexed a large area on the southeastern shore of the Caspian Sea between Khiva and Atrek, forming the military zone beyond the Caspian Sea⁷³. In 1876, Ashuradeh Island was flooded by the rising sea level and many Russian buildings were damaged. Russian troops in Chikishliar, Bayat and Atrek withdrew to Krasnovodsk⁷⁴. The British side did not consider the Russian withdrawal from the island as a retreat. On the contrary, it was believed

⁷⁰ IOR/L/PS/18/C28, pp. 94-95.

⁷¹ Hertslet, *ibid.*, p. 134.

⁷² Murat Özkan, *Hive Hanlığı (1511-1920)*, Selenge Yayınları, İstanbul 2022, p. 97.

⁷³ IOR/L/PS/18/C28, p. 95.

⁷⁴ IOR/L/PS/20/253, p. 28.

that Ashuradeh Island would continue to serve as an ammunition depot for the Russians and that Krasnovodsk would be used as a base for military operations to the east of the Caspian Sea⁷⁵. Although Ashuradeh was in an important position to serve as a supply point, Krasnovodsk had more favorable conditions for the command and administration of troops, being both a port city and a territory connected to the mainland.

The Russian advance in the east and south of the Caspian gained momentum after this period. Advancing as far as Turkestan in the east and Murghab on the northwestern border of Afghanistan in the south, by 1885, the Russian armies had subjugated many Turkmen tribes in the region⁷⁶. During this time, Ashuradeh Island continued to be used by the Russians as a supply base⁷⁷. Indeed, the status of Ashuradeh Island -which was occupied by the Russians and was one of the most vital bases of the empire on the Caspian- remained uncertain until 1921. Although the Russians formally accepted that the island was officially Iranian territory, they did not leave the island. However, following the seminal fall of the Tsarist Russian regime in 1917 and with the ensuing treaty of friendship signed between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Iran in Moscow on 26 February 1921, Moscow invalidated all treaties previously signed with the Iranian government and went on to withdraw from the island⁷⁸.

75 IOR/L/PS/20/253, p. 28.

76 Dilip Kumar Ghose, "Russo-Afghan Frontier Delimitation, 1885-87", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 21, 1958, pp. 515-516.

77 Great Britain. FO. *Further Correspondence Respecting Central Asia*. Harrison, London 1879, pp. 52,69,83,

78 League of Nations, *Treaty Series*, Publication of Treaties and International Engagements Registered with the Secretariat of the League of Nations, Vol. 9, 1922, pp. 401-411, "No. 268. Treaty of Friendship Between Persia and the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, Signed at Moscow, February 26, 1921".

Conclusion

Tsarist Russia's occupation of Ashuradeh Island in 1841 constituted an important step for Russian occupation activities in Turkestan. The fact that the island was located at a strategic point both commercially and politically in the southeast of the Caspian Sea meant that it was a priority for Russian imperial interests in the region. In this process, Iran's military inferiority to Russia left the Russians open to act more effectively on the Caspian Sea. However, a similar political conflict between the Russians and Iranians was also experienced with the Turkmens in the region. The Turkmens, who were especially active in the south of the Caspian Sea and controlled the trade in the region, where the Iranian government was unable to intervene, resisted both Russian and Iranian pressure in this period.

Although the British government also sought to intervene in the crisis in the region through its envoys in Iran, in the long run, their intervention could not bolster a formidable counter to Russian advances in the Caspian Sea and Turkestan. Following the occupation of Ashuradeh in 1841, the Russians captured Krasnovodsk in 1869 and established Russian garrisons in the lands east of the Caspian Sea. Important supply points were established for Russian military activities in the east and south. During the Russian military advance in the regions where Turkmen groups, such as the Yamut, Tekke, and Akhal, were located, Turkmens were displaced from their homes and further Russian occupations were carried out at many points in Turkestan. Ashuradeh, which served as a base for military operations in Turkestan east of the Caspian Sea, played an important role in the provision of supplies and food for the Russian armies.

Although the occupation of the island could be read as having resulted from the Iranian government's request for assistance from the Russians against the activities of the Turkmens, it can be said that this request for assistance provided a pretext for the occupation of the island and facilitated Russian dominance in Turkestan. Here, it is crucial to foreground the presence of Russian expeditions in the Caspian Sea and the eastern coasts going back to the 1830s. That being said, it should be noted that considering these Russian expeditions, it is arguable that the Russians would have intervened militarily in these regions, regardless of any such pretext, such as Iranian requests for assistance. The contacts of the Russian government with the Turkmens in the region and the reports submitted by the Russian military authorities to the Russian government on the points where bases could be established in the territories east of the Caspian Sea provide compelling evidence for this interpretation.

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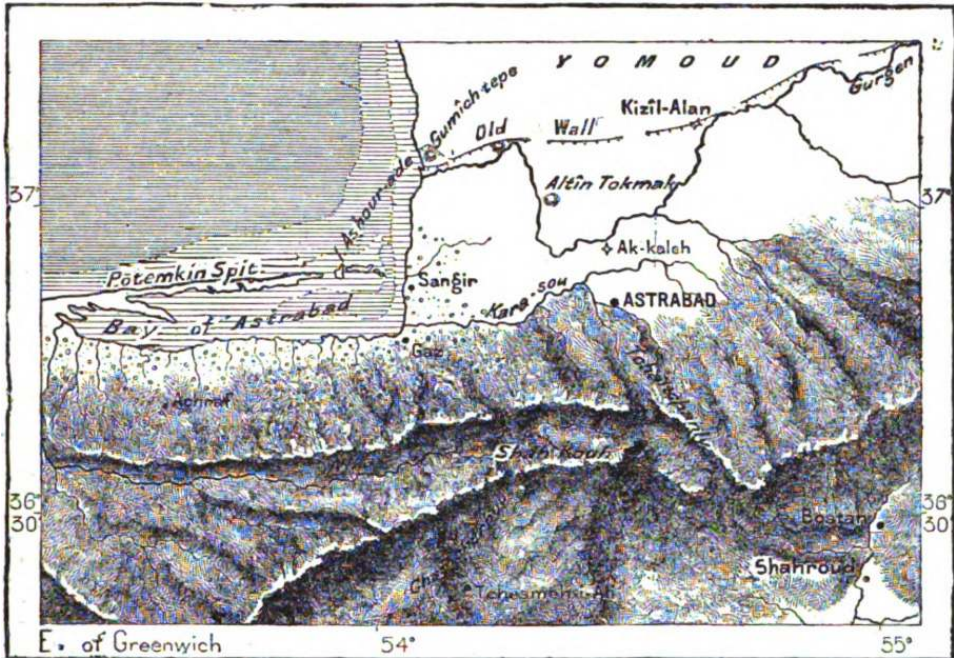
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APPENDICES



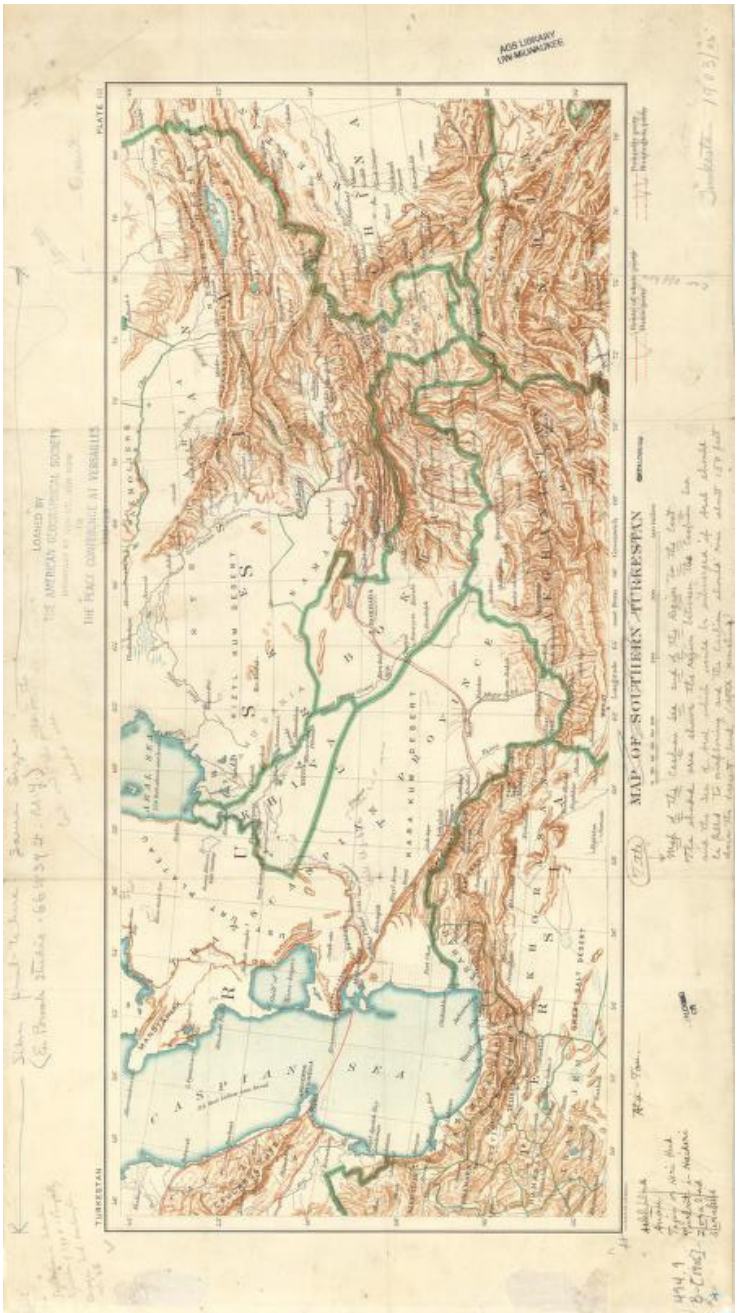
Appendix 1: Map showing the Astrabad Bay, Ashuradeh Island and the mountains and passes in the region.

Source: Elisee Reclus, Augustus Henry Keane, E. George Ravenstein, *The universal geography: the earth and its inhabitants*, Virtue & Co., Limited, London 1882, p. 83.



Appendix 2: Map of Iran, Afghanistan and Baluchistan, including the south-east of the Caspian Sea (1904).

Source: Americana Company. Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan. S.l.: The Americana Company, 1904], Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004629037/>. Date of access: 27.06.2023.



Appendix 3: Map of South Turkestan (1903-1905).
Source: Carnegie Institution of Washington Creator; and United States Department of State Annotator. Map of Southern Turkistan. Washington, D.C.: AB. Graham, 1905.
Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021668606/> . Date of access: 27.06.2023.

