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INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION FOR DOMINANCE IN THE CASPIAN REGION (THE 20–40S OF THE 18th CENTURY)

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An active policy exercised by Tsar Peter I (Peter the Great of Russia) in the East coincided with the decline and fall of the Safavid Empire. The goal of this article is to show the Russian ambitions in the Caspian region in the 20–40s of the 18th century during the reign of Peter the Great who wanted Russia to gain full control over the silk trade. This article investigates methods used by Peter the Great to increase Russia's influence in the Caspian region. The historical sources discover and reveal the essence of the policy of Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain, and Nadir Shah Afshar in the Caspian Sea basin in the 20–40s of the 18th century. The novelty of the article is that the author investigates political processes in the Caspian region, the reasons for the diplomatic tricks of Peter the Great and his rivalry with Nadir Shah Afshar, interpreting known historical sources in a new way as well as exploring new original materials. In 1711, following an unsuccessful war against the Ottoman Empire and the signing of the Treaty of the Pruth, Russia lost its access to the Black Sea. In such a situation, the Caspian region was the only hope for Russia. As an ongoing war with Sweden made it impossible for Russia to advance further south, the Russian tsar sent a reconnaissance mission to the Caspian region.

Keywords: Nadir Shah Afshar, Caspian region, Russia, Peter the Great, Ottoman Empire, diplomacy

Russia had sole right to have the navy and merchant fleet on the Caspian Sea disregarding the fact that it was not until the annexation of the Astrakhan Khanate in 1556 that Russia got access to the Caspian Sea. While Tsar Peter's invasion of the Caspian region of the Safavid Empire was condoned, Nadir Shakh Afshar who made the Russians return the seized territories and was building his own navy and merchant fleet on the Caspian Sea, was labelled as an invader, and the activities undertaken by the English were described as subversive to Russia's interests in the Caspian region.

The article is aimed at exploring the struggle for domination on the Caspian Sea, based on primary sources and shed light on the policies of Russia, the Ottoman, the Afsharid, and the British Empire.

The novelty of the article is in undertaking a comprehensive study of international rivalry in the Caspian Sea basin based on facts and information obtained from historical records and other primary sources; many of those have been newly introduced into scientific discourse. It has revealed an aggressive nature of Russia's policy in the Caspian Sea region designed to achieve absolute dominance and oppose Nadir Shakh Afshar's plan to build his own navy and merchant fleet. It shows that one of the factors that influenced Tsar Peter's decision to abort the mission to the Caspian region was a backlash from the Ottoman Empire and the news about Hadji Dawud trying to unite the scattered

detachments of the insurgents in Shirvan and intending a surprise attack on the Russian troops as the latter attempted to cross the Samur River.

In 1714 Tsar Peter sent an expedition led by Bekovich-Cherkassky to explore the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, but the expedition ended up in failure. Later the Russian tsar sent Artemy Volynsky as an envoy to the Safavid Empire in order to explore the western coast of the Caspian Sea. For this purpose, he chose the territory of Azerbaijan, namely taking the Silk Road through Shirvan. On his way to Isfahan Volynsky received secret instructions from the tsar. The Russian envoy was ordered to assess the defensive capability of the local troops and establish contacts with the Christian population as well as explore the area. Volynsky was also instructed to study the prospects for Russia's trade with the Caspian littoral [Aliyev 1979, 19].

Volynsky stopped in Shemakha and stayed there for over three months. All the time he was following the instructions from Tsar Peter I and resolved important issues. He collected important information that interested the state and established contacts with Russian merchants who lived in Shemakha [Aliyev 1979, 33–34].

On December 7, 1716, Volynsky drove from Shamakhi to Isfahan together with a group of escorts appointed by a high-ranking official [Aliyev 1979, 60–61]. He wrote about rebellions in Shamakhi and frequent raids on Isfahan [Zevakin 1929, 15].

Volynsky had an official audience with Shah Sultan Hussein and presented his letters of credence to him. After that, on March 14, 1717, he met with the Grand vizier (minister) Fatali Khan and negotiated with him [Aliyev 1985, 61; 1979, 45–46]. On July 30, 1717, Artemy Volynsky and Fatali Khan signed the first trade agreement between Russia and the Safavid Empire [Aliyev 1985, 63; 1979, 46].

In fact, the Russian-Iranian trade project was concerned with Shirvan and its Caspian provinces because Russian merchants were mainly concentrated in these places. Volynsky suggested setting up a consulting office in the Safavid state, namely in Shamakhi to solve trade issues [Aktepe 1970, 14; Aliyev 1979, 52–53].

After concluding a trade agreement with the Shah's government, A. Volynsky went back to Russia. He wanted to get to Rasht overland, then to Astrakhan by sea, and thus collect information about Gilan. Soon the Shah found out about A. Volynsky's intentions and told him to return the way he arrived [Aliyev 1979, 72–74].

On December 17, 1717, the Russian envoy arrived in Shamakhi and stayed there for 8 months. He waited for the roads to open. On Peter the Great's instructions Volynsky met with Christians in the South Caucasus. The representative of the future tsar of Kartli Vakhtang VI – Farsadan Bey arrived in Shamakha to meet Volynsky [Azerbaijan tarihi 1999, 386]. Then the Russian envoy met with Armenian merchants who secretly provided Volynsky with a fortification plan of Derbent. The "gift" had an important military and political significance for Peter I because he was prepared for a war in this region [Aliyev 1979, 85].

Thus, he observed the peculiarities of caravan trade routes and recorded them in his journal. Only the route from Shamakhi to Astrakhan remained unexplored. In order to explore the route Volynsky decided to send one of his representatives – the nobleman Lopukhin with a caravan. The Russian ambassador justifies his actions and the reason why he used a caravan route to get to Russia. He said that the Shah's gift to Peter included an elephant and two leopards and could not be sent to Astrakhan by ship. While accompanying Lopukhin, Volynsky ordered him to make a journal and keep a record of his observations on his way from the port of Niyazabad to Astrakhan [Aliyev 1985, 68].

Peter the Great waited until the end of the Great Northern War (1700–1721) in order to achieve his goals and launch a military campaign to the South. A pretext for the war was found. It is well known that during the occupation of Shamakhi in August 1721 the Shirvan rebels led by Hadji Davud and Surkhay Khan killed and robbed several Russian merchants. Despite the fact that Peter I demanded that the guilty should be punished,

which was beyond the capabilities of the Shah's state [Mustafazade 1993, 21]. Therefore, he seemed to be able to intervene militarily in the name of "punishing the guilty". Initially, the military campaign was planned to be launched in 1723 but was postponed by a year. It was reported to St. Petersburg that rebel Afghan tribes had defeated the Shah's army near Isfahan in March 1722 and laid siege to the capital of the Safavid Empire. The representatives of the royal palace were afraid that the Ottoman Empire would use the fall of the Safavid state and take control of the Caspian region. The Russian tsar issued a declaration called the "Manifesto" to justify in the eyes of the inhabitants of the Caspian provinces the military campaign. It was circulated to all the towns and villages the Russian army would march through. The "Manifesto" concealed the real reason for the military campaign and stated that the aim of the Russian army was to avenge the murder and robbery of Russian merchants in Shamakhi during the Shirvan uprising, as well as punish Haji Davud and Surkhay Khan. In this Manifesto, Peter I also promised peace to the local people [Dalili 1979, 31–34].

The military campaign along the Caspian coast began on July 29, 1722. On the same day the army led by the Russian tsar set out for Astrakhan [RGVIA, fund 846, inventory 1, file 1539, sheet 3; Tumanskiy 1793, 65]. The cavalry detachment under the command of brigadier Veteranin was sent overland from Tsaritsin to Greben [Bergman 1844, 65].

On the way to Derbent, the Russian army faced resistance from Ahmad Khan and Sultan Mahmud Itemishli. In order to intimidate the local population, the Russians set fire to the village of Itemish and 6 villages with 500 houses [Neveroskiy 1848, 13].

It should be noted that the Russian army did not face any serious resistance from the Shah's troops when it entered the territory of Azerbaijan in 1722. Sometimes separate garrisons tried to resist, and some military leaders considered it wiser to surrender to a superior enemy.

As the Russian troops approached Derbent, the head of the city Alkhaz Sultan went to Isfahan. At that time, the commander of the fortress troops Naib Imamgulu believed that he would be able to protect the city from an attack by the Shirvan feudal lords if he sided with the Russians [Neveroskiy 1848, 137]. On September 3, accompanied by many townspeople Imamgulu Bey met the Russian emperor at the city gates and presented him with the key to the city [RGADA, fund 9, book 54, sheet 63]. The Russian garrison and artillery were stationed in the fortress of Derbent. Colonel Junger was appointed commandant of the city, and Imamgulu Bey was appointed as his deputy [AVPRI, fund 77, inventory 1, 1722, file 18, sheet 190 and the reverse]. Peter I did not hide his joy and wrote to the senate: "With God's help, I congratulate you on setting a foot on these walls" [Lystsov 1951, 36].

On September 5, Peter I sent Lieutenant Lunin to Baku with a decree stating that the Russian army would arrive soon [AVPRI, fund 77, inventory 1, 1722, file 13, sheet 104]. The arrival of Russian troops in the Caspian provinces was not welcomed by Baku residents. It is well known that by that time the fortress of Baku had been attacked by Shirvan rebels. A certain part of the Baku population, who could not get help from anywhere, mostly merchants with close ties to Russia, were kind to the Russian troops and even sent the tsar a letter bearing the signatures of thirteen people. However, Mohammad Hussein Sultan who was a ruler of Baku and other nobles opposed it. Mohammad Hussein did not allow Sultan Luni to enter Baku and said that he did not need any backing from the Russian troops [AVPRI, fund 77, inventory 1, 1722, file 13, sheet 103]. Nevertheless, the tsar decided to continue the attack. On September 10 following a week-long respite, the Russian army moved from Derbent to Baku [AVPRI, fund 77, inventory 1, 1722, file 13, sheets 60–65].

Peter I's campaign failed for a number of reasons. As a result of a storm in the Caspian Sea, most of the ships carrying food and ammunition for Russian soldiers were wrecked at sea [Lystsov 1951, 124]. An outcry from Ottoman palace also played a role in Peter the

Great's decision to return [Mustafazade 1993, 48]. It was reported that Haji Davud leading 10,000 troops took up a position in the village of Zeykhur on the southern bank of the Samur River intending to attack the Russian army while it was crossing the river [Aliyev 1979, 49; AVPRI, Fund 77, Inventory 1, 1722 r., doc.20, Sheets 67–68; Mustafazade 1993, 48]. Although all these events forced Peter I to return to Derbent, he did not want Haji Davud to accept the patronage of Turkey. The emperor instructed his ambassador to Istanbul I. Neplyuyev to prevent Haji Davud from passing under the protection of Turkey at any cost. However, after his return to Russia, Peter I sent a letter to the Ottoman sultan stating that he accepts Haji Davud as a Turkish citizen under the authority of the Crimean khan. Sultan gave Haji Davud the title of khan and recognized him as the ruler of Shirvan and Dagestan [Mustafazade 1993, 38–39]. After returning to Russia, Peter I sent military expeditions to capture all the provinces west of the Caspian coast and annex them to Russia. In this regard, the primary objective was the capture of the Fortress of Baku, which was of great strategic military value and economic significance. The emperor entrusted such an important and serious task to Major-General Matyushkin. The order given to the general said: “As soon as the ice melts in the spring, approach Baku and try to take that city with God's help, for the key to all our deeds is in these lands” [Komarov 1867, 596]. Peter I also instructed Matyushkin to pay serious attention to strengthening the defense of the fortress after the capture of Baku. This order of the emperor was reflected in the instruction given to Matyushkin under the heading “God willing, what should we do if we take Baku”. According to the instructions, after the capture of Baku, Matyushkin was to move south and build a fortress on the right bank of the Kura River, which could accommodate 300 soldiers. Peter I had conceived the idea of building a big city there like the one on the banks of the Neva River [Komarov 1867, 598]. Meanwhile, when a naval expedition to Baku was being prepared in October 1722, the capital of the Safavid state was captured by the Afghans. Not content with this, the invaders began to attack other Iranian cities. The Gilan province was also in danger. In order to capture Gilan, the emperor ordered to move in the same direction with the ships ready to go with no time wasted. In December 1722, a Russian squadron led by Colonel Shipov, entered the port of Anzali, and finally captured the city of Rasht [Komarov 1867, 578–579].

Relations between the two countries soured as Peter's I campaign provoked strong protests from the Ottoman court. Peter I tried to deceive the Ottoman court, claiming that he did not intend to annex the Safavid territories, but only to punish the rebels, and even offered the Ottoman government to send an observer to the Caspian provinces [Mustafazade 1993, 51]. Although the Ottoman court initially believed Peter's words, it was doubtful that a large army led by the tsar himself would appear on the southwestern shores of the Caspian Sea. In order to prevent the advance of the Russian tsar, the beylerbey (governor) of Kars Mustafa Pasha was ordered to move towards Shamakhi [Paychadze 1970, 33]. It should be noted that the ambassadors of Western European countries incited anti-Russian sentiment in the Ottoman palace. British diplomacy made an effort. The Secretary of State of the United Kingdom, John Carteret, believed that Russia's expansion to the south threatened British interests in India, and that India's trade with Europe could be directed to Russian territory (Peter I had such an intention). Russia could expand its frontiers and capture the Ottoman territories directly. At Carteret's behest, the British ambassador to Istanbul, S. Stenyanyan, used every opportunity to deepen the Ottoman-Russian conflict. In a letter dated January 5, 1723, Carteret advised Stenyanyan to persuade the Ottomans. He said that if the Russian tsar seized the territories he intended, the role of the Ottoman Empire as a trading intermediary between East and West would be severely undermined. In August 1723, Ottoman President Ibrahim Pasha Nevsehirli invited the Russian envoy I. Neplyuyev to Istanbul and told him that the Russian ruler entered the territories subject to the Ottomans and expressed concern that it might destroy eternal peace between the two countries. He also added that for such a small matter, there

was no need for the Russian ruler to personally act against the “Lezgins” with a large army. The people at the Russian palace saw a way out by proposing that Istanbul should unite its Safavi territories [Komarov 1867, 602]. The Ottoman court could not stand idly by while the Russians were taking over the territory of Safavi. First, at the end of 1722, the sultan issued a decree making Shirvan a protectorate of the Ottoman Empire and conferring on its ruler Haji Davud the title of khan. The fact that the armies of the two empires were operating in the same area increased the likelihood of military conflict between them. Peter I was afraid of a new military confrontation with the Ottoman Empire, which had suffered a heavy blow only 12 years ago, and therefore asked the French government to mediate between the two states. At that time, there was a threat of war between France and Austria, and the French government felt the need to form an alliance with the Ottoman state. Therefore, The Grand Vizier Ibrahim pasha (Nevshehirli) was not interested in involving Turkey in the war with another state – Russia. For this reason the French government instructed its ambassador Marquis de Bonaka to Istanbul to mediate in the settlement of the dispute between Russia and the Ottomans. Thanks to De Bonak’s efforts, long and tense negotiations began between I. Neptyuyev who was a Russian agent in Istanbul, and the head of the Ottoman court Mehmed Efendi. The Ottoman side demanded that the Russian troops should withdraw from all the Safavi territories occupied by Russia [Lystsov 1951, 68–69].

It should be noted that when the Afghans were besieging Isfahan, Shah Sultan Hussein sent Ismail Bey to St. Petersburg to sign an agreement with the Russian government on military assistance to the Safavids in exchange for concessions on the Caspian provinces. Ismail Bey said that the Afghans, who had not yet left Iran, had captured Isfahan and Tahmasib II declared himself shah. Therefore, he returned, considering it important to confirm his authority as a new shah [Dogovory Rossii s Vostokom... 1899, 51]. Unaware those Russian troops were occupying the Caspian provinces Tahmasib II agreed with Ismail Bey to carry out his mission. However, after Ismail Bey’s departure, Tahmasib II was informed that Russian troops had already arrived and captured Rasht. Upon hearing this news, Shah Ismail Bey sent a letter carrier to call Ismail Bey back.

When the letter carrier arrived in Rasht, Colonel Shipov lied that the ship with Ismayil Bey had already left for Russia and did not allow him to meet with Ismayil Bey. Unaware of the events, Ismail Bey set off on board of one of the Russian ships [Komarov 1867, 33].

The Ottoman state, which could not accept the advance of its archrival Russia towards the South Caucasus and Iran, also sent troops to the southern Caucasus. The possibility of the conquest of the entire southern Caucasus by the Ottoman Empire hastened the conquest of Baku by Peter I. He explained his concern to Major-General Matyushkin: “I have received information from Georgia that the Turks have forced the population to become their subjects and are still moving to Shamakhi. I am afraid that they will occupy Baku” [Bergman 1844, 602]. In order to outpace the Ottomans, Peter I instructed Major-General Matyushkin to take as many ships as they had prepared in Kazan and Nizhny Novgorod and move to Baku without delay, and to take the Shah’s envoy Ismail Bey with him [Bergman 1844, 602].

On July 28, 1723 (August 8), the Russian fleet entered the port of Baku. Despite serious resistance, the Baku garrison could not withstand the onslaught of the enemy with a large and well-armed army, and was forced to surrender the fortress to the foreign invaders in order to avoid fires and casualties in the city from artillery [Aliyev 1975, 57–60].

After the capture of the Baku Fortress, Prince Baryatinsky was appointed commandant of the buta. After capturing Baku, the Russians easily occupied the city of Salyan [Aliyev 1975, 63].

After taking over the Caspian provinces Peter I offered Ismail Bey to conclude an agreement with Safavid on the official concession on the territories extending from Derbent to

Gilan Shamakhi, Mazandaran and Astrabad. As mentioned above, Ismail Bey was unaware that the Shah had deprived him of his power. Without permission from the Shah he signed a treaty with Russia in St. Petersburg on September 23, 1723 on specified terms. Russia was under an obligation to provide military assistance to the Safavid Shah in order to maintain his power [Dogovory Rossii s Vostokom... 1899, 186–187].

However, Tahmasib II flatly refused to ratify this agreement, which had no legal basis in the first place. Ismail Bey was declared a traitor and did not dare to return and remained in Russia until the end of his life [Aliyev 1975, 64].

The entrance of Ottoman troops into the territory of Azerbaijan and their movement to the East posed a threat of clashes with Russian troops stationed in the Caspian provinces. However, unwilling to start a war with the Ottomans, Russia decided to offer the Ottoman Empire an agreement to divide the region.

After long negotiations and disputes, the parties agreed to share the Safavid heritage. On June 24, 1724, an agreement with Russia was signed in Istanbul. According to the agreement, the Turkish side confirmed the Russian-occupied Caspian provinces “as a concession to Russia by Iran”. Russia stated that they would not object to Turkey’s occupation of the western Caucasus and South Azerbaijan. One of the main clauses of the Istanbul Agreement was dedicated to Shirvan. With the exception of the Caspian provinces, the rest of Shirvan was established as a separate khanate dependent on Turkey. According to the agreement, Turkey did not have the right to keep troops in Shirvan. In the event of unrest, the sultan could only send troops there with Russia’s consent. Haji Davud had already gained a certain reputation among the local population and had been confirmed as Shirvan khan by Turkey [Mustafazade 2002, 61–62].

The Treaty of Istanbul was equally important for both Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Thanks to the signing of the agreement, clashes between Turkish and Russian troops in the territory of Azerbaijan were prevented. While strengthening its position in the Caspian provinces, Russia managed to prevent the arrival of Ottoman troops in the region. At the same time, the Treaty of Istanbul created conditions for Ottoman troops to occupy the northwestern and western territories of the Safavid state, including Azerbaijan (except for the Caspian provinces). The beys of the surrounding districts, the priests of Uchmuazzin and the chief of the Iravan fortress Mohammad Zaman bey, came to the Ottoman camp and expressed their obedience. However, the garrison refused to surrender. Only in August 1724, those inside the fortress surrendered [Aktepe 1970, 46–47]. After capturing the city of Yerevan, the Ottoman army advanced in the direction of South Azerbaijan. The Ottoman soldiers, who broke the resistance of Khoy, approached the city of Tabriz after capturing the city of Marand.

When Russia and the Ottoman Empire agreed to divide the Safavid lands among themselves the Safavid state began to revive under the leadership of the talented commander Nadir Shah. First, Nadir expelled the Afghans from Iran, and then began a long war with the Ottomans. By 1731, much of southern Azerbaijan had been taken back from the Ottomans. However, when the uprising took place in Khorasan, Nadir went there to quell the uprising. Tahmasib II had completely lost his prestige among the army and the population and tried to capture Yerevan and Nakhchivan in order to re-establish his prestige, but he was defeated. The Ottoman armies counterattacked, and in December 1731, Tabriz was recaptured [Mustafazade 1993, 179]. Tahmasib asked for a peace treaty to be signed with Kermanshah. According to this agreement, the lands of Azerbaijan north of Araz were to remain part of the Ottoman state.

Nadir suppressed the uprising in Khorasan. Then he returned and refused to recognise the peace treaty. It was a reason for a war with the Ottomans that flared up again. At the same time, according to the agreement signed with the Russian representative in Rasht in January 1732, Russia returned the Safavid lands seized from Baku [Mustafazade 1993, 184–185].

At the same time, in August 1732, Nadir dethroned Tahmasib II and proclaimed his several-month-old son Abbas III as the Shah, and himself as the Shah's deputy [Mustafazade 2002, 89–98].

Nadir expanded military operations against the Ottomans and even laid siege to Baghdad. In 1734, Nadir conducted military operations in the northern part of Azerbaijan. Shamakhi was captured and Ganja was besieged. But the siege of Ganja went on.

Russia was interested in the capture of Ganja by Nadir and secretly helped him. In November 1734, the commander of the Russian troops in the Caspian region Levashov sent an officer-mechanic and four artillerymen dressed in the uniform of a red-headed warrior to Nadir's camp. Several heavy cannons were also sent [Mustafazade 2002, 104–105]. At that time, it was reported that the Ottoman commander Abdullah Pasha had begun a campaign with a large army, which was in Kars intending to come to the aid of the Ottoman garrison in Ganja.

The news alarmed the Russian government. Therefore, the Russian government used this as an excuse to expel the Ottomans from the southern Caucasus and agreed to cede Baku and Derbent to Nadir. The Russian ambassador to Nadir, S. Golitsyn, told Nadir that the empress was absolutely convinced that he would completely oust the Ottomans from the South Caucasus and was therefore ready to return all the territories occupied by Russia after 1722; provided that Nadir undertook not to cede these territories to the Ottoman state and treat Russia's enemies as his own. Nadir was very happy with this offer and promised to fulfill those conditions [Lystsov 1951, 105]. On March 10 (21), 1735, an agreement was signed between Nadir and S. Golitsyn in his camp near Ganja. Russia undertook to retake all the territorial gains along the Caspian Sea south of the Sulak River, which it had made since 1722 [Lystsov 1951, 105].

Baku and Derbent were to be handed over two weeks after the agreement was signed. In addition, both countries undertook not to negotiate with the Ottoman Empire without them knowing. Nadir undertook to be Russia's ally and not to cede Baku and Derbent to a third state. Russia handed over Baku and Derbent within an agreed period, and even though it was not specified in the agreement, it renounced the Holy Cross and destroyed it [Mustafazade 1993, 185].

In the 1930s, British trading capital also sought to gain a foothold in the Caspian region.

It is well known that in 1734 an agreement was signed between the British "Russian company" and the Russian government, according to Article 8 of the agreement, the British were allowed to trade with Iran through the territory of Russia [Pokrovsky 1947, 101; Aliyev 1964, 101].

In 1739, the British sent their secret agents, Captain John Elton and M. Graham, to the southern shores of the Caspian via the Volga-Caspian route. During this period, Nadir Shah was in the middle of his military campaign in India, so after Elton came to Rasht, he sent a 10-item petition to Prince Rzagulu Mirza, whose residence was in Mashhad [Aliyev 1964, 103]. On behalf of his government Elton asked the Iranian government to grant privileges to British traders within the Iranian state, including the Caspian ports. After receiving a positive response, Elton moved to St. Petersburg. Here, he presented written proposals of the British for future events in the Caspian Sea to the British Ambassador E. Finja [Aliyev 1964, 103]. Elton and Graham received the right for the company's merchants to trade freely and unhindered in all parts of Nadir Shah's state. The British built two ships in Kazan with the consent of the Russian government [Yunusova 1988, 103]. Elton also believed that once the British strengthened their position in the Caspian Sea, they would greatly facilitate relations with distant countries such as India and China.

In the summer of 1741, English Captain J. Elton contacted Nadir Shah's authorities. At that time, Elton was transporting the goods of Russian merchants from Kazan

to Astrakhan, and at the same time he was coming to Anzali. One day, Elton and Russian captain Woodruff entered Anzali. As soon as the British ship unloaded its cargo, it passed into the hands of the Afshar state. The rice was transported twice by this ship in Derbent. This incident aggravated the relations between the Russian state and the British Russian campaign. The Russians began to mistreat Elton and Woodruff. An enraged Nadir Shah wanted to cross the frozen Terek River and enter the Russian territory, but did not do so due to the threat of a new war with the Ottoman state [Lokhart 1938, 177].

At that time, Elton, who had won Nadir Shah's trust, promised that if necessary, British ships could bring food, ammunition and clothing for Iranian soldiers stationed in the Caspian region of the Caucasus. Elton also promised the king to build warships for him. Russian officials soon regretted giving the British a chance in the Caspian Sea because their activities undermined Russian shipping and Russia's Eastern trade in the Caspian Sea.

After some time, Consul Arapov informed St. Petersburg that Elton had promised Nadir Shah to build several new ships with a length of 34 arsh in 3 years [Aliyev 1964, 108]. News soon reached St. Petersburg that Nadir Shah, who had appointed Elton commander-in-chief of the Shah's fleet in the Caspian Sea, had also instructed him to train the Iranian military in naval work.

Elton's and British merchants activated in the Caspian Sea dealt a severe blow to Russia's maritime trade due to weak Russian trade capital and the inability of Russian goods to compete. Anxious, the Russian government began harassing the British company. The Astrakhan governor from St. Petersburg, Tatishev, was instructed to prevent the arrival of British masters from Astrakhan to Iran and not to allow anchors, wings, sails, tar, ropes, cloth and other goods needed for blacksmithing from Astrakhan to Iran [Aliyev 1964, 111]. Elton openly entered the service of Nadir Shah in order to withstand Russian pressure. He built shipyards in Langarud and Lahijan. He cut down the trees needed for shipbuilding and brought them to shore, weaving sails of cotton and ropes of linen. Since the anchor could not be repaired, they found the old anchors that had sunk in the sea.

The use of the Volga-Caspian trade route by the British also had some benefits. Several ships were built and armed with European equipment for Nadir Shah in the Caspian Sea.

The British historian Sir Percy Sykes notes that Nadir was the first Shah of Iran who realized the importance of the navy [Sykes 1921, 271]. Priest Bazen writes: "When Nadir Shah heard that the Europeans were strong, he began to study the source of this power. His plans to buy ships from the British and to establish shipping in his country were an indicative factor of his future plans. The initiative to establish a shipbuilding industry in Bandar Abbas was met with difficulties. The absence of wood there, despite the difficulties in transporting it from a distance of 900 km, he continued this work" [Afrasiyabi 1371 Hijri Shamsi (Miladi 1992), 829–830].

When the representative of the Russian government Kalushkin told to Nadir Shah that Elizabeth Petrovna had come to power as a result of a coup d'état on December 6, 1741, he was pleased and asked Russia to lend him 10 ships, some from the Dagestani rebels and some from Astrakhan that used for cargo transportation. Kalushkin informed the Russian government about this request, but said that if Nadir Shah was given ships, he would not return them, because he wanted to create a powerful navy. Therefore, Nadir Shah's request was not granted [Lokhart 1938, 177].

At that time, the shah had at his disposal only one English carpenter, several Russian and Indian ships, and a ship with a cannon weighing 23 pounds [Quddusi 1999, 174].

The translator of the Russian embassy V. Bratishev wrote in a message from Derbent on April 30, 1743, that the chief of the Shah's ships, Khalil, had seized a Russian ship and was detaining many "muzurs" (means black worker) who were Russian citizens.

Bratishev said that there were no ropes, anchors, tar, sails, iron wires in Iran for shipbuilding, and no people who knew how to sail. Therefore, they try to attract Russian citizens to their side by all means [GAAO, fund 394, inventory 4, file 164, sheets 1–2].

Nadir Shah gave Elton a salary of 2,500 tumens. Elton sent two English carpenters to Astrakhan in pursuit of cattle. In this regard, Bratishev wrote to the governor of Astrakhan not to release those carpenters and materials needed for shipbuilding [GAAO, fund 394, inventory 1, file 955, sheets 39–40].

Despite the obstacles created by the Russians, the construction of ships for the Shah's fleet was progressing rapidly. On June 19, 1744, Bakunin wrote that Elton had laid the foundation of a large, 20-ball ship, and that the ship was being built in the English style. The work was carried out under the leadership of the navigator A. Baut [AVPRI, fund 35 (Relations between Russia and England), inventory 1, 1742–1746, file 676, sheet 37 and the reverse]. After a while, Baku reported that in addition to one large ship, two small ships were built.

Since the death of Russian resident I. Kalushkin in September 1744, acting translator V. Bratishev wrote in September 1744 that Elton had laid the foundations of four large ships, according to some, seven, two of which are expected to be commissioned soon. In the words of Bratishev, Elton asked the Iranians and Indians to bring another 300 carpenters to the shipyards [AVPRI, fund 35, inventory 1, 1742–1746, file 676, sheet 37 and the reverse].

Seeing this situation, the Russian government took decisive measures and in November 30, 1744, sent an order to the governor of Astrakhan V. Tatishev to detain Elton's ship in Astrakhan and to arrest another British ship in Iran [AVPRI, fund 35, inventory 1, 1742–1746, file 676, sheet 40; GAAO, fund 394, inventory 1, 1744, file 955, sheet 570 and the reverse].

Tatishev detained Elton's ship in Astrakhan under the name of double quarantine in connection with the epidemic situation in Kazan.

Despite the resistance of the Russian authorities, the construction of the Shah's fleet in the Caspian Sea was gaining momentum.

On January 10, 1745, a large ship of 20 tons was launched and set sail for Derbent with treasures. At that time, 700 sailors, carpenters, woodcutters, etc. were engaged in shipyards [AVPRI, fund 35, inventory 1, 1742–1746, file 676, sheets 69–70]. In February, Bakunin reported that two boats had been built in Langarud, one of which was a 20-oar boat. Elton wanted to sail to Baku and Derbent. The second ship was to accommodate 25 cannons. A new ship named Asanknd (probably Hasankend) was founded [AVPRI, fund 35, inventory 1, 1742–1746, file 676, sheets 74–78 and reverse].

On March 29, Bakunin wrote that his translator reported that three more boats, one with 12 and two with 16 oars, were ready in Langarud. New ships were almost ready in Hasankend. In Lahijan, a "kanifas" factory was built from wild hemp to make sails [AVPRI, fund 35, 1742–1746, inventory 1, file 676, sheets 77–78].

Johann Yakov Lerch, who visited Azerbaijan and Iran as part of the Russian embassy in 1747–1748, wrote that he had seen two frigates built by Elton in Langarud in Derbent. They are already sailing at sea, and the construction of four large and small ships is still underway. Lerch also said that Shah gave Elton the rank of admiral and set a salary of 6,000 manat. Ober-admiral was Mirza Muhammad khan [Lerch 1747, 47].

Seeing that the Russian government could not indirectly restrict the activities of the British, in 1746 they deprived them of the right to travel to the East by crossing Russian territory. The assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747 and the beginning of chaos in the state also dealt a severe blow to English trade. The British company in Rasht completely collapsed.

With the assassination of Nadir Shah, Russia used the collapse of his empire to strengthen its position in the Caspian Sea. Gilan resident Cherkasov was instructed to buy

people from “insurgents and other Iranians” with money and burn all ships already built or under construction. If this is not possible, the captains of Russian ships sailing in the Caspian Sea should be ordered to secretly burn Iranian ships, and capture Elton and send him to Astrakhan [Solovyov 1963, 497–498].

In 1751, the tsarist government organized a special expedition to burn the remains of the ships built by Elton. However, when the expedition reached the south of the Caspian Sea, they learned that Elton had been killed in the riots. Two large ships parked in front of the Safidrud River were set on fire by Russian sailors [Novyye dokumenty... 1851, 34–35]. Thus, the study of historical facts shows that in the 1920s, there was fierce competition between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the Caspian Basin. Thanks to the tireless work of Nadir Afshar, the revived monarchy managed to oust the Ottoman Empire from the region in the mid-1930s. After that, the struggle for hegemony in the Caspian Basin began between Russia and the Afshar state. As the gradual takeover of transit trade by British capital in the region undermined the foundations of the rug trade, the Russian government took administrative action to ban British traders from entering the region from Russia. Russians worried that Nadir Shah Afshar would take steps to create a navy in the Caspian Sea and he could built modern ships by using the experience of British sailors. The Russian government by all means tried to prevent Nadir Shah from building his navy in the Caspian Sea. However, Nadir Shah’s efforts were not in vain and the core of the navy was created. But this work was not completed due to the assassination of Nadir Shah.

Conclusion

An analysis of historical documents shows that in the 20–40s of the 18th century there was a sharp rivalry in the Caspian Sea basin between Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain and the state of Nadir Shah Afshar. Russia stood out with particular activity and aggressiveness, which did not tolerate the presence of any enemy power in this region, seeking to turn the Caspian Sea into an inland lake of Russia. A striking manifestation of this policy was the invasion of Peter with a hundred thousand army into the Caspian regions of the Safavid state in 1722. Only the sharp negative reaction of the Ottoman Empire did not allow tsar to achieve his fully set goal and limited him to acquiring a narrow Caspian strip.

From the second half of the 20s, the brilliant commander Nadir Afshar managed to win back the captured Safavid territories from the Ottomans, Russians and Afghans. Those who met stubborn resistance from Russia saw in Nadir a force capable of putting an end to the undivided rule of the Russians and began to help Nadir Shah build the merchant and military fleets in the Caspian Sea. Only the assassination of Nadir Shah by his courtiers in 1747 allowed Russia to destroy the fleet, and gain full control over the Caspian Sea.

As in the past, Russia is trying to show its influence and imperial ambitions for achieving political goals.

ABBREVIATIONS

AVPRI – Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Imperii [Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire].

GAAO – Gosudarstvenniy Arkhiv Astrakhanskoy Oblasti [State Archive of the Astrakhan region].

RGADA – Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Drevnikh Aktov [Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents].

RGVIA – Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyy Voenno-istoricheskiy Arkhiv [Russian State Military History Archive].

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T. T. Мустафазаде

**Міжнародні змагання за домінування в Каспійському регіоні
(1720–1740 рр.)**

У статті розглядаються причини активізації політики царя Петра I на Сході, що збіглося у часі із занепадом і падінням імперії Сефевідів. У дослідженні показано російські амбіції в Каспійському регіоні в 20–40-х роках XVIII століття за часів правління Петра Великого, який бажав, щоб Росія отримала повний контроль над торгівлею шовком. Розглянуто методи, використані Петром Першим для посилення впливу Росії в Каспійському регіоні. Залучені автором історичні джерела розкривають суть політики Росії, Османської імперії, Великої Британії та Надір-шаха Афшара в басейні Каспійського моря в окреслений період часу. Новизна статті полягає в тому, що її автор аналізує політичні процеси в Каспійському регіоні, причини дипломатичних хитрощів Петра Першого та його суперництва з Надір-шахом Афшаром, по-новому трактуючи відомі історичні документи, а також спираючись на дані архівних джерел, ще не введених у широкий науковий обіг. У 1711 році після невдалої війни з Османською імперією та підписання Прутського мирного договору Росія втратила вихід до Чорного моря. У такій ситуації єдиною надією для Росії був Каспій. Оскільки війна зі Швецією, що тривала, унеможлиблювала просування Росії далі на південь, російський цар відрядив розвідувальну місію до Каспійського регіону.

Ключові слова: Надір Шах Афшар, Каспійський регіон, Росія, Петро I, Османська імперія, дипломатія

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