I, Ramin Ahmadoghlu, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

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Student's name: Ramin Ahmadoghlu

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Laura Jenkins, Ph.D.

Committee member: Eliz Sanasarian, Ph.D.

Committee member: Rina Williams, Ph.D.

Committee member: Joel Wolfe, Ph.D.
Nationalism, Secularism, and Islam: Azerbaijani Turks in Azerbaijan and Iran

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Ramin Ahmadoghlu

M.A. Fatih University

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Committee Chair: Laura D. Jenkins, Ph.D.
Abstract

This dissertation examines the interaction of religion, secularism and nationalism in Iranian (Southern) Azerbaijan and Caucasian Azerbaijan (now the independent Republic of Azerbaijan). Azerbaijanis were part of the same political establishment until their split in 1828. Surveying the political trajectories of Northern and Southern Azerbaijan after the separation, this study detects three different degrees of nationalism, conceptualized as assertive nationalism, integrative nationalism, and the absence of ethnic and nationalist consciousness. Assertive nationalism is a nationalist movement that prioritizes ethnic identity and seeks an independent state. Integrationist nationalism is a nationalist movement that seeks ethnic and national rights but is willing to remain a part of the host society and state. The third situation is an absence of ethnic and nationalist consciousness.

Examining three different episodes that exemplifies the three different degrees of nationalism listed above, this study attempts to answer why did Northern Azerbaijanis establish two independent states, interrupted by a period as a Soviet Republic, while Iranian Azerbaijanis—one of the largest minorities in the Middle East with a population two times the size of Northern Azerbaijan—remained a part of Iran, even at times of permissive political conditions for secession and independence?

To decipher the puzzle, this study offers a threefold framework—secular nationalist elite, relationship between the minority group and host state, and opportunity structures—to explain the divergence between the two Azerbaijani communities. To be more specific, this study argues that the primary reason for the rise of “assertive nationalism” in the North is the influence of the “secular nationalist” elite, who were exposed to Enlightenment ideas. This elite led the way to a “secular nationalist revolution” and the construction of a new nation from the ummah. In the South, however, religious institutions and identifications with Shia Islam, and political and economic integration with Iranian state and society led to an “integrationist nationalism” among Azerbaijanis in Iran.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The Treaty of Gulistan (1813) and the Treaty of Turkmanchay (1828), between Tsarist Russia and Qajar Iran, divided Azerbaijan in two. According to the terms of the treaties, the area north of the Aras River came under Russian control, and the area south of the river remained a part of the Iran (See Şükürov, 2006; Yeşilot, 2008). Initially, this division—which even divided small villages—remained fairly abstract since the lack of modern border controls and surveillance meant that cross-border relations were largely unchanged. However, two centuries after the treaties, the separation has had serious social and political implications, which merit an advanced level of investigation.

This study examines the implications of the separation with respect to the political movements (or lack thereof) toward self-determination and independence emerging from the two Azerbaijani communities. It is puzzling that, although the two Azerbaijani communities were part of the same social-political structure under the rule of the Safavid Empire and the Qajar Dynasty, they then followed two distinct patterns after the separation. This difference is especially notable in terms of political mobilization toward independence and self-rule. The two communities have become differentiated over time, and one of the important manifestations of this differentiation—and the main focus of this study—has been the degree of tendency toward secessionism and national independence.
Specifically, the political history of Northern Azerbaijan\(^1\) witnessed the establishment of three nation-states—the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (1918-1920), the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan (1936-1990), and the Republic of Azerbaijan (1991). The Northern Azerbaijans used favorable domestic and international environments for their own nationalist ends. On the other side of the river, the Azerbaijanis in Iran have remained a part of Iran and, with a few exceptions, limited their claims to regional autonomy and respected the territorial integrity of Iran. This tendency was observed during the Khiyabani Movement of the early 20th century, the occupation of Iran by the allied forces during the Second World War, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Building on the comparisons between the two Azerbaijani communities, this study aims to clarify the actors, processes, and institutions that have promoted this divergence. As a first step, the next section will describe the puzzle in more detail and introduce a new comparative conceptualization of nationalism. Accordingly, Northern Azerbaijan is categorized as an example of “assertive nationalism,” which is a pro-independence nationalist ideology and movement. On the other hand, the Iranian Azerbaijani\(^2\) case is an exemplar of “integrationist nationalism,” a nationalist movement whose claims do not go beyond autonomy and cultural-linguistic recognition and which shows a willingness to coexist within the host society and state. Needless to say, these concepts are “ideal types,” in Weberian terms. The third section of this chapter will review the relevant literature on

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\(^1\)“Caucasian Azerbaijan” and “Northern Azerbaijan” will be used interchangeably in this study. Likewise, “Iranian Azerbaijan,” Southern Azerbaijan,” and “Azerbaijan” will be used interchangeably to describe the Azerbaijan that has remained a part of Iran.

\(^2\)“Iranian Azerbaijan” and “Southern Azerbaijan” will be used interchangeably in this paper.
nations and nationalism. The fourth section, departing from the existing literature, will propose a new explanation that prioritizes agency in explaining the emergence of the two different types of nationalism while also recognizing the catalyzing effect of structure.

More specifically, this study offers a threefold explanation. The principal factor behind the two different approaches to self-rule and secession is the emergence, or lack thereof, of a secular nationalist intelligentsia. In addition to the key explanatory variable, the secular nationalist intelligentsia, there is an antecedent condition, the relationship between the minority group and the host state and society, that catalyzes nationalist mobilization. If the relationship produces ethnic grievances, then the minority group is more likely to support the nationalist movement lead by the secular nationalist elite. The third variable is opportunity structure, which is a permissive environment for the nationalist movement. The effect of opportunity structure varies according to the amount of resources available, or that become available, and the status and development of the nationalist mobilization. Specifically, opportunity structures broaden the vision and goals of the nationalist elite and the movement in the earlier stages of nationalist mobilization; and opportunity structure enhances secessionism in the later stages of nationalist mobilization.

This study examines the process of nationalist mobilization—the secular nationalist revolution—in three stages. The first stage is the emergence of the secular nationalist elite. The second stage is the introduction of a secular definition of nation and the construction of an ethnic identity separate from religious identity. In this stage, the secular nationalist elite popularizes the secular ethnic identity through the means they control, such as the
press and educational institutions. The third stage is the phase of political action: the moment when the secular elite uses the opportunity structure to further their nationalist claims and seek an independent state.

Using this lens, Northern Azerbaijan was exposed to Enlightenment ideas, such as nationalism, secularization, and democracy, in the first quarter of the 19th century. Accordingly, it produced a new intelligentsia: a local secular nationalist elite. This new intelligentsia staged a secular revolution, transforming all aspects of life, including the national identity, and gave birth to the Azerbaijani nation. With the catalyzing effect of ethnic grievances resulting from mistreatment and discrimination at the hands of the Tsarist regime, the Northern Azerbaijani nationalist elite led the way to independent statehood when the opportunity structure became favorable due to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and World War I. On the other hand, Iran had a different experience of secularization, and Iranian Azerbaijanis did not produce a robust secular nationalist elite. Moreover, the relationship between the Azerbaijani minority and Iranian state was completely different from the colonial relationship in Northern Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis belonged to the ethno-national group that ruled Iran for more than four centuries. In addition, Azerbaijanis were strongly affiliated with Shi’a Islam. As a result, they considered Iran to be their homeland. The lack of a secular nationalist elite and the relationship with the Iranian state affected the Azerbaijani minority’s attitudes towards independence and secessionism.

This chapter is composed of six parts. The first part describes the puzzle at the core of this dissertation. The second part introduces a new comparative conceptualization for
analyzing nationalism in the two Azerbaijani communities. The third section reviews the relevant literature and relates the empirical and theoretical contributions of this research to the wider scholarly debate on the roots of nations and nationalism. The fourth section introduces a threefold framework that this research employs to examine Azerbaijani nationalism, or lack thereof, in Iran and Northern Azerbaijan. In addition, the section briefly demonstrates the application of the threefold framework on each of the three case examined in this dissertation. The fifth section addresses the research design and methodology. The last section introduces the organization of this dissertation.

1. Describing and Defining the Puzzle: Assertive vs. Integrationist Nationalism

The Northern Azerbaijanis established three independent states in the 20th century. The first of these states was the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (DRA), which was established in 1918 and lasted two years. This first Azerbaijani state was established right after the First World War and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, events which first weakened and then replaced the Tsarist Regime. However, after the new Russian regime consolidated itself politically and militarily, it recaptured the whole Caucasus region, including Azerbaijan, in 1920. This brought the first Azerbaijani state to an end. The second Azerbaijani state was the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan (SSRA), which was established in 1936 and lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even before the official fall of the Soviet Union, the Azerbaijani leadership declared independence for the Republic of Azerbaijan. However, the Soviet Army violently suppressed this independence effort on 20 January 1990, now commemorated as “Black January” in Azerbaijan. The latest
Azerbaijani state celebrated its twentieth Anniversary in 2011. Common to all three states is a strong spirit of nationalism. This Azerbaijani nationalism has been strengthened and consolidated through all of the earlier experiences of statehood. In sum, after their separation from the South, the Northern Azerbaijani exhibited a growing nationalist attitude, apparent in their three successful attempts to establish nation-states.

Contrary to the pro-independence tendencies of the Northern Azerbaijanis, Iranian Azerbaijanis have been more favorable toward maintaining a union with Iran and have refrained from secessionism. To illustrate this, I will briefly present four different episodes from the history of Iranian Azerbaijan when the political environment was favorable for a declaration of succession, but when Iranian Azerbaijanis maintained their support for and loyalty to the Iranian state.

The first episode is the Khiyabani Insurgency in 1920. A well-educated cleric, political leader, and advocate of constitutionalism in Iran, Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani founded the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan in 1917. He staged a revolt in Tabriz as a reaction to the 1919 agreement between Britain and Iran, viewing the agreement as contrary to the national interest of Iran. Consequently, he cut ties with the central government in Tehran and decreed that Azerbaijan would henceforth be autonomous Azadistan—land of freedom (Zirinsky, 1994, p. 50). The name “Azadistan” was chosen intentionally to “emphasize the distinction between it and the independent republic of Azerbaijan under the Baku regime, and partly to serve as a model of freedom and independence for the rest of Iran” (Swietochowski & Collins, 1999). Khiyabani was also opposed to the Ottoman wartime occupation of Azerbaijan, and he rejected both Sunni
domination and pan-Turanism, one of the leading ethnic Turkish nationalist ideological movements in the late Ottoman period. Khiyabani, “reacting as an indignant Iranian patriot, declared that no foreigners, whether they were British or Russian, had a right to intervene in the internal affairs of Iran,” and “warned that should the Bolsheviks attempt to annex any part of Iranian territory, Azerbaijan would fight against to the end” (Swietochowski, 1995, p. 97). Even though Khiyabani expelled Tehran’s appointed governor and declared autonomy, as the British political officer sent to meet Khiyabani reported, Khiyabani did not have any separatist intentions (Chaquèri, 1995, pp. 465-466). His movement was rather a genuine political attempt to topple the 1919 Anglo-Iranian agreement and to restore constitutional rule in Iran (Ghani, 2000, p. 103). This case is puzzling when compared to the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in the North, in which Azerbaijani nationalists declared independence from Russia in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

A second instance in which the Iranian Azerbaijanis did not seek independence despite favorable conditions was the 1941 invasion of the country by the allied forces, namely Soviet and British, during the Second World War. Reza Shah abdicated, and his son, Mohammed Reza, was crowned the new Shah of Iran. The occupation lasted five years; these years were marked by a weak central Iranian government struggling under occupation and by economic and political turmoil (Abrahamian, 1982). The allied forces divided the country into three regions of control, and the Soviet Union held control of the Northern part of the country, including Iranian Azerbaijan. The Soviet forces in Northern Iran supported the local leftist organizations, namely the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan. Armed with weapons provided by the Soviet Union, on 20 November 1945, Azerbaijani
military forces under the leadership of Ja’far Pishevari, a renowned veteran Marxist, managed to win minor victories over the Iranian troops in small clashes. Pishevari then declared the “autonomy” of the National Government of Azerbaijan. The new government program stated that “the people of Azerbaijan have been endowed by history with distinct national, linguistic, cultural and traditional characteristics,” but that the “Nation [millet] of Azerbaijan has no desire to separate itself from Iran or to harm the territorial integrity of Iran” (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 400). The government further claimed that “The Nation of Azerbaijan officially and openly declares that it has the right to form its own government, like other living nations, and to administer its internal and national affairs, observing the integrity of Iran” (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 400-401).

This attempt at autonomous self-rule, though it was short lived, was a very prolific period in terms of the revival of Azerbaijani language and culture in Iranian Azerbaijan. The region had suffered greatly under the assimilationist policies of the Reza Shah. Now the schools in the region, as well as Azerbaijan University, started in Tabriz, the capital of the provincial government, started instruction in the Azerbaijani language and instituted a curriculum that emphasized Azerbaijani literature and history. Tabriz began to radio broadcasts in the local language. These achievements in support of the Azerbaijani language and culture were welcomed enthusiastically by the people; however, many Azerbaijanis became increasingly “apprehensive” about rumors that the provincial government intended to secede (Shaffer, 2002, p. 56). A year later, at the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union withdrew its troops from Iran, and in December 1946, the Iranian troops entered Tabriz to the “welcome of the population” (Shaffer, 2002, p. 22). This put an end to the National Government of Azerbaijan and its autonomy efforts.
The approach of limiting claims to autonomy within Iranian borders, rather than striving for independence, reappeared during the Iranian Revolution in 1979. After the fall of the Shah and before the consolidation of power under Khomeini’s leadership, the Azerbaijani people of Iran gathered around Ayatollah Shariatmadari, an Azerbaijani cleric. Alongside their support for Shariatmadari, the Iranian Azerbaijanis struggled to secure the ethnic and cultural rights of Azerbaijanis in Iran—again, as part of a united Iran, without making any secessionist claims.

Last, the same pattern is also evident after the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. The emergence of an independent Azerbaijan, free from Russian control, revived Azerbaijani identity in Iran and was welcomed by Iranian Azerbaijanis, who greeted this news with enthusiasm. However, the “honeymoon” did not last long (Shaffer, 2002, p. 202). The elite Iranian Azerbaijani response was almost identical to earlier statements on the issue: “Azerbaijan is part of the territory of Iran and should return to Iran in order [to] fulfill the dream of Azerbaijanis in Iran,” said Fatema Homayoon Mohaddam, a congresswoman from Tabriz, the capital city of Iranian Azerbaijan.

When these episodes from the history of the Southern Azerbaijan are considered, the following intriguing questions require attention: Why did Iranian Azerbaijanis, especially Khiyabani and Pishevari, limit their claims to cultural and linguistic recognition and autonomy rather than moving toward independence or joining Northern Azerbaijan when the central Iranian regime was in a state of weakness or collapse? What made the Iranian Azerbaijanis so concerned with and attached to the territorial unity of Iran?
I am not arguing that all Iranian Azerbaijanis think the same or that all Iranian Azerbaijanis were at varying times against independence, supportive of independence, or took some other position depending on the era. There were many different positions, including extreme edges—full independence, joining with Northern Azerbaijan, and full assimilation to the Persian culture and language. However, as the relevant literature demonstrates, these extremes were marginal and limited to individuals or very minor groups that did not have popular support. In my study, I will examine the dominant political preferences in each case by examining the political parties, platforms, statements, and demands of elites or leaders in each setting. Through analysis of journals, magazines, newspapers, party declarations and documents, elite statements, and archival documents, I expect to trace the emergence of the two different forms of nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan.

Building on the comparison of the cases above, the main purpose of this study is to describe and explain the political differentiation between the two Azerbaijani communities—why did one advocate independence and self-rule while the other did not?—and to find out what actors, processes, mechanisms, and institutions have promoted this divergence. The next step is to conceptualize the differences in the nationalist attitudes of the two Azerbaijani communities.
2. Assertive Nationalism and Integrationist Nationalism

For analytical purposes, I would like to differentiate the two cases above as manifestations of two different types of nationalism. Before defining the concepts, it is important to note that these types are “ideal types,” as introduced and defined by Weber.³ To be more specific, the Northern Azerbaijani case represents an assertive nationalism that aims at independence and secession if the ethnic group is a minority within the larger state, is ruled by a different nationality, or if it does not have an independent nation-state. The minority ethnic group may even appeal to military struggle when it encounters resistance. Therefore, the goal of assertive nationalism is independence for that nation; anything short of independence is unacceptable. The other type of nationalism is integrationist nationalism. In this instance, the ethnic group is conscious of its ethnic and national distinctiveness, and it struggles for ethnic, cultural, and linguistic recognition and rights. However, it limits its claims to recognition and some level of autonomy rather than full independence and secession. Key manifestations of integrationist nationalism include claims for education, broadcasting, and press in the native language, and use of the native language in local government and administrative bureaus. The minority ethnic group accepts a coexistence with other nationalities under a supranational political umbrella; this larger governance unit can be united by religious or geographic commonalities. The third

³ The two types of nationalism introduced above should be acknowledged as “ideal types.” Weber introduces an ideal type as “a unified analytical construct” that “cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality” (Weber, 2011, p. 90). But, it “will help to develop our skill in imputation in research: it is no “hypothesis” but it offers guidance to the construction of hypotheses. It is not a description of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description” (Weber, 2011, p. 90). In other words, an ideal type is a utopia, and constructed to address a researchers’ “task of determining in each individual case, the extent to which this ideal-construct approximates to or diverges from reality” (Weber, 2011, p. 90).
category is the absence of ethnic and national consciousness and full assimilation to the dominant identity (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Nationalism</th>
<th>Assertive</th>
<th>Integrationist</th>
<th>Absence of Ethnic &amp; Nationalist Consciousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consciousness of ethnic/national distinctiveness</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong/Medium</td>
<td>None or weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic identification (in comparison to geographical or religious)</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Medium/Secondary</td>
<td>None or weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claims from host state</td>
<td>Secession; independent state</td>
<td>Cultural &amp; linguistic rights; autonomy</td>
<td>Economic, political, social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with the host state and society</td>
<td>Contention</td>
<td>Integration, coexistence; contention if claims not met</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of violence</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>None (for ethnic/nationalist purposes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Types of nationalism
This study examines instances of all three types of nationalism described above. The 1918 establishment of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in Northern Azerbaijan represents assertive nationalism; this is examined in Chapter two. The 1920 Khiyabani Insurgency, which took place in Iranian Azerbaijan exemplifies the absence of ethnic and national consciousness; this is investigated in chapter three. The 1945 declaration autonomy for the National Government of Azerbaijan in Southern Azerbaijan is analyzed as a case of integrationist nationalism; this is the focus of chapter four.

In conclusion, by defining and describing the cases as assertive nationalism, integrationist nationalism, or the lack of either type of nationalism, I aim to explain why the Northern and Southern Azerbaijanis, formerly one group, ended up with different attitudes toward and experiences of secessionism and independence. What actors, processes, mechanisms and institutions caused this divergence? Why and how did the Northern Azerbaijanis become assertive nationalists while the Iranian Azerbaijanis lacked an ethnic and nationalist consciousness at the beginning of the 20th century and then demonstrated integrationist nationalist attitudes after World War II? More broadly, why and when does a group of people with a separate ethnic identity—including a consciousness about their ethnic distinctiveness and a territory that is even called by the name of that group—decide not to struggle for independence, but rather limit their claims to autonomy, despite permissive environments like the weakening or collapse of the central authority?
3. Literature Review

The case of Iranian Azerbaijan, especially in comparison to that of Northern Azerbaijan, is an understudied issue. This may be because of the integrationist nationalist attitude of the ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran. The concentration of scholarly attention on assertive nationalism, which has often escalated into ethnic conflicts, especially after the end of the Cold War, is understandable. However, in this study, I aim to demonstrate that exploring peaceful instances of nationalism makes a useful scholarly contribution to understanding and explaining assertive nationalist cases and may offer helpful policy hints as well. This dissertation engages with two specific scholarly debates. First, I would like to contribute to the Iranian and Azerbaijani studies literature. Second, the hypotheses I test in these cases contribute to the debate about the trajectories of nations and nationalism.

3.1. Iranian Studies

Regarding the Iranian studies literature, the case of Iranian Azerbaijanis is considerably understudied. The only volume that focuses on the two Azerbaijani communities comparatively is Brenda Shaffer’s Borders and Brethren (Shaffer, 2002). Shaffer provides a brief comparative history of the two communities and concludes that a distinctive Azerbaijani identity exists in Iran. This finding is contrary to the portrayal of Iranian Azerbaijanis in the mainstream Iranian studies literature in which the group is seen as a “well-integrated minority” with little “sense of separate identity,” and thus as an
assimilated group (Amirahmadi, 1987; Atabaki, 1993; Higgins, 1984). In my study, I differentiate between “integration” and “assimilation.” In so doing, I demonstrate that describing Iranian Azerbaijanis as “well-integrated” does not mean an absence of nationalist feelings. In addition, I explain the transformation of Azerbaijani identity and nationalism in Iran using the threefold explanation introduced in this chapter.

Beyond Shaffer’s comparative work, there are a handful of other studies that focus exclusively on Iranian Azerbaijan, most of which address events during the Second World War (Atabaki, 1993; Blake, 2009; Hasanli, 2006; Nissman, 1987). However, these studies evaluate the topic within a Cold War framework, concentrating their attention on and attributing causal powers to global competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. There are also other books that deal with the history of Azerbaijan in general or focus on a particular period of time (Altstadt, 1983, 1992; Clark, 2006; Cornell, 2011; Leeuw, 2000; Swietochowski, 1985, 1995).

This dissertation aims to make empirical and theoretical contributions to the study of Azerbaijani nationalism in Azerbaijan and Iran. Empirically, this study builds upon numerous primary and secondary sources collected from the libraries of Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran; most of these sources were written in the languages of these countries.

Among the three cases examined in this study, the Khiyabani Insurgency of 1920 is the least known to English speaking academia. There are no scholarly articles or books examining the insurgency, excluding history books, which grant the case merely a few sentences within a broader treatment of Iranian history. Offering a robust account of the
Khiyabani Insurgency, this dissertation incorporates primary and secondary sources published in Azerbaijani, Turkish, Russian and Persian, including the original writings and speeches of Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani and his colleagues. In order to use these sources in this analysis, I have translated some of them myself. Additionally, by examining nationalism in Iranian Azerbaijan and Northern Azerbaijan analytically and comparatively, this study answers key questions not clearly addressed by the Azerbaijani, Turkish, and Iranian sources.

Likewise, my analysis in another case examined in this work, the Pishevari Movement of 1945-1946, relies on archival documents recently released by the Wilson Center as part of the Cold War International History Project. The motives behind the declaration of provincial autonomy in Iranian Azerbaijan in 1945 under the leadership of Seyyid Ja'far Pishevari had given rise to a long-standing and unresolved debate. Soviet and Azerbaijani publications presented the movement as a result of Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran. However, Iranian and Western publications treated the autonomy movement as a mere outcome of the Soviet Union’s Middle East policy, disregarding domestic factors. Building upon the Wilson Center documents, which include previously secret documents obtained from the Azerbaijani and Russian archives, this study, while acknowledging the intense Soviet involvement, traces the domestic dynamics that contributed to the emergence and rise of ethnic Azerbaijani identity and nationalism in Iran.
3.2. Nations and Nationalism Literature

I would also like to engage with the literature on nations and nationalism; since the 1980s, this body of work has been especially focused on the origins of nations and nationalism. This literature is animated by the debate among three different approaches: primordialists, modernists, and ethno-symbolists (Özkırımlı, 2000, 2005, 2010). In this debate, the primordialists trace the origins of nations to time immemorial. Modernists contend that nationalism was born along with modernity; they claim the nation to be a product of nationalism. The ethno-symbolists, while agreeing with the modernity of nations and nationalism, think that modern nations are the extensions of pre-modern ethnic cores.

Among the nations and nationalism literature, some theories from the modernist and ethno-symbolist perspectives are relevant to my study and hypothesis. My hypothesis emphasizes the process of elite-led secularization in the emergence of ethnic and national consciousness in Azerbaijan(s). This approach can be linked to the modernist theorists, who think that nations and nationalism are products of modernization; they prioritize parallel processes, such as the emergence of the modern nation-state, industrialization, the rise of capitalism, urbanization, and secularization. In this section, I will address some of the relevant works of the modernist school.

To start, Tom Nairn explains the rise of nationalism in terms of the “uneven development” of the world capitalist system leading to invasion and exploitation in the periphery, which then engendered the birth of a nationalist response to colonial powers (Nairn, 1981a). According to Nairn, nationalism is “determined by certain features of the world political economy, in the era between the French and Industrial Revolutions and the
present day” (Nairn, 1981, 332). Therefore, one has to look at “world history” and “the general process of historical development since the end of the eighteenth century” rather than the internal dynamics of individual societies (Ozkirimli, 2010, 75). Another renowned modernist, John Breuilly, describes nationalism as “political movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalist arguments” (Breuilly, 2001, 32). Breuilly thus argues that “nationalism is inconceivable without the state and vice versa” (Breuilly, 1985). In other words, nationalism is organized politics, and politics is about power, which is, in the modern world, about the control of the state (Breuilly, 1985, p. 1). Paul Brass, also affiliated with modernist approach to nationalism, thinks that “there is nothing inevitable about the rise of ethnic identity and its transformation into nationalism among the diverse peoples of the contemporary world” (Brass, 1991, p. 13). According to Brass, it is the nationalist politicians who promote and use ethnic nationalism instrumentally for achieving their political purposes.

Many of the modernists were inspired by Ernest Gellner, whose longstanding work on nationalism is best exemplified by *Nations and Nationalism* (Gellner, 1983). In this volume, Gellner defined nationalism as a “political principle, which holds that the political and the national units should be congruent”; Gellner further stated that the breach of this principle may cause “feeling of anger” (Gellner, 1983, p. 1). According to Gellner, “nations and nationalism are not natural because they are not a permanent feature of human condition,” rather they “came into being with the transition to industrialism” (Gellner, 1983, p. xxiii). Regarding the relationship between nations and nationalism, Gellner thinks that “Nationalism is not a sentiment expressed by pre-existing nations; rather it creates nations where they did not previously exist,” and “where nationalism has acquired power
and prestige, it can give rise to derivative or imitative forms, for example, the creation of ‘nation-states’ in Central Europe by the victor states of 1918” (See Gellner, 2006).

The modernization approach was strengthened by the introduction of two other concepts in 1983: “invented traditions” and “imagined communities.” The former was introduced by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger and argues that “many of the traditions which we think of as ancient in their origins were, in fact, invented comparatively recently” (E. J. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 1). Accordingly, “nation” was one of them, invented by nationalists in the modern age (E. J. Hobsbawm, 1990; E. J. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). The other new concept that year in the study of nationalism was Anderson’s definition of a nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 1983). According to Anderson, nationality and nationalism are “cultural artifacts of a particular time” (Anderson, 1983, p. 4). According to Anderson, these concepts emerged towards the end of eighteenth century as a result of the “spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces” (Anderson, 1983, p. 4). Specifically, the modern nation could be placed at the junction of three historical developments: a change in the conception of time, the decline of religious communities along with the expanding of the power and realm of “the secular,” and the decline of dynastic realms (Anderson, 1983, pp. 9-31).

The theories briefly presented above offer insight regarding the roots of nations and nationalism. However, two major factors hinder their ability to explain the different nationalist trajectories of the two Azerbaijani societies. The first limiting factor of these theories is that they are unable to fully explain the different trajectories of the two
Azerbaijani cases. The research question of this project is derived from a comparison of the two Azerbaijani societies residing in two different countries and cultural settings following their separation almost two centuries ago. To answer the research questions central to this project, this study examines three different episodes from the histories of the two societies; each took place during a different time period\(^4\) and in a different social, economic, and political setting\(^5\). The period of time examined encompasses major local and global developments, such as world wars and revolutions; this era is aptly described as the “age of extremes” (E. Hobsbawm, 1994). The second limiting factor related to the explanatory power of the theories of nationalism referenced above is that these theories ignored the Middle East region, the Muslim World in general, and rarely ventured outside of Western Europe to develop and test their theories. Of course, a major exception to the largely European focus of the nationalism theorists concerns the studies on anti- and post-colonial nationalism, primarily analyzing events in India or Africa. Therefore, the historical, cultural, and religious peculiarities of the Middle East region, in general, and the Azerbaijani societies, in particular, prove to be a cultural mismatch for the theories derived from and developed to explain the roots of nations and nationalism primarily in Europe.

Nairn’s explanation, which centers on the uneven historical development of the world political economy, offers insights for Azerbaijani nationalism in the north, which was a colony of the Russian Empire, but disregards the interplay of domestic social, political,

\(^{4}\text{The independent Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918-1920 in the Northern Azerbaijan; the Khiyabani Insurgency in 1920 in Iranian Azerbaijan; and the Pishevari Movement in 1945-1946 in Iranian Azerbaijan.}\)

\(^{5}\text{Level of economic and industrial development, political system, and culture were greatly varied in the Russia and Iran in the period of time examined in this study.}\)
and religious factors that were influential in the formation of integrationist Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran. Breiully’s description of nationalism as a movement seeking or exercising state power helps in understanding the assertive nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan but fails to address the integrationist nationalism that limits its claims primarily to linguistic, economic, and cultural issues. Paul Brass’s instrumentalist view of nationalism reveals the central role of the nationalist elite but does so at the expense of the emotional and cultural elements that both inspire mass support for nationalist movements and shape the views of the activist elite.

In sum, to explain the emergence and rise of assertive and integrationist Azerbaijani nationalism in Azerbaijan and in Iran since their split in 1828, a new framework is needed—one that addresses the historical and socio-cultural peculiarities of the Azerbaijani communities, and one that also relates the study of nationalism in Azerbaijan and Iran to the broader literature on nations and nationalism. I thus offer a threefold framework that draws from the theoretical and conceptual debates in the mainstream Western scholarship on nationalism to be tested against the historical and cultural processes at the local level.

4. Historical Formation of the Assertive and Integrationist Nationalism

I argue that the rise of the assertive nationalism and integrationist nationalism is a result of the interplay of three variables: secular nationalist elite, relationship between the host society and an ethnic minority, and opportunity structure. The secular nationalist elite is at
the core of nationalist mobilization and the process that leads to secession.\textsuperscript{6} The relationship between host society and ethnic minority may be colonial, religious, etc. If the result of the relationship is an ethnic grievance, then it may act as an antecedent condition\textsuperscript{7} for nationalist mobilization led by the elite. To put the three variables together, this study argues that when a nationalist movement is led by the secular nationalist elite and supplemented with ethnic grievances, opportunity structures\textsuperscript{8} are likely to broaden nationalist goals and move the minority group towards secession and independence.

\textbf{4.1. Assertive Nationalism: The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, 1918-1920}

According to the threefold framework introduced above, I argue that the main reason for, and the core actor behind, the rise of assertive nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan was the secular nationalist elite, the intelligentsia. The intelligentsia was a product of the European, Russian, and Ottoman intellectual atmosphere and the Tsarist secular education policies that had exposed the Azerbaijani elite to Enlightenment ideas such as secularism, nationalism, and democracy. This new intelligentsia, I argue, staged a “secular nationalist

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\textsuperscript{6} Here I need to emphasize the term “secular.” Prior to their exposure to ethnic nationalism, the both Azerbaijani communities equated the term “nation” with \textit{umma}, community of believers. As I will demonstrate in the forthcoming chapters, one of the challenges of ethnic nationalist mobilization was the lack of ethnic consciousness among the populace. Therefore, the secular elite’s initial task was to separate ethnic identity from religious identity.

\textsuperscript{7} Stephen Van Evera defines an antecedent condition as “A phenomenon whose presence activates or magnifies the action of a causal law or hypothesis. Without it causation operates more weakly...or not at all...” (Evera, 1994, pp. 9-10).

\textsuperscript{8} I borrow the term “opportunity structure” from Tilly and Tarrow (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). In their use, political opportunity structure “refers to features of regime and institutions (e.g., splits in the ruling class) that facilitate or inhibit a political actor’s collective action and to changes in those features” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 49)
revolution,”⁹ that is to say, a silent, non-violent revolution that enabled them to acquire leadership positions at political offices, educational institutions, and the media, etc. They thus attempted to transform, or modernize, all aspects of life, including the national identity. Meanwhile, this transformation encountered resistance from the established social institutions and groups, such as the clergy. In the north, the intelligentsia succeeded in the construction of the ethnic Azerbaijani identity and the construction of a nation out of a religious community [ummah].¹⁰ Building on the grievances accumulated during Russian colonial rule, the nationalist intelligentsia declared an independent state when a favorable opportunity structure arrived in the form of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the outbreak of World War I.

Specifically, Northern Azerbaijan was exposed to European Enlightenment ideas in the 19th century both because it was a part of the Russian and Ottoman intellectual scene and because it benefitted from the secular education initiated by the Tsarist Regime in the mid-nineteenth century. Initially, non-Russian elements, especially the Muslim populations, were excluded from the educational, political, and military professions within the Russian Empire. However, as part of the mid-nineteenth century reforms, specifically the December Rescript of 1846, government positions became open to the non-Russian Transcaucasians; the goal was to produce loyal native bureaucrats among the non-Russians. However, the aim was co-optation rather than Russification or integration (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 14). One

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⁹ I Borrow the term "secular revolution" from Christian Smith (C. Smith, 2003b) and adopt it as “secular nationalist revolution” in my study.

¹⁰ Ummah is defined as Muslim community, “A fundamental concept in Islam, expressing the essential unity and theoretical equality of Muslims from diverse cultural and geographical setting...” (Esposito, 2003, p. 327).
of the reformed areas included educational institutions, which saw the introduction of the Caucasian Educational Grant and the opening of the Transcaucasian teacher seminaries in Gori and Tbilisi (See Mişiyev, 1987). This resulted in the “rise of an Azerbaijani class of professional bureaucrats possessed of a modicum of European education, a new element in the traditional society” (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 14). As a result, in the late 19th century, “as civil service was increasingly purged of the Muslim element, the intelligentsia became dominated by the graduates of Russian universities and the Transcaucasian teacher seminaries in Gori and Tbilisi” (Swietochowski & Collins, 1999, p. 63).

In addition to students educated in the Russian universities and the new teacher seminaries, another group of Azerbaijani intellectuals involved with the rising nationalists of the late Ottoman period. This was a complicated era: three ideologies—Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turkism, and Westernism—were each in the process of emergence and in competition with one another. Pan-Turkism was the leading ideology with transnational impact. The late 20th century observed intensive interaction between emerging Azerbaijani and Turkish nationalists. The two shaped each other: while Azerbaijani Ali bey Huseyinzade was a source of inspiration for the famous Turkish nationalist poet and thinker Ziya Gokalp, Istanbul was a safe destination after the 1908 coup against Sultan Abdulhamit for those who escaped from the Soviet rule established in Azerbaijan in 1920.

In parallel with the growth of the nationalist intelligentsia, the Tsar’s discriminatory policies toward the Muslim population engendered resentment and hatred—conceptualized as “grievances” in this study—that catalyzed secessionist sentiments among the Caucasian Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijanis, when compared with Russians and Armenians,
were underrepresented in political institutions even in Baku, were paid less as workers, and were excluded from the military and political structures of the Tsarist regime. These injustices resulted in feelings of animosity against Russian rulers and were part of a larger history of discriminatory colonial rule in which Russian rulers were seen as invaders, colonists, and imperialists (See Umudlu, 2004). Grievances dramatically increased when the Russians supported the Armenians in Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes during the early twentieth century, especially during the political turmoil in 1905 and in the time period surrounding the 1917 Revolution.

In sum, the new Azerbaijani intelligentsia in the north staged a secular revolution that targeted all aspects of life, from educational institutions and policies to political and administrative issues. Secularization played a key role in redefining and transforming identity. The new secular intelligentsia dominated the decades-long debate on identity through their dominant positions in academia, the media, educational institutions, and political offices. This secular revolution gave birth to a secular nationalism. This nationalism offered a modern nation in place of older patterns of identification shaped by religion. The nationalist intelligentsia first generated a new nation and then, with the catalyzing effect of ethnic grievances, founded a nation-state. In other words, the late 19th and early 20th century observed both the birth of the Azerbaijani nation and then the birth of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918.
4.2. The Lack of Ethnic and National Consciousness: The 1920 Khiyabani Insurgency

In 1920, Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani organized an insurgency against the central government of Iran. Khiyabani was a cleric and political activist in Tabriz, the capital of the Iranian province of Azerbaijan. Khiyabani expelled state representatives from Tabriz and declared autonomy for Azadistan, the name he gave to the former province of Azerbaijan. The Khiyabani Insurgency is an understudied social movement, especially so when one considers English-language scholarly sources. While Western literature lacks a dedicated examination of the case, the ideological nature of the Soviet, Azerbaijani, and Iranian sources magnifies challenge in deciphering the puzzle of the Khiyabani Insurgency: was this a secessionist movement? If not, why did Khiyabani limit his claims to autonomy while Northern Azerbaijan declared an independent state?

This study examines the 1920 Khiyabani Insurgency and aims to answer the above questions with the help of the threefold framework. First, this study argues that the Khiyabani Insurgency was not a nationalist or secessionist movement. Rather, the movement was driven by anti-imperialist and constitutionalist sentiments. Furthermore, Azerbaijanis in Iran lacked an ethnic and nationalist consciousness at the turn of the 20th century. From the perspective of the threefold framework, the absence of this consciousness is related to the lack of a secular nationalist elite and the distinct relationship between the Azerbaijani minority and the Iranian state.

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11 As will be discussed in chapter three, there is almost no dedicated work on the movement in Western scholarship.
Employing the threefold framework, Iranian Azerbaijan lacked the secular nationalist elite to stage the secular nationalist revolution observed in Northern Azerbaijan. The absence of this elite was a result of Iran’s different trajectory of modernization and secularization. In comparison to Northern Azerbaijan’s intense interactions with Europe, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, Azerbaijanis in Iran remained more isolated from outer world. Iranians would come to know the West through the Western presence in the Iranian economy and Western demands for economic concessions. The Iranian government, under Qajar Dynasty, failed to resist the foreign presence, became increasingly financially dependent on the West, and then granted numerous economic concessions to Western companies at the expense of domestic interests. As a result, the reaction of the Iranian populace turned to anti-imperialism and resistance, rather than an espousal of Western values or perspectives.\textsuperscript{12} Iran witnessed several protests against the Qajar government from early 1890s until the rise of the Pahlavi Dynasty in 1925.

The protests were a reaction to the increased presence of foreigners—imperialist powers—in Iran. In the meantime, the involvement of clergy magnified the scope, audience and influence of these rebellions on the Iranian state. The clergy were not motivated by economic concerns alone. For the Iranian clerics, Western ideas such as secularism were heretical and irreligious; these new ideas also posed a threat to the power of the clergy. Thus the clergy joined the front lines in the struggle against Western ideas and material presence in Iran. As a result, in comparison to Northern Azerbaijan, Iran experienced

\textsuperscript{12} The Iranian intelligentsia gradually embraced Western ideas and values towards the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and especially during the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. However, the Iranian people, including Azerbaijanis, remained resistant to these ideas not only out of anti-imperialist sentiments, but also due to religious conservatism. This will be further discussed in Chapters three and four.
secularization and Westernization much later. In fact, secularization did not come to Iran until the reign of Shah Reza Pahlavi in the third decade of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Returning to the threefold framework, the relationship between the Southern Azerbaijanis and the Iranian state was very different from the colonial relationship between Northern Azerbaijan and the Russian Empire. With respect to ethnic grievances, Iranian Azerbaijanis had a very different experience, especially prior to 1925. Until the rise of Reza Shah, Azerbaijanis in Iran had occupied leadership roles, including both religious and political positions. The leaders of the Safavid Empire and the Qajar Dynasty were of Turkish Azerbaijani origin. Indeed, Shah Ismail (1487-1524), founder of the Safavids, forcefully converted subjects of the Safavid empire to a Shi’a sect (See Abisaab, 2015). Turkish Azerbaijani dominance and affiliation with Shi’a identity in the military and political bureaucracies continued during the Qajar dynasty (İpek, 2012, p. 269). It is not surprising that even Northern Azerbaijanim consider the Safavids as an Azerbaijani state (Əfəndiyev, 2007), and view Iran as a “homeland of Turks” (Gökdağ & Heyet, 2004, p. 51). In short, there was little evidence of ethnic grievances prior to 1925, when Reza Shah founded modern Iran and embarked on a new era of Persian nationalism. Consequently, prior to 1925, Azerbaijanis in Iran not only lacked an ethnic and national consciousness, but they also considered Iran to be their homeland and were strongly affiliated with Iranian religious institutions.

In examining the development of the Khiyabani Insurgency, this study argues that Azerbaijanis in Iran lacked an ethnic nationalist consciousness in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century; this was related to the lack of a secular nationalist elite and the relatively harmonious
relationship between the Azerbaijani minority and the Iranian state. As a result, the 1920 Khiyabani Insurgency was not a demonstration of Azerbaijani nationalist sentiments. Rather, it was a struggle for Iranian independence, targeting both foreign powers and their collaborator in Tehran, the central government of Iran.


The third case examined in this study is the 1945-1946 Pishevari Movement in Iranian Azerbaijan. Briefly, Seyyid Ja'far Pishevari founded the Azerbaijan Democrat Party (ADP), gathered Azerbaijani intelligentsia from diverse backgrounds under the auspices of the party, and then declared autonomy for the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in 1945. The puzzle in this movement is that while the ADP was successful in garnering considerable popular support for its autonomy movement, once rumors spread regarding Azerbaijan's secession from Iran, the people of Iranian Azerbaijan became “apprehensive,” withdrew their support, and even welcomed the return of the Iranian Army to the province at the expense of provincial autonomy (Shaffer, 2002, pp. 22, 56). Why did Iranian Azerbaijanis support the ADP initially, and why were they apprehensive about secession from Iran?

First, this study classifies the Pishevari Movement as a case of integrationist nationalism. Azerbaijanis in Iran had sharpened their sense of ethnic identity by the mid-twentieth century. The two-and-half decades following the Khiyabani Insurgency witnessed a transformation in the nationalist sentiments of the Azerbaijani minority in Iran. However, Iranian Azerbaijanis also maintained their historical and religious bonds with Iranian
society. Thus, while Iranian Azerbaijanis approved of the ADP’s promises to help the region recover from twenty years of neglect by the central government, they wanted this recovery to happen within the borders of Iran.

Second, this study explains the transformation in Azerbaijani nationalism, from an absence of nationalism to integrationist nationalism, using the threefold explanation. In short, state policies regarding the Azerbaijani minority in Iran changed dramatically after the establishment of Reza Shah Pahlavi’s regime in Iran in 1925; these policy changes fundamentally altered the relationship between the center and the province. Systematic discrimination and repression created ethnic grievances. The occupation of Iranian Azerbaijan by Soviet troops in 1941 provided opportunities for the Azerbaijani intelligentsia to flourish. Iranian Azerbaijanis were once again able to use their native language in schools, business, local government affairs, and in the press. Once the Soviet Politburo, under the leadership of Stalin, decided to create and support a separatist movement in the province, Iranian Azerbaijan now had the elite and the ethnic grievances. The following paragraphs explore the process in more detail.

In considering the development of integrationist nationalism, it is important note that the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925 inaugurated a new era for Azerbaijanis in Iran.\textsuperscript{13} Prior to the Pahlavi dynasty, Iran had a weak central state apparatus with limited reach beyond capital and was dependent on loans from foreign companies for its survival. After taking control of the state via a military coup in 1921, Reza Khan declared

\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, the repressive policies of Shah Reza Pahlavi had repercussions for all other ethnic and religious groups as well. However, due to its social and political position during the reigns of the Safavids and Qajars, the province of Azerbaijan, it could be argued, was influenced more than other groups. This will be elaborated in more detail in chapter four.
himself the new king of Iran in 1925; he then launched an intense project of state- and army-building. Once he had consolidated his power, Reza Shah used the newly powerful state and army to redesign Iranian society and refashion Persian nationalism. Shah Pahlavi remained in power until 1941; these years marked the harshest repression that Azerbaijanis had ever experienced in their history. In his efforts to build an Iranian nation, Reza Shah used the state and military to homogenize Iranian society, regardless of the ethnic and religious diversity within the country. The new regime prohibited the use of Azerbaijani language in schools, courts, and the press. Moreover, new economy policies ended Azerbaijan’s central role in the Iranian economy. As a result, when the Shah abdicated in 1941, he left behind a ruined regional economy and a host of ethnic grievances.

In the meantime, the two decades of repressive and discriminatory rule in Iran had triggered the development of a separate Azerbaijani identity in Iran. Extreme restrictions on the use of the native Azeri language sharpened Azerbaijani identity separate from Iranian and Persian identities.

Iran was occupied by the Allied forces in 1941; the northern part of the country, remained under Soviet occupation for five years. The years of Soviet control witnessed a flowering of Azerbaijani identity and nationalism, both of which had been harshly suppressed by the Shah’s regime. Moreover, following a few years of passive nationalist propaganda blended with communist propaganda, the Politburo decided to launch a secret

14 Reza Pahlavi was replaced by his son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. However, it took several years for the new Shah to establish his control over the country. Indeed, during his first five years as king, Iran remained under occupation by the Allies, which greatly restrained the new shah’s territorial control.
Azerbaijani separatist movement in Iran.\textsuperscript{15} As a result, with the stealth backing of the Soviet Union, Seyyid Ja'far Pishevari founded the Azerbaijan Democrat Party (ADP) in 1945, built support among the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, and launched an intense nationalist mobilization in Iranian Azerbaijan.

The ADP’s propaganda focused on protecting the ethnic, cultural and linguistic rights of the Azerbaijani people. The ADP also promised to help the province recover from the central government’s neglect and repression. In addition, the new government promised to revitalize the province’s economy. Azerbaijan had suffered a dramatic economic decline during the Shah’s reign; this was alleged to be intentional revenge of the province’s support for the earlier the Khiyabani Insurgency (See Shaffer, 2002, p. 56). Therefore, despite the concerns of the populace regarding the political backgrounds of the ADP leaders,\textsuperscript{16} people from all segments of society supported the autonomous government. In its declaration of autonomy, the new government promised to remain committed to the territorial integrity of Iran. Thus, support of the majority of the elite who wrote this declaration was both pragmatic and built on a commitment to remaining within Iranian borders.

Iranian Azerbaijanis had maintained their historical and religious affiliation with Iranian society despite the repression at the hands of the state. Indeed, Iranian Azerbaijanis blamed the Shah for their woes. Indeed, many ethnic and religious groups suffered under

\textsuperscript{15} Soviet involvement behind the nationalist movement in Azerbaijan in 1945-1946 has been proven by the release of the secret documents from the Soviet archives by the Woodrow Wilson Center in 1997. Chapter four will examine the Azerbaijani movement in 1945-1945 in light of these new documents.

\textsuperscript{16} The majority of the ADP leadership was affiliated with the leftist Tudeh Party of Iran [People's Party of Iran].
the Shah. Thus, as tensions grew between the ADP and Tehran and as the ADP failed to deliver on its promises of long-term economic development and political stability, the people withdrew their support for the ADP. One of the influential factors in this shift was the populace’s fear of joining Soviet Socialist Azerbaijan, in other words, becoming part of a communist regime.\footnote{Communism was equated with atheism and immorality, and was thus demonized by the clergy. In addition, the central government of Iran, allied with the West, also promoted anti-communist propaganda. Therefore, the religious and conservative people were strongly opposed both to rapprochement with the Soviet Union and to leftist political parties in Iran.} The rise and fall of the ADP is explored in chapter four.

5. Methodology

The logic of my comparison of the two cases is based on Mill’s method of agreement and difference (Mill, 1851). The method of difference looks for the causes of different results in similar cases, while the method of agreement compares similar results in different cases. My cases relate to each other according to the method of difference. As described above, the two Azerbaijani societies were once similar—joined together in the same political unit—but found their way to two very different results in terms of their attitudes toward independent statehood. The initial condition of the two cases can also be regarded as a most similar systems situation: these are “systems as similar as possible with respect to as many features as possible [that] constitute the optimal samples for comparative inquiry” (Przeworski & Teune, 1970, p. 32). Of course the “absolute elimination of adventitious elements,” is impossible, as “one can never be even approximately certain that two societies agree or differ in all aspects save one” (Durkheim, Solovay, Mueller, & Catlin, 1938, pp. 129-
There are, indeed, inherent and potential difficulties in making effective use of Mill’s method in social phenomena; some of these are even acknowledged by Mill himself (See George & Bennett, 2005, pp. 153-160; Mill, 1851). Fully aware of the challenges and difficulties associated with the comparative method (Lijphart, 1971, 1975), I also employ process-tracing as “an essential supplement to all forms of case comparisons to reduce the dangers of false positives and false negatives” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 159).

Process-tracing is a method that “attempts to identify the intervening causal process—the causal chain and causal mechanisms—between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 208). In other words, process-tracing “can identify single or different parts to an outcome, point out variables that were otherwise left out in the initial comparison of cases, check for spuriousness, and permit causal inference on the basis of a few cases or even a single case” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 215). My aim in using process-tracing is to overcome the challenges associated with linking the events and variables that played a significant role in negotiating secularization and nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan.

My research is designed according to George and Bennett’s “method of structured, focused comparison” (George & Bennett, 2005). The method is designed in such a way that the researcher is expected to ask “general questions that reflect the research objective and . . . these questions are asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison and cumulation of the findings of the cases possible” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 67). The method is “focused” in that it deals only with certain aspects of the cases under examination (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 67).
My analysis of the two cases also benefits from the method of comparative historical analysis, a method which is “defined by a concern with causal analysis, an emphasis on process over time, and the use of systematic and contextualized comparison” (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Comparative historical analysis shares basic features with the logic of process-tracing (Elman & Elman, 2001; George & Bennett, 2005; Roberts, 1996). Thus in this study, I explain the causes and historical roots of Azerbaijani nationalism in two Azerbaijani communities. Using process tracing, I decipher the causal mechanisms, the aptly named causal chains, between my dependent and independent variable. My explanation prioritizes the “secular nationalist elite” in the process of identity formation also acknowledges the different contexts of the two Azerbaijani communities and recognizes the limiting effect of the Iranian religious establishment.

Studying nationalism and minorities in Azerbaijan, and especially in Iran, is challenging. One of the major difficulties stems from the limited amount of available scholarly resources. The two cases are considerably understudied issues in English-speaking academia. It is difficult to access data due to the official policies and unofficial constraints of the relevant governments. Another obstacle may be language limitations of researchers. In addition, public opinion and survey data is not available on nationalist attitudes in each region. However, I have overcome some of these difficulties. Given the limited number of scholarly works in English, this study is primarily built on works written in Azerbaijani that were published in the Soviet Union and in the Republic of Azerbaijan after its independence in 1991. In addition, I also use primary and secondary sources published in Iran and Turkey. The Soviet literature is ideologically biased; the studies published in Turkey, Iran, and Azerbaijan, with few exceptions, carry the bias of a
nationalistic spirit, as they are usually authored by Turkish or Iranian nationalists. These beliefs are a natural result of the nationalist attitude— the very subject of this study. On the other hand, the tone of these works also poses a challenge for the careful scholar who aims to differentiate reality from the perceptions of the nationalists. With careful examination, I introduce and incorporate these studies into English-speaking academia, offering a clear context for these works. This is one of the contributions of this study. Regarding the absence of public opinion data, I mainly rely on elite opinions; these are present in interviews, news stories, books, journal articles, archival documents, reports, political speeches, party platforms, and other documents. These sources reflect my theoretical approach, which prioritizes the role of the elites in nationalist movements.

6. The Organization of the Chapters

This study examines the divergence in the nationalist attitudes of the two Azerbaijani communities after their split in 1828. This study first introduces a new comparative conceptualization of nationalism that differentiates assertive nationalism from integrationist nationalism as reflected in attitudes toward independence and secessionism; both of these forms of nationalism differ from a condition in which an ethnic and nationalist consciousness is absent. Second, this study explains divergence in nationalist attitudes using the threefold explanation introduced in this chapter. More specifically, this study argues that the core of the nationalist mobilization is the secular nationalist elite. In addition to the elite, two other factors play a crucial role in nationalist mobilization: the relationship between the minority group and the host state and society, and the
opportunity structures. This study examines three historical episodes in Northern and the Southern Azerbaijan that represent the three types of nationalist behavior introduced above.

Chapter two focuses on Northern Azerbaijan, classifying the 1918 declaration of the independent Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan as a manifestation of assertive nationalism. Using the threefold framework, chapter two traces the roots of the secular nationalist elite and their secular nationalist revolution. The chapter also demonstrates that the success of the nationalist elite was strongly tied to the existence of ethnic grievances, which were the result of Russian colonial rule, and opportunity structures, which were the Russian Revolution in 1917 and World War I.

Chapter three examines the 1920 Khiyabani Insurgency in Iranian Azerbaijan. Building upon the comparative conceptualization of nationalism introduced above, chapter three argues that Azerbaijanis in Iran lacked an ethnic and nationalist consciousness; the Khiyabani Insurgency in 1920 was thus motivated by constitutionalist and anti-imperialist sentiments rather than secessionist desires. Using the threefold framework, chapter three demonstrates that the lack of an ethnic and nationalist consciousness in Iranian Azerbaijan and in the Khiyabani Insurgency resulted both from the absence of a secular nationalist elite and from the distinct relationship between the Azerbaijani minority and the Iranian state.

The fourth chapter concentrates on the autonomy movement in Iranian Azerbaijan in 1945-1946 as an exemplar the integrationist nationalism, explaining the transformation in Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran with the threefold framework. Within this framework,
chapter four examines the relationship between the new Iranian state under the reign of
Shah Reza Pahlavi and Iranian Azerbaijan, a relationship which created many ethnic
grievances on the part of the latter; the contributions of the Soviet Union to the
development of the secular nationalist elite in Azerbaijan; and the historical and religious
bonds between the Azerbaijani community and Iranian society, which limited Azerbaijani
claims to autonomy, rather than secessionism or independence.

This empirical examination of Azerbaijani nationalism in Northern and Southern
Azerbaijan shows the theoretical link between secularism and nationalist secessionism and
traces key intervening variables and causal mechanisms.
Chapter Two:
The Emergence of Assertive Azerbaijani Nationalism: The Establishment of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, 1918

The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, founded on 28 May 1918, was the first modern democratic republic in the Muslim world. It was also the first state of the emergent Azerbaijani nation, who had been known as “Tatars” or “Caucasian Muslims.” Though the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (DRA) lasted less than two years, ending with Soviet occupation in 1920, its establishment was noteworthy. Examining the dynamics behind the construction of the Azerbaijani identity, nation, and state has useful empirical and theoretical contributions for understanding nation building and state building in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and in Muslim societies in general.

The literature examining the origins of nations and nationalism has offered multifarious explanations regarding the origins of nations and the rise of nationalism. There are several notable works that link the emergence of nationalism to modernization, in particular to the “uneven development” of the world capitalist system (Nairn, 1981a), the rise of the nation-state (Breuilly, 1985), or industrialization (Gellner, 1983). Other scholars consider nations to be “an invention” (E. J. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 1) and “imagined” (Anderson, 1983).

In explaining the rise of Azerbaijani nationalism, this paper is both inspired by and departs from Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. To be more specific, Anderson considers
nationality and nationalism as “cultural artifacts of a particular time.” According to Anderson, nations and nationalism emerged towards the end of 18th century as a result of the “spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces”: a change in the conception of time, the decline of religious communities, and the expansion of the power and realm of “the secular” that accompanied fading dynastic realms (Anderson, 1983, pp. 9-31). Likewise, this paper argues that the rise of Azerbaijani nationalism was a result of the secularization process in Azerbaijan. However, contrary to Anderson’s structuralism, this paper adopts a more agency-centered approach to secularization, while remaining cognizant of important structural factors.

To be more specific, this paper argues that the key factor behind the emergence and rise of Azerbaijani nationalism and the Azerbaijani state was the secular nationalist Azerbaijani elite. The elite’s nationalist endeavor found fertile ground because of two key conditions: colonial grievances and an opportunity structure that made nationalist mobilization possible. Colonial “grievances”18 legitimized the elite’s nationalist struggle and drew popular support to their cause. The opportunity structures19 provided favorable conditions for the promotion of nationalist ideas and practices, culminating in the establishment of an independent state. The absence of these conditions might have affected the strength of the nationalist struggle, but absent the nationalist elite, there would have

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18The term “grievance” is conceptually equated with “relative deprivation” (Shaykhutdinov & Bragg, 2011, p. 143), which is built on Gurr’s argument that the “greater the frustration, the greater the quantity of aggression against the source of frustration” (Gurr, 1970).

19The term is defined as “features of regime and institutions...that facilitate or inhibit a political actor’s collective action and to changes in those features” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 49).
been no movement from “grievance” and “opportunity” toward purposeful nation- and state-building.

The founders of Azerbaijani nationalism and the Azerbaijani state were the secular nationalist elite, the intelligentsia\textsuperscript{20}—Azerbaijani thinkers and writers who had studied at Russian, Ottoman, and European universities where they were exposed to the ideas of nationalism, secularism, and democracy. They were the children of the age of nationalism and sovereignty “in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” and “nations dream of being free” (Anderson, 1983, p. 7).

The intelligentsia staged a “secular nationalist revolution.”\textsuperscript{21} Upon returning home from abroad, they acquired leadership positions in politics, in educational institutions, and in the media. They also founded newspapers, magazines, and new schools with secular education; their goal was to modernize traditional Azerbaijani society. The core focus of this paper is the intelligentsia’s role in constructing a new nation from a traditional society and a religious ummah, despite the resistance of religious and conservative forces. In the background, the repressive Russian regime provided ample grievances that served to

\textsuperscript{20} The term was originally used to describe the group of 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Russian critical thinkers and writers ‘who derided the traditional Russian society and sought to modernize it through “higher” education’ (C. Smith, 2003a, p. 40).

\textsuperscript{21} I borrow the term ‘secular revolution’ from Christian Smith (C. Smith, 2003b) and employ his approach to secularization. Smith rejects the proposition that the process of secularization is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and argues that the declining authority of religion in American public life was a result of an intentional project of secular intellectual elites—scientists, academics, and literary intellectuals—who were seeking to gain control of social institutions and increase their own cultural authority. Critical of the framing of secularization as an abstract and agentless process in traditional secularization theory, Smith moves ‘agency, interests, power, resources, mobilization, strategy, and conflict to the foreground’ (C. Smith, 2003b, p. vii).
increase popular support for the new nationalist project, while the emergent opportunity structures facilitated the establishment of the independent state.

The rise of nationalism and the establishment of the state in Azerbaijan can be analyzed in three stages. The first stage was the emergence of the secular nationalist elite. The second stage was the introduction and popularization of the secular definition of “nation” by the intelligentsia, differentiating this term from the religious ummah; this conceptual division contributed to the rise of national awareness. The third stage was the moment of “political action,” when the secular elite utilized the opportunity structure provided by World War One—and a weakened and overthrown Russian government—to further their nationalist claims and found their independent state in 1918.

1. Colonial Rule and Accumulated Grievances

The Russian invasion of the Southern Caucasus took several decades, reaching its ultimate borders with the Treaty of Turkmanchay between Russia and Qajar Iran in 1828. The treaty was a turning point in the history of Azerbaijan—dividing the land and people of Azerbaijan into two pieces along the Aras River. Thus, for the first time, the Azerbaijani Turks passed under the rule of a European power, leaving many more of their co-ethnics behind within the borders of Iran.

Russians did not possess the cadres and institutions to rule the new lands. The colonial regime had to introduce new social and political reforms in order to integrate the new territory with the Russian mainland; these changes often resulted in Azerbaijani's
feeling alienated from and aggrieved by their new colonial overlords (See Qurbanov, 2006, p. 45; Umudlu, 2004).

The Russian regime introduced the 1849 Rescripts, which opened Russian universities to non-Russians with the purpose of preparing future government workers and the merchant class for expanding trade and industry in the Caucasus. In addition, seminaries opened in the following years to educate native instructors for the local elementary schools, with the awareness that “the population only trusts teachers from their own milieu” (Mostashari, 2006, p. 62). Interestingly, graduates of these schools did more than just teach at primary schools. They became the individuals who transformed Azerbaijani society.

The Russian Emancipation Reforms of the early 1860s proceeded slowly, if at all, in the region. The colonial regime blamed the “backward” native people for the delay (Hasanova & Aliyeva, 2010, p. 115). Land reform arrived in 1870, but there was no real progress reported as late as 1913, mainly due to the lack of purchasing power and credit opportunities (Mostashari, 2006, p. 69). The first city duma in Baku came into being only in 1878; other cities had to wait two more decades. Moreover there were strict limitations on native representation.22 The military reforms of 1874 were never fully applied among non-Russians, as “it was not wise to train Muslims in the use of firearms, given that their political loyalties were questionable” (Cited in Mostashari, 2006, pp. 70-71).

22The native people could consist only half of the duma, and one-third of it after 1892 (Cited in Swietochowski, 1985, p. 15).
Economically, Baku had become the main oil supplier to the Russian empire, but the benefits were not felt at home. Baku oil revenues increased fourfold from 1877 to 1882, and the increase was tenfold from 1883 to 1900, which was accompanied with population increases at more than ten times (Muradaliyeva & Əziz, 2010, pp. 127, 129). Contrary to the magnificent buildings in the city center, the grimy suburbs hosted worker bunkhouses, sometimes located adjacent to the oil wells (Hüseynov, 2007, p. 58). Besides inhumane working conditions, Azerbaijani oil workers were poorly paid in comparison to the Russian and Armenian workers, and Azerbaijani businessmen were under-represented in the Baku Council of Oil Industrialists and the Baku Military-Industry Committee (Əzizov, 1997, p. 74). Approximately half of Baku businesses were Azerbaijani, but none were included in the Baku stock market committee (Əzizov, 1997, p. 74).

All in all, by the end of the 19th century, Azerbaijan became an established periphery of the Russian empire. However, the Tsarist regime systematically discriminated against the non-Russians, excluding them from economic and political institutions. Russian rule was rapidly accruing grievances among the Azerbaijani people, driving them closer to the struggle of the secular nationalist elite (Baykara, 1975, p. 82). This stir provided legitimacy and generated popular support to the emergent nationalist sentiments raised by the secular nationalist elite.
2. Roots of the Azerbaijani Intelligentsia

The roots of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia can be traced back to two groups from the first half of the 19th century. The first group, the Russian école, consisted of the graduates of Russian universities and schools. This group also included graduates from the local teacher seminaries that were opened after the Russian conquest in order to both prepare cadres for the regime and to promote Russification at the expense of Iranian influence (Baykara, 1966, p. 106). The second group, the Turkish école, consisted of graduates from Turkish universities. Additionally, this group also contained activists who were influenced by Turkish nationalism, Turkchuluk or Pan-Turkism. Education abroad exposed these students to Western ideas of nationalism, secularism, and democracy. Yet, the intellectual heritage was not identical: students who had studied at Russian schools and universities were equipped with revolutionary ideas and nurtured a “particularistic” nationalism, Azerbaijanism, while students who had studied Turkish schools became proponents of a “trans-border” Turkish nationalism, Pan-Turkism.

2.1. Azerbaijanism

The most prominent representative of the first generation of intelligentsia was M.F. Akhundzada (also Akhundov), initially a student of religious sciences, but later an “enemy” of the “pharisaic and fraudulent clerics”(Мустафаев, 1967, pp. 10-11). He began his tenure in Tblisi as an interpreter of Eastern languages for the Tsarist administration. There, he
produced the first examples of modern Azerbaijani satirical comedies and was renowned as the “Tatar Molière” by European and Russian writers (Tahirov & Əfərəliyeva, 2012, p. 29). As a secular materialist philosopher, he targeted superstitions and ignorance and preached education (See Мәҳәмәдәдә, 1971). Akhundzada attempted to open the first Teachers Seminary in Azerbaijan; this was only approved by Russian authorities in 1879, a year after his death (Süleymanlı, 2006, p. 62).

Akhundzada’s path was followed primarily by the graduates of the Russian schools and universities. Notably, the first Azerbaijani newspaper Akinchi [Peasant] appeared in 1875. It was published by H. Zardabi, a graduate of the Tiflis gymnasium and Moscow University; he had met Russian intellectuals and was exposed to progressive ideas during his time in Russia. Zardabi considered literacy and education as the key means to enlighten his society. He attempted to further these goals by publishing a newspaper in the “mother tongue.” Printing in the local language was, to Zardabi, an essential element of nationhood (Əkinçi. 1875-1877, 2005, pp. 197, 205). Akinchi was closed in 1877 with the start of the Russo-Ottoman war.

The press was the primary means of the rising intelligentsia, thus the closure of Akinchi gave way to several other newspapers and magazines. Kashkul [Dervish Bowl] continued the mission of Akinchi. Kashkul was strongly critical of religious fundamentalism and superstition and blamed the clergy for the illiteracy and backwardness of the society (Aşırli, 2009, p. 36). The editor of the journal was a strong supporter of the new generation of intelligentsia, having been educated at one of the newly established teacher seminaries and having embraced his school’s view of education as the means to enlighten society.
Kashkul had soon surpassed the Akinchi and became the foremost paper for the intelligentsia. It was also first newspaper to use “nation” and “religion” separately in a satirical piece under the pseudonym “Azerbaijan” (Kashkul, no. 15, 1890), an early sign of Azerbaijanism. Those who “want to perpetuate their nation,” wrote Kashkul, “have to preserve their language and teach it to their children” (Kashkul, no: 60, 1889). However, the newspaper did not live long. The Censor Committee of the Tsarist regime initially thwarted it and then eventually closed it in 1891 (Zeinalov, 1978, pp. 36-37). No other newspaper in the native language was allowed until 1904.

During the absence of an Azerbaijani language press, the intelligentsia continued their efforts via contributions to Russian newspapers, such as Kaspiy. Kaspiy was the paper of preference for Russian liberals; it became famous as “Muslim Kaspiy” after H.Z. Taghiyev, a rich Azerbaijani businessman, purchased it in 1897 (Yaqublu, 2011, pp. 24-25). Under the new ownership and with its up and coming writers, Kaspiy signaled and mirrored the rising influence of Turkism in Azerbaijan.

2.2. The Rise of Turkism

The second nationalist school of thought in Azerbaijan was Pan-Turkism, which had originated in the Ottoman Empire. Istanbul was becoming a center of Turkish nationalism, led by the “Young Turks”; it had become a source of inspiration for a group of Azerbaijani intellectuals, such as Ali Bay Huseynzada, Ahmad Aghaoglu, and Mammad Amin
Rasulzada. These nationalist elite thinkers brought the ideals of Pan-Turkism to Azerbaijan, thereby shaping the course of state-building and nation-building.

No discussion of Pan-Turkism is complete without recognizing the role of Ismail Gaspirali (also Gasprinsky). Gaspirali, founded the newspaper Tarjuman in 1883, using it to promote his nationalist program of “Unity in Language, Thought, and Action” (See Kırımer, 1934). His most important contribution was the Usul-i Jadid [New Method] Schools. In addition to traditional religious subjects, these schools taught modern sciences and Turkish—an important innovation of these schools was the secularization of education (Zenkovsky, 1960, p. 34). Though the Usul-i Jadid program soon encountered resistance from the Kadimists, the traditionalist forces in society, more than 5,000 Tatar and a number of other Muslim schools had adopted this curriculum by 1914 (Zenkovsky, 1960, p. 35).

Azerbaijan was timely in adopting these modern schools with secular education. S.A. Shirvani, a student of Zardabi and an active contributor to the Akinhci, opened one of the first schools with the new secular curriculum as early as 1874. Two other notable secular schools were Akhtar, opened 1892, and Tarbiya, opened in 1894 by M.T. Sidqi in Nakhchevan (Məmmədov, 1996, p. 35).

Some of the Azerbaijani nationalists, such as Ali Bay Huseynzada, were early contributors to the development of Turkism in Istanbul. Huseynzada moved to Istanbul, the “homeland of Turks” (See Turan, 2008), and became an active member of clandestine nationalist organizations, where he met and inspired the famous Turkish nationalist ideologue Ziya Gokalp (A. H. Bayat, 1992, pp. 17-21). These organizations remained underground until the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, which established Turkism as the
official ideology of the Ottoman Empire.

Another prominent member of the Istanbul school was Ahmad Aghaoghlu (also Aghayev). During the early years of his time at the Collège de France in Paris, he identified himself as an Iranian and acted as an apostle of Shi’ite Islam (Sakal, 1999, p. 91). While still in Paris, he met leading members of the Young Turks. After a few years, Aghaoghlu completed his “move away from denominationalism” and internalized the more universal Turkism (Sakal, 1999, p. 93). During the revolutionary upheavals in Russia in 1905, Aghaoghlu emerged as a forerunner of Turkish nationalism in Azerbaijan, whose self-transformation symbolized the undergoing change from ummah to a “nation” (Sakal, 1999, p. 93).

The Azerbaijani intelligentsia were increasing towards the end of the 19th century as educational opportunities at home and abroad expanded, while Russia was facing mounting revolutionary pressure. The threat of impending revolution would eventually force the Tsarist regime to grant temporary concessions, creating a short period of opportunity for the Azerbaijani intelligentsia.

3. The 1905 Revolution and the Nationalist Awakening in Azerbaijan

The first decade of the 20th century was a turning point for nationalist mobilization in Azerbaijan. Specifically, the Tsar had reluctantly issued the October Manifesto, introducing civil and political liberties as a way to assuage revolutionary sentiments. This permissive environment, though it lasted but eighteen months, gave the flourishing Azerbaijani
intelligentsia an opportunity to articulate their nationalist views openly. In this period, the two nationalist movements, Azerbaijanism and Turkism, gathered around revolutionary organizations, newspapers and magazines, were diverging and becoming more tangible. Now the proponents of the former were known as *Azarijilar* and the proponents of the latter as *Turkchular*.

*The Azarijilar* emphasized the particular culture and characteristics of Azerbaijani Turks. They were concerned with the backwardness of the people, blaming tradition, religious institutions, and clergy as the primary cause of social ills. The *Azarijilar* had no overarching nationalist goals, but mainly sought to improve literacy and social conditions. They advocated democratic freedoms and equality for all of the subjects of the Russian Empire.

The *Molla Nasraddin* magazine, founded in 1906, became the mouthpiece of the *Azarijilar* after the closure of the *Sharq-i Rus* newspaper. The magazine was launched with the mission of “destroying and replacing the Eastern darkness with European civilization” (*Molla Nasraddin*, No: 40, 1926). The paper was strictly committed to using simple native language that could be understood by everyone. The editor of *Mola Nasraddin*, J.M. Quluzada, was known for his strong anti-clerical views: he explicitly called Islam an obstacle to world peace, suggested abandoning the sayings and practices of clerics and the Qur’an, and proposed adopting the views of Darwin and Lamarck (Җәсыәнов, 1967, pp. 49-50). Quluzada's staff included many talented satirists who helped promote these views. It is no wonder, then, that the magazine generated strong conservative reactions and had to
publish its third issue in secret. Though censors attempted to close it, the magazine survived and remained a mainstay of the Azarijilar until 1931 (ңусејнов, 1986).

Contrary to the stress on unique Azerbaijani experiences and societal improvement, the Turkchular stressed a trans-border romantic Turkism. Ali bay Huseynzada was the first to introduce Turkism to Azerbaijan. In 1905, shortly after his return from Turkey, Huseynzada, along with Ahmad Aghaoglu, founded the newspaper Hayat [Life] (Zenkovsky, 1960, p. 35). Although the newspaper initially had a religious orientation, Huseynzada considered Hayat as the inheritor of the newspaper Tajuman and used it to promote his Turkist views (Aştirli, 2009, pp. 61, 66). Aghaoglu left Hayat in 1905 to found the newspaper Irshad, which primarily focused on sectarian clashes and denominational fragmentation between Sunnis and Shi’as; the newspaper called for unity along national lines in response to these conflicts (Aştirli, 2009, p. 74). In 1906, Huseynzada oversaw the transition of Hayat to Fuyuzzat. This name change marked the shift from a religious orientation to a romantic Turkism, and Fuyuzzat became the mouthpiece of Pan-Turkism in Azerbaijan. Fuyuzzat's call for the unification of all Caucasian Turks under the Ottoman Empire (Fuyuzzat, 20, 1907) further strained relations with the Azarijilar.

3.1. Debate on Language and Identity

The question of “who are we?” divided the Azarijilar and the Turkchular though both agreed that a literary language was needed, and that ethnic identity was separate from religious identity. While the former were supportive of local Azerbaijani dialect, the latter
leaned toward Ottoman Turkish. One prioritized local culture and practices; the other had overarching nationalist goals, such as uniting all Turks.

In fact, the debate about language had begun decades earlier, on the pages of the Akinchi and Kashkul newspapers. A significant contribution to this discussion was the Kashkul piece “How to Call Transcaucasian Muslims?” by M. Shakhtakhtli. In this opinion piece, Shakhtakhtli criticized the Tsarist administration’s use of the terms “Muslim” or “Transcaucasian Tatar” and the use of the term “Caucasian Turks” by “bourgeoisie intellectuals” (Мишиев, 1987, p. 159). Instead, he suggested “Azarbaijanli” [Azerbaijani] as an identity and Azarbaycan Dili [Azerbaijani language] as the name of the language. Shakhtakhtli continued his argument on the very first page of the Sharq-i Rus newspaper in 1891. Not surprisingly, the Turkchular accused him of a particularistic nationalism that served the interests of Russia.

On the other side, the Turkists like Huseynzada, Ahmat Kamal, Abdullah Cevdet, and the Crimean Tatar Ayvazov, all gathered around the newspaper Fuyuzzat, proposed Ottoman Turkish as a common literary language. In fact, Ottoman Turkish was already the language of publication of the magazine. However, Ottoman Turkish had many Perso-Arabic words and expressions, and ordinary people could not easily understand it. Even Ismail Gaspirali recommended that Huseynzada simplify the magazine’s language (Toker, 2004, p. 35). Molla Nasraddin, the Azerijilar publication, considered the adoption of Ottoman Turkish to be imposing a complex language for nationalist purposes. Instead, the magazine and insisted on a “mother tongue” in which everyone could easily communicate (Molla Nasraddin, No; 11, 1906).
In the meantime, another movement, the *Yeni Lisan* [New Language], was on the rise in Turkey. This group offered a new solution to the linguistic fracas by attempting to purge Ottoman Turkish of alien words (See Öksüz, 1995). The movement had the support of the Turkish state and had also secured the support of the prominent Azerbaijani nationalist figure, Mammad Amin Rasulzada. Rasulzada disapproved of the two extremes and advocated simplifying Turkish (Hesenli, 2008, p. 33). He joined the discussion on national identity in his series of articles “National Vitality” published in *Dirilik* [Vitality] in 1913. In these articles, he boldly called for the separation of the *ummah* from the nation, and argued for defining vitality as national vitality rather than individual vitality (Hesenli, 2008, p. 33).

The New Language endeavor was not successful in convincing the Azarijilar, since, for them, Turkish was Arabicized in Istanbul more than anywhere else (*Molla Nasraddin*, No: 32, 1909). Accordingly, only thirty percent of the new purified Turkish consisted of original Turkish words, while Azerbaijani relied far more substantially on local sources (*İkbal*, No: 44, 1912). The Azarijilar’s reaction reached its height with F. Kocharli’s article “Mother Tongue,” in which he blamed Huseynzada for the confusion about language, warned against new Ottoman imperialism, and considered the adoption of a purified Ottoman Turkish as to be “mimicry [equivalent to] national treason” (*Molla Nasraddin*, No: 23, 1913).

The debate on national identity and language continued. Ultimately, a new synthesis was in the making with the establishment of the Musavat Party in 1911, the rise of which signaled a transition to “political action,” the third stage in the Azerbaijani nationalism.
4. Towards Political Action: The Emergence of the Musavat Party

After consolidating power, the Russian state, under the premiership of Pyotr Stolypin, retreated from the 1905 October Manifesto and repressed the revolutionary movements in Russia. Though this repression provided a measure of security to the Russian state in the short-term, it had had long-term repercussions for the government and opposition forces, including ethnic minorities. The growing Azerbaijani intelligentsia was losing hope in their dream of free and equal treatment by the Russian regime. Dashed hopes gave way to an ever-increasing list of grievances; this quickened detachment from Russia in favor of the growing nationalist movement.

In Azerbaijan, one of the important side effects of the strengthened Russian state was the nationalist activists' switch from cultural activism to political struggle. However, in response to the government pressure, the nationalist mobilization had gone underground. Grievances legitimized the nationalist struggle and increased its popular support. Many Azerbaijanis abandoned the revolutionary movements, which were focused on toppling the Russian state, and switched their support to the clandestine religious and nationalist movements. In this period of shifting loyalties, the Musavat Party became the most popular choice for many (Sünbül, 1990, p. 42).

The Musavat Party started as a clandestine organization of nationalists who embraced Rasulzada’s recommendations to found a political organization via his letters from Istanbul (Resuloğlu, 1962, p. 10). The the founders communicated only in person and
to people they knew, and they warned members to keep their affiliation secret (Ягублю, 1997, pp. 44-45). Nevertheless, the number of members quickly grew from all over the Caucasus, and supporters were soon found even in the Iranian city of Rasht (Oruclu, 2001, p. 35).

Initially, the social base of Musavat consisted of the intelligentsia, workers, and peasants, professionals who had supported the revolutionary movements against the Russian state. In addition, Azerbaijani liberals terminated their ties with Russian liberals and joined Musavat as a reaction to the anti-Turkish position of Russian liberals during the Balkan Wars (Рәсүлзәдә, 1990, p. 25). The most important source of growth for the party came when Musavat merged with the Turkic Party of Decentralization (TPD) in 1917: TPD’s strong peasant support in rural areas was brought into the Musavat fold (Oruclu, 2001, p. 56). In short, Musavat was becoming the party of all social and economic groups in Azerbaijan.

The ideology of the party was also in transition. The party initially started as a social democratic movement, and demonstrated a pro-Islamic bent during the Balkan Wars of 1911-1913. When Russia issued a general amnesty in 1913, Rasulzada returned from Turkey. Now a proponent of Turkism and a colleague of Huseynzada and Aghaoghlu, Rasulzada became the leader of the Musavat Party and transformed it into “the first European-style party of the Islamic East” (Əhmədli, 2007, p. 221).

Specifically, Musavat’s first program was concerned with “supporting the rights of Muslims,” and the pamphlet disseminated during the Balkan Wars called upon “believers” to “awaken,” to prevent the “forfeit of our rights, religion and nationality” (Ягублю, 1997, pp. 44-45). Once Rasulzada became the party leader, Huseynzada’s “Turkify, Islamicize,
Europeanize” motto was adopted as the official ideology of the Party. The party became the champion of the transformation from *ummah* to an Azerbaijani “nation” (Mehmetzade, 1991, p. 39).

From its start with a handful of isolated and striving elites gathered around newspapers and magazines, now the nationalist elite was a popular political force with a political party its own making. Fed up with discrimination and repression, and intellectually and politically mobilized, the supporters of Azerbaijani nationalism were prepared for changes to the opportunity structure.

5. World War I: An opportunity for the “sacred rights of nations”?

The outbreak of World War I and the subsequent revolutions in Russia in the second decade of the 20th century provided invaluable opportunities at both the international and domestic levels to Azerbaijani nationalism. The spread of ideas about self-determination provided international legitimacy. The Ottoman Empire’s expansionist desires—fueled by Turkish nationalism—provided the Azerbaijani nationalists with needed military power. Domestically, the increasing burden of WWI and the subsequent revolutions diminished the power and reach of the Russian government. The weakened central Russian government coupled with Ottoman support, presented the Azerbaijani nationalists with a golden opportunity at a time of increasing popular support and accelerating nationalist mobilization. There would not be a better time for anyone willing to be independent, since
for Rasulzada, the Great War demonstrated the “sacred rights of nations” (Рәсүлзадә, 1990, p. 25).

As concerned the Ottomans, Enver Pasha, the Ottoman War Minister, was busy with plans to capture the Southern Caucasus and unite the Turks. He had gone so far as to assign three reserve divisions under Halil Pasha to command the operations toward Northern Azerbaijan (Swietochowski, 1985, pp. 76-78). Despite the desire of the Ottoman leadership to unite the Turks, the disastrous defeat at Sarikamish at the hands of the Russian army in 1914-1915 compelled the Ottomans to change their plans. Enver Pasha was forced to agree with the Azerbaijani delegate’s demand for independence rather than a merger with Turkey.\textsuperscript{23} The Azerbaijani nationalists’ desire for a separate state signifies the emergence of an assertive nationalism.

The effects of World War I were devastating for Russia. The economic burden of war-making and high numbers of military casualties led to social unrest, culminating in the subsequent revolutions that replaced the Tsarist regime with the Soviets. Each step toward the destruction of Tsarist Russia provided another opportunity for the Azerbaijani elite in their struggle for independence.

Shaken by domestic unrest, the Tsarist regime, as well as the interim governments that followed, had to adopt more accommodating policies towards the frontier lands. The first sign of change in government policy was the appointment of Grand Duke Nikolai Nicholaevich as the new viceroy in Septmeber 1915; his appointment signaled a desire to

\textsuperscript{23}For this purpose, A. K. Khoisky secretly crossed the border in May 1915, when he met with the Pasha in Erzerum and asked for Ottoman support for an independent Azerbaijan (Рәсүлзадә, 1990, p. 19).
ameliorate relations with Azerbaijani people (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 82). The new
Viceroy visited Baku immediately. The Viceroy even accepted Rasulzada’s request to
publish the newspaper AchiqSoz [Open Statement], despite his popularity as a
revolutionary activist (Hasanli, 1998, p. 30). Thus emerged the first newspaper with the
caption of “Socio-Political and Literary Turkish Newspaper.” The paper became the official
mouthpiece for the Musavat Party. For the party leadership, the founding of the paper
was the start of the “nationalist era” for Turks (Oruclu, 2001, p. 37).

The domestic unrest, coupled with the effects of the Great War, led to a revolution
that dethroned the Romanov Dynasty on 23 February 1917. Tsar Nicholas II abdicated
when striking Petrograd workers secured the backing of the mutinous army and the State
Duma failed to support the authority of the Tsar (Service, 2009, pp. 24-41). The Provisional
Government assumed power and promised to remain the supreme authority until the
Constituent Assembly could be convened.

The February Revolution came in peace and increased the hopes and expectations of
all minorities in Russia for equal treatment and rights and liberties. Lenin declared Russia
to be “the freest of all the belligerent countries” (Wood, 1986, p. 42). The new government
quickly abolished restrictions based on ethnicity and religion and launched administrative
revisions to increase minority representation in the borderlands ( Ağamaliyeva & Xudiyev,
1998, p. 29). Molla Nasraddin caricatured the end of absolutism as great happiness (No: 5,
1917); Rasulzada saw the revolution as granting “freedom to enslaved classes” and
“autonomy to subordinated nations” (Рәсүлзәдә, 1990, p. 26).
5.1. The All-Russian Muslim Congresses: A Quest for Identity and Autonomy

The democratic atmosphere of the 1917 February Revolution inspired a group of Pan-Turkist activists to call for an all-Russian Muslim Congress. The convention was to be held without delay. The organizers sought to represent all Muslims in Russia with delegates be elected by local conferences (Zenkovsky, 1960, pp. 139-140).

The local Caucasus conference met in Baku on 15-20 April [1917]. The key agenda item was quite polarizing: the future administrative structure of Russia. Here, Musavat proposed a “federal republic” model with recognition of the “territorial autonomy of nationalities.” This was harshly criticized by the Ittihad, a religious-conservative group from Azerbaijan, and the Socialists (Рәсүлзадә, 1990, p. 27). These groups instead proposed “cultural autonomy” within a “unitary Russia.” The main motivation of the Ittihad was to maintain the unity of the ummah in Russia, while the Socialists aimed to preserve the unity of the working class. The local Conference in Baku ended with a federalist victory, granting them the power to suggest the “autonomy” model at the forthcoming regional Congress (Рәсүлзадә, 1990, p. 27). The Baku meeting was an important test for the “autonomy” proposal.24

The First All Muslim Congress of Russia started on 1 May 1917 in Moscow with more than 800 regional delegates (Daulet, 1989, p. 22). Disagreement on the future

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24 The Party was founded in Ganja in 1917 by Nasib Yusufbayli (Ussubakov), Gaspirali’s son-in-law and publishing partner for Tarjuman. The party advocated a decentralized federal structure for Russia, composed of autonomous national units (Mehmetzade, 1991, pp. 47-48). Its leadership consisted of old Difai members and large landowners in the rural city of Ganja, while its membership was composed of the rural and small-town populations of Ganja (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 86).
administrative structure of Russia also marked this meeting. Rasulzada’s speech inflamed these tensions when he declared that there was a group of people who had come to consider themselves as “Turks first and Muslim second”:

The question that has to be asked is: What is a nation? ... It is said sometimes that Islam is the embodiment of a nation because when a Turco-Tatar is asked to what nationality he belonged, his answer is: I am a Muslim. But this is an erroneous view... There is no Christian nationality, and likewise there is no Islamic one. In this great Muslim house, there must exist separate dwellings for Turks, Persians, and Arabs (Zenkovsky, 1960, pp. 144-145).

The Congress ended with a landslide victory for the “federalists.” While they were planning to advocate for the democratic autonomy of ethnic minorities at the Constituent Assembly, Russia was spinning out of control.

The optimism of the February Revolution was giving way to turmoil. Russia’s continued participation in the War was a major point of contention for various groups within Russian society. Wide support for the Provisional Government was gradually replaced with criticism, including accusations of “defeatism and treason” (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 95). While the social unrest was increasing, the Chief of Staff, General G. Kornilov, attempted to stage a coup on 9 September 1917 (Asher, 1970, p. 286). The attempt failed, but had important reverberations. The Musavat leadership considered the coup attempt as contrary to their goal of national autonomy. Accordingly, they condemned it and organized large protests in Baku and the provinces. Party leadership warned its members to be ready

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25 446 delegates voted in favor of (and 271 voted against) the model advocating “autonomous democratic republics based on national, territorial, and federative principles” and granting “national-cultural autonomy” to those who do not possess their own separate territory (Zenkovsky, 1960, pp. 146-147).
to defend the February Revolution, with weapons if needed ( Ağamaliyeva & Xudiyev, 1998, p. 45).

The October 1917 elections were a watershed moment for Musavat. Though the Bolsheviks had hoped to use the elections to increase their relative power, Musavat won pluralities in all industrial cities but Baku (Suny, 1972, p. 140). Musavat had become the Party with largest local support in Azerbaijan. After this victory, the Party held its first Congress on 25-29 October 1917. Rasulzada was elected the leader of the Party, and delegates picked the blue flag—the symbol of Turkism—as the Party’s official emblem (Karaca, 1982, p. 13). Rasulzada, in his opening speech, emphasized the importance of “uniting around a common idea and thought for the nation,” and reminded attendees of Musavat’s success in gathering “all progressive forces” together (Oruclu, 2001, p. 43). News of the Bolshevik Revolution reached Baku in the second day of the Congress, and this likely emboldened Musavat to declare that “a nation without sovereignty and autonomy cannot protect its freedom” (Oruclu, 2001, p. 43).

6. The Bolshevik Revolution and the Road to Independence

The Bolshevik Revolution on 25 October 1918 overthrew the Provisional Government and opened a new page in the history of Russia. Afterwards, the Second All-Russia Congress of Worker Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies approved Lenin’s call to transfer “All

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power to the Soviets!” Lenin then formed a new government, called for an immediate end to the War, and asked the workers of the Europe to establish their own socialist states (Service, 2009, p. 62). The Revolution had serious repercussions for the Azerbaijani nationalist struggle, turning Baku and Tiflis into a political battleground for independence. Interestingly, having lost control of Baku to Bolsheviks, Azerbaijani nationalists had to declare their independence from the city of Tiflis. Baku would be returned later—and only after the Ottomans lent their support.

6.1. The Struggle for Baku

The Revolution was felt immediately in Baku. The Baku Soviet convened without delay to discuss their position regarding the Bolshevik Revolution: they decided not to recognize it, and called for an immediate and peaceful transfer of power to the Constituent Assembly. The Baku Soviet then founded the Committee of Public Safety and declared the new committee to be the supreme authority in possession of emergency powers in Baku. This was a clear precaution against a Bolshevik takeover of Baku (Suny, 1972, pp. 158-159). Having only two choices, Musavat decided not to join the Committee of Public Safety and supported the Bolsheviks at a meeting on 2 November 1917 (Ağamaliyeva, 1998, p. 53). Instrumental in Musavat’s decision to support the Bolsheviks were the latter's warm messages to national minorities in Russia.

The Baku Soviet’s resistance to the Bolsheviks did not last long. Stepan Shaumian convened the new Soviets on 2 November 1917 to reconsider Lenin’s call to transfer
powers to the Soviets. This time, the Socialist Revolutionary group split, and the left wing of the group joined the Bolsheviks (Swietochowski, 1985, pp. 101-102). As a result, the Baku Soviet had passed under the control of the Bolsheviks and their allies. The Baku Soviet then declared itself the revolutionary organ and the only legitimate authority in Baku.

In the meantime, on 2 November 1917, the Council of the People’s Commissars, the Sovnarkom, proclaimed the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, marked by the signatures of both Lenin and Stalin. The Declaration approved the Soviet government’s commitment to the “inalienable rights of the people of Russia” (Robert Vincent Daniels, 1993, pp. 84-85). The Declaration also reaffirmed “the equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia” and their right to self-determination “even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state” (Robert Vincent Daniels, 1993, pp. 84-85).

The Musavat Party’s Baku Council, after the Sovnarkom’s declaration, approved the Bolshevik coup on 7 November 1917 and criticized the overthrown provisional government for prolonging the costly war and disappointing national minorities. In allying with the Bolsheviks, Musavat certainly hoped for an increased share of power in Baku (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 102). But the news was not promising. The Baku Soviet ordered the dissolution of the Council of Muslim Public Associations27 on 22 November (Ağamaliyeva, 1998, p. 53).

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27 The Council of Muslim Public Associations was an umbrella organization of the nationalist and religious groups. The Councils was founded by Hajinski, Musvatists lawyer, to organize Muslim associations—that were excluded from the Soviets for elections to the Constituent Assembly. As the largest organized opposition to the Soviets, it was accused with “Islamic nationalism” and “counter revolutionism” (Ağamaliyeva & Xudiyev, 1998, p. 34). Musavat was the predominant force in the Council, followed by the Turkic Party of Decentralization (TPD)—founded in Ganja in 1917 by Nasib Yusufbayli—son-in-law and collaborator of Gaspirali in Tarjuman. The TPD advocated a decentralized federal structure for Russia, composed of autonomous national units (Mehmetzade, 1991, pp. 47-48). The Party leadership was
While Baku continued disappointing Musavat partisans, the news from Petrograd was more promising. Lenin and Stalin appealed “to all the Muslim workers of Russia and the East” and assured that:

Your beliefs and usages, your national and cultural institutions are forever free and inviolate. Know that your rights, like those of all the peoples of Russia, are under the mighty protection of the Revolution and its organs (Florinsky, 1969, p. 452).

Initially, the discrepancy between Petrograd and Baku was confusing, but it was soon clear that the Bolsheviks were only interested in winning time to consolidate their own power (Рәсулзадә, 1990, pp. 31-32). Indeed, the Baku Bolsheviks offered a quick lesson in the new reality: once Musavat declared its interest in “autonomy,” the Baku Soviets accused Musavat of articulating the interests of bourgeoisie and threatened them with “devastation” rather than autonomy (Рәсулзадә, 1990, p. 32).

After increasing their power in the Baku Soviet, the Bolsheviks restructured the election law and held new elections on 12-13 December 1917. Despite its considerable success a few months before, Musavat won only twenty-one seats—significantly less than the Bolshevik's fifty-two seats (Ağamaliyeva, 1998, pp. 55-56). Rasulzada, in the meeting of the Soviets, refused to recognize the election results and stated that Musavat would accept the transfer of power to the Soviets only via fair elections (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 103). Hopes were completely exhausted when Lenin appointed Stepan Shaumian as the Special Commissar of the Caucasus. Musavat had now lost Baku.

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consisted of old Difai members and large landowners in Ganja, while its social base was rural and small-town population of Ganja (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 86).
6.2. Power Politics in Tiflis and the Declaration of Independence

The Azerbaijani nationalist elite, represented by Musavat, intensified its struggle in Tiflis. The geographical shift to Tiflis reflected the changing nature of regional power politics: Russia's power and influence was giving way to the Ottoman Empire. This left the three largest ethnic groups in the region—Azerbaijans, Georgians, and Armenians—in search of alternative ways of governance and new political alliances. This time, the regional power balance and political makeup in Tiflis was in favor of the Azerbaijani nationalists.

The Tiflis Socialists refused to recognize the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd. A few weeks after the Bolshevik coup, the Georgian Mensheviks\(^{28}\) spearheaded a meeting of local social and political organizations to discuss the fate of the Caucasus. Noy Jordania, a leading Georgian Menshevik, suggested forming a temporary regional government (Hasanli, 1998, p. 35). The majority of the participants supported Jordania's suggestion, and voted in favor of establishing the temporary government, the Transcaucasian Commissariat, Zakavkom. The Commissariat, inaugurated on 8 November, was to retain its powers until the start of the Constituent Assembly, “but should [the convocation of the Constituent Assembly] prove impossible ... it would then subordinate itself to caucus of the deputies elected to that Assembly from Transcaucasia and the Caucasus front” (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 107).

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\(^{28}\) The split in Russian communist-socialist movements—that gave birth to Bolsheviks and Mensheviks—was reflected in all leftist groups in the empire. Bolsheviks was the group sided with Lenin and advocated revolutionary change. Mensheviks advocated mild and gradual change rather than radical revolution. That is why Georgian Mensheviks did not approve the Bolshevik Revolution.
Zakavkom held regional elections to the Constituent Assembly on 26-28 November 1917. The result was an important victory for Musavat: the party came in second after the Mensheviks. Rasulzada interpreted this victory as Caucasian Muslims’ support for the idea of “Azerbaijani autonomy” (Oruclu, 2001).

Ottoman leadership supported the establishment of the Zakavkom in congruence with its regional interests. However, the Zakavkom member groups had a wide range of feelings toward the Turks. The Azerbaijanis had been in close cooperation with the Turkish Generals, and had even secured their support for independence. The Georgians were neutral as long as the territorial integrity of their region was not the question. However, the Armenian representatives disapproved of cooperation with or support from the Turks, due to their worsening relations with the Ottoman Empire (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 37).

Ottoman leadership was interested in strengthening the Zakavkom as a an entity separate from Russia, thereby weakening a regional power broker; as a means to create buffer state(s) in the region, thereby distancing themselves from the reach of Russia; and as a vehicle for increasing their own regional influence. In congruence with these goals, the Ottomans compelled the Zakavkom, as representatives of the Caucasus, to meet to discuss armistice. The Ottomans then imposed the Erzincan Armistice on 5 December 1917, which did not have any serious repercussions, and therefore did not become an issue of debate (Yavuz, 1995, p. 226).

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29 Number of votes and corresponding seats: Mensheviks: 661,934 (11 seats); Musavat: 615,816 (10 seats), Dashnaktsutiun: 558,400 (9 seats), Muslim Socialist Bloc: 159,770 (3), SRs: 117,522 (1 seat), Bolsheviks: 95,581 (1 seat), Himmat: 84,748 (1 seat), Ittihad: 66,504 (1 seat) (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 107).
However, potential controversy emerged when Vehib Pasha, representing the Ottomans, appealed to the Zakavkom to convey Enver Pasha’s messages. The Ottoman side, first, complained about Russian and Armenian terror actions against ordinary people. Second, in accordance with the Ottoman government’s desire to have an independent government in the Caucasus, Enver Pasha wanted to sign a peace treaty with an independent Zakavkom (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 45). In response, the Zakavkom asked for a waiting period until the scheduled meeting of the Constituent Assembly on 18 January 1918. Despite the Azerbaijani representatives willingness to cooperate with the Ottomans, Georgians and Armenians placed their hopes on a democratic Russia. However, Lenin forcibly dissolved the Constituent Assembly after its first day, due to opposition, and accused opponents of counterrevolutionism (Daniels, 1984, pp. 90-91). Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly eroded the Georgian and Armenian hopes of a democratic Russia.

Vehib Pasha sent letter in January 1918, this time inviting the Zakavkom to the Brest-Litovsk Peace talks, with promise of support for its independence from Russia (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 45). However, due to the disagreement among its member nations regarding cooperation with the Ottomans, the Zakavkom rejected the offer, with the hope that the Bolshevik rule would be temporary. Indeed, the Armenians even considered the Bolsheviks preferable to the Ottomans (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 47). As the Zakavkom was not able to stop the massacres of Muslim civilians by Armenian armed bands, the Vehib Pasha launched a military operation on 12 February 1918, in violation of the Erzincan Armistice. Zakavkom kept mute due to ongoing and heightened internal disagreements: all that the representatives could agree to was to wait for the opening of the Transcaucasian Parliament on 23 February, as a last chance to find consensus on an appropriate response.
to the Ottomans.

The Parliament met as scheduled under the shock of a dissolved Constituent Assembly in Moscow and the pressure of Ottoman wishes for peace talks. This time, Georgian Mensheviks suggested a Polish-style Seim [Parliament]. Musavat was the only party to support this suggestion, and with the votes of Georgian Mensheviks and Musavat, the Parliament decided to transform itself into the Transcaucasian Seim on 23 February 1918 (Hasanlı, 1998, pp. 40, 41).

The Seim was inaugurated with the participation of representatives elected to the Constituent Assembly. However, the question of its status vis-à-vis Russia remained unresolved, as its members could not come to a consensus (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 50). The Musvat partisans denounced traditional Russian centralism as bankrupt, and started making plans for a Greater Azerbaijan that would include Iranian Azerbaijan and Daghestan. This vision was a rejection of the suggestion of Yusuf Yusufbayli, who had favored a union with Turkey (Swietochowski, 1985, pp. 120-121). The Georgians broached the issue of an independent Transcaucasia. The stakes were raised with the news that the Russian government had signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and had thereby agreed to transfer three cities under the control of the Seim, Ardahan, Kars and Batum, to Turkey (Nəsibli, 2011, p. 38). This was unacceptable to the Georgians. Accordingly, the Seim refused to recognize the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and, expressed their rejection in their telegram to Saint Petersburg (Ağamaliyeva, 1998, p. 62).

Having no choice, the Seim agreed to start peace talks with the Ottoman Empire on 14 March 1918 in Trabzon. The Azerbaijani and Daghestani members of the Seim
considered this to be opportunity for their nationalist causes. In a secret meeting with Ottoman representatives, they recommended the Ottomans push for an independent Transcaucasia, since, as they reported, the Seim’s reluctance to call openly for independence was rooted in the hope of reunion with Russia (Kurat, 1990, p. 469).

**6.3. Bloody Days in Baku, March 1918**

While the Azerbaijani diplomatic mission was busy convincing the representatives in Trabzon and Tiflis to cooperate with the Ottomans, Baku witnessed armed conflict between the Azerbaijani groups and the Bolsheviks near the end of March 1918. This time Shaumian successfully managed to play the two groups, Azerbaijanis and Armenians, against each other as a means of eliminating rivals and expanding his power in the region (Swietochowski, 1985, pp. 112-119). As a result of the conflict, more than ten thousand people died in Baku, while the total number of casualties reached thirty thousand after the massacres in the cities of Lankaran, Shamakhi, and Quba (Baykara, 1975, pp. 250-252). Shaumian reported the results to be “splendid,” as he consolidated Soviet power in Eastern Azerbaijan and started preparations for actions in the Southern Caucasus (Nasibli, 1990, p. 43). For the people of Azerbaijan, the “March Days” became a symbol of sorrow and insecurity, contributing to feelings of frustration already exacerbated by previous grievances.

The “March Days” had important repercussions for the Azerbaijani nationalist struggle. Earlier, some of the Azerbaijani elite had been hopeful about a democratic Russia
and had lobbied for autonomy within it. The grievance of the “March Days” had exhausted all hopes for amicable relations with Russia, and convinced those in the Azerbaijani elite who had initially been reluctant to support independence (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 119). Independence was now seen as a necessity for preserving Azerbaijani identity, security, and property. And, in Rasulzada’s own terms, there was only one rising faith in the hearts of the people that “could save the nation from the impasse”—Turkey! (Рәсүлзәдә, 1990, p. 37)

After all, the Ottomans had sent a note to the Seim giving them only forty-eight hours for to make their final decision and had ordered the army to occupy the territories adjusted by the Brest-Litovsk. In the meantime, Enver Pasha met the Azerbaijani representatives in Trabzon and suggested a union similar to the one between Austria-Hungary. However, the Azerbaijani delegates reiterated their interest in an independent state (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 72).

The terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in combination with Ottoman pressure led to both intensified debate and polarization in the Seim. The Muslim representatives categorically rejected the idea of war with the Ottomans (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 65). Left with no choice, the Mensheviks, with the support of the leftist Himmat party, appealed to the “Russian proletariat,” in their letter declaring the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk unacceptable, and reminding readers that it would mean a complete separation from Russia (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 66). Nevertheless, the Seim declared war against the Ottomans on 13 April 1918.

In response, the Azerbaijani members, excluding the members of Himmat, started discussing the possibility of leaving the Seim and declaring independence (Hasanlı, 1998, p.
When the Ottoman Army reached the city of Batum (in modern-day Georgia) on 22 April 1918, Vehip Pasha notified the Seim that they could sit for peace talks only if it declared independence from Russia. Rasulzada welcomed the idea of independence and asked the Seim not to sacrifice the benefits of the October Revolution to the “backward face of Russia” (Hasanlı, 1998, pp. 74-75). In reality, the Seim had no choice and it reluctantly declared itself to be an “independent, federative, democratic republic” of the Caucasus region on 22 April 1918 (Kurat, 1990, p. 473).

A new round of peace talks started between the newly independent Transcaucasian Republic and the Ottoman Empire on 11 May 1918. Things did not proceed smoothly: the Ottomans blamed the Transcaucasian side for not accepting the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and demanded two other cities, Ahiska and Ahalkelek, as compensation for the blood of the war that the Ottomans staged due to the delay in peace talks (See Şahin, 2002). The Georgians flatly rejected this demand, and Transcaucasian representatives then started looking for alternative solutions they could bring to the negotiating table.

The Azerbaijanis asked the Ottomans to support a sovereign Azerbaijan (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 72). Meanwhile, the Georgians secretly appealed to the Germans for support. The Germans responded positively, and even promised to get Soviet approval if they declared independent Georgia and gave access to their national resources (Hasanlı, 1998, p. 86). Consequently, on 26 May 1918, the Georgian representative Tseteli, in a private meeting of the Georgian representatives, confessed the impossibility of maintaining a unitary state of the Transcaucasian Republic. In the same meeting the Georgian group decided to secede from the Transcaucasian Republic and proclaimed the establishment of an independent
A day later, the Azerbaijani members founded the Azerbaijani National Council with the participation of the Musavatists, the Independent Democrats, the Muslim Socialist Bloc, and the Ittihad group. They elected Rasulzada as the Council’s leader (Nasibli, 1990, p. 49). Finally, on 28 May 1918, the Council declared the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan.

Thus was born the first modern republic of the Muslim world. Rasulzada described newly independent Azerbaijan as the “first Turkish state and Muslim Republic” (Azerbaycan Gazetesi, 28, Special Issue, 1919). Turkey was the first to grant diplomatic recognition to Azerbaijan. The two states quickly concluded a treaty of “perpetual peace and cooperation,” which, more concretely, facilitated Ottoman support for the formation of the Caucasus Islamic Army. The army was carried out the liberation of Baku on 15 September 1918, after more than four months of fighting and 12,000 casualties (Yaqublu, 2008, pp. 20-21).

The new republic lived but a few years: the Soviets occupied Azerbaijan in 1920. However, Azerbaijani nationalism, like other nationalisms the world over, once emerged, became permanent. This was reflected in Rasulzada’s response to Stalin: “the flag that rises once, never descends” (Resulzade, 1925, pp. 6-7). Accordingly, the Republic of Azerbaijan that was established in 1991 declared itself to be the descendent of the Republic founded in 1918, adopting its flag, hymn, and name.
7. Conclusion

There are two important conclusions to draw from this study of the Azerbaijani struggle for independence as examined through the lens of nations and nationalism literature. First, this study affirms the link between secularization and ethnic nationalism. The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan case demonstrates the potential of secularization in Islamic societies. It was the secular approach of the elite that separated nation from ummah, and prioritized the national over the religious, as a result, giving birth to a new nation and state that did not exist before. Before the secular revolution of the secular nationalist elite, Azerbaijanis were known as “Caucasian Muslims” or “Tatars.” Azerbaijan was only the name of the territory that Turkish-speaking people resided.

The second key finding is the vital role of the elites in nationalist mobilization. Imperial collapse, opportunity structures, accumulated grievances from repressive and discriminatory colonial rule may be necessary but not sufficient to give birth to a nation absent a defined nationalist elite. However, it is also important to recognize the key role played by these structural factors. As observed in the Azerbaijani case, grievances spurred popular support while opportunity structures revised the visions of nationalists and facilitated their move forward.

All in all, the assertive nationalism of the secular nationalist elite gave birth to a new nation—Azerbaijani—and state in Northern Azerbaijan. The life of Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was short, came to an early end due to the Soviet occupation and annexation in 1920. However, even though the state ceased to exist shortly, the Azerbaijani people—in
other words, the Azerbaijani nation—preserved their assertive nationalism via the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan (1916-1989), even utilized Soviet Union’s nationalities policies to consolidate Azerbaijani identity and language. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Azerbaijani nationalist elite was quick to declare independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan—officially recognized by the UN in 1991—this time with consolidated identity and experience of statehood. Furthermore, the nationalist elite of the Republic of Azerbaijan considered the new state as the successor of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan founded in 1918, adopted its flag and nationalist ideology, as well as the slogan: “The flag that rises once, never descends” (Resulzade, 1925, pp. 6-7).
Chapter Three:

The Khiyabani Insurgency, 1920: Freedom or Independence?

Shortly after the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic declared its independence in 1918, the Azerbaijanis in Iran initiated an insurgency movement against the Tehran government. In 1920, led by Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani, a cleric and political activist from Tabriz, the Azerbaijanis in Iran succeed in expelling Tehran’s representative from the city of Tabriz. The movement declared autonomy for Azadistan [Land of Freedom], the name Khiyabani choose for his regional government in Iranian Azerbaijan. The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in the north was a clear manifestation of assertive Azerbaijani nationalism. The northern Azerbaijani intelligentsia staged a secular nationalist revolution and attempted to construct a new nation out of a traditional and religious community; the intelligentsia then sought independence for this new nation. Contrary to the assertive ethnic nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan, in Iranian Azerbaijan, as exemplified by the Khiyabani movement, there was a lack of assertive ethnic nationalist elements. This chapter aims to explore why Southern Azerbaijan lacked these ethnic nationalist sentiments. If not driven by nationalist and separatist aims, then why did Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani rebel against the central government? Furthermore, why did he limit his claims to autonomy instead of seeking independence from Iran?

30 “Southern Azerbaijan” and “Iranian Azerbaijan” are used interchangeably. Likewise, the terms “Iranian Azerbaijanis” and “Iranian Turks” are used to indicate Azerbaijanis residing within Iranian territories. When “Azerbaijan” is used with no modifier, it indicates Iranian Azerbaijan.
This chapter has two main goals. First, this chapter aims to demonstrate that the Iranian Azerbaijanis lacked an ethnic and national consciousness at the dawn of the 20th century. The Khiyabani Insurgency was not a nationalist separatist movement. Rather, the insurgency was mainly a constitutionalist and anti-colonial movement, demanding rule by constitution and the removal of foreign powers from Iran.

More specifically, within the broader historical context, this chapter shows that the Khiyabani insurgency was one of the popular reactions against the despotic and inept Qajar government. The populace accused the government of yielding to the imperialist interests of the European powers in Iranian economics and politics. Indeed, these same factors generated many other popular protests during the same time period. Briefly, Iran had become a battleground for colonial competition since the second half of the 19th century, and this generated several large-scale rebellions against the Qajar Dynasty. One of these rebellions gathered enough support to become the Constitutional Revolution which, in 1906, gave Iran its first constitution. The Qajar government, despite its reluctant initial approval of the constitution, continued its attempts to quash the constitutionalist movement. In 1919, following the end of World War I, the Iranian government signed a new Oil Agreement with Britain. This agreement was perceived by Iranians as a complete surrender to Britain. This was the final straw for Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani: he refused to accept the oil concessions and launched his insurgency in the province of Azerbaijan.

The second goal of this chapter is to trace the lack of ethnic and nationalist sentiments in the Khiyabani Insurgency using the threefold framework introduced in chapter one. This framework explains the divergence in the two Azerbaijani communities
after their split in the early nineteenth century with the help of three variables: secular nationalist elite, relationship between the minority group and host state, and opportunity structures. Chapter two used that framework to explain the rise of “assertive nationalism” in Northern Azerbaijan. In Northern Azerbaijan, the elite, exposed to and equipped with ideas of secular nationalism, staged a secular nationalist revolution. In the meantime, grievances stemming from Russian colonial rule increased popular support for the growing nationalist movement. The nationalist elite used the favorable opportunity structure for their nationalist cause: the establishment of an independent state. Contrary to Northern Azerbaijan, Iranian Azerbaijan lacked a secular nationalist elite. Iranian Azerbaijanis were strongly tied to Iranian society with deep historical and religious bonds. Moreover, their relationship with the Iranian state did not engender ethnic grievances. Therefore, the Khiyabani movement was primarily shaped by Iranian patriotism, constitutionalism, and anti-colonialism—not ethnic Azerbaijani nationalism.

To be more specific, as part of Tsarist Russia,31 the Northern Azerbaijani intelligentsia had had the opportunity to study at European, Russian, and Turkish schools and universities. There, they were exposed to the ideas of secularism, democracy, and nationalism. In the south, the Azerbaijanis had remained within Iranian social, religious, and political system. The worldview in the south was shaped primarily by conservative and religious values resistant to Western ideas and ideologies. Iran in general, and Iranian Azerbaijan in particular, were to experience secularization much later, during the reign of

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31 As a result of a series of wars between Tsarist Russia and Qajar Iran, Azerbaijan was divided in two: while the southern half of the territory remained in Iran, the northern half came under Russian control in 1828.
Shah Reza Pahlavi, 1921-1941 (See Banani, 1961). Therefore, in the first two decades of the 20th century, and specifically during the Khiyabani Insurgency, Azerbaijan lacked both a “secular nationalist” elite and an ethnic consciousness.

Regarding the relationship between the ethnic minority and the host society, contrary to the colonial relationship between Northern Azerbaijan and the Russian Empire, Azerbaijani in Iran had a privileged status in Iran. From the establishment of the Safavid Empire by Shah Ismail in 1501 until the establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty in 1925, Iran was ruled by Azerbaijani Turkish dynasties. During the reign of the Qajar Dynasty, Tabriz, the capital city of the province of Azerbaijan, hosted crown princes and enjoyed a status akin to a second capital. Therefore, contrary to the grievances associated with Russian colonial rule in the north, Iranian Azerbaijanis in the south did not experience ethnic-based repression or discrimination.

Despite its importance for the study of Azerbaijani nationalism and the constitutionalist struggle in Iran, the Khiyabani Insurgency has been neglected by Western scholars. In the rare instances when the case is mentioned, it is examined only as a footnote.

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32 The Iranian intelligentsia was already aware of secular ideas and ideologies, but they lacked the power and means to secularize Iranian society. Change came only with the state-imposed modernization policies of Shah Reza Pahlavi.

33 Iran and Iranian Azerbaijan had a secular intelligentsia. Indeed, they were the ones that turned the popular protests against the Qajar Court into a constitutionalist revolution, as will be discussed below. However, the Azerbaijani elite lacked “secular nationalist” sentiments. The Azerbaijani elite was under the influence of liberal and social democratic ideas, and they were even moving towards becoming political parties. However, these groups did not prioritize ethnic Azerbaijani nationalism. Here, I am using the term “secular” to distinguish ethnic nationalism from the religious definition of a nation. Contrary to the secular definition of a nation, in Islamic terminology a nation means a community of believers [ummah]. As shown in chapter two, the secular nationalist intelligentsia’s first step in Northern Azerbaijan was to introduce an ethnic definition of nation, separating the national from the religious. Iranian Azerbaijan lacked a similar awareness during this period of time.
This study builds on original and secondary resources published in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkey. Records of Khiyabani’s speeches and articles constitute the main data for this study and are used to assess the nature and goals of the insurgency. These sources are examined against the ideological accounts of the Soviet Azerbaijani literature which lensed the insurgency as a socialist revolution and an Azerbaijani nationalist uprising in Iran.

This chapter is organized in four sections. The first section briefly introduces the Azerbaijanis in Iran and details their relationships with the Iranian state and Iranian society. The second section traces the historical roots of colonial involvement in Iran, and provides the political and economic context for the Khiyabani insurgency. This section demonstrates that Azerbaijanis in Iran had been an integral part of the Iranian society and had played key roles in the social and political life of Iran. The third section concentrates on Khiyabani’s political rise as the leader of the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan, which served as the animating force behind the insurgency in 1920. The fourth part traces the step-by-step development of the insurgency and its escalation into an autonomous Azadistan. The chapter ends with the conclusion that the Khiyabani Insurgency was a constitutionalist and anti-imperialist struggle rather than a separatist movement. Notably, Iranian Azerbaijan lacked both a secular nationalist elite and any ethnic grievances in the relationship between the Azerbaijani minority and the Iranian state.

34 Despite my extensive search, I was not able to find any significant articles or book-length studies of the case in English or in any publication in the West.
1. Azerbaijani in Iran: Relationship between the Azerbaijani Minority and Iranian States

Azerbaijanis played an important social and political role in Iran from the sixteenth century onward. The founders of the modern Iranian empires, the Safavids (1501-1722) and the Qajars (1785-1725), were of Azerbaijani Turkic origin. Furthermore, it was Shah Ismail (1487-1524), again of Azerbaijani Turkish descent, who established Shia Islam as the official religion of Iran. More recently, Azerbaijan played a vital role in the 1906-1909 Constitutionalist Revolution of Iran, as will be discussed in more detail in this section. However, in spite of their social and political roles, Iranian Azerbaijanis lacked an ethnic consciousness. This section surveys historical roots of Azerbaijani community in Iran; examines their relationship with the Iranian state and society at the dawn of the 20th century; and aims to demonstrate reasons behind lack of nationalist consciousness in Azerbaijan.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Azerbaijani Turks in Iran constituted one-third of the total population of the country and did not consider themselves to be a separate ethnic minority. Indeed, they were the founders and leaders of several empires.

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35 The Azerbaijani population Iran numbered between 1.4 million – 2 million during this time. (Do you have some sources for this?)

36 The mainstream view is that Turks migrated to Iran, the Caucasus, and Anatolia from Central Asia in 10th and 11th centuries (See Findley, 2005). Another group, primarily nationalists, trace the history of Turks in Iran back 3,500 years, and argue that the Persians arrived later (See Zehtabi-Kirisci & Rahimi, 2010). For more on the culture and civilization of the Azerbaijaini Turks in Iran see (Heyät, 1993).
in Iran. Shah Ismail, a member of a Turkic clan, not only founded the Safavid Empire in 1501, but also established Shiite Islam as the official religion of the state (See Abisaab, 2015; Çetinkaya, 2012, pp. 379-382; Gündüz, 2010, p. 3). Azerbaijani Turkish was one of the official languages of the Safavid court, though Persian was the dominant language used in the literary and intellectual works of the time, including the works of the Safavid shahs. Likewise, the founders and rulers of the Qajar Dynasty (1785-1925), established after the period of political turmoil that followed the collapse of the Safavid Empire in 1722, were again from a Turkic background (Resulzade, 1993, p. 11). Historical records demonstrate that the Qajar civil and military bureaucracy were dominated by Iranian Turks (Mustafayev, 1998, pp. 33, 34-37). However, Azerbaijani subjects of these empires did not have any privileges due to their ethnic origin (Resulzade, 1993, p. 17). Thus, contrary to the colonial relationship between Northern Azerbaijanis and the Tsarist Russian Empire, Southern Azerbaijanis considered Iran as their homeland, and their relationship with the Iranian state did not generate ethnic grievances.

37 The mainstream view in the (Northern) Republic of Azerbaijan, in other words, including historians and officials, considers the Safavids Empire as an Azerbaijani state (See Äfändiyev, 2007; Sälimbäyli, 2001). In state authorized textbooks, the Safavids Empire is recognized as “Azerbaijan Safavid State” (See Bünyadov & Yusifov, 2007; Mustafazadä, 2011; Väliyev, 2009).

38 For Azerbaijani nationalists, even during this time of semi-autonomy, the Azerbaijan Turks were not a “subjugated nation” since the Iranian Empires were ruled by Turks (Расулзада, 1990, p. 14). For example, Shah Ismail, the founder of the Safavid Empire, belonged to a Turkish clan and wrote literary works in Turkish under the pseudonym Khatai (Savory, 1980, p. 169).

39 As will be demonstrate below, this does not mean absence of grievances at all. Indeed, Azerbaijanis played active role in rebellions against the central government due to their disapproval of the Qajar regime’s economy policies. Statement of lack of grievances here is limited to “ethnic grievances.” In other words, Azerbaijani community was not subject to discrimination or suppression due to their ethnicity.
Azerbaijan Turks in Iran were concentrated in the northern part of the country, primarily in the province known as Azerbaijan. Different Turkic-speaking groups existed in other parts of the country as well, but all groups lacked the sense of belonging to a broader ethnic nation (Mustafayev, 1998, p. 16). Both ordinary people and the intelligentsia lacked nationalist sentiments; the absence of such nationalism was reflected in their literary and intellectual works (Mustafayev, 1998, pp. 44, 48-50). In the words of Muhammad Amin Resulzade, the nationalist activist and the founder of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in the north,

> Persians, since they did not conceive Turkish rulers of as a threat to their own nationality, considered them as Iranian kings; and Turks considered Persian civilization and language as their national literary language. This way, though Turkish khans occupied throne as shahs for five hundred years, those same khans as well as Turkish people have been Iranianized, in other words, been represented by Persians (Resulzade, 1993, pp. 17-18). [My translation from original text in old Turkish]

For Resulzade, it was Shi’ā Islam that “Persianized Iranian Turks to the extent that now they consider themselves as Turkified Persians, thus, original Iranians!” (Resulzade, 1993, p. 18). For others, it was the use the of Persian language by the rulers and intellectuals that prevented the development of national consciousness among Iranian Azerbaijanis (Sumbatzadă, Taghiyeva, & Mālikov, 1985, pp. 214-215).

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40 The province was re-organized and divided into several pieces after the establishment of the Pahlavi rule.
Tabriz was the capital of the province of Azerbaijan. During the reign of the Qajar Dynasty, the crown princes lived in Tabriz as governors of the province. The presence of these crown princes contributed to the prestige and standard of life in the city. Tabriz was even considered as the second capital city of the empire (Resulzade, 1993, pp. 19, 20). In addition, due to its geographic location, Tabriz was also a crossroads for trading routes linking the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, and Asia. This long history with trade explains why the city was a rising trade center in the early twentieth century and why even a number of foreign companies and banks were headquartered there (Mustafayev, 1998, p. 17). Tabriz was also a gateway for the ideas and ideologies flowing from the surrounding empires. Iranian Azerbaijanis enjoyed a better standard of living and were wealthier than those in many other parts of Iran.

Given these considerations, it is not a surprise that Iranian Azerbaijanis internalized Iran as their homeland. The complaints of an Iranian Azerbaijani nationalist in the early 1940s are helpful for understanding this sense of belonging to Iran:

We, Iranian Turks, the unlucky group of people who have been destined to live within Iranian borders, have struggled for its existence and protection for centuries. We even fought against the Anatolian Turks, our friends, for the sake of Iran. We have spent our property for the Iranian case...We have glorified them [Persians], have forgotten ourselves... (Azer, 1942, p. 3) [My translation from Turkish]

The owner of this view, Sa’nan Azer, continues with a harsh critique of the mistreatment of Iranian Azerbaijanis by the Iranian state under the Pahlavi Dynasty, a topic which is the subject of the next chapter. In the context of Iranian Azerbaijani identity and allegiance, the

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41 The population of the city was, approximately, 250,000 (Resulzade, 1993, pp. 10, 11).
brief quotation illustrates the insider perspective of the Iranian Azerbaijanis in their relationship with the Iranian state.

In conclusion, a variety of reasons made Azerbaijanis feel at one with Iran rather than as a minority population. It is hard to talk about ethnic grievances against the Iranian state until the establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty in 1925. The integration of Azerbaijanis into the power structure in Iran also helps to explain the sacrifices of the Azerbaijani community in Iran during the three decades of social upheavals prior to the establishment of the modern Iranian state by Reza Shah Pahlavi. This period of social turmoil is examined in next section.

2. From Protest to Constitutional Revolution: Azerbaijanis as the Heroes of the
Constitutional Movement

The Azerbaijani Turks of Iran lacked ethnic nationalist sentiments at the dawn of the twentieth century. They were strongly affiliated with Shi’a Islam and considered themselves Iranians and Muslims. Therefore, when they disapproved of the policies of the Qajar government, a government which also hailed from the Turkic ethnic family, Iranian Azerbaijanis did not hesitate to protest or join to rebellions that started in the other part of the country. This section surveys the history of colonial competition and popular revolutions in Iran from the early 1890s to the late 1910s, demonstrating the active involvement and vital role of Azerbaijanis in Iranian social and political life. This section thus begins to offer the reader a better understanding of the Khiyabani Insurgency in 1920
by revealing the lack of ethnic and nationalist sentiments in the years before the insurgency.

2.1. The Great Game: From Imperial Collapse to Colonial Dependence

The collapse of the Safavid Empire in 1722 led to political turmoil and continuous wars among the khanates, semi-feudal territorial power structures in Iran. The post-Safavid history of Iran in the 1700s became the story of struggle among the khanates for re-unification as an empire. The transition from the Safavids to the Qajar Dynasty was “tumultuous and traumatic,” leaving behind an era that “may be viewed as a ‘dark age’ of political chaos, military destruction, and economic decline,” marked by the central authority’s collapse and by feudal rivalry and wars for dominance (Aghaie, 2012, p. 317). The cost of the power struggle among the khanates was high: social and agricultural life was devastated, irrigation systems were destroyed, villages were impoverished, and manufacturing slowed down and became more local (Qurbanov, 2006, p. 15). When Fath Ali Shah Qajar inherited power in 1797 beginning of the rule of the Qajar Dynasty, Iran looked like an “estate long neglected by successive owners,” and “the Shah was scarcely even a nominal ruler” (Hambly, 1991a, p. 144).

After almost a century of chaos, the Qajar shahs of Turkic descent, motivated by the memories of the great Persian Empires, assumed control over the scattered khanates. The Qajar shahs endeavored to control even those khanates that were far from the capital, regardless of the lack of the means for effective suzerainty (Hambly, 1991a, pp. 145-146). Indeed, even these distant khanates acknowledged the power of the center and sought the
Qajar shahs’ approval in local affairs, especially transition of power (Süleymanlı, 2006, p. 40).

The dream of rebuilding a glorious Iranian empire was fading as Europe’s power was rising and colonial rivalry between the Tsarist Russia and Great Britain was increasing. Once the “The Great Game”—a term coined by Captain Arthur Connolly, an intelligence agent of the British East India Company, to describe the rivalry between the Russian and British empires for colonial dominance in Central Asia (Hopkirk, 1992, p. 1)—had begun, Iran gradually became a battleground for the colonial powers. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Iran looked very much like a semi-colony of the big powers. In words of Lenczowski,

The modern history of Iran is largely a history of Big-Power rivalry. Owing to this fact, Iran during the past century and a half has often appeared to be a pawn of international diplomacy. In the great struggle for influence in Iran two forces seen to have been permanent throughout the nineteenth and a good part of the twentieth century, namely, Russia and Britain. Other great powers appeared like meteors, outshone temporarily the brightness of two constant starts, but soon faded into oblivion. Such was the case of Napoleonic France in the beginning of the nineteenth century and of Imperial Germany one hundred years later (Lenczowski, 1949, p. 1).

The Qajar shahs attempted to modernize the bureaucracy and army in response to the challenges of colonial pressure; this has been conceptualized as “defensive modernization” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 38). In this modernization process, Qajar shahs, princes, and bureaucrats visited Europe and attempted to import and adopt modern technology. One of these visitors was Abbas Mirza, a crown prince and the governor of the province of

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42 One of the early attempts to modernize Iranian army was led by Abbas Mirza, crown prince and governor of the province of Azerbaijan.
Azerbaijan, known for his struggle against Russian occupation in Caucasian Azerbaijan (See Naghmi & Akhundov, 1993; Pakravan, 2010). However, the state treasury not only failed to suffice for military modernization, but also failed to provide for the shahs’ travel expenses.

Economic crises, due to the dysfunctional tax structure and extravagant court expenses, made the Qajar government dependent on foreign loans. Britain and Russia, the two colonial neighbors, were more than willing to offer loans in exchange for economic concessions in Iran. The loans never managed to improve the Iranian economy and they had high political repercussions as well: economic penetration by colonial powers would also bring political intervention. The increased colonial presence in the economy exhausted local merchants and businessmen and resulted in rebellions and insurgencies. Gilbar links these variables:

[T]he economic penetration of the West into Iran further weakened the ability of the central government to rule. Because of their growing economic and political weakness, the Qajars were ready to accept an increase in the direct involvement of Europeans in the economy of Iran. The possibility of a symmetrical European economic involvement aroused strong opposition on the part of those who benefited from the asymmetrical situation, namely the big merchants. Other sections of the Iranian society were also hostile to more direct European penetration, but for different reasons. The conflict that evolved between these groups and the government greatly contributed to the fall of the Qajars (Gilbar, 1986, p. 89).

The roots of the concession-hunting era, as described by Moaddel (Moaddel, 1992, p. 456), can be traced back to the early 1870s. Baron Julius de Reuter, a British businessman and founder of Reuters News Agency, was granted a huge concession in 1872. This concession, “among other things,” gave him “the exclusive right to exploit all the minerals of Iran, except gold, silver, and precious stones, and to build railways, telegraph
lines, and so forth” (Lenczowski, 1949, p. 4). Lord Curzon described the deal as the “most complete surrender of the entire resources of a kingdom into foreign hands that has ever been dreamed of, much less accomplished in history” (Curzon, 1892, p. 480). Though the concessions had to be cancelled due to Russian pressure, they opened a new chapter in Iranian history.

As a result of the increased colonial presence, Iranian merchants lost their hold on the economy towards the end of the nineteenth century and “the bulk of transaction” passed to Russian and British traders (Floor, 1976, p. 133). In other words, the Iranian economy “moved from the external arena of the world-system in 1800 and before, to the periphery by the turn of the twentieth century, subject to the more powerful rhythms of English and Russian capitalism” (Foran, 1991, p. 800).

The province of Azerbaijan felt the burdens of increasing colonial penetration more than other parts of the country, mainly because of the province’s strategic location at Iran’s borders with the Ottoman Empire and the Tsarist Empire. Losing economic advantage to alien traders and the Qajar court’s increased dependency on foreign loans led to popular dissatisfaction with government policies throughout the country, including in Azerbaijan. During this time, Azerbaijanis in the north also experienced cultural and economic discrimination at the hands of the Tsarist government. These conditions further generated ethnic grievances and stimulated popular support for the nationalist movement led by the secular nationalist elite. However, in Iran, the problems Azerbaijanis faced were economic rather than ethnic. Indeed, Iranian Azerbaijanis lacked an ethnic consciousness and there was no secular nationalist elite to trigger nationalist sentiments and channel grievances
towards a nationalist cause. As a result, Iranian Azerbaijanis acted similarly to the rest of the country when they expressed their reactions against the government’s failure to address economic crises and its increasing dependence on foreign loans. One of the early collective actions against the Qajar government—and one in which Azerbaijanis played active role—was the Tobacco Rebellion of 1891-92.

2.2. From Tobacco Concession to Constitutional Revolution

Concessions to European companies in return for rent and loans became source of revenue for the Qajar shahs, enabling their rule. However, this economic and political survival came at the expense of domestic merchants and traders. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the tobacco concession granted to a British businessman led to massive nationwide protests known as the “Tobacco Rebellion.” Protestors ultimately forced the Shah to retreat, a first in modern Iranian history. Iranians discovered the power of collective action. Considering the social and political consequences of this rebellion, some scholars have even argued that “If any one event can be said to mark the beginning of Iran’s history as a modern nation-state, it is probably the so-called Tobacco Rebellion of 1891-1892” (Daniel, 2001, p. 115).

More specifically, after his expensive trips to Europe, Shah Nasir al-Din was in need of cash. In 1890, he thus approved a deal that gave a monopoly for the purchase, sale, and production of tobacco in Iran to a British citizen, Major G. F. Tabot. The deal was to remain in force for fifty years in return for an annual rent of £15,000, a quarter of the expected
yearly profits after the payment of all expenses and a dividend of five percent on the capital (Moaddel, 1992, p. 459). Accordingly, the sale prices were to be mutually agreed upon by the company and the Iranian sellers, and disagreements were to be settled by compulsory arbitration (Mottahedeh, 2000, p. 215). However, the tobacco crop also had cultural value for Iranians: it was a source of pride to cultivate “a variety of tobacco not cultivated elsewhere which was much prized in foreign markets as well as in Iran itself” (Mottahedeh, 2000, p. 215). Economically, the concession would hurt both the merchants and the retail traders—together a significant portion of the population—who depended on the tobacco trade (Moaddel, 1992, p. 459).

The local merchants were not alone in their dislike of the tobacco concession; the Russians also perceived the tobacco concession as a threat to their interests in Iran. The scope of the concession, which signaled an increased British influence in Iran, alarmed the Tsarist government (Lambton, 1988, p. 223). Russia declared the tobacco concession to be a violation of the Treaty of Turkmenchay (Keddie, 1966, p. 43). The Russian ambassador to Tehran condemned the agreement, and started looking for ways to build public sentiment against the concession by lobbying the clergy (Daniel, 2001, p. 117).

Merchants in Tehran were the first to protest against the concession, followed by the merchants of Fars, Azerbaijan, Isfahan, and Meshed (See Moaddel, 1992, pp. 458-463). The Shah’s insistence on preserving the concession further increased protests, turning the protests into a nationwide rebellion by an alliance of different social classes.43 Despite their

43 The closest allies of the merchants were retail traders and craftsmen that were organized in occupational guilds. A guild was “a group of towns people engaged in the same occupation, who elect their own chief and officers, who pay guild taxes, this group having fiscal and administrative functions” (Floor, 1975, p. 100).
numerical supremacy, the protestors were initially unable to dissuade Shah Nasir al-Din from granting the concessions. The determining factor in the struggle was the introduction of the “religious card” by the merchants. Both the protestors and the Shah had attempted to gain the support of Iranian clergy and the \textit{ulama}^{44} since the beginning of the protests. However, the Iranian ulama did not act consistently. In some places, merchants were successful in convincing the ulama, obtaining their support in protesting the concession. However, in other places, the ulama remained closer to the shah and supported the concession.

The turning point came in late 1891. Tehran protestors, following the example of protestors in Isfahan, adopted a tobacco boycott towards the end of November. A rumor that tipped the balance in favor of the protestors arrived in early December: a \textit{fatva}^{45} declared, in the name of God, that “As of now, the consumption of tobacco and tootoon in any form is tantamount to war against the Imam of the Age.” (Cited in Moaddel, 1992, p. 464). It was said that “the \textit{fatva} [religious decree issued by Shirazi, a renowned religious scholar] had arrived, and that the original copy of the fatva was at the disposal of Ayatollah Ashtiyani, a leading \textit{mojtahid}^{46} of Tehran” (Cited in Moaddel, 1992, p. 464). Indeed, the fatva that was distributed all around the country and launched a nationwide tobacco boycott was a fabrication by a group of merchants—but Shirazi “was prudent enough not

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44 \textit{Ulama} are religious scholars who had prestige and influence on people.

45 \textit{Fatva} is a religious authorization or decree that could be issued by selected ulama specifically for issues that not specifically addressed in core religious texts.

46 \textit{Mojtahid} is a religious scholar with higher rank. Ranking clergy and ulama is more widespread in Iran and Shi'a Islam in comparison to other Sunni Muslim societies. This granted them more power and resources, and made them less dependent on political power. Therefore, ulama and clergy played more active role in many of the rebellions and revolutions in Iran. However, this does not mean complete independence and uniform reaction by the clergy and ulama; there are many evidences of cooperation between the clergy/ulama and the political establishment (See M. Bayat, 1991).
to deny its authenticity” (Cited in Moaddel, 1992, p. 464). As a result, the shah, left with no choice, repudiated the concessions by the end of January 1892.

In addition to altering the shah’s desired course of action for the first time in modern Iranian history, the tobacco protests also led to the discovery of an important force that could challenge the shah: the political power of religion and a coalition with the ulama. The shah resisted domestic and foreign pressures against the concession, but "when the merchants invoked religious principles against the tobacco concession, it was not so easy for the state to repress" it, as the struggle then became a holy contest for religion (Moaddel, 1992, p. 459). In addition, the tobacco protest not only demonstrated the potential power of religion against the state, but also “provided a historical precedent and justification for subsequent intervention of the Shi’i establishment in politics” (Moaddel, 1992, pp. 447-448). Indeed, this was an important beginning. The coalition that had participated in the tobacco movement would also play a key role in the Constitutional Revolution that was to begin in 1906 (Keddie, 1966, p. 131).

In the larger argument of this chapter, the Tobacco Movement also illustrates the close integration and willing cooperation of the Azerbaijani ulama, merchant, and clergy with the social and political forces of Iran. These allies protested against the Qajar government regardless of their ethnic affinity. Moreover, Azerbaijanis were soon to play a much larger role in the Constitutional Revolution in the first decade of the 19th century.

47 “Shi’a” and “Shi’i” are same words and can be interchangeably. The difference spelling is due to different transliterations from Persian and Arabic. This study adopts “Shi’a” and uses “Shi’i” (or others) only when citing other sources.
The tobacco protests were not only a response to the penetration of foreign powers but also took aim at the court’s despotism, extravagancy, and ineptitude in managing the economy. However, shortly after the cancellation of the concession by Naser od-Din Shah, his son, Muzaffar od-Din, ascended to throne in 1897. The new shah started searching for additional loans from the West. This time, the financial crises and concessions led to more repressive measures against popular protests. These actions culminated in the Constitutional Revolution in 1906, endowing Iran with a constitution for the first time in its history.

The struggle to obtain a constitutional regime took years; the Qajar regime was not willing to give up its despotic powers. In this decisive struggle, Azerbaijan played a vital role. Briefly, in 1909, after the Shah’s army bombarded the Iranian Majlis in an attempt to destroy the constitutionalist movement in Iran, Azerbaijan resisted and resuscitated the movement. As a result, Azerbaijan gained the reputation as the savior of constitutionalism in Iran. Importantly, the Khiyabani Insurgency in 1920 would reference this image as Sheikh Muhammad would legitimize his rebellion by reminding Azerbaijanis of their sacrifices in the earlier Constitutionalist Revolution.

2.3. The Roots of the Constitutional Revolution

Court expenses and Muzaffar od-Din Shah’s frequent and expensive trips to Europe for medical treatment led to an increasing state debt, necessitating new loans from the Russians in exchange for new monopolistic concessions (Axworthy, 2008, p. 199). As a result, the Shah’s government started searching for ways to secure the desired loans. To
obtain loans, Iran was forced to start reforming its customs administration, as customs revenue would be the primary method by which Iran would pay back the new loans. Accordingly, Prime Minister Amin od-Dowleh introduced a revision to the customs administration. This attempt failed to secure loans from Britain and caused Ol-Dowleh’s dismissal in 1898. The subsequent prime minister, Amin ol-Sultan, introduced a new plan and appointed a Belgian citizen, Joseph Naus, as customs minister. While the new customs regulations largely satisfied foreign lenders, the regulations also made conditions harder for local people. In particular, locals were forced to pay even more than before and more than foreigners (Axworthy, 2008, p. 200). Naus soon became finance minister (Keddie, 1991, pp. 199-200); he also became one of the targets of the masses suffering from the new customs policies.

Another noteworthy concession came in 1901: the sole right to explore oil resources in the southern part of the country was granted to William Knox D’Arcy, a British entrepreneur (Axworthy, 2008, p. 200). While this concession did not have an immediate impact on the economy, the discovery of oil was to make Iran more than a market or crossroad for Britain, as this was the eve of British navy’s switch from coal to oil. The discovery of oil, which was to take a few more years, would make Iran an inevitable oil source for Great Britain. As a result, the British envoy in Iran started to “liaise with some members of the ulema48, notably Ayatollah Behbehani, to oppose the customs arrangements, including the Russian loans” in 1902-1903 (Axworthy, 2008, p. 200). This lobbying paid off, and agitation against foreigners led to riots in Isfahan and Yazd in the

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48 Ulema and ulama are used to mean same group people, religious scholar, as introduced above. Difference is a result of different transliterations of different sources. This study adopts ulama, but uses different spellings only when cited from different sources.
summer of 1903. Thus began a new cycle of popular protests that was to move Iran gradually towards revolution.

A series of developments in 1904 and 1905 sparked the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. Globally, Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and the revolutionary upheavals in 1905 had important reverberations in Iran. First, these events restrained Russia’s influence in Iran and meant less support for the autocratic regime; this provided Britain with a freer hand in Iran. Second, Iranian intellectuals viewed Russia’s defeat by Japan as a victory for constitutionalist forces: “the only Asian constitutional state had defeated the major Western non-constitutional one” (Foran, 1991, p. 803). This “suggested the desirability of having a constitution” (Foran, 1991, p. 803). Iranian intellectuals would later draw similar lessons from the 1917 Russian Revolution, which transpired just before the start of the Khiyabani Insurgency.

Domestically, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Qajar government “was more in debt than ever” (Shirali, 2015, p. 20); resulted in bankruptcy of state and high rates of inflation in 1904–1905. Muzaffar al-Din Shah appealed to British and Russian banks for new loans. At the time, Iran already owed £4 million and had given control of the entire customs system to a group of Belgian administrators headed by Naus (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 41). However, Naus did not have a favorable image in Iran. Rumors that “Naus had Jewish origins, preferred to employ Armenians over Muslims, planned to raise drastically the tariffs on local merchants, and aspired to become minister of finance even though he was completely ignorant of the traditional mostowfi system” were added to a photograph
of “him masquerading as a mullah at a fancy dress ball” during the month of Muharram\(^{49}\) in 1905 (Kasravi, 1978b, pp. 49-58). There were signs of local discontent towards him and the customs policies implemented under his leadership.

The worsening image of Naus was not without cause. Iran faced very sharp inflation, which caused dramatic price increases. For example, the price of sugar increased by thirty-three percent and the price of bread by ninety percent. A combination of other factors also had a role in the growth of inflation: bad harvests, a cholera epidemic, and decreased trade with Russia due to the 1905 Russo-Japanese War and the subsequent revolutionary upheavals (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 42). However, the populace placed the lion’s share of the blame for these economic woes on the “many risky innovations by Joseph Naus” and on his customs policies. Due to the increased tariffs and costs, merchants were “obliged to buy sugar at the highest price”; in response, they then “refused to sell it at the [artificially low] price demanded by the government” (Shirali, 2015, p. 21).

Sugar and bread were not only important elements of the Iranian diet, but the increase in their prices also provided the spark for the overwhelmed masses to stand up against the Qajar regime, in spite of foreseeable government repression. The governor of Tehran, attempting to divert public attention by blaming the bazaar for the rising sugar prices, ordered three prominent sugar merchants—one of them “a seventy-year-old importer highly respected because of his philanthropic activities”—to be bastinadoed.

\(^{49}\) Muharram is a holy month for Muslims and has special importance for Shi’as. It was in the month of Muharram when a group of Muslims, including the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, were killed near the city of Karbala. The Karbala incidents constitute one of the cornerstones of Shi’a sect. Shi’as in Iran and other parts of the world celebrate this month as a memoir of sorrow, and abstain from events of entertainment and joy, such as marriage ceremonies.
publicly in November 1905 (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 42). Once news reached the rest of Tehran, the whole bazaar closed and launched a strike, demanding the dismissal of the governor. In the meantime, Mashed, a holly city for Shi’as, hosted another clash: “bread rioters assaulted the home of a court-linked corn dealer, and the latter retaliated by having his private gunmen shoot down forty protestors who had taken sanctuary in the Imam Reza Shrine” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 42).

This arbitrary, violent, and humiliating treatment further galvanized protestors and led to two major protests in 1906, one organized by senior ulama and another by Tehran merchants. Both protests managed to draw support from other social groups. In one instance, a group of approximately one thousand seminary students under the leadership of Sayyed Abdallah Behbehani and Sayyed Muhammad Tabatabai, two of the venerated Tehran mojtahids, organized a protest walk the sanctuary in Qom. Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, another respected mojtahid from Tehran, joined to them in the city of Qom. The movement secured the support of the three most prominent members of the Tehran ulama and “threatened to move en masse to Karbala and Najaf [the holy cities for Shi’a Muslims located within the borders of Iraq], and thus deprive the country of religious services unless the shah dismissed both Naus and the governor, resolved the Kerman crisis, stopped the bank construction, and, most important of all, established an Adalat Khaneh (House of Justice)” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 43).

In another instance, a larger group of protestors, primarily composed of merchants, mullahs, and others, took sanctuary in the British legation in Tehran. The British charge d’affaires accepted the protestors’ request for sanctuary as a sign of respect to the Persian
tradition of hospitality (Axworthy, 2008, p. 202). Once inside, the Tehran merchant guilds undertook organization of the movement and accommodated their daily needs (Axworthy, 2008, p. 202). The organizing committee also arranged women’s demonstrations outside the legation. The protesters eventually limited the entry of newcomers into the compound (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 44) as the number of participants passed 13,000 in four days with around 500 tents, according to a report of one of the participants (Kasravi, 2006, p. 136).

Once the faculty and students of the Dar al-Fanon [Academy of Sciences] joined the protesters in the legation, the compound was transformed into “one vast open-air school of political science” where the students and faculty were “lecturing on the advantages of constitutional government and even of republicanism” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 44). With this increased popular support and the contributions of the intellectuals from diverse backgrounds—liberals, nationalists (Axworthy, 2008, p. 202), and social democrats (Afary, 1994, p. 24)—the organizing committee augmented its demands to the shah. In addition to a House of Justice, the committee now wanted a written constitution, to be drafted by an elected National Assembly (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 44). During this time, the ulama also organized a telegram campaign, asking the Shah to accept the demands of the protesters (Kasravi, 2006, pp. 140-144).

The government’s first response was to dismiss the claims and characterize the protesters as “Babi heretics” and “British-hired traitors” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 44). However, faced with the unprecedented strike, the shah had to yield to the demands. The report of a direct observer summarizes the situation:

[The protesters’] greatest triumph was, of course, the dismissal of M. Naus, which
the Government accorded very unwillingly. They presented several demands of far-reaching consequences...The Government refused, temporised, threatened, but in vain. The Shah with his unarmed, unpaid, ragged, starving soldiers, what can he do in face of the menace of a general strike and riots. The Government had to climb down and grant all that was asked of them (Quoted in Browne, 1910, pp. 137-138).

Muzaffer od-Din Shah approved the proclamation for general elections for the Constituent Assembly on 5 August 1906. The Constituent Assembly convened in Tehran and promptly prepared an electoral law that granted “suffrage to all male Iranian citizens over the age of thirty who owned property, irrespective of their religion” (Daniel, 2001, pp. 121-122). Because of these property requirements, the new voting rights did not extend to the peasants and the poor.

In the Tobacco Protests of early the 1890s, the coalition of the ulama and the merchants forced the shah to revise his plans. This time, in 1906, a larger and a more organized coalition managed to bring a constitution to Iran, the first in its history.50

Understandably, the composition of the opposition in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution has been a subject of intense inquiry. Some called the coalition a “religious-radical alliance” in consideration of the ideological elements (Keddie, 1980); others considered it to be a coalition of the merchants, the ulama, and the new generation of “enlightened thinkers,” all a product of contact with the West (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 35). For some, it was a mixed “populist” alliance that embraced larger segments of the society:

50 As is observed in many other mass revolutions, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution did not start as an organized attempt with specific purpose of asking for a constitution. However, once diverse groups came together, they acted in an organized way, and collaborated against the Qajar court despite their disagreements about many other issues.
“rather than a bourgeois revolution, it was more of a popular, democratic, mass urban movement fought by a pre-capitalist class in decline (the artisans) and two small capitalist classes in formation (the intelligentsia and working class), and led by two classes/groups that were divided (ulama and merchants)” (Foran, 1991, pp. 803-804). Still others emphasized the economic dimensions of the alliance, specifically the links between the ulama, the merchants (Martin, 1989), and the guilds (Gilbar, 1977). While the size and diversity made the alliance more powerful against the shah’s government, these same factors also posed challenges for the sustainability of the alliance. Once the old shah—the common enemy—was defeated, this diversity led to disagreements.

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution was also an important milestone, a predecessor, for the development of the Khiyabani Movement in Tabriz, the capital city of Iranian Azerbaijan. As discussed below, Iranian Azerbaijanis were among the leading supporters of the constitutionalist movement. Most importantly, when the movement’s power was fading in the rest of the country, Tabriz remained as the stronghold of the constitutionalist struggle. Furthermore, two of the core demands of the Khiyabani insurgents were to be the reestablishment of the constitutional regime in Iran and the removal foreign powers from Iranian territories.
2.4. Iran’s First Constitution

Iran’s first National Assembly met on 7 October 1906, with the participation of Muzaffar od-Din Shah Qajar. The shah was old and sick, and opening the Majlis was one of his last acts as king (Mackey, 1998, pp. 150-155). The Crown Prince, Muhammad Ali, was known for his distaste of constitutionalism. Therefore, in its very first meeting, the Majlis acted promptly in making the new constitution and declared itself a Constitutional Assembly with right to make a constitution. As a result, the constitution was approved by Muzaffar od-Din Shah on 31 December 1906, a few days before his death.

The first Majlis witnessed the emergence of two political tendencies, conservatives and liberals; it would take several years for them to organize as political parties. The conservatives would eventually become the Moderate Party, and the liberals would eventually become the Democrat Party. There was also a small, unpopular third group, the royalists. The liberals were led by Hassan Taqizadeh, a former cleric from Tabriz, who “still wore his turban” and “had become increasingly enamored of modern ideas,” primarily after his trip to Baku (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 46). Interestingly, the majority of the Democrats were from Iranian Azerbaijan and had the support of the intelligentsia, as well as some of the Tehran guilds and merchants (Foran, 1991, p. 805). The Moderates dominated the Majlis and had the backing of the two most notable members of Tehran ulama, Behbehani and Tabatabai (Axworthy, 2008, p. 203).

51 More than sixty of 156 members elected to the Majlis were “merchants and guild elders; twenty-five clerics; and some fifty landlords, local notables, and senior officials” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 46).
The first two years of the Majlis witnessed cooperation among the old constitutionalist allies, primarily the *ulama*, the merchants, and the progressives.52 “[T]he progressives knew that they needed the influence of the ulama and bazaar classes, while the latter were compelled to follow the popular movement” (Foran, 1991, p. 806).

Historically, the Iranian *ulama*—diverse and even controversial individuals (See M. Bayat, 1991)—had developed cooperative relationships with the Qajar court, and, at the same time, commanded the means necessary to mobilize the masses (Algar, 1978, pp. 231-233). Their social position thus made them a necessary ally for the other revolutionary groups, primarily the liberals and social democrats. Between 1907 and 1911, the reformist agenda was shaped by the progressives, primarily by the social democrats (Afary, 1994, p. 24). It is important to remember that a considerable number of these progressives were from Iranian Azerbaijan, a region that had traditionally been the gateway for the flow of new ideas and ideologies to Iran.

Aware of their need for each other, as well as of the Crown Prince’s anti-constitutional tendencies, the Moderates and the Liberals cooperated to draft a “constitution that would be acceptable not only to Muzaffar al-Din Shah, who died soon after signing the original proclamation, but also to his successor, Muhammad Ali Shah, who tried to water down royal promises” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 47). According to the reports of eyewitnesses, graduates of Dar al-Fanon [the Academy of Sciences] played a key role in shaping the final two documents—the Fundamental and the Supplementary Fundamental Laws—that aimed to construct a constitutional monarchy built on the separation of powers

52 “Progressives” was a common term (among whom?) to describe the secular intelligentsia, including pro-Western liberals, and Social Democrats sympathizers of Russian left.
Emulating the Belgian constitution, Iranian constitution clearly stated that “the shah’s sovereignty derived from the people, as a power given to him in trust, not as a right bestowed directly by God” (Axworthy, 2008, p. 204). Shi’ism was declared as the state’s official religion. The constitution also recognized shari’a law, giving a significant role to clerical courts and establishing “a five-man committee of senior ulama to scrutinize legislation passed by Majles, to confirm its spiritual legitimacy” (Axworthy, 2008, p. 204). Furthermore, only Shi’a Muslims were allowed to hold cabinet positions, and government was given right to ban “heretical” books, “anti-religious” associations, and “pernicious ideas” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 48).

The emergent constitutional system reflected the compromises necessary to satisfy both sides in the short term. It did not take long to see that the two major sides had different expectations and were not really compatible with each other. As discussed below, these incompatibilities would eventually destroy the coalition and drag Iran into a civil war when the province of Azerbaijan emerged as the champion of constitutionalism in Iran.

2.4.1. Secret Societies during the Constitutional Revolution: The Rise of the Tabriz Anjumans

Secret societies, some of which were known as anjumans [councils or associations], were one of the important actors during the Constitutional Revolution. Anjumans were clandestine gatherings of different groups that discussed social and political issues; they also took advantage of this secrecy to plan collective action. Importantly, the anjumans in

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53 Shari’a is used to mean Islamic law and legal principles derived from religious sources.
the province of Azerbaijan not only facilitated constitutionalist resistance in the first
decade of the new century, but they also provided the core supporters of the Khiyabani
Insurgency.

The intelligentsia from diverse backgrounds were at the heart of these societies. The
idea of restricting state power was becoming commonly accepted among members these
societies. Lambton describes both the challenges these societies faced:

The government was absolute. The shah considered himself the chosen of God and
the people taken by and large accepted this belief. The will of the shah was regarded
as tantamount to the divine law and obedience to him as obedience to God. Opposition to, or rebellion against, him was thus regarded as opposition to God.
Compromise or give take in such circumstances was ruled out. Those who did not
conform had no choice but to withdraw from active participation in affairs or to
overthrow the state. It is this dilemma which accounts in part for the sporadic
growth of secret societies often associated with extreme religious sects and using
assassinations as a weapon for the attainment of political power (Lambton, 1988, p.
302).

Anjumans remained secret until 1906. One of the achievements of the Constitutional
Revolution, the Electoral Laws of September 1906, called for the formation—essentially
legalization—of anjumans in local towns to supervise the elections. The constitutional
supplements of 7 October 1907 formalized the provincial and departmental anjumans (in
smaller provinces) to supervise tax collection and monitor the activities of the local
governors (See Afary, 1991). Not long after, hundreds of anjumans “sprang up all over the
country to debate political issues and in some cases to disperse welfare services, conduct
literacy classes, and even run local governments” (Foran, 1991, p. 805). Anjumans were
granted “dual power with the parliament and the government,” and the Tabriz Anjuman became the most powerful and vocal of the regional anjumans (Afary, 1994, p. 25). Once loose and secret gatherings, now the anjumans served as the core of an emerging civil society. The Tabriz Anjuman even functioned as de facto regional ruler in Azerbaijan.

The anjumans were planned as temporary institutions with the narrow purpose of supervising elections. However, the Tabriz Anjuman decided to remain open even after elections were held; it was fast becoming an alternative local administration. From its early days, the Tabriz Anjuman directly addressed the social, administrative, and even judicial needs of the local people. The Crown Prince Muhammad Ali Mirza, then residing in Tabriz, as well as by other anti-constitutionalists, did not welcome this involvement by the Tabriz Anjuman, perceiving it as usurping the power/role of government institutions (Afary, 1994, p. 25). Thus, the crown prince attempted to dissolve the anjuman. However, since the prince was called to Tehran after the death of his father, the city was left to the Tabriz Anjuman (Mustafayev, 2005, pp. 44-45). On 19 October 1906, The Tabriz Anjuman launched its own magazine, Anjuman, without the permission of the central government authorities. For some, this was also the “first swallow of the free press in Iran” (P. Mämmäldi, 2009, p. 44).

The Tabriz Anjuman was an outgrowth of the underground struggle for the constitution; its legalization turned it into an increasingly powerful alternative administrative organ in Iranian Azerbaijan. Muhammad Ali, once challenged by the Tabriz Anjuman during his reign in Tabriz, was now shah of Iran. He now busied himself with plans for weakening and destroying theconstitutionalist alliance. Indeed, as discussed
below, the increasing disagreements between the two major groups of the Majlis, the Democrats and the Moderates, also had repercussions for the Tabriz Anjuman. Two strong supporters of the Moderates, Tabatabai and Behbehani, addressed the Majlis on 15 January 1907, and criticized the Tabriz Anjuman’s position, accusing it of causing turmoil in the country (Mustafayev, 2005, p. 47). Worse, the collapse of the constitutionalist alliance was leading to a more violent clash between the conservatives and radicals: civil war. And Tabriz, a stronghold of the Democrats, was poised to become one of the battlegrounds in the coming war.

2.5. The Collapse of the Constitutionalist Alliance and Civil War

Crown Prince Muhammad Ali ascended to the throne in January 1907, inheriting a constitution approved by his father. Despite his dislike of the democratic claims, he was bound by his father’s promises and was under considerable pressure from a large opposition. However, changes in domestic and global-regional power balances provided the new shah with some crucial opportunities. Increasing disagreement among the constitutionalist coalition and weakened external support, which had primarily from Great Britain, emboldening Muhammad Ali Shah to the extent that he dared to dissolve the Majlis and then bomb it.

According to Abrahamian, three specific developments shattered the delicate balance among the revolutionary groups as well as between them and the Qajar regime. First, to counter the rise of Germany, Britain and Russia signed the Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907. This agreement divided Iran into three zones—allocating the north to
Russia and the south to Britain, and demarcating the rest as a neutral zone—and required each power to seek concessions only in its own zone. The convention that ended the sworn competition between Britain and Russia, taught Iranians a hard lesson according to Abrahamian: “however predatory the two “neighbors” were, they were even more dangerous when they put aside their rivalries” (Abrahamian, 2008, pp. 49-50).

Second, the Majlis introduced a new tax reform and deeper constitutional limitations on the court, and this created a serious backlash against it. To be more specific:

[The new reform package] restricted the practice of auctioning off tax farms. It transferred state lands from the royal treasury to the finance ministry. It gave the ministry jurisdiction over provincial mostowfis. It reduced allocations to the court treasury, which, in turn, was obliged to streamline the palace stables, armories, kitchens, kilns, warehouses, harem, and work-shops. It was even forced to close down the Drum Towers (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 50).

In addition, the Majlis introduced a proposal to found a military force, a gendarme, independent of the shah. The shah perceived this to be a conspiracy to depose him in favor of another member of the Qajar family (Daniel, 2001, p. 124).

Third, the far-reaching secular reforms promoted by the Liberals—who blamed the ulama for “covering up slimy interests with sublime sermons” and questioned the ulama’s constitutional veto power over parliamentary legislation—led to defections from the constitutionalist alliance. For example, Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, one of the three Tehran mojtaheds that had initially sided with the constitutionalists, broke with his two colleagues, Behbehani and Tabatabai. His new organization, the “Society of the Prophet,” favored rapprochement with the Shah and issued a major fatva denouncing Liberals for opening up
the floodgates to “anarchism, nihilism, socialism, and naturalism” (Cited in Abrahamian, 2008, p. 50; Razavani, 1983, pp. 30-31).

Collapsing constitutionalist alliance and increased power of the Qajar court was to give way to a bloody civil war between constitutionalists and the ones opposed to a constitutional rule in Iran. Thus, Muhammad Ali Shah, filled with dislike and suspicion, ordered the arrest of several Qajar aristocrats sympathetic to Majlis and issued an ultimatum to send some vocal radicals into exile (Daniel, 2001, p. 125). The shah appointed Russian Cossack Commander Colonel Liakhoff as the military governor of Tehran; and Liakhoff immediately banned all newspapers, public meetings, and religious ceremonies such as Muharram processions (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 51). The Tabriz Anjuman, alarmed by these actions, called on all Iranian cities, via telegraph, to resist against anti-constitutionalists and to overthrow the despotic shah (Mustafayev, 2005, p. 50). When the Majlis rejected the ultimatum related to the proposed exile of the radicals, Muhammad Ali Shah ordered the Cossack Brigade under Colonel Liakhoff to bomb the Majlis on 23 June 1908. As a result, some prominent constitutionalists, such as Jahangir Khan, editor of Sour-e Esrafil, and the orator Malek-al-Motakallemin, were killed; Behbehani and Tabatabai were arrested; some took sanctuary in the British legation, while others fled to Ottoman Turkey.

The bombardment of the Majlis ushered in a short period of “lesser despotism” and civil war, ending the reign of Muhammad Ali Shah on 16 July 1909. In this brief period of

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54 The shah drew his strength in part from the 1,500 Cossacks garrisoned in Tehran whose loyalty he had secured after distributing the £10,000 in cash received from Mukhber al-Dowleh (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 51).
turmoil and civil war, “the shah ruled by decree, repeatedly postponing the elections he had promised to the nation and the foreign envoys, on the grounds that heresy and sedition had first to be entirely eliminated” (M. Bayat, 1991, p. 232). Though the bombardment of the Majlis replaced the constitutional period with a despotic regime concentrated in Tehran, the constitutionalist struggle was far from over in the rest of the country. In addition to the armed struggle in Iranian cities; high-ranking Shi’a clergy in Iraq criticized the shah; and constitutionalists in exile, especially those in Britain, worked hard to gather public support for their cause (Daniel, 2001, p. 125). Constitutionalists in major cities, especially in Tabriz, took up arms against the royal forces.

2.6. The Civil War and the Rise of Tabriz

The anjumans all around the country were banned following Colonel Liakhoff’s pronouncements in Tehran. Once the news reached Tabriz, the members of the Tabriz Anjuman appealed to the Russian and British consulates for protection, a demand made more urgent by the siege of the city by pro-shah Shahseven tribesmen. As a result, all but one anjuman in Tabriz was dissolved: the Haqiqat [Truth] Anjuman remained. This anjuman was located in city locality under the leadership of Sattar Khan, an horse dealer, and his companion Bager Khan, a bricklayer (Mustafayev, 2005, p. 50).

Once Sattar Khan and Bager Khan refused to recognize the shah’s orders and called for resistance, many others joined them. Soon, Tabriz had become the “locus of resistance,” with widening support from very diverse groups. Notably, the constitutionalist militia, the mujahidin (Foran, 1991, p. 807), banded together with “members of the [other dissolved]
anjumans, volunteers from the Caucasus, Armenians, tradesmen, religious students, and peasants and tribesmen from the surrounding countryside” (Daniel, 2001, p. 125) to drive the shah’s forces from the city.55 Rumors, probably purposefully exaggerated, reported the number of militants under the command of Sattar Khan to be as high as 20,000 (Q. Mämmädli, 1949, p. 14). 56

The siege and the fighting between the constitutionalist coalition in Tabriz and the royalists lasted ten months, causing devastation and starvation among the local people. According to reports:

The city streets were covered with trenches. Resistance was everywhere; streets against streets, boulevards against boulevards, neighborhoods against neighborhoods. Streets became famous either as “constitutionalist” or “despot” (Q. Mämmädli, 1949, p. 20) [My translation from a Soviet/Azerbaijani source]

“One of the streets that became famous in the constitutionalist struggle,” as Mämmädli reads, “was Khiyaban Street,” which witnessed the resistance of the young and devoted constitutionalist Sheikh Muhammad who would become Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani. Khiyabani’s contributions in Tabriz—particularly his attempts to raise funds and arms during the siege of the city—were also acknowledged by Sattar (Q. Mämmädli, 1949, p. 26). This was an early sign of Khiyabani’s potential as a future leader of Iranian Azerbaijan: he participated in the military confrontation against the central government and he fought for

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55 British reporters also remarked on the contributions of the volunteers from the Caucasus, noting that the hand grenades they brought with them and their bomb-making skills made them “walking arsenals” (See Abrahamian, 2008, p. 52).

56 Many Azerbaijanis in Iran, including Sattar Khan, spent some time in Baku, usually as workers. There, they were exposed to revolutionary ideas and witnessed revolutionary upheavals (Q. Mämmädli, 1949, p. 14).
the cause of constitutionalism and democracy in Iran. Indeed, the insurgency he was to lead in 1920 reflected elements of the constitutionalist struggle in Tabriz. The core demands put forth by the insurgents in the civil war and during the 1920 movement were identical: constitutional rule and the removal of foreign spheres of influence. In short, what Khiyabani sought in 1920 was a slightly updated version of what the Tabriz Anjuman had sought in 1906-1907.

The pace of confrontation in Tabriz was altered by several developments. Constitutionalists in Tabriz received terminal support from three sources; together these turned the tide in the struggle between the revolutionaries and the Iranian state and lead to the victory of the revolutionaries. First, the Russians intervened. As the clashes began to cause serious devastation, especially in Tabriz, the Russians forced Muhammad Ali Shah to accept a cease-fire and to restore the constitution. Furthermore, after the encouragement of Great Britain, the Russian troops entered Tabriz to break the siege and to allow for food supplies to enter the city (Daniel, 2001, pp. 125-126). Second, groups from other cities joined the struggle against the central government. Specifically, armed forces from Mazanderan and Rasht sided with the Tabriz constitutionalists. Muhammad Vali Sepahdar, commander of the army that was sent to support the royalist forces in Tabriz, defected. With his loyal men from Mazanderan, he joined Yeprem Khan, the leader of the revolutionary government that was set up after the coup in Rasht (Daniel, 2001, pp. 125-126). They arrived at Qazvin on 5 May and, after joining with the constitutionalists, prepared to move on Tabriz. Third, support to the constitutionalists also came from the Bakhtiyaris, who, after capturing Isfahan, marched on Tehran with around 12,000 armed

As a result, Iran experienced another victory by a coalition of forces from diverse backgrounds united in their struggle for a constitutional regime. The deputies of the Majlis, representatives of the armed groups, and merchants—around 500 delegates all together—convened a Constituent Assembly. Then the assembly called itself the Grand Majlis, and it decided to replace the exiled shah with his twelve-year old son, Ahmad Shah (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 53). The Grand Majlis retained Colonel Liakhoff in his position as the commander of the Cossacks, founded a new Cossack Brigade in Tabriz, and set up a special tribunal to punish parties responsible for the civil war. In this capacity, the tribunal publically executed Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri and five others in Cannon Square in Tehran (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 53). Furthermore, the Grand Majlis revised the electoral law to allow more provincial and minority representation and formed a provisional government (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 53).

Sattar Khan, who started the resistance, became the “hero” of the constitutionalist struggle (Resulzade, 1993, p. 23). As a result of Khan’s elevated role, Iranian Azerbaijan became known as the savior of Iran. In the words of Atabaki:

...the entire country, except for Azerbaijan, was subjugated to the new regime. By sending in the army and imposing economic restrictions, the central government strove to bring the Azerbaijaniis, too, to their knees. However, while famine spread across the province, the Azerbaijani constitutionalists set up barricades in Tabriz and prepared to offer armed resistance. When the government in Tehran was eventually overthrown, the constitutionalists found themselves in a nearly unique position, with the attention of the entire nation fixed on them. Gradually the belief arose among Iranians that although the Constitutional Revolution had been bon in
The recognition of the vital role played by the Azerbaijani constitutionalists in protecting constitutionalism in Iran “left Azerbaijani constitutionalists with a strong sense of being the protectors of the country’s territorial integrity” (Atabaki, 2006b, p. 122). According to Atabaki, this feeling persists to this day. Indeed, a variety of sources support this observation. The Russian ambassador to Iran, in his report of 24 August 1908, noted that “Azerbaijanis led the movement” (Quoted in Q. Mämmädli, 1949, p. 14). The champion of Azerbaijani nationalism, Rasulzade, also reported this sense of Iranian patriotism: “Iranian Turkic [Azerbaijani] constitutionalists did not think about their Turkishness; they had performed all of the sacrifices merely in the name of Iranianism and common country” (Resulzade, 1993, p. 30). The primacy of place Azerbaijanis gave to Iranian concerns during this time still festers almost a century later:

Even though the government was in the hands of Turks and the flag of the Constitutional Revolution was in the hands of Azerbaijanis, though there was an opportunity to give legal status to Turkish, in addition to Persian, Azerbaijani intellectuals had forgotten Azerbaijan completely for the sake of saving whole Iran (P. Mämmädli, 2009, p. 47). [My translation from Modern Azerbaijani]

In sum, Tabriz served as the “nest” of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (Särdariniya, 2005, p. 32), and Sattar Khan was recorded as “the brave son of [the Iranian] Azerbaijan” (Häsänov, 1986) and its “commander” and “guide” (Rähimli, 2005, p. 89). All these symbols would soon serve as points of reference in the Khiyabani insurgency.
2.7. The Collapse of the Constitutionalist Alliance

The Second Majlis convened in the fall of 1910 with increased democratic expectations in Iran. The shah’s court had been weakened, but Iran, now under the control of an elected government, faced new challenges. Economic deficits and growing political polarization dragged Iran into another cycle of turmoil and violent clashes between various political groups. However, the government was unable to address the rising domestic tensions due to limited reach of its state apparatus. As a result, Russia and Great Britain were able to use this social unrest as a pretext to occupy the zones designated by the 1907 treaty.57

The specter haunting Iran since the mid-nineteenth century—financial deficiency and dependence on foreign loans—loomed soon after the elected government was inaugurated. The new government was challenged by a serious financial crisis that dragged the Iranian economy to the point of bankruptcy. Expenses exceeded revenues, and this left no choice for the government other than to solicit year-to-year loans from London and St. Petersburg (See Abrahamian, 2008, p. 54). Customs revenues, still remaining in Belgian hands, barely sufficed to pay off the existing loans. More specifically, northern customs duties and income from the Caspian fisheries went to pay for the loans from Russia; southern customs duties and revenue from the telegraph system went to pay for the loans from Britain (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 55).58 However, in 1914, the Belgians even recommended that the government sell parts of Azerbaijan and Gurgan to Russia, and sell

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57 Increased political turmoil further diminished central government’s capacity to provide order and security especially in peripheral areas. As a result, many small, mafia like armed groups emerged in villages and peripheral areas attempting to provide their own security. Some of these groups targeted foreign companies and persons and raided their assets, which alarmed the Russian and the British governments.

58 Iran started receiving its first oil money only in 1912-13, several years after the Burma Oil Company took over the 1905 D’Arcy Concession.
the Gulf islands to Britain to avoid bankruptcy (Cited in Abrahamian, 2008, p. 55).

Another major problem was the increasing ideological polarization between the Democrats and the Moderates. Disagreement started with debates over secularism, minority and women’s rights, and the role of sharia in the judicial system; the discord escalated into violent clashes after the assassination of Behbehani, a supporter of the Moderates and a prominent figure from the constitutional revolution. The Moderates blamed the Democrats, especially Taqizadeh, and, after declaring him a traitor, they deported him to Europe (Caldarola, 1982, p. 213).

Escalating political turmoil in Iran was both a concern for Britain and Russia, and a convenient opportunity for their direct intervention. In 1909, Russian troops occupied Iranian Azerbaijan, “on the pretext of establishing law and order” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 58). In 1910, Britain sent an ultimatum that “gave Iran three months to secure southern trade routes carrying British goods from the tribal attacks,” or it would “regulate the Busherie-Isfahan road using a local police force placed under the authority of [British] officers from India” if Iran failed to pacify the trade route (Ateş, 2013, p. 265). Russia, inspired by Britain, issued its own ultimatum in November of 1911 regarding lack of order and security and their threatened interests in Iran.

The British and Russian ultimatums produced harsh reactions from many social groups in Iran. The Majlis witnessed fiery debates and speeches calling on the government to reject the ultimatums. One of enthusiastic voices was Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani. Now affiliated with the Democrats, Khiyabani stated: “I and my comrades, if any government accepts this ultimatum, we will become its enemy…” (Q. Mämmäldi, 1949, p.
In spite of Khiyabani’s words, Tehran accepted the ultimatum. However, yielding to these foreign ultimatums did not save Iran from occupation: the Russians occupied the rest of the area assigned to them in the 1907 convention. After tightening their hold in Tabriz, the Russians “hanged forty-three men in retaliation for the assassination of one of their soldiers” and bombarded the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashed, killing some forty pilgrims (Abrahamian, 2008, pp. 58-59).

In sum, Iran, economically bankrupt and politically polarized, now was also under direct military occupation, even before the outbreak of World War. It is important to note here that while economic bankruptcy and the government’s inability to maintain order were linked and mutually reinforcing, these conditions could also be linked to a larger problem: the absence of a centralized state machinery (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 54). The lack of state machinery will be discussed in chapter four.

2.8. The First World War and the National Defense Committee

Most of the Iranian territories were under the control of Russian and British troops even before the start of the World War I. However, the war introduced two more foreign powers with desires of getting their share from Iran—Germany and Ottoman Turkey. Since the Iranian government proved impotent to resist foreign occupation, a variety of groups attempted to find their own solutions, one of them being the declaration of the National Defense Committee. This subsection aims to illustrate the extent of political turmoil in Iran during the war years, especially in regards to increased involvement of foreign powers in
the country; and examines the process that ended with declaration of an alternative government in the city of Kermanshah.

Soon after World War began, Iran declared neutrality. However, Iran’s attempt to remain neutral neither freed it from the occupation of Russia and Britain nor saved it from becoming a zone of competition among the other great powers of the day. This time, two more powers joined the scramble in Iran, namely the Ottomans and the Germans. For the Iranians, nothing changed: Iran “had no real operational army capable of maintaining law and order in the country and defending its borders” (Farrokh, 2011, p. 230). Most importantly, once the Russians threatened to occupy Tehran in 1914, a diverse group politicians and journalists declared the Provisional Government in another city, Kermanshah. The attempt to found a provisional government also signifies the political atmosphere in Iran, which forced Iranian political elite and intelligentsia to find alternative ways of saving Iran from foreign occupation, and, as will be observed in the Khiyabani Insurgency, to establish the constitutional government in Iran.

More specifically, building upon the declaration of neutrality, the Iranian prime minister, Mostofi al-Mamalek, requested that the Russians withdraw their troops from Iran, as their presence would give the Turks a pretext for occupying Iran. In response, “the Russian minister appreciated the Iranian viewpoint but inquired what guarantees could be given that the withdrawal of Russian [troops], the Turks would not bring in theirs” (Cited in Atabaki, 2006a, p. 2). In the south, Britain steadily increased its military presence. Iran was not only a transit line between Britain and her colonies in Asia, but was also becoming a source of fuel for the British navy, as Britain had begun switching from coal to oil in the
early 1900s (See Engdahl, 2004, pp. 19-22). In order to safeguard its ever-increasing interests in Iran, Britain transferred some of its troops and arms which had been under the command of the British Indian Army to southern Iran in 1914, and formed the South Persian Rifles in 1916 (Fromkin, 1989, p. 209).

Among the four states, only Germany was well-liked by Iranians. Great Britain and Russia, for the reasons detailed above, had very bad reputations not only among the Iranian people, but also among “[s]ome of the emergent Iranian policy makers” (Ramazani, 1966, p. 137). These politicians “were so intense in their hatred of Great Britain and Russia that they could only adopt a policy of neutrality as a façade behind which flirtation and even secret agreement with Germany might take place” (Ramazani, 1966, p. 137). Rising negative sentiments against the allies favored German interests in Iran. Specifically, Germany hoped to curtail the British and Russian presence in Persia and diminish their access to India. Germany, for this purpose, even founded an intelligence unit in Iran and employed nationalist agitators against the Russian and British interventions (See Popplewell, 1995). The Germans went even further and promoted the “Unity of Islam, calling on Iranian, Turkish, Arab, and Indian Muslim to join Germany against the imperialist Entente Allies” (Marashi-Asgari, 2014, p. 53).

The German plan in Iran had some initial successes, as a group of Democrat deputies came to view siding with Germany as the preferable choice. However, the Democrats’ rapprochement with Germany alerted the allies. In 1914, Russia ordered its troops stationed in Kazvin, only a hundred miles from Tehran, to march towards the capital city. Meanwhile, the Tsar’s legation in Iran announced that "Russia has decided to put a stop to
the activities of the Turko-German agents who are trying to drag Persia into war,” added that the movement of the Russian troops was “in agreement with the Government of Shah” (Barker, 2009, p. 133). In response, thirty Democrat deputies, joined by a group of Moderates and journalists, staged a “long march.” The group first stopped in Qom, where they formed the National Defense Committee, and finally arrived at Kermanshah, where they declared themselves the Iranian Provisional Government (Atabaki, 2006a, p. 3). The government that was formed in Kermanshah lasted only until 1916, when Russia occupied the city.

The Ottomans, under the command of Turkish nationalists, also had designs on Iranian territory. They dreamed of capturing Iranian Azerbaijan as a part of the Turan project, which aimed at uniting all Turks of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Accordingly, they occupied Tabriz twice during the Great War. Despite their attempts to spread Turkish nationalism in Iranian Azerbaijan, the Ottoman plans backfired. Indeed, the Ottoman attempts resulted in increased support for the anti-imperialist and nationalist sentiments that Khiyabani and his colleagues were promoting. This issue will be discussed below in the context of the dynamics of the Khiyabani insurgency.

The occupation of Iran by the Ottomans, Russians, and Great Britain had two interrelated effects. First, anti-imperialist sentiments grew, and Iranian nationalism and an increased commitment to Iran’s territorial integrity and independence also emerged. Second, Iranian political elite and intelligentsia started loosing their hopes in the central government’s ability to resist against the demands of foreign powers, and started looking for alternative ways for ending Iran’s dependence on and independence from foreign
powers. The Provisional Government in Kermanshah (See Nasseri, 1980) also offers clues about the nature of the Khiyabani insurgency against the Tehran government.

2.9. The 1919 Anglo-Iranian Agreement

World War I ended with all Great Britain's rivals either dissolved or exhausted. Russia withdrew from the war after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. The new Soviet government abolished all of the privileges and concessions that had been established in Iran by the Tsarist regime (Q. Mämmäldli, 1949, p. 64). The Ottoman Empire was dissolved, and Germany was weakened. Left alone, Great Britain had obtained an “unprecedented opportunity to project maximum power in the region without having to worry about rival reactions and to assume full control over Iran,” which, of course, extended to Iran’s “precious oil fields” (Behravesh, 2012, p. 390). The shah’s regime, accustomed to relying on external loans for survival, now needed these loans more than ever in order to repair the ruins of war and establish control within its borders. Britain’s glory and Iran’s needs converged in a new series of agreement signed on 9 August 1919.

The first agreement gave the British the opportunity to provide administrative expertise; to supply ammunition and officers for the Iranian army; to provide loans and organize customs; to improve the means of communication and increase trade; and to appoint a joint committee of experts “for [the] examination and revision of the existing customs tariff with a view to its reconstruction on a basis calculated to accord with the legitimate interests of the country and to promote its prosperity” (Heshey, 1919, pp. 749-750). The second agreement provided Iran with a loan of £2,000,000 sterling.
The Iranian government—led by a young shah running a weakened state—considered the Anglo-Persian Agreement to be a financial necessity it had to accept. The shah’s regime was also aware of the revolutionary and ideological threat that could spread from the new Bolshevik regime in Russia; and considered collaboration with Great Britain as an important way to contain the Soviets (Lesham, 1953). However, short after, it became clear that only the two, the Iranian and British governments, were in favor of the agreement. For Lord Curzon, the agreement was a British “diplomatic masterpiece and a great triumph” (Behravesh, 2012, p. 390). As a result, the agreement elicited unprecedented reactions. Katouzian notes that “Every shade of Iranian political opinion,” including “pro-Qajar, pro-Pahlavi, conservative liberal, democrat, Marxist-Leninist, and Islamist,” all agreed that “the 1919 agreement had been designed by the British government to turn Iran into a British protectorate” (Homa Katouzian, 1998, p. 5).

Consequently, several protest campaigns began in Iran. These protests brought an end to the shah’s dynastic regime. The National Assembly, motivated by nationalist sentiments and the desire to save their country from becoming “a virtual British protectorate” (Saikal, 1991, p. 428), rejected to approve the agreement. Another serious source of opposition to the 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement came from Iranian Azerbaijan, under the leadership of the Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani.

There was strong international reaction, too. On 30 August 1919, The Foreign Relations Commission of the Soviets published a declaration that specifically addressed “Iranian workers and peasants”:

[With the Anglo-Persian agreement] ...Iran has been dropped from the list of independent countries. People of Iran are eliminated from the list of free peoples.
The despot and cruel rulers of this country has sold their people and turned them into slaves of Englishman in exchange for money...

Russian workers bestow their hands to you, the suffering imprisoned Iranian masses. We have to struggle against big and small monsters, and we will not abstain from doing our duty (Quoted in Q. Mämmädlī, 1949, p. 66). [My translation from Soviet Azerbaijani source]

This declaration also reflected the changed status of the great power rivalry in the region. The 1907 Anglo-Russian Agreement that divided Iran into spheres of influence launched a period of controlled competition that lasted ten years. However, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 caused a serious shift in Russian foreign policy. As the declaration above shows, the entente had ended and a period of ideological competition had begun.

From the perspective of ordinary Iranians, those who had tired of the shah’s despotic rule considered the overthrow of the Romanov Dynasty a hopeful sign since the dynasty was one of the important sponsors of the shah’s regime. There emerged a reason for supporting and cooperating with the new Soviet government in Russia: the appealing and generous declarations by the new Russian government in the months following the revolution. Russian rhetoric rejected any type of repression or exploitation and stressed the democratic rights of people (See Robert V. Daniels, 1993). However, it did not take very long to see that the Soviet leaders had different conceptions of “people,” “freedom,” and “democracy.” Similar feelings toward Russia were also observed in Northern Azerbaijan, as is discussed in Chapter two.

For Khiyabani and his colleagues, the Bolshevik Revolution had demonstrated that an organized revolutionary movement could take down an autocratic regime. Furthermore,
the new Soviet government not only renounced Russian imperial interests in Iran, but also whispered its willingness to support the struggle against autocracy. A rare opportunity had arrived—and this was reflected in Tabriz. In a secret meeting at the office of the magazine Tajaddod, Khiyabani inaugurated a new phase in his constitutionalist struggle against the Tehran government: “There have opened a new square of resistance. We have to utilize this opportunity for our struggle. This utilization has to be as much as possible” (Q. Mämmâdli, 1949, p. 66). It is important to note that Khiyabani was operating within a new opportunity structure, but he was not to use this for the benefit of ethnic Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran, as will be discussed below.

Indeed, the emergent Khiyabani Insurgency was not unique at all; Iran witnessed several other rebellions against the regime in Tehran in this period. One of these rebellions took place in Gilan59 and ended with a declaration of autonomy. Another was a military coup that declared the short-lived Autonomous Government of Khorasan60 in 1921. While

59 The Jangali Movement, under the leadership of Mirza Kuchik Khan, had similarities with the Khiyabani movement. Mirza Kuchik Khan participated in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and was described as “A Shi‘ite Muslim and an unyielding patriot...an indefatigable fighter and an incorruptible leader whose sole ambition was to rid the country of foreign imperial domination and domestic administrative corruption” (Quoted in Hambly, 1991b, pp. 216, 217). He was also described “as deeply religious and a through-going Iranian nationalist” by historians (Quoted in Hambly, 1991b, pp. 216, 217). The 1919 Anglo-Iranian Agreement was a turning point in the development of the Jangali Movement. Kuchik Khan shared the view that the agreement effectively turned Iran into a British protectorate, accused Iranian government officials of being “British agents,” and called on the people of Gilan to rise against the Vosuq al-Dowleh government in Tehran. The Russians joined the struggle against British intervention in the Caucasus: the movement had the backing of the Soviets and was supported by the Red Army. As a result, Kuchik Khan was not fan of socialist ideology but "reluctantly acquiesced in the proclamation of a Soviet Republic of Gilan" (Hambly, 1991b, p. 216). While the movement's goals and political orientation remain subject to debate (Hunter, 2014, pp. 63-64), the impact of the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 as well as the effect of the "broad-based disillusion with the general mismanagement of the country, and of economic and other grievances" clearly played a large role in garnering support for the movement (Hambly, 1991b, p. 217). Notably, these same forces would motivate supporters of the Khiyabani Movement.

60 In Khorasan, Colonel Taqi Khan, commander of the Khorasan gendarmerie, following an order issued by the Iranian Prime Minister, Sayyed Ziya, arrested the governor of the city, Ahmad Qawam. Taqi Khan then
the former resembled the Khiyabani Movement, the latter was more reflective of an intra-
military power struggle.

In conclusion, this section briefly surveyed the history of colonial competition in Iran. In particular, the Iranian people blamed the Qajar court for allowing Iran to become dependent on foreign loans, which then opened the door to deeper foreign economic and political penetration at the expense of Iranian interests. As a result of the numerous concessions to foreign companies, some of which granted monopolies, diverse segments of Iranian society formed coalitions and organized protests against the government. After the first success in the early 1890s, a larger coalition under the leadership of the intelligentsia and the clergy had gradually turned the protests into a constitutional revolution. Consequently, Iran then possessed a constitution for the first time in its history. The Azerbaijani community in Iran actively participated in the initial protests and the eventual constitutional revolution, even becoming the defenders of the constitutional revolution once the Shah attempted to eliminate the Majlis and the constitutional movement by force.

After a turbulent struggle between the constitutionalist forces and the central government, Iran fell under foreign occupation shortly before the start of World War I. The became acting governor of the city. As governor, he became very popular due to his progress against tribal depredations. However, with Reza Khan's concurrence, Ahmad Qawam asked Taqi Khan to surrender his position and return to Tabriz (Cottam, 1979, p. 108). Taqi Khan's rule in Khorasan lasted only a few months. Eventually, the Cossacks arrived in support of the Bakhtiyaris, and these forces acting under the command of Reza Khan ended the rebellion.. The Khorasan rebellion was more a result of this intra-military struggle in the formative years of the Modern Iranian State and army (Cronin, 1997b, p. 693). Indeed, Taqi Khan had an "impressive record as an Iranian nationalist" and was known as a "sincere and devoted nationalist" (Cottam, 1979, p. 108). The Khorasan rebellion, rather than being a secessionist struggle, was a result of the failed Iranian state in which various groups struggled for power. This struggle took the form of a military coup in 1921. It was followed by the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Iran in 1925 when Reza Shah Pahlavi deposed Ahmad Shah, the last Qajar Shah, and established the Pahlavi Dynasty.
occupation lasted until the end of the war. One of the noteworthy incidents during this time was the Ottoman occupation of Iranian Azerbaijan. Contrary to Northern Azerbaijan, which cooperated with the Pan-Turkist leaders of the Ottoman Empire, Iranian Azerbaijanis in general, and Khiyabani and his followers in particular, resisted the Ottoman efforts to spread Turkish nationalism in Iranian Azerbaijan. World War I proved to be difficult for Iran. For nearly three decades, Iranians from a wide range of backgrounds had been rebelling in pursuit of a constitutional government free from foreign power. However, once the Qajar Shah signed the 1919 Anglo-Iranian Oil Agreement, many in Iran, especially Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani and his followers, lost faith in the central government. Iran then witnessed a new cycle of local protests. Building upon the historical context provided in this section, the next section examines a protest movement that took place in the Iranian Azerbaijan under the leadership of Khiyabani.

Last, in terms of my threefold theoretical framework, Iranian Azerbaijanis lacked a secular nationalist elite during the period examined in this section. The Azerbaijani intelligentsia were scattered across a variety of political and ideological groupings from left to right, but none had the assertive nationalist goals observed in the example of Musavat Party in Northern Azerbaijan, as examined in chapter two. Likewise, the Azerbaijani community in Iran did not experience ethnic grievances in their relationship with the Qajar state. The lack of a secular nationalist elite and the lack of ethnic grievances hindered the development of assertive Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran. Instead, Iranian Azerbaijanis suffered under the Qajar regime—experiencing economic mismanagement, growing dependence on foreign loans, and despotic rule—as much as the rest of Iran. Therefore, they acted alongside the rest of Iran in the Iranian constitutionalist struggle. The Khiyabani
Insurgency, as demonstrated in the next section, was one of those struggles.


The first section above demonstrated that Azerbaijanis in Iran did not have an ethnic nationalist consciousness and that their relationship with the central Iranian government did not produce ethnic grievances. The second section showed that the Qajar Dynasty’s relations with Western powers and its inept economic policies caused grievances in all segments of Iranian society resulting in protests and rebellions in which Azerbaijanis played important roles too. After the end of World War I, the Qajar Shah’s new oil agreement with Britain, in spite of popular reactions, marked a new phase in Iran and Iranian Azerbaijan. This time, Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani, having lost hope in a change in the central government’s attitude, launched an insurgency in the province of Azerbaijan, and declared autonomous Azadistan. Following the historical survey of social and political revolutions in Iran at the national level, this section turns to the regional level with a focus on the rise of Khiyabani as a revolutionary leader, the development of his revolutionary ideas, and the rise of the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan which served to promote the insurgency.

In response to the discriminatory policies of Russian colonial rule, the Azerbaijani nationalist elite in the north launched a nationalist movement that would lead to an independent Azerbaijani state. In the south, the nature of the relationship between the Azerbaijanis and the Iranian government, and the lack of a secular nationalist Azerbaijani
elite in Iran would lead to the Khiyabani Insurgency—a movement whose partisans considered Iran to be their homeland and who saw themselves as struggling to defend the Iranian constitution and to save their country from foreign occupation.

3.1. Khiyabani: His Life and his Rise as a Revolutionary Leader

Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani was born in 1880 in Khamaneh, in the East Azerbaijan Province of Iran today. After finishing primary school in his town, Khiyabani went to Russia to work with his father, a merchant, in Petrovsk, a city on the western shore of the Caspian Sea. As Khiyabani came of age, his father, Abdulhamid Muhammadi, decided to move back to Iran for Khiyabani’s religious education, since the Caucasian Muslims were mostly Sunnis and their associated schools reflected this orientation (Abbaszadä, 2001, p. 13). After his return to Iran, Khiyabani studied under the supervision of the leading ulama [religious scholars] of Tabriz and reached the level of mojtahid, a high rank in religious education (Abbaszadä, 2001, pp. 14-15). He was an influential orator and was becoming an increasingly popular imam [preacher and prayer leader] of two mosques in Tabriz (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 31). In addition to his expertise in religious sciences and his mastery of Persian and Arabic, Khiyabani studied Russian and French and was familiar with the progressive ideas of the time. His stay in the Caucasus, and trips to Russia and Europe introduced him to new developments and ideas (Abbaszadä, 2001, p. 11). He was particularly taken by the ideas of democracy, limited government, and constitutionalism.

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61 Khiyabani married the daughter of Sayyid Hussain Khamanei, the grandfather of today’s supreme leader of Iran (Abbaszadä, 2001, p. 5). Therefore, he is the son-in-law of Ayatullah Khamanei, who became the Supreme Leader of Iran after Khomeini.

62 Petrovsk is now Makhachkala, the capital city of the Republic of Dagestan in Russia.
He grew up as a strong supporter of constitutionalism in Iran, and became one of the forerunners of the Constitutional Revolution in 1906-1907.

Khiyabani was the imam of two Tabriz mosques when the Constitutionalist Revolution broke out in Tehran; during this time he was also working as a math teacher at the Talebiyeh School. As the struggle escalated into a violent conflict between the royalists and constitutionalists, Khiyabani sided with latter, and had become active participant of the Tabriz Anjuman. This was the “point in time that his [political] career really began,” and “he successfully stood as a candidate for Azerbaijan and then took up his seat in the [Second] Majles in Tehran” (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 112).

Khiyabani remained detached from the political parties in the Second Majlis. He “denied being a member of any particular party,” though “acknowledged that he attended the meetings of the parliamentary factions of Democrats” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 46). When the Russians sent the ultimatum to the Iranian government in 1911, Khiyabani strongly urged the Tehran government to reject the Russian demands (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 31). Khiyabani then abandoned his neutral position and joined the Democrat Party of Iran (Q. Mammâdlî, 1949, p. 31). Though the shah’s government yielded to the Russian ultimatum and dissolved Majlis, Khiyabani had strengthened his public image as an anti-imperialist and an Iranian patriot. Indeed, as reported by one of his colleagues, Khiyabani’s stance against the ultimatum was seen as a daring deed by his colleagues (Badamchy, 1925, p. 32).

Deprived of his pulpit in the Majlis, Khiyabani organized street meetings, where he continued his harsh attacks on the government, this time in accompanied by people chanting the slogan “Long live Khiyabani!” (Q. Mammâdlî, 1949, p. 33). Not long after,
Khiyabani had to exile to Petrovsk with his family to escape from arrest. He returned to Tabriz in 1914. He opened a small business and continued his political activities underground. He organized clandestine gatherings that discussed literary, philosophical, and political issues (Kasravi, 1978a, pp. 675-676; Q. Mämmädli, 1949, p. 35). Khiyabani also increased his ties to the Provincial Committee of the Democrat Party of Iran, becoming an active participant in its underground activities.

The Provincial Committee in Tabriz was launched shortly after the establishment of the Democrat Party in 1909. Though the Party had to be dissolved officially in 1916, its members continued their meetings underground. Indeed, the increased burden and the grievances of the World War increased popular interest in politics in general and in the Democrat Party in particular in 1915-1916 (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 30). Khiyabani, known for his revolutionary and political enthusiasm, became the leader of the Provincial Committee of the Democrat Party. Khiyabani contributed to the rising popularity of the committee in the province. As news of the Russian February Revolution—which ended the autocratic regime in Russia and brought liberals to power—reached Tabriz, the Democrat Provincial Committee in Tabriz organized its first public meeting. This meeting took place on 7 April 1917 and celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Iranian Constitution (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 34). Khiyabani, with two of his colleagues, Nowbari and Chaychi, announced the re-establishment of the Democrat Party in 1917 (Atabaki, 2000, p. 47). The magazine *Tajaddod* [Renovation] was announced as the party’s press organ. The first issue appeared

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on 9 April 1917 and was published in Persian (Q. Mämmäldi, 1949, p. 42). The party and the magazine were to become the main promoters of the nascent revolutionary movement.

3.2. The Azerbaijan Democrat Party under the Leadership of Khiyabani:

Political Views

Soon after the public reemergence of the Democrat Party, the diversity of views among its members threatened it with disintegration. Indeed, diverging political views caused a major break in the party in 1918 (See Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 34). At its Second Congress in Tabriz, in which 480 delegates participated, the Provincial Committee declared its independence from the Democrat Party of Iran and announced the establishment of the Democrat party of Azerbaijan (DPA). The specific reason for Khiyabani’s separation from the Democrat Party of Iran was his dislike of the leader of the Central Committee of the Party in Tehran, Mukbir os-Saltana-Hidayat. According to Khiyabani, Mukbir os-Saltana-Hidayat looked like a Democrat but “was a vile retrogressive servant of the government” (Q. Mämmäldi, 1949, p. 36).

The split in the Democrat Party raises the question of whether the declaration of the DPA was a sign of separatist intentions. An examination of the agenda, decisions, and activities of the DPA and its leadership all provide convincing evidence to counter the claims of separatism. In this regard, the first meeting of the newly founded DPA is noteworthy. The delegates framed the mission of the party around these desires:

64 The date of the establishment of the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan differs in different sources. While some report it as August 24, 1917 (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 37), others note it as March 28, 1918 (Atabaki, 2000).
— to put an end to the imperial exploitation of Iran, especially after the collapse of the Tsarist regime in Russia;
— to consolidate the party organization, and avoid interventions by backward and conservative forces who were devoid of nationalist and patriotic values;
— to quicken the preparations for the elections to the Parliament in Tehran and for the elections for the provincial anjumans;
— to increase the reach of the Tajaddod and to increase the people’s affiliation with the party (Ören & Alkin, 1980, pp. 63-64). [My translation from a Turkish source]

It is apparent that the DPA not only lacked secessionist sentiments, but also acted as a political party that sought to gain influence in Tehran and reach wider audience in Iran.

Khiyabani’s speeches and articles published in Tajaddod are another source refuting the existence of separatist intentions. It is important to note that the magazine was born as the official organ of the party and remained under the strict control of Khiyabani, even when was not the magazines’ official editor (P. Mämmäli, 2009, p. 38). Tajaddod is an important document that illuminates the motivation and goals behind the Khiyabani Insurgency. Mirzayeva, based on her investigation of the content of the magazine, lists Tajaddod’s primary goals as follows:

1. Encouraging the masses to rebel against the shah’s regime and despotism;
2. Restoring the DPA’s leadership in this struggle;
3. Criticizing unfairness and arbitrary rule in the country;
4. Arranging the relationships between the rulers and the ruled according to democratic principles;
5. Struggling against the foreign occupation of Iran and Southern Azerbaijan;
6. Gathering patriots and nationalist intellectuals around Tajaddod;
7. Proselytizing a reformist approach in state, society, and literature;
8. Demanding more resources for Azerbaijan from the central government...[and particularly] restoring [the] anjumans and empowering them, increasing the budget share for Azerbaijan, [the] development of Azerbaijan, and ameliorating the conditions for the swift movement of capital, the struggle against
unemployment, [and] increasing attention to literacy and civil life (Mirzāyeva, 2011, pp. 210-211). [My translation]

Khiyabani’s articles in *Tajaddod* and his speeches show that in addition to struggling to free Iran from “foreign occupation,” he was also calling for more resources for Iranian Azerbaijan. This is reflected Khiyabani’s view that Azerbaijan,—and the ADP—had a vital role to play in reestablishing the democratic constitutional regime in Iran. In one of his articles in *Tajaddod*, Khiyabani criticized the central government’s ignorance and expressed his expectations for the province:

If you are the same democratic Azerbaijan who provided material power to the [Iranian] revolution and struggle, if the blood that kneaded and solidified the constitutional dough still circulates in your veins, you will [have to] get ready for the repair and renovation to be undertaken in the homeland [Iran], and you will find the energy for the effort and hard work.

Destruction, elimination is easy. Now it is time for repair and reconstruction. There is a need for renovation.

Insurgency against despotism, resistance against foreign occupation; there is a need for courage and bravery against internal elements of a debacle, and there is a need for integrity and protection.

All these exist in you, pure children.

To realize these goals, to destroy the castle of despotism, it is required to extinguish repression, obstinacy and robbery. All these [achievements] culminated in your existence...
Interestingly, despite its separation from the Democrat Party of Iran, the ADP continued using the party program prepared by the national party—it did not prepare a separate party program. For some, this was an indication that the ADP, ideologically, still considered itself as a part of the Democrat Party of Iran despite its organizational separation (See Taghiyeva, 1990, pp. 38-39).

After its establishment, the ADP’s popularity grew, especially in the province. Interestingly, one of the factors that contributed to this growth was the famine that broke out towards the end of World War I. In addition to the direct military occupation and confrontations, the war devastated Iran’s economy. Iranian Azerbaijan, whose economy relied heavily on international trade, experienced a famine in 1917-1918 (Hābibov, 1988, pp. 4-5). The famine had serious repercussions, not only in humanitarian terms, but also politically. However, one of the side effects of the famine was the rapprochement between the ADP and the people. In times of scarcity, the ADP organized food drives, prepared lists of poor people, formed assistance committees for villages, and delivered bread and other food supplies to people in need (Q. Māmmädli, 1949, p. 53). As a result, popular support for the Democrats increased. In addition to food shortages, the ongoing war had other unpleasant surprises in store for the Iranian Azerbaijanis. The Young Turk movement, who had staged a nationalist revolution in the Ottoman Empire, planned to expand the territories of the empire to include ethnic Turks in Iran and the Northern Azerbaijan. As
discussed in chapter one, these nationalist Turkish forces occupied Iranian Azerbaijan. This brought a temporary halt to Khiyabani and his revolutionary movement in Iran.

### 3.3. The 1919 Ottoman Occupation of Northern Iran: Guided by Turkism

The occupation of Iranian Azerbaijan by Ottoman troops was an important test for Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran. The Ottoman foreign policy was guided by Pan-Turkism,\textsuperscript{65} which became state ideology after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908: occupying Iranian Azerbaijan was a part of plan to spread Turkish nationalism and unite all Turkic groups and territories under the banner of Turan, a dreamland of all Turks.\textsuperscript{66}

Pan-Turkists considered Iranian Azerbaijan to be one of the historical homes of Turks, and they planned to use the opportunity that came with the world war to realize their dream of conquering Turan.\textsuperscript{67} For this purpose, the Ottoman troops attempted to capture the province twice during World War I. First, in November of 1914, Ottoman forces occupied the city of Maragha and marched toward Tabriz, then under Russian control, on 14 January 1915. The Russian troops initially evacuated Tabriz to prevent military confrontation and then regained the city in March 1915 after defeating the Ottoman forces (Atabaki, 2006b, p. 124).

\textsuperscript{65} The gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire, vis-à-vis a rising Europe, spurred deep questions and debates among Ottoman intellectuals and gave birth to three major ideological movements: Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turkism, and Westernism. Pan-Islamists emphasized Islamic unity and a return to the religion as a solution to the decline. Another group, with Western education and admiration, suggested complete Westernization.

\textsuperscript{66} Chapter two includes a discussion on the roots, ideas, and development of Pan-Turkists, Turkchuler, in Turkey and Northern Azerbaijan. This chapter will focus on the involvement in Iran, especially during the Ottoman occupation of Northern Azerbaijan.

\textsuperscript{67} See chapter two for discussion on Turkish nationalism and Turan.
The Ottoman troops returned to Iran for the second time in 1918, when Russia was busy addressing the social turmoil brought on by the Russian Revolution. 1918 was also when the Azerbaijani nationalists in the north established the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, on 28 May 1918, and signed a military cooperation agreement with the Ottoman Empire. In accordance with the terms of this agreement, the 5th Caucasus Military Corps of the Ottoman army started marching towards northern Azerbaijan, while another group of troops advanced towards Tabriz (Ören & Alkın, 1980, p. 64). Ottoman leadership planned to gain control of the two Azerbaijans simultaneously. Consequently, the Ottoman army arrived at Tabriz on June 1918, and, following their nationalist ideals, launched intense propaganda activities.

In fact, Turkism attempted to find a way into Iranian Azerbaijan even before the Ottoman occupation. As discussed in the chapter two, Turkish Azerbaijani nationalism was on the rise in the north in the first decade of the twentieth century. When Turkish Azerbaijani nationalism reached the peak of its strength under the Musavat Party in Baku, in October 1917, “an emissary arrived in Tabriz, approached the local politicians and advocated that they separate from Iran and join with Baku in a great federation. This proposal was rejected by the Azerbaijani Democrats in Iran (Atabaki, 2006b, p. 129). The Azerbaijani nationalists in the north, in the words of Achiq Soz, the official publication of Musavat, considered it their “natural right” to call Iranian Azerbaijan “their territory” and they hoped that “one day their brothers in the south could join them” (Quoted in Atabaki, 2006b, p. 129). However, both the Azerbaijani Democrats of Tabriz and the Iranian Azerbaijanis residing in Baku rejected this idea and launched a pro-Iranian propaganda
campaign in Baku. They especially sought to counter the nationalist propaganda of the
Ottoman forces in Iranian Azerbaijan.

There were numerous Ottoman nationalist propaganda activities in Iranian
Azerbaijan. The Ottomans opened schools whose language of instruction was Turkish and
whose curriculum promoted Turkish nationalism (Mustafayev, 1998, p. 72). The Ottomans
even founded a Tabriz branch of the Ottoman Special Organization, Teşkilat-i Mahsusa,
under the leadership of Yusuf Ziya. Ziya established a Pan-Turkist political Party, Ittihat-i
Islam [Islamic Unity], and launched a prtyewspaper, Azerbaijan (Abrahamian, 2013, p.
105). The Pan-Turkism that had found very fertile ground in the north was not as
successful in Iranian Azerbaijan: the Ottomans were not successful in garnering the
popular and political support they had expected. This was especially true after their actions
strained relations with the DPA and Khiyabani (Atabaki, 2006b, p. 131).

The Ottoman occupation of Tabriz brought an end to the “honeymoon for the
[Azerbaijani] Democrats” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 47). Khiyabani, and a few others who opposed
the Ottoman occupation and Pan-Turkism, were first arrested then exiled to eastern
Turkey (Q. Mämmäldli, 1949, p. 60). This not only upset the party leadership but also
cause resentment among the populace, who had high regard for the ADP due to its role
during the ongoing famine. Consequently, the ADP’s anti-Ottoman propaganda slowly
gained traction. Rumors that the Ottomans were acting at the behest of the Iranian
government spread quickly (Atabaki, 2000, p. 47). The Ottoman’s public image gradually
worsened. In the meantime, the war was approaching its end and it was becoming obvious
that the Ottomans were not going to realize their dream of Turan. Not only were they
unable to take possession of lands in Iran, but they were not even going to be able to maintain their existing territories. As a result, they signed a protocol with the Germans on 23 September 1918 accepting the territorial integrity of Iran and withdrew from Iran. As a result, the venture of Pan-Turkism failed to gain hold in the Iranian Azerbaijan and was forced to leave.

Khiyabani returned to Iran from exile after the withdrawal of Ottoman troops. He was against any type of foreign involvement in Iranian territories before, but being exiled and arrested by the Ottomans had made him even more radical. His ire was aimed not only at the foreigners but also at the government in Tehran, which he accused of yielding to outsiders at the expense of Iranian national interests. As a result, Khiyabani, like many others, had lost his trust and hope in the central government: “[f]rom now on he was committed to a policy of radical change in Iran, and more specifically, he was convinced of the necessity of greater local autonomy for Azerbaijan” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 47). Change in Iranian Azerbaijan would be just a start, which, according to him, would later diffuse to the rest of Iran.

4. The Establishment of Azadistan

The end of World War I marked a new beginning in Iran. The Russian and British troops that occupied Iran left, lifting hopes that Iran might become an independent country ruled by a constitution after many decades of presence of foreign powers. However, in 1919, soon after the official end of the war, the Iranian Government, under the rule of Ahmad Shah, signed the oil agreement with Britain that was discussed above. The terms of the agreement signaled that little had changed in Iran. The agreement also generated
widespread negative reactions from diverse segments of Iranian society. The Khiyabani Insurgency was one of these reactions to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Agreement.

The previous section examined the rise of Khiyabani as a constitutionalist leader and the rise of the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan. The party, with Khiyabani at its helm, became a strong instrument of opposition to the Qajar regime. Khiyabani and the ADP blamed the Qajar government for yielding to the interests of colonial powers and turning Iran into a semi-colony. Khiyabani and the party also led an active struggle against the despotism of the central government. This section focuses on the step-by-step development of the insurgency and the declaration of autonomous Azadistan with specific attention to whether or not the movement had separatist goals. In addition to the specific subsection discussing whether the insurgency was a separatist or not, other subsections evaluate each step of the Khiyabani Insurgency from this perspective as well.

4.1. The First Step towards Insurgency

As introduced above, the 1919 Anglo-Iranian Agreement elicited strong reactions from different segments of Iranian society. Clergy, religious institutions, and political parties were all against the deal. Likewise, Khiyabani, who also opposed the agreement, started losing faith in the Qajar government’s willingness and ability to resist colonialism and to implement the Constitution. The final incident that convinced Khiyabani and his colleagues to launch an insurgency was the central government’s use of repressive measures against the ADP.
More specifically, the turning point for the Khiyabani Insurgency was the elections to the Fourth Majlis in the fall of 1919 (Atabaki, 2000, p. 48). The result of the elections was promising for the ADP. Six of the nine seats that were assigned to Tabriz were won by Khiyabani and five other Democrat candidates (Azeri, 1995, pp. 78-81, 138). However, the increasing popular support for the ADP in Iranian Azerbaijan, primarily in Tabriz, alarmed Tehran. In response, the government, hoping to reassert its authority, appointed a new “able”—in other words, “brutal”—governor and vice-governor for the province (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 63). The new administrators were also accompanied by a group of police force led by two Swedish officers (Atabaki, 2000, p. 48).

The arrival of the new governor and the police force launched a period of repression and political discrimination in the province. The governor started a process of political cleansing, attempting to remove from state offices all personnel sympathetic to the Democrats. The governor also used police force against any type of protest or meeting. The harsh character of the new provincial government was most evident at a meeting organized by the Democrat Party that attracted many participants with anti-British flags and slogans in Tabriz in March 1920 (Q. Mämmäldi, 1949, p. 71). The police responded brutally and arrested members of the Democrat Party. In response, the Democrats “called on their members and supporters to arm themselves and gather before the premises of the party's newspaper” (Cited in Atabaki, 2000, p. 48). They then “marched to the police station and forced the release of the jailed individual” (Cited in Atabaki, 2000, p. 48). This incident was a sign of the rising tension between the Democrats and the government.
It is important to note that the worry—for both the Qajar government and for Britain—was not only the Democrats or Khiyabani, but also the socialist revolutionary ideas and the growing Soviet involvement in Iran. These were valid concerns. The revolutionary ideas that were exported from the north under guise of “equality,” freedom,” and “struggle against imperialism,” were appealing to the people, especially to the Democrats. The government’s response was strict control of the population with recourse to the use of force. Thus, brutal repression was becoming a chronic state of affairs in Iran, especially in Iranian Azerbaijan. The government’s harsh behavior came at a time when other countries had succeeded in overthrowing autocratic regimes; there would never be a better opportunity for doing the same, especially with the Soviets offering their implicit support.

The ADP leadership gathered in the office of Tajaddod and decided to launch an armed resistance against the central government on the night of 6 April 1920 (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 65). Once they decided to act, the Democrats received support from other social groups, including the members of the Social Democrat Party and the Justice Party (Ibrahimov, 1963, pp. 164-165). However, the decision to launch an armed struggle also caused a split in the Democrat Party and a group who disapproved of the idea left the ADP (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 65). Some, like Ahmad Kasravi, “were firmly committed to the idea of a strong, centralized government, whose power base would be located in the capital city of Tehran, rather than on the provinces” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 49).

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68 As discussed in Chapter two, the same effect was also observed in Northern Azerbaijan, when Azerbaijani nationalists had found the generous Bolshevik promises as to be an opportunity for their actions.
The insurgency’s first armed group of 50-60 people took to the streets on 7 April 1920, demanding the release of the arrested Democrats (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 65). Thus began armed resistance in Iranian Azerbaijan; the date was recorded as the start of the armed revolution (Q. Mämmäldli, 1949, p. 43). The authorities of the central government reluctantly released the political prisoners in response to this first armed protest action.

### 4.2. The Committee of Public Administration

In its next step, the ADP leadership founded the Committee of Public Administration (CPA) to lead the insurgency. Khiyabani became its leader. The CPA managed to take control of almost all public administration buildings in two days and the police were forced to leave Tabriz; this brought the CPA a bloodless victory (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 66). A brief declaration published on 8 April 1920 expressed the CPA’s aims: providing security and implementing the principles of the Constitution (Azeri, 1995, p. 157). Goals of the declaration was also articulated in Khiyabani in article in *Tajaddod*:

... Do not touch our constitution!

Azerbaijani liberals [or, people for freedom] rebelled to put an end to the tiresome turmoil and anarchy. They awakened the forgetful from their deep sleep with the “Long live constitution!” clamors. Hereafter, the precautions will be taken to avoid any anti-constitutional machinations of adventurist minds. (Quoted in Azeri, 1995, p. 158)

Furthermore, in his address to the people of Tabriz, Khiyabani stated that “[t]oday [we] officially inform the whole world community that we revolted against the Vosuq od Dovleh...
Another noteworthy development was the introduction of a new name for the province and its administration. In Khiyabani’s own words, “[t]he decision has been made to call the province as ‘Azadistan’ [the land of freedom] due to its sacrifices in struggle for freedom” (Azeri, 1995, p. 176). The reasons behind choosing a new name for the province long known as Azerbaijan are an issue of debate among Iranian and Azerbaijani historians and intellectuals. While one group argued that “Azadistan” [Land of Freedom] was chosen to reflect Iranian Azerbaijan’s struggle for freedom in Iran, the mainstream view is that the chief purpose for the new name was to distinguish Iranian Azerbaijan from the independent Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan established to the north in 1918 (Atabaki, 2000, p. 50; Kasravi, 1978a, p. 877; Salamullah, 1979, p. 39). Indeed, when the nationalists in Northern Azerbaijan declared independence for the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan on 28 May 1928, many from Iran, including the Iranian government, argued that the name “Azerbaijan” belonged to the province in Iran (See Chapter two).

The CPA expelled the representatives of the central government from the city of Tabriz. To be more specific, the Committee forced civil servants, bureaucrats, and the personnel of the Justice Directorate to leave Tabriz (Kasravi, 1978a; Tağıyeva, 1998, p. 883). The CPA started administrative reforms and appointed ADP members to government positions (Kasravi, 1978a, pp. 883-884). Meanwhile, the CPA introduced a new magazine, Azadistan, with the involvement of the youth branch of the party (Taghiyeva, 1990, pp. 69-
It also organized frequent public meetings where Khiyabani shared updates and discussed social and political issues with the people (See Khiyabani, 1323a, 1323b).

News of the insurgency and takeover in Tabriz prompted a swift response from the central government. The government’s first reaction was to order the military troops in Tabriz to intervene. However, some of the forces had already joined the insurgents and others decided to remain neutral, especially those under Russian command (Taghiyeva, 1990, pp. 75-76). Negotiations with Khiyabani were Tehran’s only option.

The representatives of the two sides met in a village near Tabriz and the CPA presented Tehran with a list of eight demands. The CPA’s initial demands included the withdrawal of the governor and the police force as well as the granting of loans to be spent for the needs of the people of the province (Azeri, 1995, p. 168). The CPA also asked the central government to assign only individuals confirmed by the CPA who could be trusted to act in accordance with the interests it represented (Azeri, 1995, p. 168). Tehran accepted the demands, and the governor was permitted to enter Tabriz. However, it did not take long to discern that the governor, following the directions of the central government, was attempting to organize a plot against the Azadistan government.

When the demands of the Tabriz insurgents are considered, it becomes clear that Khiyabani and his colleagues did not have any secessionist sentiments, but wanted the central government to consider local need and interests. The province of Azerbaijan had been one of the well-to-do regions of Iran, but was devastated during World War I. Azerbaijan became a battleground between the Russian and the Ottoman troops. It also
suffered a devastating famine, and the central government failed to address these calamities. In the words of Khiyabani:

Azerbaijan has suffered a lot, been subjected to blows, and been damaged by insiders and outsiders. Now Azerbaijan needs repair and reconstruction. If some day Tehran gives us a hand and offers alliance, contemplates for a solution for improving this province, we will say to her that: this province is consecrated, it did sacrifices for others in the past. Now it is others’ turn. Now others have to help to repair the ruins of this country (Khiyabani, 1323a, p. 85).

In the meantime, the insurgency that started in Tabriz spread to other cities in Iranian Azerbaijan and even sparked anti-government protests in Tehran. Khiyabani’s call “to free Iran from being an instrument in the hands of foreigners” (Khiyabani, 1323b, p. 20) had attracted many others from all over Iran. In a meeting on 4 May 1920 in Tabriz, Khiyabani “acknowledged” that the “people of Iran shared [their] sorrow and were in solidarity [with the Azerbaijanis]” in their struggle against autocratic rule (Khiyabani, 1323a, p. 28).

4.3. The National Government of Azerbaijan

As the popular support for the insurgency was growing, and there was no hope of progress towards a constitutional type of regime, the CPA started planning for autonomy from the center in order to create a constitutional government locally. On 23 June 1920, the CPA decided to establish the National Government of Azadistan in the province. The ceremony took place in the Ali Qapi, the provincial headquarters of the central government, and Khiyabani announced that the “Milli Hokumat [National Government] starts to operate”
The new government was launched with military parades, students singing the *Marseillaise* (Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 91).

It is important to note that the Azadistan government's discourse and acts may lens it as a secessionist movement. Therefore, careful examination of the terms “national” and “government,” and meaning attached to them is necessary. According to Atabaki:

[b]y *Milli Hokumat* [National Government], Khiyabani had in mind a popular government rather than a national one....Khiyabani [in his various speeches] had used the expression “free and independent *mellat* [nation] of Iran”, when addressing the nation of Iran as a whole. These earlier usage of the term *mellat* clearly indicate that he had not been specifically referring to a particular group on those occasions. Apparently, his use of *milli* (*melli*) or *millat* was not rigorously consistent. In any case, *Melli Hokumat*, as employed to describe the newly set up government of Azerbaijan, was never intended to convey the meaning of independent Azerbaijani nation-state (Atabaki, 2000, p. 49).

This general meaning is also confirmed by Khiyabani’s companions at the time of insurgency, who interpreted his use of “country” and “compatriots” to mean the whole of Iran and all the Iranian people (Azari, 1975, pp. 300-308; Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 99).

Regarding the status of the Azadistan, for some it “was nor an independent state, neither a government” (Ören & Alkin, 1980, p. 65). In addition, when reviewing Khiyabani’s speeches, publications, and the Democrat Party’s manifestos, it is hard to find evidence of ethnic nationalism (Mustafayev, 1998, p. 78). Furthermore, the British Consul in Tabriz interviewed Khiyabani and asked him “whether he [Khiyabani] objected to Tehran’s authority.” Khiyabani reportedly responded to the questions with a bold denial: “in the most positive terms,” Khiyabani assured the Consul that “[t]here was nothing of a separatist nature in their movement,” and added that “he [Khiyabani] considered
Azerbaijan as an integral part of Persia.” (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 49). According to the memoirs of the witnesses, Britain was not convinced of Khiyabani’s professed goals and was worried that he might ultimately hoist the Bolshevik flag in Tabriz (Kasravi, 1946, pp. 85-87).

After taking control of the province, the Azadistan administration introduced a variety of reforms with a primary focus on the development of the rural areas and on improving the peasants’ standard of living. The reforms that were introduced in these early days also provide some insight about the priorities of the provincial government. One comprehensive reform package in the early days accomplished the following:

— Introduced a tax waiver, and required peasants to pay tax only after a certain amount of revenue;
— Decided to distribute state-owned lands to peasants free of charge;
— Permitted the sale of private and charity lands to peasants with installment payments;
— Decided to open primary schools in all villages, and made primary and secondary education compulsory in towns and cities;
— Decided to open hospitals in villages and cities;
— Decided to establish an army with 12,000 members;
— Decided to encourage industrialization (Ören & Alkin, 1980, p. 66) [My translation from Turkish]

Furthermore, in his address to the people, Khiyabani explained the government’s purpose and stated that the government had “decided to teach the lower layers of the society their social rights” and “[i]nform them about, and show them the ways to their own independence via arming them with the weapons of science” (Quoted in Ören & Alkin, 1980, pp. 66-67).
Meanwhile, Tehran continued to communicate with Khiyabani and attempted to convince him to surrender. Accordingly, in one of the written telegraph conversations, Khiyabani criticized the central government due to its despotic behavior. Khiyabani articulated his demands:

The State will not be successful unless it rests on the will of people.

In our country, the state consists of a prime minister, who is dominating the people with 5-10 persons of his own choice. There is no popular participation in this government. On the contrary, a group of traitors proposed these ministers as representatives of people.

This type of government is not addressing the concerns and needs of people. Whenever people rebel against the state or speak against it, government asks:

—What do you want?

Poor people express their needs to government, aggrievedly. In response, government deceives [them] with baseless and hollow promises, and invites people to give up.

However, our insurgency is not of a kind to beg [for] something from government. Our goal is to give people the right to determine their own rulers and ministers.

My [or, our] conclusion from conversation with state representatives is that the state, first of all, wants to send a mayor to Azerbaijan. But we do not need a mayor. We deserve to rule Azerbaijan ourselves, and are able to do it. Let the state, before anything else, take measures to meet the demands of the people [in love] of freedom (Quoted in Q. Mämmäldli, 1949, p. 97). [My translation from Azerbaijani]

### 4.4. Independence or Freedom?

Careful examination of Khiyabani’s speeches and writings reveals an important point regarding his expectations for both Azadistan and the central government. As this study argues, Khiyabani wanted a constitutional government in all of Iran. Building on the role the province played during the Constitutional Revolution and responding to the difficulties the province endured during World War I, Khiyabani wanted to restore the province to its
former glory. Moreover, he expected the province to play an important role in the
democratization of the rest of Iran. In his speech on 28 April 1920, Khiyabani detailed the
type of regime he wanted to have in the Iran:

...We want a democratic regime...We want to establish a democratic government
that builds upon the will of people. This democratic government must be
independent, and must be free to act in a way it desires. The institutions built by the
will of democracy should not have despotic powers. The institutions empowered by
the will of society can never act against its interests...(Quoted in Azeri, 1995, p. 178)

Rather than secession or independence from Iran, Khiyabani wanted the Tabriz insurgency
to inspire other Iranian cities and ignite a all-out rebellion against the despotic regime. In
Azadistan, he attempted to present a democratic model for the rest of the country to
emulate. On 3 June 1920, short the declaration of the national government, Khiyabani
stated that “Tabriz will be a salvation for Iran” (Khiyabani, 1323a, pp. 13-15). In his piece
entitled “Azerbaijan,” published in Tajaddod, Khiyabani called upon the “fearless heroes of
freedom” and “studious Azerbaijan” to “rebel against despotism, [and] resist against
foreign occupation (Quoted in Ören & Alkin, 1980, p. 61). In another speech on 23 June
1920, he stated that:

The government [in Iranian Azerbaijan] is in the hands of the Democrats
today...This democratic government, starting from Tabriz, will reach to the far cities
of Iran. All directorates and positions will be under our control (Quoted in
Taghiyeva, 1990, p. 98)
Khiyabani’s approach to political turmoil in Iran, especially at a time when the Tehran government had collapsed as a result of political protests and economic troubles, shows that he considered Azadistan as part of Iran:

Our insurgency coincided with an unbearable condition in [the] country [Iran]. The [national] government, which wanted to put liberals in a predicament, fell two-and-half months after our insurgency. [The] Cabinet of ministers has been dissolved. [The] new cabinet has not been elected yet. The king and the prince cannot intervene yet. I am hoping they will be able to found a stable government in [the] near future. They have to consider our opinions, too. [The] future of our country interests us too. The whole [of] Iran is busy with forming the new government. We, in comparison to other provinces, evaluate this issue from a different angle. The state [or government] of Azadistan is in a position of elder brother for other provinces [or cities]. We cannot stay indifferent to this subject. We are at a very critical time.

We have to pursue external developments very carefully. We have to know who to cooperate with and who to stay away from. All eyes are focused on Tabriz and the people in this building [or room] in such a critical time period. The operation to save all Iran will start from here and will spread to whole country... (Azeri, 1995, p. 230) [My translation]

Last, in one of the early issues of the *Tajaddod*, Khiyabani wrote that “The time has come to execute the Constitutional rules,” and he expected the following from Azerbaijan:

Dear Azerbaijan, you are an acute eye, through which Iran looks at the Western civilization. You are a sensitive and grieved hearth that this homeland senses the light of world.

Our mother[land] Azerbaijan, address these hopes, keep your head up, and live long! Live forever! (Quoted in P. Mämmâldî, 2009, pp. 69-70)

Alas, Azadistan did not live a long life. For some, it was Khiyabani’s “uncompromising policy” that “made it impossible for him to negotiate with the central government” and “co-ordinate his efforts with other contemporary regional movements in
Iran” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 50). Others identify the weakness of the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie, internal disagreements among the members of the Democrat Party, and the insurgency’s lack of military power (Nahidi-Azer, 2005, pp. 63-64). As a result, Mokhber os-Saltaneh Hedayat, the new governor appointed by Tehran, reached Tabriz and “on 12 September, the Cossack Brigade was deployed to take control of all the strategic points throughout the city” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 51). They did, and shortly thereafter Khiyabani and fifty Democrats were killed. Azadistan ceased to exist as the military, under the command of the new governor, took control of the city and killed the leadership of the ADP. The Khiyabani Insurgency and Azadistan came to an end.

5. Conclusion

The Khiyabani Insurgency is a severely neglected issue in Western scholarship. Excluding the superficial evaluations and references in studies examining broader Iranian history, it was not possible to find a significant article or book length study concentrating on the movement. This chapter relied on primary and secondary sources that were published in Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Iran. The availability of Khiyabani’s articles and speeches—his own words—have shaped the arguments in this chapter. However, the ideological approaches of, and the conflicts among, the secondary sources have been a challenge. While the Soviet sources saw the insurgency as a socialist revolution, some of the Azerbaijani and the majority of the Turkish sources depicted the insurgency as a high point of Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran. After a critical assessment of the different perspectives in light of the primary resources and available data, this chapter shows that the Khiyabani Insurgency was neither a socialist revolution nor a nationalist uprising. It was a constitutionalist and
anti-imperialist insurgency against the Qajar Dynasty, which attempted to undermine constitutionalist demands and was seen by the populace as serving foreign interests at the expense of the Iranian people.

This chapter analyzed the Khiyabani Insurgency, and argued that, contrary to the assertive nationalism of the north, Iranian Azerbaijan lacked ethnic nationalist sentiments at the dawn of the twentieth century. Thus, Azadistan, rather than being an outcome of separatist motivations, was the result of popular reactions against the policies of the Qajar government. Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani, as well as other social and political groups in Iran, blamed the Iranian government for the trouble facing Iran. First, the government’s economic policies had made Iran dependent on colonial powers. Second, a coalition of various social and political forces in Iran had staged a constitutionalist revolution in 1906, and they expected the government to honor and implement the constitutionalist principles. The Qajar court’s ongoing attempts to undermine and destroy the constitutionalist movement resulted in social turmoil. This instability culminated in civil war, providing a pretext for the British and Russian Empires to invade the country and remain in Iran until the end of World War I. The end of the war, which necessitated withdrawal of foreign troops, renewed the hopes of the Iranian people for democratic rule and independence from foreign powers. However, once Ahmad Shah announced the Anglo-Iranian Oil Agreement in 1919, Khiyabani, like many others, lost faith in the government. Furthermore, once the central government intensified its repressive measures in response to the increased political power of the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan, Khiyabani and his colleagues decided to start a military resistance. This insurgency led to the brief autonomous provincial government in Azerbaijan.
Chapter one introduced comparative analytical conceptions of nationalism—lack of ethnic and national consciousness, integrationist nationalism and assertive nationalism. This chapter attempted to show that, at the beginning of the century, Iranian Azerbaijan did not fit either of these categories: the people of the province lacked ethnic and nationalist sentiments. However, the two decades following the collapse of the Khiyabani Insurgency were to trigger the development of Azerbaijani identity and nationalism and move Iranian Azerbaijan to the category of integrationist nationalism. These events are examined in chapter four.

This chapter also attempted to explain the lack of nationalism in Iranian Azerbaijan using the threefold framework introduced in chapter one. Accordingly, Iranian Azerbaijan lacked the secular nationalist elite necessary to mobilize the masses towards a nationalist action. Furthermore, the relationship between the Azerbaijani minority and the central government of Iran did not produce ethnic grievances. The Northern Azerbaijani intelligentsia was exposed to the ideas of nationalism and secularism, especially through their education in European, Ottoman, and Russian schools. Upon completing their studies, the northern Azerbaijani intelligentsia returned home and launched a secular nationalist revolution, mobilizing the masses towards nationalist action. After decades of nationalist propaganda, they used the opportunity structure of World War I to realize their nationalist goals. To be more specific, war and revolution had weakened the Tsar’s government, leading to its collapse. In addition, the Ottoman government had decided to support Turkish nationalist movements in the region. The Northern Azerbaijani nationalist elite, building upon increased popular support resulting from ethnic grievances associated with Russian colonial rule, used these opportunities to establish the independent Democratic
Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918. Contrary to the situation in Northern Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani in Iran remained embedded in the Iranian religious and political system. They were both strongly affiliated with Shi’a Islam and considered Iran to be their historical homeland. These ties prevented the penetration of Turkish nationalism in Iranian Azerbaijan, despite the attempts of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. In sum, contrary to the rise of assertive nationalism in the north, Iranian Azerbaijan remained resistant to ethnic nationalist sentiments.

Although Iranian Azerbaijanis lacked ethnic and separatist demands at the time of the Khiyabani Insurgency, the devastating effects of World War I and the central government’s indifferent attitude toward the suffering in the province caused resentment and gave rise to new expectations for the central government. Khiyabani’s statements and articles reflect these changes. In other words, in addition to the broader constitutionalist and anti-imperialist demands, Khiyabani also identified more resources for the province of Azerbaijan as a key priority. In response, the army repressed the insurgency and killed its leaders. The province would suffer even harsher repression at the hands of the new state of Iran, founded in 1925. Contrary to the political and economic status of Iranian Azerbaijan during the Qajar Dynasty, the repressive and discriminatory policies of the Pahlavi Dynasty were to cause a transformation in the nationalist sentiments. This is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Four: Autonomous Azerbaijan, 1945-46

The Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (ADP), under the leadership of Seyyid Ja’far Pishevari, a veteran communist, declared an autonomous national government of Azerbaijan in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan on 12 December 1945. The declaration of autonomy described the Azerbaijanis living in Iran as a distinct “nation” and then expressed the new government’s commitment to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iran. Reactions to the autonomy claims of the ADP varied. The central government of Iran denied the autonomy claims and, together with the western allies, namely the United Kingdom and the United States, accused the movement of being a Soviet project. The reactions of the inhabitants of the province were more puzzling; this chapter aims to decipher their responses to the claims of autonomy. The province’s residents initially appreciated the idea of autonomy and provided tentative support since autonomy seemed a promising alternative to the central government’s neglect. However, the people of the province later became apprehensive, especially when rumors spread regarding secession from Iran (See Shaffer, 2002, p. 56). Why did the Azerbaijanis in Iran initially support the autonomy movement? Why did they then become unsure about secession from Iran? More broadly, why would an ethnic group—with a distinct language, ethnic identity, and a demarcated territory identified with it—not seek independence from the state where it was a minority group facing discrimination?

69 This chapter will use Azerbaijan to mean the Iranian province of Azerbaijan; and will use Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan (SSRA) for the state of Azerbaijan in the southern Caucasus.
The autonomy declaration by the National Government of Azerbaijan was one of the early crises of the Cold War (Pipe, 2007, p. 138). It is even considered by some as “the dawn of the Cold War” (Hasanli, 2006), since the province was occupied by Soviet troops when the autonomy movement started and reached its peak. When the Soviet Union delayed withdrawing its troops from Soviet-controlled Iranian territory after the end of World War II, Iran and the Allied powers attributed this delay to the fledging Azerbaijani autonomy movement in the region. After ineffective diplomatic pressure by Allied forces, Iran appealed to the newly formed United Nations. For some observers, this marked a turning point in US foreign policy from a passive position to a “tougher” attitude (Yergin, 1978, p. 179), signaling the start of the Cold War.

The mainstream Cold War literature has examined this case from a global political perspective, showing less interest in domestic political dynamics (See Fawcett, 1992; Hess, 1974; Lawson, 1989; Nissman, 1987; Rossow, 1956). These scholars were unsure about Soviet involvement in and support for the emergence of the autonomy movement, as there had been no tangible proof for it. On the other side, Soviet and Azerbaijani scholars saw the case solely as the outcome of Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran (Cheshmazär, 1986). However, the release of secret documents from the Soviet and Azerbaijani archives in the

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70 The USSR and the UK occupied Iran in 1941 to prevent German control and to secure a supply line between the Soviets and the Allied forces. They divided Iran into three zones. The northern part was under Soviet control, the southern under British control, and the central area was left for the central government of Iran. The SU and the UK signed the Tripartite Treaty with Iran in 1942 declaring Iran to be an ally; they refused to consider their military presence to be an occupation. According to the Treaty, the Allied powers pledged to leave Iranian territory within six months from the end of the World War II.

71 Kurdish groups in Iran, populated in the Soviet controlled area, declared an autonomous Kurdish republic simultaneously with the Azerbaijani, and this increased suspicion about Russian support behind the scenes.
late 1990s\textsuperscript{72} has opened a new chapter in the study of the 1945-1946 autonomy movement in Iranian Azerbaijan. This new data requires a careful reconsideration of the case. More specifically, the new documents provide evidence of direct—but highly concealed—Soviet involvement in the establishment and rise of the ADP. Documents demonstrate that the Soviet Politburo issued a decree to start, support, and guide a separatist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan. The new documents corroborate the claims of Soviet involvement but also carry the risk of undermining or neglecting the local nationalist element that was present in Iranian Azerbaijan. This chapter explores the Azerbaijani autonomy case in light of the new evidence and also considers the internal dynamics that both led to conditional popular support for the ADP and caused apprehension about the province’s possible secession from Iran.

This chapter examines the autonomy movement with use of the new comparative conceptualization and the threefold framework introduced in chapter one. Building upon the comparison of the political trajectories in Northern Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan after their separation in 1828, chapter one argued that the Azerbaijani communities had evolved towards two distinct types of nationalism, assertive and integrationist. In this categorization, Northern Azerbaijan represents assertive nationalism: a pro-independence nationalist movement seeking its own nation state. Iranian Azerbaijan, on the other hand, is an exemplar of integrationist nationalism: an ethnic group is aware of its ethnic distinctiveness but is willing to embrace, even prioritize, a supra-ethnic identity, and limits its claims to linguistic and cultural rights and some level of administrate autonomy instead

\textsuperscript{72} The archival documents are now available online as a part of the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC. (http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org).
of seeking secession. Building on this conceptualization, the threefold framework aims to explain how the two Azerbaijani communities have been drawn toward distinct types of nationalism since the early nineteenth century.

Describing Iranian Azerbaijan as a case of integrationist nationalism acknowledges the emergence or existence of ethnic nationalist sentiments and the minority group’s struggle for recognition of and respect for its ethnic and linguistic rights. Likewise, integrationist nationalism’s willingness to accept and prioritize a supra-ethnic identity, which is a result of the existence of other values and bonds tying the minority group to the host society and state, helps to explain the popular apprehension about secession. Next, the chapter introduces the dynamics that gave birth to this integrationist nationalism in Iranian Azerbaijan.

The three key variables this study uses to explain the divergence in nationalist mobilization and attitudes towards secession are the secular nationalist elite, the relationship between the minority group and the host society and state, and the opportunity structures. More specifically, the core actor in the emergence of assertive or integrationist nationalism is the secular nationalist elite. As demonstrated in the examination of the emergence of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918, this secular elite staged a secular nationalist revolution. They first separated ethnic identity from religious identity; then they popularized this new ethnic identity. In addition to the secular nationalist elite, chapter one introduced two antecedent conditions, the existence of which impact the influence of the core variable. The first antecedent condition is the relationship between the minority group and the host state and society. When the
relationship is problematic and produces ethnic grievances, it increases popular support for the elite’s nationalist movement. If the relationship is not problematic, it becomes harder for the nationalist elite to garner popular support for their nationalist cause. The second antecedent condition is opportunity structure, which can also be defined as favorable structural conditions for the nationalist mobilization; these favorable conditions might include weakening of the central state or its breakdown. The existence of the nationalist elite is vital, since it is the nationalist elite that channels grievances towards a purposeful nationalist action. In response, the existence of the antecedent variables is vital for the success of the elite-led nationalist mobilization.

This chapter examines the emergence of integrationist nationalism in Iranian Azerbaijan in two periods: the repressive rule of Shah Reza Pahlavi, from 1921 to 1941; and the occupation of Iran by allied forces during World War II (1941-1946). In the first period, Azerbaijanis in Iran faced harsh state repression, something they never experienced before. The systematic discrimination in this period angered Azerbaijanis in Iran and estranged them from the state. Discrimination in the form of strict prohibitions on the use of the Azerbaijani language triggered the formation of an Azerbaijani identity. However, during this period, Iranian Azerbaijan lacked a nationalist elite to channel ethnic grievances into a nationalist action. As a result, the reactions to state repression remained isolated and very limited. Furthermore, Iranian Azerbaijanis blamed the Shah’s regime for the discrimination, but maintained their attachment to Iran, an attachment that was based on their historical and religious bonds with the Iranian society and state.
The second phase of nationalist mobilization in Iranian Azerbaijan began with the occupation of Iran by the allied forces in 1941. This occupation ushered in opportunity structure for the formation of an Azerbaijani identity in Iran. Iran was divided into three zones; the Soviet troops took control of the northern part of the country, including Iranian Azerbaijan. While the occupation ended the repression associated with the Shah’s regime, Soviet soldiers and officers, purposefully selected from Soviet Socialist Azerbaijan, began the intense propagation of communism blended with an Azerbaijani nationalism. Iranian Azerbaijan returned to having newspapers, magazines, radio, etc., in its own language after a long absence. However, the critical opportunity for Azerbaijani nationalist mobilization came towards the end of World War II. In 1945, as the archival documents show, the Soviet Politburo ordered Mir Bagirov, the Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) of Azerbaijan, to organize a secessionist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan. Bagirov, known for his effusive Azerbaijani nationalism, chose Seyyid Ja’far Pishevari, a veteran communist in Iranian Azerbaijan, to lead the top-secret project. Pishevari founded the Azerbaijan Democrat Party, gathered the scattered Azerbaijani intelligentsia around the party, and then, with the help of Soviet support that was known only to him and two of his colleagues, declared autonomy for the National Government of Azerbaijan. People from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds in Iranian Azerbaijan initially supported the ADP, especially because of its promises to heal the social and economic injuries caused by the Shah’s rule and World War II. However, the ADP’s honeymoon did not last long. Once Stalin was satisfied with his gains from Iran, following intense diplomatic meetings and UN pressure, he ordered the Soviet troops to withdraw from Azerbaijan. Withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Azerbaijan had serious repercussions for the provincial government.
The ADP started losing its control of the social and military groups that were supposed to be under its command. This brought insecurity and economic decline. In only a few months, it became clear that the ADP-led government lacked the capacity to keep its promises, including respect for the territorial integrity of Iran.

In sum, the Soviet occupation and the Politburo decision to start a separatist movement provided the Azerbaijani elite with a golden opportunity for nationalist mobilization. Pishevari organized the Azerbaijani elite around the ADP and started a nationalist movement with the goal of creating an autonomous government in Iranian Azerbaijan. The grievances associated with the Shah’s regime channeled elite and popular support to the autonomy movement, which promised to respect the territorial integrity of Iran. However, Stalin’s decision to withdraw Russian troops from Iran altered the power balance and deprived the Azerbaijani elite of their major source of support. In the meantime, the ADP leadership’s increased tendency toward independence from Iran alienated the populace; Iranian Azerbaijanis were attached to the larger Iranian society with historical, religious, and economic bonds. Consequently, the party rapidly lost its popular support and was forced to yield to the terms of the central government of Iran, bringing an end to the autonomy movement in Azerbaijan.

This chapter develops and supports the above explanation with evidence obtained from original sources, secondary sources, and, especially, archival documents released by the Woodrow Wilson Center. The chapter is organized in three sections. The first section focuses on the repressive Pahlavi rule of 1921-1941. The second section presents the details of the secret Soviet plan for creating a separatist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan.
The third section examines the Politburo plan in action, starting from the establishment of the party until the declaration of autonomy. The fourth section examines the rise and fall of the popularity of the autonomous Azerbaijani government.

1. Authoritarian Modernization and the Accumulation of Grievances, 1921-1941

Iran experienced many significant crises in the first quarter of the twentieth century. These crises included revolutions, economic breakdown, political turmoil, and occupation by foreign powers. Many Iranians blamed the Qajar court for all their national woes, from economic crises to the country’s loss of territory and sovereignty. In reality, the central state was not able to reach much beyond the capital city. However, Iran entered a new era in 1921 with the military coup organized by General Reza Khan, Qazvin Cossack Garrison Commander. He initially took control of the armed forces. In 1926, after consolidating his power and increasing his grip on the state, Reza Khan declared himself the new shah of Iran, beginning the reign of Pahlavi Dynasty that was to last until 1979. Reza Khan experienced Iran’s turbulent decades as a military officer. Thus, after coming to power, he prioritized building a strong army and state. Once he had consolidated his power, he launched a comprehensive state-led modernization project that encompassed almost all aspects of life, including the way people dressed and the language they spoke. Reza Shah, “the man of order,” started building the glorious state of the “nation of Iran” at the expense
of all other ethnic and religious elements in Iranian society\(^{73}\) (See Atabaki & Zürcher, 2004).

A strong centralized state would be the solution to the earlier predicaments ascribed to a weak and absent state. However, using the state to build a uniform society and a nation out of diverse social elements led to many grievances, especially for ethnic and religious minorities. In this regard, the Azerbaijani minority in Iran experienced their harshest treatment ever by the state during the two-decade rule of Shah Pahlavi. The new state applied all types of repressive measures, from discrimination to humiliating punishment, to assimilate the Azerbaijani into the Persian culture and language. This was quite a task, given that the majority of Iranian Azerbaijani did not speak Persian. This being said, it is notable that the Azerbaijani people in Iran, despite their harsh treatment at the hands of the Iranian state, did not want to secede from Iran in 1946. This section, in three subsections, concentrates on this puzzle. The first subsection briefly introduces Shah Reza Pahlavi’s modernization project. The second subsection depicts how state-led modernization was seen in the Azerbaijani community. The third subsection discusses the lack of an organized nationalist reaction against the authoritarian assimilationist state policies; this absence of organized nationalist sentiment also offers a crucial perspective as to why Azerbaijanis were apprehensive about secession when the ADP declared autonomy from Iran in 1946.

\(^{73}\) Iran is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, and only slightly more than half of the society is ethnically Persian.
1.1. “One State, One Nation”

In 1921, General Reza Khan, commander of the Cossack garrison in Qazvin, took control of local gendarmes and the city police, declared martial law, and assured Ahmad Shah “that he had come to save him from the Bolsheviks” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 63). However, five years later, after establishing his control as the real power behind the throne, Reza Khan “convened a Constituent Assembly, deposed Ahmad Shah, accepted the crown, named his son heir apparent, and crowned himself monarch—much in the fashion of his heroes, Napoleon and Nader Shah” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 65). Shah Reza Pahlavi ruled Iran for two decades, until he was forced by the Allied Powers to abdicate in 1941. He spent his first years after the coup, from 1921 to 1926, rebuilding the army and the state (See Cronin, 1997a). However, he continued expanding the both the army and the state until his departure. As a result of these efforts, both the Iranian military and the state bureaucracy expanded exponentially.74

Strengthening and expanding the army and the central state were not goals in and of themselves for Shah Reza; these expansions were also key instruments for transforming Iranian society.75 Once he had consolidated his power, the Shah began to eliminate all rival social and political forces. First, the Shah disqualified the elite opposition after a short period of skirmishes in the first half of the 1920s. This meant that “the outstanding

74 Specifically, the military grew tenfold and the bureaucracy grew seventeenfold (See Abrahamian, 2008, p. 67)

75 Shah Pahlavi built his regime on two core elements, the army and bureaucracy, the both under his strict control. These were also the tools he employed in constructing and modernizing the Iranian nation. Therefore, Reza Pahlavi’s social engineering project is conceptualized as a “military-led modernization” (See Cronin, 2003, p. 2).
constitutional and political issues had been resolved in favour of the establishment of a military–monarchical dictatorship,” enabling the Shah “to embark on [his] programme of far-reaching and profound modernization” (Cronin, 2007, p. 72). Two other targets were the peripheral landlords that exercised feudal powers and the ethnic and national minorities (Ataev, 1970, p. 71). The new regime attempted to eliminate the former via the establishment of the state bureaucracy in all parts of the country, thereby depriving the landlords of their traditional powers. Ethnic and religious minorities were subject to strict state-imposed discrimination and restrictions. As a result, almost all social, political, and economic groups paid a high cost for the realization of Reza Shah’s project of “one state, one nation.” In words of Abrahamian, a scholar of modern Iranian history:

Reza Shah drove like a steamroller toward this goal [of establishing the power of the central state], crushing all opposition, whether from the left or right, from the center or the provinces, from the aristocratic notables or the nascent trade unions. A man of few words, he had little time for rhetoric, philosophy, or political theory. The main ideological baggage he carried stressed order, discipline, and state power. He conflated his own persona with the monarchy; the monarchy with the state; and the state with the nation. Not averse to harnessing religion, he gave the state a motto containing three words: *Khoda* (God), *Shah*, and *Mehan* (Nation) (Abrahamian, 2008, pp. 65-66).

Reza Shah’s program was comprehensive, reaching into almost all aspects of social life. For example, the new dress code, one of the reforms of the Shah regime, outlawed traditional clothes and accessories, and required all adult males to wear the “Pahlavi cap,” which was to signify “national unity” (Abrahamian, 2008, pp. 83-84). The educational reforms nationalized all types of educational institutions, including traditional, minority, and missionary schools; schools were required to use the state-approved curriculum,
textbooks, and “of course, the same language—Persian” (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 85). To instill greater national uniformity and awareness, Reza Shah founded various organizations, such as the Cultural Academy, the Department of Public Guidance, the National Heritage Society, and the Geography Commission. The Shah established the journal of *Iran-e Bastan* [Ancient Iran] and two newspapers, *Ettela’at* [Information] and *Journal de Tehran*, all of which sought to glorify ancient Iran and rid the Persian language of alien words (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 86), namely Azerbaijani, Turkish, and Arabic words. In 1934, Shah Pahlavi changed the name of the country and decreed that “henceforth Persia was to be known to the outside world as Iran...whereas ‘Persia’ was associated with Fars and Qajar decadence, ‘Iran’ invoked the glories and birthplace of the ancient Aryans” (Cited in Abrahamian, 2008, p. 86).

The Geography Commission changed the names of more than a hundred places, noting that “it would be impractical to eliminate all Arabic, Turkish, and Armenian names,” and prohibited the use of languages other than Persian on “public signs, store fronts, business letterheads, and even visiting cards” (Cited in Abrahamian, 2008, p. 87). The Cultural Academy, meanwhile, Persianized administrative terms; the Society for National Heritage was busy building a state museum, a state library, and a number of major mausoleums.

In sum, the military-led modernization project of Shah Reza Pahlavi negatively impacted almost all social groups and forces in Iran. Among them, the Azerbaijani minority was affected more than others for several reasons. First, the vast majority of Iranian Azerbaijanis did not speak Persian, so linguistic and educational reforms mandating the
use of Persian had significant repercussions. Second, the new regime greatly altered the place of Azerbaijani in Iranian society: they went from being the ruling elite to a repressed minority. Third, the new state imposed its Persianization policies in a brutal and humiliating manner. The next subsection focuses on these latter two grievances in more detail.

1.2. Repression, Discrimination, and the Accumulation of Ethnic Grievances

The Azerbaijanis have historically been the largest ethnic minority group in Iran, complete with a distinct language and culture. The vast majority of Azerbaijanis were concentrated in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan. Bordering Turkey and Caucasian Azerbaijan, the province was one of the county's trade and business centers until the establishment of Pahlavi Dynasty (see chapter three). Azerbaijan's geographic location and trade revenues made it one of the wealthier provinces in Iran, and, more importantly, economically less dependent on Tehran. Azerbaijanis had played important social and political roles in Iranian history, especially in the Constitutional Revolution of Iran (see chapter three).

Thus, when Reza Shah's modernization project was under consideration, Azerbaijan was a major challenge. First, Iranian Azerbaijan did not speak Persian. Moreover, its borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan not only permitted the diffusion of new ideas and ideologies, but also provided a certain level of economic independence due to trade revenues. Last, Iranian Azerbaijanis were known as the champions of constitutionalist and democratic ideas in Iran. Therefore, for the success of Reza Shah's comprehensive state-
making project, it was vital that the Azerbaijanis be assimilated into Persian culture and language and that the trans-border interactions with Turkey and Soviet Azerbaijan be eliminated. Furthermore, the province needed to be highly dependent on Tehran economically and had to be kept under strict scrutiny to prevent the formation of any opposition movement. These goals meant that tight control and continuous repression became the norm, and, as a result of this, more grievances accumulated. The Iranian state used purposeful “discrimination, economic disadvantages and cultural repression, possibly to punish [the province] for their part in the Khiyabani-led rebellion in 1920” (Homayoun Katouzian, 1981, pp. 133, 150; Shaffer, 2002, p. 48)

Iranian Azerbaijan was introduced to the modern face of the Iranian state via new state officers and civil servants known for their brutality and new policies known for their repressive character, such as the ones restricting the use of the native language. In 1923, Reza Khan sent an official directive to all Iranian provinces ordering the use of Persian in all official written documents and as the language of instruction in all educational institutions (Yenisey, 2009, p. 112). Starting in 1926, all of the high-ranking bureaucrats and state officers that were appointed to Azerbaijan were selected from Persian speakers; subordinate positions were open to Azerbaijanis only if they knew Persian (Mustafayev, 1998, p. 97). Cronin describes the relationship between the state policies, officers, and the local people:

Preferring rapid and radical change imposed by force over a slower pace of change encumbered by any democratic process, the regime’s key personnel, heavily influenced by the martial temper of Riza Shah himself, developed a commandist approach, seeking to impose their will across vast geographical areas and intricate social contexts by diktat, backed up by the threat of military intervention. These methods produced in civilian officials and especially in army officers a tendency to
underestimate and sometimes even deliberately minimize the complexities and
difficulties of their task, and often provoked and aggravated opposition as much or
more than the reforms themselves (Cronin, 1997, 73)

In parallel with the rising power of the central state, Reza Shah accelerated his
assimilation policies in the 1930s (Razmara, 1320 [1941 or 1942], p. 47). In 1934, the
Iranian Majlis [Parliament] passed a new law that required the use of Persian in mail
correspondence (Mustafayev, 1998, p. 99). In the same year, the central government
banned the publication of books in Azerbaijani and attempted to collect all the published
ones, especially from schools (Varliq, 1983 [1362], no: 5-6, p. 46-48).

Another target of the assimilation policies was the Azerbaijani identity. Azerbaijanis
in Iran did not have separatist or secessionist sentiments and considered Iran as their
homeland at the dawn of the century. However, they knew that they spoke a language other
than Persian. While they knew that the language they spoke was same as the people of
Turkey and Soviet Azerbaijan, this linguistic commonality did not constitute the core of
their identity at the turn of the 20th century. However, Reza Shah’s dream of creating a
homogeneous Iranian nation and state was not tolerant of any alternative ethnic identities.
One of the government documents of the time denied the existence of any identity in
Azerbaijan other than an Iranian one (Quoted in Rähimli, 2003, p. 21; Varliq, 1358, No.2,
29). Azerbaijanis in Iran were even taught that they were Turkified Iranians, not Iranian
Turks—that is, that the Iranian identity trumped any historical trans-border legacy of their
people. To accompany this teaching, school and location names were replaced with the
names of key Persian personalities and symbols if they carried Turkish or Azerbaijani

For the local people, the most galling part of the assimilation campaign was the cruel and humiliating treatment they suffered at the hands of the representatives of the central state. Students were fined if they spoke Azerbaijani even during breaks (Yenisey, 2009, p. 112). For example, the director of the provincial department of education, R. Mohsini, reportedly punished students via saddling them and keeping them in isolation in horse barns if they resisted speaking Azerbaijani Turkish in schools (Quoted in Rähimli, 2003, pp. 22; Dada Qorqud, 1379, No:1372, 1324). The subsequent director of the provincial department of education resorted to physical punishment when monetary fines did not work (Quoted in Rähimli, 2003, pp. 22; Yoldash, 1379, No:1378, 1327). Another state official took the opportunity of a funeral ceremony in Azerbaijan to proudly clarify misconceptions regarding the ethnic roots of the Azerbaijani, teaching them about their purported Persian ancestors (Quoted in Rähimli, 2003, pp. 22; Yoldash, 1379, No:1378, 1327).

Economically, both the city of Tabriz and the province of Azerbaijan lost economic strength during the two decades of the Shah’s rule, going from a crossroads of international trade to a neglected periphery of the central economy. This economic decline was due to several factors. First, Reza Shah excluded the province from his grand project of modernization and his development plans (Mustafayev, 1998, pp. 94-95), probably in retaliation for the region’s role in the Khiyabani insurgency as mentioned above. Second, the closed border with Soviet Azerbaijan, in response to the threat of the diffusion of both
communism and nationalism, withered trade—the main source of revenue in the province (Shaffer, 2002, p. 49). As a result, Tabriz lost its competitive edge against state-supported industrialization and economic growth in Tehran. The share of the budget that was reserved for the province of Azerbaijan was less than many other parts of the country, such as Isfahan or Shiraz, and almost twenty times less than the monies allocated to Tehran in the early 1940s (Rāhimli, 2003, p. 23).

The economic regress of the province had social repercussions. In the early 1940s, 75%-80% of the population of the province was still living in rural areas, and 91.8% of them depended on agriculture (Rāhimli, 2003, pp. 26-27). In 1940-1941, Azerbaijan’s industrial output was only 1.1% of the whole country (Cited in Rāhimli, 2003, p. 26). As a result of the declining economy, Azerbaijani capital, skilled labor, and manual workers began to flow to Tehran and other parts of the country (Kavyanpur, 1346 [1967], p. 347). More specifically, Azerbaijan lost a “significant portion” of its merchants to Tehran in this period and a large portion of its middle-class residents during World War II (Shaffer, 2002, p. 49).

Emigration from the province of Azerbaijan to Tehran had two side effects. On the one hand, it gave many of the Azerbaijani people the opportunity to observe the gap in economic progress and living standards between the center and the periphery, drawing attention to the neglect of the central government towards their province. On the other hand, new life in Tehran increased their economic dependence on the center and, therefore caused increased assimilation for some (Shaffer, 2002, p. 49).
The *Varliq*, the first Azerbaijani magazine published in Iran after the 1979 revolution, provides a useful comparison of the social and economic conditions in Azerbaijan before and after Shah Pahlavi:

...Azerbaijan was one of the developed and well-to-do regions of Iran due to its geographic location and nature [or natural asserts]. Several newspapers were published in Azerbaijani language. Theater shows were played in Azerbaijani [language] in schools, and Azerbaijan had improving trade and economic relations with foreign countries. The black days started with the establishment of Pahlavi dynasty. Use of mother tongue in Azerbaijan, reading and writing in the native language, even speaking in the mother tongue in courts was prohibited. Azerbaijani people had to face assorted insults. Azerbaijan, which was considered as the light [or candle] and eye of Iran in the past, started to be treated as a colony (Varliq, 1358, No:2, p.29). [My translation from Iranian Azerbaijani]

The speech of an Azerbaijani Parliamentarian in the meeting of the 13th National Majlis of Iran also presents a useful illustration of the central state’s treatment of the province:

Only one building and an elevator were constructed for a higher pedagogical school [or institution] in last twenty years. The only fund reserved for the province from [its] large budget was the small amount for a little municipality building and a short dam. The unqualified and unworthy state officers that were busy with robbing... infringed on the feelings of the brave children of this land, remained unpunished, and even were even accommodated after their return to Tehran. (Quoted in Mustafayev, 1998, p. 107). [My translation from Iranian Azerbaijani]

All in all, the province of Azerbaijan experienced its worst two decades under the rule of Shah Reza Pahlavi, in terms of treatment by the central state, its economy, and state-led limitations on Azerbaijani linguistic and cultural rights. In order to assimilate the Azerbaijani minority into Persian language and culture, in accordance with Reza Shah’s state-led modernization project, the people of Azerbaijan suffered humiliating and
repressive treatment and intense restrictions. Furthermore, as shown above, the regime excluded the province from economic and industrial development plans in retaliation for the region’s support for the Khiyabani insurgency in 1920. When the trans-border relations with the SSR of Azerbaijan came under very tight restrictions, Azerbaijan lost almost all of its trade-based economic revenue and came to rely more on agriculture. As the quotations from Varliq and the Azerbaijani parliamentarian’s address of the Iranian Majlis reflect, Azerbaijani were well aware of the central state’s ignorance and discrimination and this frustrated them greatly. However, the intriguing question is why, despite tremendous discrimination, repression, and grievances, did the Azerbaijani in Iran not rebel against the Pahlavi regime? The answer to this question will also help explain why the Azerbaijani people became apprehensive about seceding from Iran when they had the opportunity to do so in 1946, an issue that will be explored in the next section.

1.3. Why did they not rebel?

Looking at the threefold framework of chapter one, the Azerbaijani community in Iran between 1921 and 1941 lacked the secular nationalist elite to channel the grievances of state repression towards nationalist action. Indeed, historical sources report the existence of opposition to the repressive actions of the Pahlavi state, especially “over the years 1927–29 throughout the provinces, in various towns and cities, and among different rural groups” that were “led, in general, by middle-ranking clerics and the guilds in the urban centres and by junior tribal khans and aghas in the countryside” (Cronin, 1997, 72). In
addition, one can also find evidence of isolated and small-scale actions in response to mistreatment by state officials (See Mustafayev, 1998, pp. 101-103; Yenisey, 2009). However, owing to the lack of secular nationalist elite, there was no avenue for the escalation and organization of grievances into collective nationalist action. This, again, demonstrates the key importance of the elite in nationalist mobilization.

The absence of an organized nationalist elite in Iranian Azerbaijan, especially in the years between 1921 and 1941, is also confirmed by other studies. Needless to say, here I do not mean not mean the complete absence of individuals with nationalistic sentiments. Rather, there is no record of an organized elite with a nationalist agenda of mobilizing masses for a nationalist cause, as can be observed in the Northern Azerbaijan (See chapter two). Mustafayev, for example, notes the lack of any records of a bourgeoisie or a state elite struggling to serve the national interests of Azerbaijanis in Iran; Mustafayev also records complaints about the dependence of the Azerbaijani elite on the center and the elite's willing assimilation therein (Mustafayev, 1998, p. 101). Shaffer's categorization of the Azerbaijani elite also shows no organized attempts before 1941.76 Indeed, the influential Azerbaijani intelligentsia in Iran not only lacked nationalist sentiments, some of them, such as Ahmad Kasravi, even advocated assimilation into the Persian culture and language (See Abrahamian, 2013). These Iranian Azerbaijani elites saw fit to unite under the Iranian state and Iranian identity to aid in the modernization of Iran and in the struggle against imperial powers (Shaffer, 2002, p. 50).

76 Brenda Shaffer categorizes the Iranian Azerbaijani elite into three groups: those who were advocates of assimilation to an Iranian identity, those who prioritized a class identity, and a third group who converted to the nationalist movement of the ADP that started under the leadership of Ja'far Pishevari in 1945 (Shaffer, 2002).
Despite lacking a secular nationalist elite to hasten the development of nationalist sentiments, the Pahlavi regime’s repressive assimilationist policies contributed to the sharpening of Azerbaijani identity in Iran. Specifically, state policies triggered two tendencies. On one hand, the new regime made assimilation inevitable. As stated above, the Tehran-focused economic policies tied the business elite to the center and the immigration of the middle and lower class to other parts of the country resulted in cultural assimilation. Furthermore, state-imposed Persianization and the consequent exclusion from government offices necessitated assimilation. In the meantime, brutal punishments by Iranian the state curtailed any potential for organized resistance or opposition at the elite or intellectual levels (See Mustafayev, 1998, pp. 91-106). On the other hand, state repression and ethnic grievances also led to the gradual emergence of Azerbaijan identity vis-à-vis Persian identity. As the Iranian Azerbaijanis were increasingly subject to humiliation and discrimination and increasingly deprived of social and economic rights for their ethnicity and language, the ethnic distinction between self and other became ever sharper.

The Iranian Azerbaijanis suffered under the Shah’s regime and lacked an organized nationalist elite to mobilize them. In addition, the Azerbaijani community had stronger bonds with Iranian society, such as an affiliation with Shia Islam, a historical memory of Iran as their homeland, and newly intensified economic integration. Though the repression created ethnic grievances, Azerbaijanis blamed the Pahlavi state instead of questioning their relationship with and their ability to belong to Iranian society. Indeed, the state repressed other minority groups and ethnicities as well. In particular, the secularization
policies of the Pahlavi state, which regulated and restricted everything from the way people dressed to the institutional power and structure of the religious establishment, alienated all segments of society.

In conclusion, from 1921 to 1941, Iranian Azerbaijan lacked both a secular nationalist elite and the conditions for such an elite to emerge. At a popular level, state repression and discrimination engendered ethnic grievances, which prompted the formation of a distinct Azerbaijani identity. Nevertheless, Iranian Azerbaijanis blamed the Pahlavi state; their religious affiliation, historical attachment, and economic integration with Iran foreclosed the idea of secession from Iran. Azerbaijani nationalism after the abdication of Reza Shah is examined in the next section.

2. Iran under the Allied Occupation, 1941-1946

Iran declared neutrality soon after the outbreak of World War II. However, the Soviet Union and Britain occupied Iran in 1941 to secure Soviet supply lines and to prevent German penetration in Iran. They divided Iran into three regions: The Soviet troops took control of the north, the British forces were stationed in the south, and the center was left to the Iranian government. The Allied forces also forced the abdication of Reza in favor of his son, Muhammad Reza Shah, due to the father’s ideological and strategic inclination toward Hitler. The new king of Iran had limited powers in his early years, and the presence of foreign troops curtailed his reach beyond the area left to the control of the central government. Therefore, until the withdrawal of Allied troops, Azerbaijan, and Iran in
general, enjoyed an exceptional period of considerable freedoms, including the accommodation of diverse political parties, press organs, and civil organizations.

The province of Azerbaijan was in the region under Soviet control. This, in addition to saving the province from the repression of the central state, also provided a golden opportunity for nationalist mobilization. The Soviet leadership saw an opportunity to propagate a brand of socialism that was blended with Azerbaijani nationalism. For Iranian Azerbaijan, this occupation meant the ability to resume their social and economic relations with their compatriots across the border after two decades of strict restrictions. The Soviet occupation lasted nearly five years and comprised two distinct periods of involvement and intervention: an initial implicit and passive propagation period from 1941 to 1945, and an active interventionist period from 1945 to 1946. The main focus of this section is the second period that began when the Politburo decreed the initiation of a separationist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan.

The Soviet Union adopted a passive and implicit socialist-nationalist propagation policy in the early period of its occupation. In addition to securing their primary military and strategic interests in the region, Soviet leadership appealed to Azerbaijani nationalism in its approach to the populace. Soviet troops and representatives in the province were purposefully selected from the citizens of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan. Moreover, Soviet leadership established and supported cultural organizations and press organs that reflected the local culture and were attuned to the needs of the province. This was an excellent opportunity for the Soviets to spread communist ideology blended with Azerbaijani nationalism, while giving a boost to the cultural and intellectual life in the
province. A variety of news organs, such as the newspaper *Azerbaijan*, as well as civil organizations, such as the Azerbaijan Community group, all became platforms for cultural expression. This was significant, given that activities like this had been prohibited during the rule of Reza Shah (Mustafayev, 1998, pp. 117-121). In other words, the occupation of the province by the Soviet troops provided an opportunity structure in which the Iranian Azerbaijani identity and language flourished. In particular, one of the first questions broached in newspapers and social gatherings was the issue of the native language. Overall, the period was marked by observable intellectual and cultural progress (Yenisey, 2009, p. 137).

The Soviets and the British organized intense anti-German propaganda efforts, while the Soviet representatives in the province busied themselves by supporting leftist movements sympathetic to the Soviet Union. In this regard, the Soviets maintained close relations with the Tudeh Party of Iran—the party that was founded in 1941 by a group of leftist political prisoners who were liberated in the Allied occupation of Iran (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 107). The Azerbaijani branch of Tudeh was to play an important role in the formation of the Azerbaijani autonomy movement in 1945.

The Tudeh Party started with intentions of becoming a “liberal rather than a radical party,” and even attempted to appeal to the traditional and non-secular masses of Iran via embracing and tolerating religious values and practices (Abrahamian, 1999, pp. 77-78). However, this did not last long; Tudeh rapidly moved to the left. The party's ideological orientation made it an important ally of the Soviet Union in Iran. However, as World War II was winding down, and especially after the defeat of Hitler’s Germany, the pragmatic
alliance between the Allied powers gave way to ideological rivalry. In 1945, the main concern of the central government of Iran and its western allies was Soviet ideological penetration in Iran. Since the Tudeh Party was known as a close ally of the Soviets, it became a major target for government repression.

As in other Islamic societies, the clergy and religious institutions in Iran were important actors in the struggle against communism. Both the Soviet Union and communist ideology more broadly were equated with atheism and immorality. In response, the clergy, with help from the Iranian government and the western allies, ran active anti-communist propaganda campaigns. As the sections below will show, the negative image of communism and the Tudeh Party’s close ties with the Soviet Union hindered popular support for the party. As a result, in 1945, with the participation of the Iranian police and the Iranian military, Tabriz, which was under Soviet control, hosted serious anti-Tudeh demonstrations. In the report sent to Stalin, Mir Bagirov described the situation desperately:

Things have got so bad, he wrote, that the reactionary elements, supported by Iranian military units, organized a provocative demonstration...which marched down the streets of Tabriz...carrying banners reading “Down with the People's Party [the Tudeh Party] and its supporters”... Such open appearances (vystuplenia) did not even take place in the most tense days of 1941–1942 (Quoted in Raine, 2001, p. 5)

As the war was approaching its end, Iranian Azerbaijan experienced an unexpected development. As the Soviet archival documents show, Stalin, hoping to secure oil concessions and strengthen Soviet power in the region, launched a separatist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan. With the secret support of the Soviet Union, Seyyid Ja’far Pishevari and
two of his colleagues founded the Azerbaijan Democrat Party. After a few months of intense campaigning, they called for a meeting of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan and then declared an autonomous government for the province of Azerbaijan on 12 December 1945. In total, it took less than a year to found the party and declare a national autonomous government. The party was also successful in garnering considerable level of popular support, though it did not take long for the new autonomous government to lose its popularity. Support for the party declined owing to the party’s worsening relations with the central Iranian government, the party’s failure to keep its promises, and the party’s consideration of secession from Iran. This section aims to discuss the rise and fall of the National Government of Azerbaijan using the threefold explanation—nationalist elite, grievances, and opportunity structure—in light of the Soviet archival documents released by the Wilson Center.

As the threefold framework introduced in chapter one indicates, even though the occupation by Soviet troops reinvigorated the cultural and intellectual life in the province, Iranian Azerbaijanis still lacked a secular nationalist elite. Until the emergence of the ADP, the Azerbaijani intelligentsia was divided ideologically and scattered around diverse political parties and ideological groupings, one of which was the Tudeh Party of Iran. The breaking point in the evolution of Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran was the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democrat Party, which, as will be discussed below, was a Soviet project rather than a spontaneous result of local nationalist dynamics. The grievances against the Pahlavi regime and the destructive effects of the war on the Iranian economy—both felt more acutely at the local level— attracted the Azerbaijani elite and non-elite to the ADP. However, due to the political orientations of the ADP leadership, the majority of whom
were either ex-communists or former Tudeh Party members, the populace’s support was weak at first. The ADP’s promises and reforms garnered some support, but this diminished, as will be discussed below.

The next two subsections discuss details of the Soviet plan for starting a separatist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan.

2.1. The Soviet Plan

After its establishment, the ADP marched very rapidly towards the declaration of an autonomous provincial government. Soviet archival records clearly illustrate Stalin’s interest in launching and supporting a separatist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan; this helps to make better sense of the mysterious rise of the ADP.

Before discussing the details of the Politburo decree, it would be useful to note that Stalin’s support for the separatist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan was completely instrumental. He had previously shown little tolerance for Azerbaijani nationalism, but acted pragmatically at that moment for the sake of securing Soviet interests in Iran (Raine, 2001, p. 3). In other words, Stalin was desperate for an oil concession and Azerbaijani autonomy “seemed to be his only chance left to secure it” (Raine, 2001, p. 31). One of the architects and strong supporters of this project was Mir Bagirov, the Central Committee Secretary (CC) of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (CPA). A brief introduction to Mir

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77 For comprehensive examination of the Soviet Foreign Policy and Stalin’s interest in getting oil concessions from Iran see (Yegorova, 1996).
Bagirov will help one to better understand the development of the Soviet project in Iranian Azerbaijan.

In addition to being a loyal communist, Bagirov was known for his Azerbaijani nationalism and patriotism. His loyalty to the Soviet ideology and regime, especially to Stalin, brought him to one of the highest positions in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan. Stalin assigned him the responsibility of "supervising and enacting Soviet policy in Iran" following the deployment of Soviet troops to Iran in August 1941. Mir Bagirov had also long been instrumental in realizing Stalin’s policy of allowing nations to develop a culture that was national in content, but socialist in form (Raine, 2001, p. 4). In Raine’s words,

When Bagirov looked around from his elevated position in Baku, he saw a flourishing Azeri national culture and an oil industry, which he knew to be the lifeline of the Soviet army. Looking over the Araxes River into Iran, Bagirov saw an underdeveloped industry and Azeris who did not enjoy the right to develop their cultural identity. It was Bagirov’s dream to bring these Azeris and their resources into the Soviet fold (Raine, 2001, p. 4).

Bagirov regarded the annexation of Iranian Azerbaijan as inevitable; soon after the occupation, he was “reported as saying that the frontier between Soviet and Persian Azerbaijan no longer existed in a ‘cultural or psychological’ sense,” and was known for his desire that “the whole of Azerbaijan would be one” (Fawcett, 1992, p. 97). In this regard, while he performed the duty assigned to him by Stalin, Bagirov also “nurtured the hope that Stalin would play the card of Azeri nationalism as a means of expanding Soviet influence in Iran” (Raine, 2001, p. 4). Bagirov also reportedly prepared a draft proposal, “a plan for future work in Iran, the goal of which he defined loosely as the unification of
southern Azerbaijan with Soviet Azerbaijan, or the formation of an independent southern 
Azerbaijani People’s Republic, or the establishment of an independent bourgeois-
democratic system or, at least, cultural autonomy in the framework of the Iranian state”
(Raine, 2001, p. 6). More specifically, Bagirov’s draft proposal had three key points:

1) Form a group in Tabriz of responsible workers to conduct all preparatory work in southern Azerbaijan.

2) Manage the leadership of the group directly from Baku. Keep the group under cover as military employees.

3) Take all necessary measures to guarantee the election of pro-Soviet and useful people at the upcoming Majlis elections. Provide the necessary financial means for this work (Raine, 2001, p. 6)

Contrary to Bagirov’s patriotism, Stalin was a pragmatist, and the condition of the Iranian Azerbaijaniis interested him instrumentally, only as much as it could serve in realizing his policies in Iran. However, once the war was ending and Soviet troops would be required to withdraw from Iran, “a plan very similar to Bagirov’s draft was given the Kremlin’s full approval” (Raine, 2001, p. 6).

2.2. The Politburo Decree: Start and Support a Separatist Movement in Iran

On 6 July 1945, the Soviet Politburo issued a decree entitled “Measures to Organize a Separatist Movement in Southern Azerbaijan and Other Provinces of Northern Iran” (hereafter: the decree). Mir Bagirov’s moment was at hand.

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78 See Document No.2, Decree of the Politburo of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to Mir Bagirov, CC Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan on “Measures to
The Politburo decree, obtained from the State Archive of Political Parties and Social Movements of the Republic of Azerbaijan by Jamil Hasanli, advised Mir Bagirov “to begin preparatory work to form a national autonomous Azerbaijan district [oblast] with broad powers within the Iranian state.”\(^7^9\) The decree suggested founding a political party named the “Azerbaijan Democrat Party” (ADP) to lead the “separatist movement.” It further advised that the party’s growth was “to be done by a corresponding reorganization of the Azerbaijani branch of the People’s Party of Iran and drawing into it supporters of the separatist movement from all strata of the population.”\(^8^0\) Another item in the decree established a workers’ union in Tabriz with the responsibility of guiding “the separatist movement,” further “charging them with coordinating [kontaktirovat] their work with the USSR General Consulate” in the city. Bagirov and Yakubov were assigned to supervise these efforts and to ensure that candidates for elections to the 15\(^{th}\) Majlis were picked from the supporters of the separatist movement. The decree even detailed the promises and slogans to be used in the electoral campaign:

a) Allotment of land to the peasants from state and large landowner holdings and awarding long-term monetary credit to the peasants;

b) Elimination of unemployment by the restoration and expansion of work at enterprises and also by developing road construction and other public works;

c) Improvement of the organization of public amenities of cities and the public water supply;

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\(^7^9\) In addition to Azerbaijan, the decree also listed the provinces of Gilyan, Mazandaran, Gorgan, and Khorasan.

\(^8^0\) The Politburo Decree ordered the same type of separatist movement to arranged “to form a national autonomous Kurdish district.”
d) Improvement in public health;

e) Use of no less than 50% of state taxes for local needs;

f) Equal rights for national minorities and tribes: opening schools and publishing newspapers and books in the Azerbaijani, Kurdish, Armenian, and Assyrian languages; court proceedings and official communications in local institutions in their native language; creating a provincial administration, including the gendarmerie and police, from local national elements; and the formation of regional, district, and city enjumens [committees] [and] local self-governing bodies.

g) Radical improvement in Soviet-Iranian relations.

The Politburo also decreed the creation of “[c]ombat groups armed with weapons of foreign manufacture” with the purposes of “self-defense for pro-Soviet people [and] activists of the separatist movement of democratic and Party organization.”

In addition to actions related to the political party, elections, and the armed forces, the Politburo project also advised involvement in cultural and journalistic activities. According to the decree, a Society for Cultural Relations between Iran and Azerbaijan SSR [SCRIA] and a Society of Friends of Soviet Azerbaijan [SFSA] were to be established for drawing broad masses into the separatist movement, strengthening “cultural and propaganda work in Southern Azerbaijan.” Furthermore, the decree advised publishing an illustrated magazine; this was to be organized in Baku for distribution in Iran. Additionally, the decree ordered the founding of a publishing house in Tabriz that would print three separatist newspapers and provide printing resources for the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan. Last, the decree ordered assigned an extensive amount of foreign currency to support favorable candidates in the elections to the 15th Majlis.
Bagirov and three of his trusted colleagues in Tabriz—Yakubov, Atakishiyev, and Gasanov—immediately started work on turning the Politburo decree into action (Raine, 2001, p. 11). The detailed plan of the “Secret Soviet Measures to Carry out Special Assignment throughout Southern Azerbaijan and the Northern Provinces of Iran” (hereafter: the plan) was submitted to the Politburo on July 14, 1945.81 The first item in the plan was the creation of the Azerbaijan Democrat Party. Yakubov, Atakishiyev, and Gasanov together picked Ja’far Pishevari as the appointed party leader and suggested his immediate transport to Baku for talks. According to the plan, party organizing committees would be formed in Tabriz and other parts of the province; within a month, candidates were to be selected from the “intelligentsia, middle-class merchants, small and average landowners, and the clergy in various democratic parties, and also from non-party members.” In the meantime, the “democratic press,” namely the Khavar Nou, Azhir, Dzhodat and others, would “publish an appeal to organize an Azerbaijani Democratic Party and print leaflets.” Most importantly, the Azerbaijani Democratic Party committees were to be created “from the most active organizations of the People’s Party [Tudeh Party] and other democratic organizations and elements,” but without the appearance of “a mechanical renaming of organizations of the People’s Party to committees of the Azerbaijani Democratic Party.” For this reason, the Tabriz district committee and its local organizations were advised to “disband the organizations of the People’s Party and enroll their members in the Azerbaijani Democratic Party.” After the party’s establishment in Tabriz, the plan suggested

founding local committees and advised sending “representatives of the central organizing committee to organize the [local] committees.” The plan also called for placing widespread “positive responses and calls to join the Azerbaijani Democratic Party in the democratic press.” After creating the Voice of Azerbaijan press agency, the plan suggested “drafting of programs and a charter for the Tabriz organizing committee.”

The second topic of the plan was the forthcoming elections to the 15th Majlis of Iran. The authors of the plan suggested beginning talks with the existing deputies of the Majlis and then nominating and supporting new candidates for the coming election “under the condition that they fight for the implementation of the slogans of the Azerbaijani Democratic Party.” Furthermore, the plan called for a vigorous press campaign and “[s]upport meetings, demonstrations, strikes, and the disbanding...of electoral commissions unsuitable for us with the objective of ensuring our interests in the elections.” In the meantime, the Politburo plan advised that Bagirov the ADP leadership should “compromise and expel from the electoral districts of northern Iran candidates nominated by reactionary circles [who are] actively operating against the candidates of the democratic movement.”

Another order that was operationalized by Yakubov, Atakishiyev, and Gasanov concerned cultural propaganda. The organizers suggested calling upon “the delegates participating in the jubilee celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Azerbaijan SSR” to establish the SCRIA and recruiting “the workers of our consulates, military commandants,

82 Suggested locations for ADP local committees included the cities of Ardebil’, Rezaye, Khoy, Mianeh, Zanjan, Maraghe, Marand, Mahabad, Maku, Qazvin, Rasht, Pahlavi, Sari, Shakh, Gorgan, and Mashhad.
and their active [Party] members into the organization of the Society.” Furthermore, the plan recommended using “the press to systematically illustrate the achievements of the economy, culture, and art of Soviet Azerbaijan and the historical friendship of the peoples of Southern Azerbaijan and the peoples of Soviet Azerbaijan” as a means to attract popular support.

Another Politburo order that was given special attention, evidenced by its own section in the plan, was the organization of the separatist movement. The plan envisioned the creation of “an Azerbaijani Autonomous District [and] a Kurdish Autonomous District with broad powers.” The plan further provided the questions and propaganda cases to be used for shaping public opinion, concluding with the advice to “bring to light locally” the questions listed “so as to organize a separatist movement” in the above provinces.” In addition, the plan wanted to “[r]aise the demand to conduct land reform not only in Southern Azerbaijan but in regions of the northern provinces of Iran” as well.

The plan also mentioned the “Organization of Enjumens” simultaneously with the constitution of the Party and the preparations for the parliamentary elections; all of these goals were to be met “using the electoral enthusiasm of the population.” Last, the plan specified that propaganda efforts were to be the product of “all the agitation work via the

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83 Accordingly, propaganda and claims in the Gorgan, Gilan, Mazandaran, and Khorasan provinces were to concentrate on “[t]he organization of public services and amenities in the cities of Rasht [and] Pahlavi, leaving no less than 50% of the tax proceeds collected from the province for this purpose.” In Gorgan Province, the plan recommended a focus on “[s]tudy in the native Turkmen language in the schools; replacement of the local organization, gendarmerie, and police with Turkomans, leaving no less than 50% of the tax proceeds collected from the province for public services, amenities, and health in Gonbad-e-Kavus, Gorgan, and Bandar Shah.” In Mazandaran and Khorasan Provinces the separatist movement was to stress the return of land to small and average landowners taken by Reza Shah (amlyak lands) and the goal of having no less than 50% of tax proceeds collected from the province go towards public services and amenities in the cities of Sari, Shah, Mashhad, and New Quchan.
press, establish[ing] a publishing house for new magazines in the cities of Rasht, Rezaye, and Mahabad in addition to the existing newspapers.”

All in all, the Soviet Union took an active role in events, from the formation of the ADP to its declaration of autonomy. Before the ADP, the Azerbaijani intelligentsia and elite were scattered around a variety of intellectual and political groups. However, as the next section demonstrates, two decades of state repression—specifically, restrictions on the Azerbaijani language, ethnicity-based discrimination in government offices, and the economic exclusion of the province—engendered grievances and sharpened Azerbaijani identity. In addition, although it brought some level of freedom, World War II also devastated economic life in the province. The ADP emerged in this context; its promises garnered a wide range of support from diverse social groups, despite the “questionable” backgrounds of its leadership. The next section examines the implementation of the Politburo plans in Iranian Azerbaijan.

3. The Soviet Plan

The Politburo assigned Bagirov and Yakubov to put the plan into action. They would be starting and supporting a separatist movement, thereby turning a new page in the history of Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran. Despite the burdens of the war, Iranian Azerbaijan was flourishing culturally and intellectually. However, it lacked an organized secular nationalist elite. The Azerbaijani intelligentsia had started expressing and debating identity- and language-related concerns, but only within the Iranian context and within Iranian
institutions. To use Benedict Anderson’s terms, Azerbaijanis started imagining themselves as a distinct ethnic group—but not as a separate nation independent from Iran. In this regard, the Politburo’s separatist plan came as an import and was not a perfect fit for the popular realities of the time, as discussed above. This section traces the fate of the Soviet-imposed plan in Iranian Azerbaijan, demonstrating the plan’s initial success in garnering a wide range of elite and popular support and then its subsequent dramatic decline.

First, it is important to note that, as corroborated by the archival documents, only a select number of people were aware of the breadth and depth of Soviet involvement. It was only after the recent release of archival documents that evidence for Soviet involvement was conclusively located. These documents also help to assess the extent of Azerbaijani nationalist sentiments in Iran, which is characterized as “integrationist nationalism” in the framework of this study (see chapter one). In other words, Iranian Azerbaijan was in search of its rights, but it was neither prepared for nor open to secession from Iran.

3.1. The Plan in Action

After receiving the plan from Moscow, Bagirov lead and monitored every step; reported to Stalin and the Politburo, asking their advice when needed; and, most importantly, managed to run the whole process with a high degree of secrecy. Only a few core people selected for the project knew of the Soviet hand behind the emergent autonomy movement. In putting

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Bagirov was very sensitive about disguising Soviet involvement, and “forbade his people on ‘special assignment’ to ‘chatter’ about their work even to high-ranking Soviet officials and insisted that the Azeri project be kept under a conspiratorial cover.” In a letter to colleagues in Tabriz, Bagirov urged the highest secrecy:

From whomever he may be coming and with whatever authorization, with whatever rights and whoever he may be, of whatever rank, in whatever position: if he does not have a concrete document
the project into motion, Bagirov and his aides acted very carefully to match each step with local values, popular needs, and the social realities of the province to avoid suspicion.

The first step for Bagirov and Yakubov was to find the person who could be both trusted by the Soviet leadership and credibly launch a nationalist movement. Their choice was the veteran communist Seyyid Ja’far Pishevari, a popular writer and an editor of a variety of journals and newspapers. He was mostly left-leaning, but had signaled a willingness to blend his views and discourse with Azerbaijani nationalism. Additionally, Pishevari had real potential for becoming a popular leader: Despite his landslide victory in the elections to the 14th Majlis of Iran, he was denied the right to take his seat in the parliament because of his views and political background. Pishevari, building upon his popularity and this recent grievance, thus had the ability to garner the support of the intelligentsia and the populace. Like Pishevari, the Azerbaijani people were denied their cultural and linguistic rights, their share of economic advancement, and proportionate seats in the Majlis during the repressive Pahlavi reign.

Pishevari was also one of the Iranian Azerbaijanis who had close ties with the Soviet Union and an allegiance to communist ideology. He was born in the Ardabil province of Iranian Azerbaijan in 1892 and moved to Soviet Azerbaijan in 1904 with his family. His stay in Azerbaijan, where he also served as school teacher, exposed him to revolutionary Marxism, which led him to join the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party and then to participate in the Bolshevik Revolution (Emami-Yeganeh, 2008, p. 13). He returned to Iran from me personally, or one with my authorization from Maslennikov, Yakubov or Emelianov, you may not speak with anyone about anything ... Regardless of the merits of each of you, if we find out that you had a conversation regarding the special task which you are fulfilling, we will immediately recall you, exclude you from the party and hand you over to the court (Quoted in Raine, 2001, p. 23).
in 1918 with the Red Army, serving as the Secretary of the Communist Party of Iran in Gilan. Pishevari later moved to Tehran and began publishing the newspaper *Haqiqat* [Truth] (P. Mämädli, 2009, p. 103). A popular activist, Pishevari was arrested and imprisoned in 1930, during Reza Shah’s repressive measures against leftist movements in Iran (Emami-Yeganeh, 2008, p. 13). His time in prison, which lasted more than a decade, introduced him to some members of the "Fifty-Three," the group that founded the Tudeh Party of Iran [People’s Party of Iran] after the amnesty of 1941.

The occupation of Iran by the Allied forces in 1941 ushered in a new chapter in Pishevari’s life. After his release from prison, Pishevari supported the Tudeh Party despite its unfavorable reputation, although he did not formally join to the party. Despite his leftist agenda, Pishevari opposed the Tudeh Party’s methods and “viewed it as a reformist movement rather than a progressive one” (Emami-Yeganeh, 2008, p. 13). Though the party leader, Dr. Arani, was an enlightened Marxist, Pishevari said,

> The same cannot be said of his followers. These men, having read some books, published a journal, and accidently participated in a strike, had no real political experience...Although there were some among us old prisoners who showed signs of weakness we were, on the whole, far superior to the "Fifty-three" (Quoted in Emami-Yeganeh, 2008, p. 13).

In questioning the credentials of the Tudeh members, Pishevari also signaled a change in his political views. The new Pishevari, shortly after his release from prison, criticized the Tudeh Party’s program, suggesting instead a strategy built on and prioritizing “national” rather than “class” interests. As Pishevari saw it, class differentiation and, consequently, class-consciousness had not yet developed in Iranian society to the point where it would be
meaningful to speak of class struggle. As he saw it, the foreign imperialist powers—rather than the class of native property owners—were the real barrier to Iran’s further economic and political development (Atabaki, 2000, p. 100).

Pishevari’s popularity, electoral grievance, and his increasingly nationalist discourse made him a suitable candidate for the Soviet project. In addition to Pishevari, two more activists, Shabustari and Padegan, were recruited for the secret mission. The former was the editor of the left-liberal journal Freedom Front, and the latter was the chairman of the Azerbaijan branch of the Tudeh Party (Raine, 2001, p. 34).

3.2. The Establishment of the Azerbaijan Democrat Party

Once the nucleus of the leadership cadre of the movement was solidified, Bagirov and his associates, Atakishiyev and Yakubov, immediately started preparations for founding the political party.\(^85\) They organized a meeting with Pishevari, Padegan, and Shabustari on 25 August 1945; they drafted the party program and bylaws; and they laid the groundwork for the grand opening of the party in the first week of October 1945 (Raine, 2001, p. 34). In crafting the party and its program, Bagirov, Atakishiyev, and Yakubov paid special attention to avoid referencing leftist terminology so as not to give any impression that the Azerbaijan Democrat Party was a Soviet project. Any indication of the Soviet role would not only trouble relations with the allied powers and the government in Tehran, but could also

\(^{85}\) Henceforth, every step was to be taken in very close cooperation between Bagirov's team (Atakishiyev and Yakubov) and Pishevari's team (Shabustari and Padegan).
diminish the support of the local people. Aware of this, the founders “consciously avoided making any reference whatsoever to class distinctions in their statements, and saw to it that the wording of the declaration would be representative of the broadest social spectrum” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 102). The declaration of the new party was published on 3 September 1945 in Tabriz and posted in the other provincial cities. It contained the signatures of twenty-eight founding members, in addition to Pishevari, Padegan, and Shabustari. On 5 September 1945, the first issue of the official party newspaper, Azerbaijan, appeared “with reams of ‘spontaneous’ congratulatory messages and statements” (Raine, 2001, p. 12).

The next step, in accordance with the Politburo project, was the transfer of the Azerbaijani committee members of the Tudeh Party to the newly founded ADP. This was a challenging task. On one hand, the Soviet side wanted these shifting allegiances to be seen as a natural and unprompted development guided by local nationalist interests. The Politburo order included a note not to let the transfer look “mechanical.” On the other hand, the Tudeh Party, as the strongest leftist party in the province, had “already recruited those people who were potentially politically minded” and would thus not ordinarily want to lose its members nor yield them to a rival party (Atabaki, 2000, p. 105). Regardless of the desires of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party, the Azerbaijani branch, under the chairmanship of Padegan, dissolved itself on 7 September 1945 with the purpose of uniting with the ADP.

The dissolution of the provincial Tudeh Party committee was received with surprise by the central Tudeh Party leadership. Reports from Bagirov to Stalin indicate that merging
with the ADP was “against the wishes of many of its members,” and that “many leading members of Tudeh remained vehemently opposed to the new creation and sought to disrupt the new party’s activities” (Raine, 2001, p. 12). To forestall their possible extreme reactions, Padegan visited Tehran only a day before the dissolution, informing the Tudeh Party leadership of a decision that had already been made. In words of Fereydun Keshavarz, a member of the central committee of Tudeh:

The day before announcing the formation of the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan, the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party held a meeting in my house because I enjoyed parliamentary immunity and the party headquarters were occupied by soldiers... I was in the meeting when I was summoned because Padegan, the Secretary of the provincial organization of the party in Azerbaijan, had arrived from Tabriz and had urgent business... I took him into the meeting... He said before meeting: “I have just arrived from Tabriz and must return immediately. I have come to inform you that our whole party organization in Azerbaijan will separate from the Tudeh Party of Iran and, with the agreement of our Soviet comrades, will join the Democrat Party of Azerbaijan, the formation of which is to be announced tomorrow.” The Central Committee appointed Eraj Eskandari to write a letter of protest to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which he did, but a reply to this letter was never received (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 106).

Eraj Eskandari, in his memoirs, confirms the “inconsiderate act” and their disapproval of it:

The Tudeh Party was wholly unaware of the formation of the Fergah. For that reason it came as a great surprise... We found ourselves confronted with a faith accompli, and we were against it (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 106).

Consequently, on 7 September 1945, only four days after the establishment of the ADP, the provincial committee of the Tudeh Party held an enlarged provincial conference in Tabriz to discuss the new developments. After a "lengthy evaluation of the cruelties of the Iranian
state against the people of Azerbaijan” and the recognition that the “Azerbaijan Democrat Party considered the needs of the Azerbaijani people carefully,” the “Azerbaijan organization of the Tudeh Party of Iran cut its administrative and leadership ties with the Central Committee of the party, and decided to join to the Azerbaijan Democrat Party as a whole” (Cheshmazär, 1986, p. 53).

The response to the merger with the ADF was not unanimously positive, especially in other localities. For example, the Zanjan committee of the Tudeh Party “expressed its hesitation to join the ADF in no uncertain terms” (Cited in Atabaki, 2000, p. 107). However, for the local ADP organizers, the crowd of eight hundred party members who gathered in a theatre in Tabriz on 10 September to listen to Pishevari’s speech on the aims of the new party meant that “the party had got off to a good start” (Raine, 2001, p. 12).

The ADF held its first conference on 13 September 1945. The participants elected the Party’s provisional eleven-member administrative body and named Pishevari as its leader until the first congress, scheduled for 2 October 1945. By 25 September, the party program and bylaws were ready; they had been written under the guidance of Bagirov and his associates to make sure they were prepared “on the basis of the decision of the Politburo of 6 July” (Raine, 2001, p. 13). The number of registered party members exceeded 6,000 in a short period of time (Cited in Atabaki, 2000, p. 107), which alarmed both Tehran and the British envoy in Tabriz. Bagirov was proud to report the English consul’s concerns to Stalin:

This party is more dangerous than the People’s Party. The People’s Party was known to all as a pro-Soviet organization: there were no strong figures and it could not base itself on the possessing class or intelligentsia. However, in the new
Democratic Party there are influential people, its programme is composed very wisely, and its demands are such that they are difficult to object to. If the party realizes its slogans, then the entire population of Azerbaijan will support it; it has very far-reaching goals (Raine, 2001, p. 13).

Tehran’s initial response was to ban all leftist pro-Soviet press organs in Tehran, prohibit all demonstrations, and close all of the clubs associated with the Tudeh Party. Furthermore, the Iranian government also replaced its bureaucrats residing in the province of Azerbaijan with individuals who could control and restrain the ADP more efficiently. The government ordered all regional authorities to treat the ADP “just as strictly as the Tudeh” (Raine, 2001, p. 13). Once the ADP members started pronouncing their desire for more autonomy, “the rightist press,” accused them of “treason, actively campaigned for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops and painted gruesome pictures of what awaited all pro-Soviet groups and individuals when their protectors left” (Raine, 2001, p. 14). Moreover, “there even were reports that Shiite mullahs were proclaiming a holy war against the Azerbaijanis” (Raine, 2001, p. 14).

The first congress of the ADP was held on 2 October 1945 in Tabriz with the participation of 237 delegates representing thirty-eight provinces, districts, and localities (Cheshmazār, 1986, p. 60). One of the important successes for the ADP was the composition of its members and congress participants. The gathering hosted a diverse group of people from different social, economic and political backgrounds, including “hajji, mullah, bazargan (merchant), ra’is-e il (tribal head), rowshafekr (intellectual), and
Komonist-e vajih ol-melleh (popular Communist)” (Cited in Atabaki, 2000, p. 108). Among other invited foreign dignitaries, only the Soviet consul general of Tabriz accepted the invitation to attend the congress (Fawcett, 2014, p. 389).

The congress lasted three days, at the end of which the party delegates ratified the constitution. Atabaki succinctly presents the key points of the constitution:

— The ADF [ADP] commits itself to safeguarding the independence and territorial integrity of Iran, while endeavouring to establish milli va yerli (national and local) autonomy for Azerbaijan which is defined in civic, economic, and cultural terms.
— The ADF [ADP] shall endeavour to establish democracy throughout the country and to that end supports the formation of a central democratic government based on parliamentary elections.
— The ADF [ADP] is in favour of altering the existing electoral law in order to establish universal suffrage: i.e. extending the vote to everyone (including women for the first time) over the age of twenty. Anyone between the age of twenty-seven and eighty may stand for office;
— The ADF [ADP] supports the introduction of a labour code which will limit work to eight hours a day, forbid child labour code which will limit unions and establish the right to social benefits.
— The lands of those landowners who have already left Azerbaijan will be confiscated by the provisional government and all illegal forms of land taxes will be abolished.
— There will be universal and compulsory free education which will recognize the right of minorities living in Azerbaijan (e.g., Armenians, Assyrians and Kurds) to study in their own language.
— Some democratic measures will be introduced into the existing structure of the military.
— Any other distinct millet, like the Azerbaijans, will have the right to use their own language and exercise national and local autonomy through its provincial and district councils (Cited in Atabaki, 2000, pp. 108-109).

86 Hajji and Mullah are two prestigious religious statuses. The former is obtained only after an individual has completed a pilgrimage to Mecca; the latter is a prayer leader.
Additionally, at the conclusion of the congress, the delegates unanimously approved the party program and its administrative structure. The result was a success for Bagirov and his associates, since the delegates “elected precisely the leadership they were supposed to elect” (Raine, 2001, p. 15).

The ADP was able to gather together people from diverse segments of society under the banner of the struggle for democratic and national rights. A new coalition was in the making. However, this broad coalition, which included radical elements, also posed potential dangers for its own sustainability. While there was general agreement on regional autonomous government within Iran, differences regarding the ultimate goals of such a movement were going to become a vital challenge to the very existence of the autonomous government only few months after its declaration.

The ADP leadership and grassroots supporters can be categorized into three groups. First, radical leftists; these were primarily immigrants from the SSR of Azerbaijan and ex-members of the Communist Party of Iran. Their goal was a socialist revolution in Iran; they considered the ADP movement to be only the first step towards their final goal. Their cooperation with the ADP was instrumental. In words of one of the members of this group, their “ultimate goal was to achieve a worker’s revolution” and they “were using the national revolution as a tactic to reach this goal” (Quoted in Ghods, 1988, p. 558).

The second group that coalesced around the ADP was composed of religious and conservative Iranian Azerbaijanis. This group reflected diverse segments of society, including clergy, merchants, peasants, as well as landed aristocrats. Their common feature was their strong affiliation with Shiite Islam and Iranian identity, an affiliation that
coexisted with the emergent Azerbaijani identity. Even though they did not embrace the left-leaning ideology of the ADP and were even suspicious of its possible hidden leftist agenda, this group supported the ADP for pragmatic reasons. In supporting the ADP, they hoped to heal the wounds of the province without damaging province’s relationship with Iranian society or altering the territorial integrity of Iran. This group constituted the majority of the Azerbaijani population in Iran.

The third group of ADP leaders and supporters were moderate leftists. They were aware of the social and political realities of Iran and thus prioritized social cohesion for achieving national democratic rights via a gradual reformist strategy (Ghods, 1988, pp. 557-558). Pishevari hailed from this group. As stated above, Pishevari had given up his revolutionary ideas and adopted nationalist discourse, considering nationalism to be a better fit than a class-oriented approach.

The first two groups—the radical leftist immigrants and the religious and conservative Iranian Azerbaijani—had little in common and were often political enemies; it was the moderates’ task to bring them together for a common end. This is what the ADP had done, albeit for only a very short time. As will be discussed below, the ADP rose rapidly, owing to its success in uniting the two poles, but it fell just as rapidly once it lost its capacity to keep the radical left under control.

The ADP was not only vexed by the relationship between the ideological poles within the party; indeed, ideological differences also hindered the ADP’s capacity to communicate with the conservative social base of Azerbaijani society. Once the party’s leading members, individuals who had transferred over from the Tudeh Party, started
campaigning throughout the entirety of the province, they were not warmly received. In some cities, they “encountered strong resistance from the landowners and merchants who had joined the party out of purely nationalist sentiments and were loath to let the former Tudeh members play such a central role” (Raine, 2001, p. 16). In other cities, such as Rezaie, Maraga and Zanjan, reactions even escalated to clashes and the “dispute ended in the resignation of the opponents of Tudeh” (Raine, 2001, pp. 16, 35).

The reactions to the former Tudeh members, despite the fact that they had resigned from the party and had now joined the ADP, reflected a deeply held value prevalent in Iranian Azerbaijan as well as in other parts of Iran: the popular dislike—and even fear—of communism. While communism and socialism had considerable support among the intelligentsia, ordinary people equated them with atheism and thus viewed them as wicked and heretical. Communism, in particular, was seen as the antithesis of religion and religious values. However, despite their reactions to seeing the ex-Tudeh members in the ranks of the ADP, the Azerbaijani people provided considerable support to the party under the leadership of Pishevari. Pishevari’s movement away from the Tudeh Party and his appeals to nationalist discourse as well as the ADP’s initial promises regarding the needs of the province and its relationship with Iran all explain Azerbaijani support for the ADP in the face of strong anti-communist sentiments.
3.3. The Second Phase: From National Congress to National Assembly

After the successful establishment and inauguration of the ADP, the next step was to gain complete political and military control of the rest of the province. The party’s press organ, *Azerbaijan*, declared the launch of the “second phase” in a piece entitled “The Emblems of the Second Phase” on 8 November 1945. The process was described in the following terms:

The first phase in the history of the ADF [ADP], when the *Fergah* was chiefly engaged in deploying its organization throughout the whole province, had now reached completion. All previous measures of the ADF [ADP] constituted the necessary practical steps before entering upon the phase two which will be to set up the governmental structure of autonomy. The next step of the ADF [ADP] will be the formation of provincial and district councils in Azerbaijan. After the formation of the provincial and district councils, it will be time to elect Azerbaijan’s deputies to the Fifteenth *Majles* which is soon to be constituted (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, pp. 110-111; Azerbaijan, November 118, 1945).

A day later, on 9 November, the ADP leadership declared “that in order to realize the programme of the party, it was necessary to begin elections to the constitutional bodies,” namely the *Majlis* and *Anjumans*, immediately. This meant that “to begin 'by the will of entire people', the National Congress would have to be formed quickly so that the elections could proceed” (Raine, 2001, p. 17).

The ADP organized a “a series of well-planned, synchronized rallies” in almost all major cities throughout the province, from the 12th to the 19th of November 1945 (Râhimli,

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87 This reverse reasoning resulted from the desire “to control the outcome of the elections to the Majlis and Anjumans without being accused of illegal activities, [so] they had decided to create a National Congress, which would elect a National Committee endowed with the legitimacy needed to do with the elections as it liked” (Raine, 2001, pp. 16-17).
These rallies were an attempt to build grassroots support for the formation of provincial and district councils, which were charged with selecting delegates to represent their districts in the assembly in Tabriz (Atabaki, 2000, p. 112). On 20 November, hundreds of delegates were ready in Tabriz for the National Congress of Azerbaijan.

The Congress began with Pishevari’s presentation of the new party. The theatre was “decorated with enormous posters bearing portraits of martyrs of the Azerbaijani national cause, filling the room with a sense of tradition, of suffering and determination” (Raine, 2001, p. 18) Pishevari “was able to reveal his mastery as a leader, capable of infusing everything and everyone with historic momentousness” (Raine, 2001, p. 18). Not only were the decorations and the people carefully chosen, but the pace of the conference and the content of speeches also reflected great care:

After the emotional opening panel, Pishevari tried to raise awareness of the desperate need to act with an overview of the history of oppression of Azeri rights by Tehran. In contrast to the squalor which he saw dominating Azerbaijan’s past and present, his following speeches projected a glowing, radiant future. Autonomy for Azerbaijan was made to stand for normal life, for cultural development, for democracy, freedom and prosperity. Raising the ADP above the battles on the streets of the very city he was speaking in, Pishevari dissociated himself from the partisan violence. ‘We do not want bloodshed’, he assured his listeners, ‘but if we are attacked, we will defend ourselves just like the Azerbaijani peasants who are currently forced to answer with violence to the countless robberies, murders and fires caused by the reactionaries.’ (Raine, 2001, p. 19)

By the end of the second day, “to strengthen the delegates’ resolve to not allow their fate to be determined from outside,” Pishevari’s call to “confirm that the Azerbaijani question

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Different sources provide different numbers. Atabaki gives the number of 724 delegates representing 150,000 Azerbaijanis (Rustamova-Tohidi, 1993, p. 12), and Raine gives number of 546 (Atabaki, 2000, p. 113)
must be decided here in Tabriz” received an enthusiastic response (Raine, 2001, p. 19). This led to the “call to broaden the powers of the national Congress and declare it a Constitutional Assembly” (Raine, 2001, p. 19).

The Constitutional Assembly of Azerbaijan was inaugurated immediately and as a first task approved the following statement addressed to the shah, the Iranian Majlis, and the prime minister of Iran:

1. The people of Azerbaijan have been endowed with unique features of nationality, language, culture, customs, and traditions by history; and these features entitle them the right of self-determination within the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iran.

2. The congress considers [and is aware of] the cultural, economic and political relations between the people of Azerbaijan and the other cities and provinces of Iran. Moreover, in consideration of the sacrifices of the people of Azerbaijan in the establishment of current Iranian state (as a matter of fact, the current state of Iran is founded with the contributions of the Azerbaianis), the Congress declares autonomy with commitment to Iran’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

3. The People of Azerbaijan, with all their power, are advocates of the constitutional and democratic rule in Iran; and will send their representatives to the National Parliament of Iran and other provinces.

4. The People of Azerbaijan officially and explicitly declare that they have the right to found a national government; and is capable of ruling its domestic affairs democratically and with respect to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iran.

5. The People of Azerbaijan, building upon their great efforts and sacrifices, want to found an autonomous government on democratic principles. For this purpose, the rules and regulations approved by congress require the members of the Azerbaijani national [autonomous] government to be elected from the members of the National Majlis and approved by it.

6. The People of Azerbaijan have their own language and are tied to it. Use of foreign [Persian] language delayed her development, and hindered the development of her national culture and literature [or intellectual and scientific progress]. To stop this stagnation, the National Congress of Azerbaijan and aims to establish the use of the Azerbaijani language in all government offices and educational institutions.

7. The National Congress, organized by the signatures of 150,000 persons and the participation of seven hundred delegates, with the will of the Azerbaijani nation declares itself the Constituent Assembly, and elects and empowers the nine-
member national committee to take measures and to meet relevant authorities for realizing its national goals (Azərbaycan, 1 Azər 1325, Tabriz). [My translation from Azerbaijani]

The declaration continued with a commitment to prevent the “bloodshed of brethren,” Azerbaijanis and Iranians, but promised to fight until the “last Azerbaijani left” to protect its national autonomy if the central government resorted to the use of force:

We want the whole democratic world to know that here is a nation that is prepared, to all of its power, to protect its rights; through raising the flag of freedom and democracy in one of the corners of Asia, this nation wants, wants to constitute its freedom solely with its own help (Azərbaycan, 1 Azər 1325, Tabriz).

Finally, the congress extended its oversight to the administrative structure of the province:

The National Congress of Azerbaijan...will elect a thirty-nine man National Commission for the running of Azerbaijan’s internal affairs. This Commission will have the power to take whatever measures are necessary for putting into practice the nation’s wishes and to enter into discussion with the competent authorities [of the Central Government]. At the same time, the Commission will see that elections are held for the Azerbaijani Milli Majlisi (the National Assembly of Azerbaijan), as well as for the National Parliament (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 114).

In order to realize its stated aims, the Assembly elected a national committee; Shabustari, Rafii, Biriya, and Ilkhami were the leaders of this committee. The committee, acting as the provisional government, was to ensure that official correspondence and primary school instruction were forthwith conducted in Azeri, and, most importantly, organize the elections to the Azerbaijani parliament and the Iranian Majlis (Raine, 2001, p. 20).
The ADP’s incremental movements towards establishing an autonomous government in Tabriz alarmed Tehran, as well as the Western allies, since they all suspected Soviet involvement and saw the Soviets desiring to extend their control over the region. In response, Tehran started arming government buildings, as reported in a secret telegram from Bagirov and Maslennikov to Moscow:

On 22 November the command of the Iranian division in Tabriz brought up to 80 soldiers armed with machineguns and ammunition into the city council building, set up posts in the courtyard, the roof of the council building, and also in a school and the governor’s building. The troops began to dig trenches and equip firing ports in the southern and northeastern outskirts of the city, in the area of the Iranian military encampment.

On 21 November General Derakhshani [Commander of the Iranian army units in Tabriz], gave the police the task of submitting lists of all leaders of the democratic movement for the purpose of arresting them. In spite of the fact that there was complete order in Tabriz and the population is behaving quietly, today 22 November he introduced martial law in Tabriz and prohibited street travel throughout the city from 1900 to 0600. These measures by General Derakhshani, which were not caused by the situation in Tabriz, might seriously complicate the situation and interfere with the work being done.

We request your instructions.89

The telegram also reported that “Tabriz reactionaries headed by Majlis deputy Sardar Satvet decided to send representatives from the population to foreign consulates with a request for assistance in restoring order in Azerbaijan.” The telegram further transmitted the concerns of the British and Iraqi consuls in the city, blaming the latter for “spreading all

sorts of slander against the Soviet Union that the Russians are hatching a new war to plunge the whole world into ruin again.”

The decisions of the National Congress, especially the declaration of the National Assembly, received unanimous support from the party delegates on 21 November 1945. Unanimous support for the autonomy movement is significant given that, as the archival documents show, only Pishevari and a few other leaders knew of the “guiding hands of Moscow and Baku” (Raine, 2001, p. 18). This grand plan, motivated by Stalin’s pragmatic interests and Bagirov’s nationalist agenda, relied on strict Soviet control. Nothing was left to chance: everything from major policy positions to congressional speeches to the speakers themselves reflected Soviet involvement (Raine, 2001, pp. 18-19).

The two goals set for the second phase, namely political and military control, had to go hand in hand. While the ADP leadership was busy with election campaigning and forming the administrative structure of the newly autonomous region, Bagirov and his colleagues created and activated the “combat forces,” as directed by the Politburo decree.

3.4. The National Army

One of the orders from the Politburo was to establish “[c]ombat groups armed with weapons of foreign manufacture” with the purpose of defending “pro-Soviet people” and
the "activists of the separatist movement." Pishevari, Shabustari, and Padegan knew of the Soviet plan to create armed troops. However, the rest of the ADP leadership and members were only aware of the need for military forces in the sense that such forces might help realize their larger goals: to extend their control to the rest of the province and to defend the province from any attempt by Tehran to abolish the provisional government. Thus, in the second general meeting of the party on 8-9 November, the delegates discussed "whether to attempt simultaneous armed insurrection in Tabriz and a few other big cities, or to adopt a strategy of small-scale guerilla fighting for short periods, with the ultimate aim of disarming the Central Government’s army barracks throughout the province" (Atabaki, 2000, p. 111). The radical leftist fraction in the party advocated the former, but the majority of the delegates voted in favor the second (Cheshmazär, 1986, p. 74), which meant forming national combat forces and employing a more defensive strategy instead of a large-scale offense.

Preparations for the creation of national combat forces started immediately. Indeed, witnesses reported that the ADP leadership had already founded small-scale military troops, even before the decision of the Central Committee (Cheshmazär, 1986, p. 72). The documents from the Soviet archives report that Bagirov, in accordance with the Politburo orders and in cooperation with ADP leadership and the commander of the Baku Military

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District, General Maslennikov, started organizing the militia-like Fedai partisan troops in mid-November.91

The Fedai armed forces were quickly ready for action and began to establish their control in the region. Their primary task was to gain control of the troops and the weaponry of the central state in the region, in order to deter possible military intervention by Tehran. The Fedai began with the assassinations of “well known reactionaries” and by “taking revenge” on the gendarmerie on 16 November 1945 (Raine, 2001, p. 17). The next step was the severing of all telephone and telegraph lines linking Tabriz to Tehran so as to hinder the ability of local authorities to communicate and take orders (Raine, 2001, p. 17).

The unexpected success of the first missions caused Tehran to broach the question of Soviet backing. The Iranian Foreign Office sent an official memorandum of protest to the Soviet authorities on 17 November, condemning the Soviet breach of the Tripartite Treaty of Alliance, signed on 29 January 1942 (Raine, 2001, p. 17). While the Soviet authorities denied charges of intervention in Iranian domestic affairs, Pishevari, the leader of the ADP, “answered that the ADP had no connection whatsoever to the partisans, who had spontaneously risen in protest against the cruel behavior of Iran’s reactionary forces” (Raine, 2001, p. 17). Accusations of Soviet involvement and debates surrounding Soviet support to the Fedai forces, and to the separatist movement in general, continued until the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iran in 1946. Despite the official denial, it was reasonable

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91 The Fedai “had assembled 30 militarized units with a total strength of 3,000 men, supplied with 11,500 rifles, 1,000 pistols, 400 machine guns, 2,000 grenades and over two million rounds of ammunition, ready to fight whoever stood in the way of realizing autonomy for Azerbaijan” (Raine, 2001, p. 17).
to argue that an armed and organized combat force, like the Fedai, could not possibly have been built from the internal resources of a province, especially if such a force were to succeed against the organized armed forces of Iran. Indeed, passive Soviet support, in the form of “handing over to the Feda'iyan of guns which had mostly been seized from the Iranian army,” and more active intervention, in the form of stopping the “Iranian government troops en route to Azerbaijan to reinforce local garrisons” were recorded long before the release of the official archival documents (Atabaki, 2000, p. 112). However, direct Soviet involvement remained secret, unproven for decades.

To be more specific, the new documents released by the Woodrow Wilson Center demonstrate that Soviet support to the Fedai forces was both planned and purposeful. Bagirov, especially after increased “clashes, deaths, and theft,” tightened his “grip on the troika in Tabriz,” reminding them of his impatience “for people who did not fulfill his orders.” He left no room for misunderstandings:

They [the enemy] can be among the landowners, merchants, among the officer corps, and civil servants, and they must be mercilessly fought against, i.e. destroyed. Even if someone is calm today, but committed atrocities yesterday, and can repeat those atrocities tomorrow, then he must be removed, i.e. destroyed, liquidated, moreover this all be done in the name of the people. Have I made myself clear? (Quoted in Raine, 2001, p. 17).

Bagirov’s bold stance reflected his confidence in the Red Army. For example, General Antonov, the Chief of the Red Army, ordered Maslennikov, the commander of the regional forces, “not to give permission for the introduction of new Iranian units without the express permission in each case of the General Staff” (Quoted in Raine, 2001, p. 18). Furthermore, Bagirov “tried to instill the ADP leaders with confidence in the military might
standing behind them” (Raine, 2001, p. 18). He strictly monitored the ADP’s interactions with Tehran and “instructed them to pursue a relentlessly hard line when negotiating with Iranian authorities” (Raine, 2001, p. 18).

The daily reports from Bagirov and Maslennikov to Moscow show the extent of Soviet involvement in the Azerbaijani autonomy movement as well as Soviet contributions to the success of the Fedai. For example, the report sent to Stalin, Molotov, Beria, and Malenkov on 21 November, notes that “two battalions of the 2nd Guards Infantry Division of Iranian troops and one company of the gendarmerie...were approaching the city of Qazvin on 20 November,” but that the Soviet “brigade commander did not permit the Iranian troops to pass.”92 The same report also recounts that “the Meyaneh region partisans attacked a gendarmerie post of the village of Tark with the objective of disarming [it]. The gendarmerie resisted, as a result of which three partisans were killed and three wounded; seven gendarmes were killed.” In addition to the other incidents that ended with casualties, the report states that “[a]t the request of the gendarmerie local elders came to the partisans with a mullah and a Koran with a request not to kill the gendarmes.” When “the gendarmes handed over [their] weapons the partisans let them go [after] receiving a promise from the gendarmes to cease brutality against the peasants.” Another report sent on 22 November informed Moscow that “[t]he partisans have begun the practice of sending

suggestions to gendarmerie posts to lay down [their weapons] and go home," noting that “two gendarmes voluntarily appeared and handed [over] their weapons.”

A telegram sent on 24 November further demonstrates Tehran’s interest in maintaining its hold on the province:

According to a report from Tabriz four representatives of the gendarmerie headquarters dressed in civilian clothes arrived in the city of Usku. They ordered the gendarmes to go to the outskirts and take up firing positions. Having found out about this, the partisans in this region who not having previously been active, surrounded them and proposed that [they] surrender. The gendarmes refused the proposal and opened fire. After a four-hour firefight eight gendarmes surrendered to the partisans with [their] weapons and the remaining 17 scattered and hid in nearby villages. The partisans kept the gendarmes who had surrendered warm and fed them. The latter, seeing the good treatment on the part of the partisans, expressed a desire to remain with them. There were no losses during this firefight. The partisans suggested that the four gendarmes who were in the city of Usku guarding a bank remain there and guard the bank.

The same telegram also reports that government representatives in several cities appealed to Tehran to send Iranian troops in response actions by the Fedai for help:

According to information from Rasht reactionary elements have been spreading provocative rumors in recent days in Gilan Province in connection with the autonomy movement which has developed in Iranian Azerbaijan about the seizure of government institutions in the cities of Meyaneh, Zanjan, and Ardebil by the democrats and the clashes which have occurred in Tabriz between the Democrats and local authorities. Farzane, the governor of Gilan Province, turned to the Iranian government with a request to bring Iranian troops into Gilan. The border


commissioner and chief of police of the city of Astara, Iran, arriving in Rasht, also turned to Tehran with a request for help. The population of Gilan is speaking favorably about the events in Iranian Azerbaijan. The leadership of the provincial committee of the People’s Party in the city of Rasht is discussing the issue of switching to active operations against reactionary elements.

On November 26, Bagirov and Maslennikov sent a new telegram with updates about the clash between the Mayeneh partisan detachment and the gendarmerie post in the village of Tark:

Wishing to avoid bloodshed, after encircling the post the partisans sent them a respected elder, a spiritual representative, with an offer to hand over weapons and disperse. Captain Ebram, the chief of the post, rejected the offer and personally shot the emissary. The partisans sent a second influential elder who knew Captain Ebram well; the latter also shot the second man and ordered fire to be opened on the partisans. All nine gendarmes were killed as a result of the firefight and Captain Ebram was seized by the partisans and shot. Three of the partisans were wounded. At the suggestion of the partisans 50 soldiers and three officers at the conscription point in Meyaneh surrendered all their weapons, ammunition, and four vehicles in an organized manner. The partisans returned the pistols to the officers and permitted [them] to go home. One of the officers, an Azerbaijani captain from the city of Tabriz, stated that he wants to serve his people, is ready to perform any very difficult mission, and asked that he be accepted in the detachment. The partisans intend to use him to teach them military matters. The disarmed soldiers were supplied with food and money by the partisans, and sent home on passing vehicles. The partisans also permitted gendarmes who had voluntarily surrendered [their] weapons to go home; at the suggestion of the partisans before leaving the finance department of the city council paid them the wages due them.95

Another secret telegram, recently revealed in the documents released by the Woodrow Wilson Center, illustrates the level of detail known to Moscow:

According to a report from Tabriz, at 11:00 on 25 November in the city of Zanjan unarmed members of the Democratic Party under the leadership of Doctor Jagan Shahi, Chairman of the city committee, and committee members Ali Zade Yunus and Abdulfaz Rauf, willfully disarmed the city gendarmerie, the railroad police, and soldiers of the city military presence, and occupied the premises of the railroad station, the military presence of the post office, and disrupted communications between Zanjan and Tehran.

The Democrats seized 95 rifles, of which 20 were issued to members of the Democratic Party. The remaining weapons are being guarded on the premises of the city committee. The police were not disarmed by the Democrats but the former, sitting in various city buildings, exchanged fire chaotically with armed members of the Democratic Party for 15 minutes. The prosecutor, the chief of the gendarmerie, his assistant, and the chief of the railroad police were arrested by the Democrats. Those arrested are being kept on the premises of the committee and the rest were disarmed and sent home.96

Towards the end of November 1945, the Fedai forces begun their offensive in the west and northwest of the province. The Fedai took control of the cities of Maragheh, Marand, Miyaneh, Sarab and Ardabil; on 25 November, they reached Zanjan, a city with an Azerbaijani-speaking population that was located less than two hundred miles from Tehran (Atabaki, 2000, p. 112). However, the military garrison in the city of Tabriz, like garrisons in a handful other cities, remained under control of the Iranian Army. Notably, the Iranian army maintained these garrisons despite the fact that the garrisons had lost their communication and supply lines to Tehran.

In sum, the ADP leadership, after establishing the party, had two immediate goals: gaining political legitimacy and bringing the province under the control of the Fedai forces. However, the political background of the ADP leadership posed a serious challenge. Politically, the party had more visible popular support in the city of Tabriz. To gain military control of the entire province, the ADP founded the Fedai forces, which were secretly organized and armed by the Soviet Union. As a result, the ADP managed to become a major military force in the province—at least in the short-term. The next step was the declaration of autonomy from Iran.


After intense preparations, as advised in the Politburo decree, the ADP was ready for the Iranian elections to the 15th Convocation of the Iranian Majlis. However, once Tehran declared that national elections would take place only after the withdrawal of the Soviet and British troops, the ADP announced that it would hold elections for the National Majlis of the province of Azerbaijan. The elections were held on 5 December, finalized that same day, and the Majlis was scheduled to convene on 12 December 1945.

There was only a week between the elections and the inauguration of the new provincial Majlis. Bagirov strictly monitored “every moment of the Azeri national committee” and sent daily reports to Moscow (Raine, 2001, p. 20). Likewise, the draft of the

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97 Choice of “National Majlis” was purposeful, and signaled the ADP’s long term ambitions for the province.
government program, as well as the schedule of the first meeting of the Majlis, was passed to Bagirov for inspection and to Moscow for confirmation. Since one of the important agenda items of the Azerbaijani Majlis was the issue of provincial autonomy, “Moscow gave the ADP express permission to use the partisan troops should the Iranians refuse to recognize the Azerbaijani national government or use force to quell the movement for autonomy” (Raine, 2001, p. 20). This consequently “strengthened Pishevari's resolve to reject a compromise with the Tehran government and to insist that the Azeris would settle for nothing less than full autonomy” (Raine, 2001, p. 20). The Iranian government had been against Azerbaijani autonomy from the start, but Pishevari's increasingly uncompromising manner heightened the tension between the province and the central government of Iran.

Finally, after intense communication between Tabriz, Baku, and Moscow, the ADP was ready for the grand opening of the National Majlis of Azerbaijan. A day before, on 11 December, Bagirov submitted a detailed plan to Moscow:

The Majlis would begin by confirming its composition and commissioning Pishevari to form a government. Pishevari would spend the afternoon “assembling” a government and in the evening have it confirmed by the Majlis. The Majlis would then proceed to pass laws on partisan warfare and discuss the programme of the new government (Raine, 2001, p. 21).

In response, the Soviet leadership amended the plan, and Bagirov’s team in Tabriz received the final version only a few hours before the first session of the Azerbaijani Majlis was to begin.
4.1. The Declaration of Autonomy

The National *Majlis* of Azerbaijan convened in Tabriz on 12 December 1945, and proceeded as planned. Most importantly, it declared the establishment of the Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan. Then, it approved the ADP’s program, which included the use of Azerbaijani language in schools and government offices, the formation of a national army, and the implementation of economic reforms. The Azerbaijani *Majlis* also approved the formation of a national government under the name of the Autonomous Government of Azerbaijan, elected Ali Shabustari as the speaker of the parliament, and appointed Ja’far Pishevari as Prime Minister and charged him with the task of forming his cabinet. Significantly, the National *Majlis* “expressed its desire to remain within Iran,” and did not appoint a foreign minister, “in order to protect itself from accusations that it planned to separate Azerbaijan from Iran” (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 401-402).

After its establishment, the national government of Azerbaijan published its first program. This program declared its “commitment to Iranian independence and territorial integrity,” pledged “not to act to the detriment of Iran’s sovereignty,” and promised to introduce extensive reforms. Key reforms included:

— laying the groundwork for electing members of the provincial councils.
— purging undesirable elements from the gendarmerie and the police department.
— revising the current tax assessment and preparing the annual budget of the province.
— working out an appropriate, centralized organization of the People’s Army and the *Feda’iyan*.
— introducing Azerbaijani as the official language to be used in the school system.
— implementing the necessary measures to systematize the relationships between landlords and peasants.
— decreeing a comprehensive labour law.
— encouraging private investment by capitalists and establishing security for capital
(Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 131).

The program was purposefully kept moderate in its claims in order to garner the support of
a wider audience (Atabaki, 2000, p. 132). However, responses to the declaration of
autonomy varied both throughout province and the country. Tehran refused to recognize
the provincial autonomous government.

The immediate challenge to autonomous rule in the province was the Iranian army.
The *Fedai* forces had secured control of a large portion of the province, specifically the
territories “stretching from Sarab, through Miyaneh to Miyandoab” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 132).
Even though all of the direct lines of communication between Tabriz and the rest of Iran
were cut, the military garrisons in the cities of Tabriz, Reza’yeh, and Ardabil remained
under control of the Iranian Army (Atabaki, 2000, p. 132). Thus, following the declaration
of autonomy, Pishevari, referring himself as the “head of the Internal Government of
Azerbaijan,” called upon the garrisons on to surrender under the following conditions:

— All the guns and artillery of the garrison would be handed over to the internal
government.
— The internal government would provide all the necessary measures for the safe
withdrawal of any officers who did not wish to remain in Azerbaijan.
— Those members of the military personnel who wished to co-operate with the
new government would be accepted, provided they took an oath of allegiance to
the internal government (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, pp. 132-133).

The commander of the Tabriz garrison, Colonel Derakhshani, announced "he was willing to
prevent unnecessary loss of lives, and that he had ordered his troops not to shoot at the
partisan units,” and surrendered (Raine, 2001, p. 21). This declaration came just before the receipt of an order from the central government to use force repress the autonomy movement. Unlike in Tabriz, the commander of the Urumiyeh garrison resisted and clashed with the Fedai forces. After a week of clashes, Colonel Zanganeh, the commander-in-chief of the Urumiyeh garrison, surrendered due to diminished ammunition. He was consequently arrested and sentenced to ten years of imprisonment after a trial in Tabriz (Atabaki, 2000, p. 133). As a result, the military challenge for the complete control of the province ended. This was an important success for the National Government of Azerbaijan. However, in the words of the British consul, although there was “no evidence that they [the Soviet troops] were in action...there seemed little doubt that their presence contributed to the Fedai’yan's victory” (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 133).

Unlike the military, the civil bureaucracy was more amenable to the new government in Iranian Azerbaijan. Pishevari “called all leading Iranian officials to a meeting and gave them the choice between leaving state service or pledging allegiance to the Azeri government” (Raine, 2001, p. 22). As a result, according to the American consul in Tabriz, “the old structure of internal administration was kept, and most of the minor civil servants appear to have stayed on in obedience” (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 132).

4.2. The ADP Reforms

The ADP had attempted to boost its popular appeal with promises to improve the lives of the populace after decades of oppression and years of war. Therefore, only a few days after establishing their control of the province, the Azerbaijani government initiated a variety of
reforms addressing issues ranging from taxation to political rights. One of the revolutionary changes concerned the election law, which, for the first time in Iran, allowed female suffrage and the election of women to the Azerbaijani Parliament (Rahimli, 2003, p. 84). The most appealing reforms for the lower strata of society provided for the redistribution of abandoned land and some state-owned land among needy villagers and peasants. Accordingly, reports state that in the early months of 1946, 437 estates were redistributed among the poor residents of 372 villages and that 380 thousand hectares of land were taken from the well-to-do landowners and redistributed to the poor villagers (Azerbaijan 1384, No:2, p.25). This reform of land tenure increased the peasants’ share of total crop production from 20% to 43% (Atabaki, 2000, p. 151).

In April 1946, the ADP also introduced a set of policies to strengthen industrialization in the province of Azerbaijan. This included nationalization of underground resources and forests, leasing of inactive and unproductive factories and workshops to private entrepreneurs, support for entrepreneurs to purchase raw industrial materials, and the reduction of taxes on producers (Azerbaijan 1364, No:2, p.23). In a short period of time, not only did several idle factories recover, but the newly founded sewing factory Zafar even started exporting its products to other parts of Iran (Azerbaijan, 1364, No:2, p.23). All in all, the new government managed to produce employment opportunities for thousands in the new factories and industrial workshops; this resulted in a significant economic recovery in the province (Rahimli, 2003, p. 90).

Some of the most visible changes took place in the educational and cultural sphere. The ADP leadership declared Azerbaijani to be the official language of the autonomous
government and returned to using the original Azeri street and place names that had been Persianized by the Pahlavi regime. The new government launched a comprehensive education program, including the preparation of new textbooks, the construction of new schools, and the opening of a new university and several libraries. To be more specific:

The [ADP] government founded the University of Tabriz, the first university built outside of Tehran, and gave government scholarships to poor students. It planned an extensive network of high schools and elementary schools, with one school per village, and it actually built eighty-two high schools and 325 elementary schools. Adult education programs were established to fight illiteracy, in villages and cities alike...A radio station and a public transportation system were established in Tabriz. Government sponsored plays and musicals promoted Azeri culture; Azeri literature blossomed in this period (Ghods, 1988, p. 547)

The resources designated by the Azerbaijani government for educational reforms in the province in just three months were reported to be three times more than the annual budget the central Iranian government had reserved for education throughout the whole country (Azerbaijan, 1364, No: 2, p.34). Furthermore, the autonomous government also founded national museums, orchestras, theaters, and other cultural and intellectual institutions (See Pishāvāri & Kānani, 2005).

In sum, the national government under the leadership of Ja’far Pishevari and the ADP had come to power with promises of healing the wounds suffered under the Pahlavi government’s repression—and it was successful. The province witnessed rapid recovery in all aspects of daily life. In response, the ADP managed to garner the support of the provincial people from all segments of the society. The government’s popularity was, indeed, widespread:
The revolutionary government’s administrative, social, and economic reforms were, as the American council conceded, extremely popular. Peasants and workers, as well as merchants, supported both the Tabriz government and the ADP... The reasons for peasants and worker support should be obvious from the above reforms. Merchants and businessmen supported the government because... Azerbaijani autonomy removed the constraints of the central government that hindered trade with the Soviet Union and other parts of Iran, and it established a measure of law and order that had been lacking since the central government’s authority had collapsed (Ghods, 1988, p. 549)

Despite the new government’s popularity, developments in the second quarter of 1946 altered the balance of power in Iran and dramatically impacted the fate of the Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan. The turning point was Stalin’s decision to withdraw Soviet troops from Iran in response to increased global pressure.

4.3. The Beginning of the End

The German surrender in early May 1945 and the Japanese surrender in early September 1945 inaugurated a new period in the short life of autonomous Azerbaijan in Iran. The autonomous government’s only international support came from the Soviet Union; the end of the war meant the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Iranian territories within six months, in accordance with the Tripartite Treaty of 1942. Thus, the Soviet troops, like those of the United States and Britain, were supposed to leave Iran no later than 2 March 1946. However, the Azerbaijani leadership did not desire this withdrawal nor was the Soviet leadership prepared to leave Iranian territory. Specifically, Pishevari was aware of
the extent to which his government relied on Soviet support, and Stalin had not yet received the oil concession he sought from Iran. Thus, on 1 March 1946, Moscow radio broadcast news that “Soviet troops would evacuate certain designated areas (Khorasan, Shahrud, and Semnan) by the following day, but that other regions of northern Iran would remain under occupation until the local political situation had been clarified” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 143). However, increased international pressure on the Soviet Union and the Iranian government’s diplomatic attacks (See Fawcett, 2014) eventually left no choice for the Soviet Union but to withdraw from all Iranian lands. This withdrawal precipitated the collapse of the provincial government of Azerbaijan.

The ADP and the provincial government had a diverse base of support. As discussed above, in accordance with the Politburo order, Mir Bagirov had assigned Pishevari the duty of founding the party. Pishevari, coming from a revolutionary socialist background, was not a supporter of the Tudeh Party. However, again in accordance with the Politburo decree, the Azerbaijan branch of the Tudeh Party dissolved itself and joined the ADP. Likewise, the radicals, the majority of whom were Azerbaijani immigrants from Northern Azerbaijan, were the second group who took an active role in the ADP. These radicals considered the autonomy movement in Azerbaijan to be part of the class struggle and an initial step in a socialist revolution. Conservative Iranian Azerbaijani were the third major group supporting the ADP. Their allegiance was rooted in nationalist feelings; they expected the regional government to right the wrongs of the Pahlavi reign. The diversity in the views and expectations of these groups did not escalate into major clashes in the early months of autonomy because the ADP had both prioritized regional issues in its government program and had declared that it was to serve the province while remaining committed to the
territorial integrity of Iran. Furthermore, Soviet control of the region played a key role in preventing internal debates. Thus, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Iranian Azerbaijan not only weakened the movement’s external support but also inaugurated a period of internal division among the leadership of the party and the various sectarian interests within the party. As a result, the ADP gradually lost its cohesion and—eventually—control of the province.

4.4. Global Pressure and the Soviet Decision to Withdraw

The central government of Iran had refused to acknowledge the autonomy demands of the ADP-led national government in Azerbaijan. As discussed above, the Iranian Army even attempted to intervene in the early days of the self-declared provincial autonomy and was stopped by Soviet troops. However, the ADP’s accelerated and daring moves towards autonomy increased Iranian and Western suspicions about Soviet involvement. Even though both the Iranian government and the Western powers lacked proof of any Soviet role in Iranian Azerbaijan, they increased diplomatic pressure on the Soviets in international fora, specifically at the United Nations, and in their bilateral relations. As a result, the Soviet leadership was forced to withdraw their troops from the region, albeit after months of delay. Thus, the opportunity structure that facilitated nationalist mobilization in the Iranian Azerbaijan was going to change.

Iran, in general, and Iranian Azerbaijan, in particular, remained a peripheral issue for the Western Allies until the province declared its autonomy under the leadership of
veteran communists. After several inefficient attempts, the Iranian government, under the premiership of Ahmad Qavam, intensified its pressure on the Soviet Union both bilaterally and in concert with the Allied powers. Qavam visited Moscow on 19 February 1946. Even though the parties failed to reach a solution, the visit was an opportunity to exchange ideas and for Iran to learn about Soviet interests in Iran. On the topic of Iranian Azerbaijan, the position of the Soviet leadership was contradictory. While the Soviets declared the situation to be an “internal matter” for Iran, they also did not hesitate to list detailed expectations:

With regard to the Iranian Azerbaijan, which is an internal matter and a concern of the state of Iran, it is recommended that arrangements be made to give full attention to carrying out social, economic and cultural reforms in the province. The name of the National Assembly should be changed to the provincial and district council, and the local prime minister of Azerbaijan should be the provincial governor of Iran. Twenty-five percent of the local revenues should be spent on economic, social and cultural reforms there in the province. There should be no local Ministry of War and Ministry of Foreign Affairs but these two ministries should belong to the area of competence of the central government (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 142).

In addition, the Azerbaijani question, there were two other issues on the agenda for the meeting, namely, oil concessions for the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. As the archival documents demonstrate, "Qavam left Moscow with the promise in hand that the Soviet troops would leave Iran in exchange for a Soviet oil concession and for a conciliatory stance of the Iranian government towards the Azerbaijani government" (Raine, 2001, p. 28). The result was devastating for the Iranian Azerbaijani leadership; they sensed the beginning of an end.
Stalin’s main motivation in starting and supporting the separatist movement in Azerbaijan had been to secure oil concessions from Iran, and he did not want to leave Iran without an oil concession. Therefore, despite the terms of the 1942 Tripartite Treaty, the Soviet Union announced on 1 March 1946 that it would delay its troop withdrawal from Iran. On the other side, the Iranian Majlis was strictly opposed to giving oil concessions to any foreign country. The Soviet demand for oil concessions and its insistence on leaving troops in Iran caused an impasse in Tehran. Thus, in response to the prolonged stay of the Soviet troops, Iran appeal to the UN Security Council on 18 March 1946, citing the Soviet Union’s failure to act in accordance with the 1942 treaty. Increased formal and informal pressure on the Soviets worked. On 4 April 1946, the Soviet Ambassador to Iran and the Iranian Prime Minister announced an agreement between the two countries. This agreement stipulated that:

— The Red Army, which had begun withdrawing its troops on March 24 1946, would complete its withdrawal within one and a half months.
— An agreement for the formation of a joint IranSoviet oil company would be presented to the Fifteenth Majles for ratification, no later than seven months after 24 March.
— The problems concerning Azerbaijan being an internal Iranian matter, conciliatory arrangements would be made between the Iranian government and the ahali [people] of Azerbaijan, with the intention of carrying out reforms in accordance with existing Iranian law and in a spirit of goodwill (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 145).

In accordance with the agreement of 4 April 1946, the Iranian Council of Ministers published their decision regarding the status of Azerbaijan on 22 April 1946:
In accordance with the principles of the Supplement to the Constitutional Code concerning the provincial and district councils in Azerbaijan:

— The heads of agriculture, commerce, industry, transportation, culture, health, the police, the Justice Department, and finance will be elected by the provincial and district councils, and in conformity with regulations their official authority will be issued by the government in Tehran.

— The designation of the governor, with due account being taken of the views of the provincial councils, will rest with the government, and the appointment of commanders of the armed forces and the gendarmerie will be carried out by the government.

— The official language of Azerbaijan, like other part of the country, will be Persian, and the business of the Justice Department will be carried in Azerbaijani.

— When the taxes and credits of the country’s budget are fixed, the government, with regard to Azerbaijan, will take into consideration the welfare and prosperity of the cities and improvements affecting cultural affairs, health, etc.

— The activities of democratic organizations in Azerbaijan, as well as unions, etc., like in other parts of the country, will be free.

— With regard to supporters and employees of the autonomous government of Azerbaijan, there will be no penalties applied to them because of their participation in the democratic movement in the past.

— It is agreed that there will be an increase in the number of Azerbaijan’s parliamentary representatives in accordance with the province’s real population. At the beginning of the fifteenth legislative session, the necessary proposal with regard to this matter will be presented to the Majles, and when it is approved, the numerical deficiency will be made up by elections for the same session (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 146).

Iran kept its promise—at least on paper. This left the autonomous government representatives no choice other than to start negotiations with the central government regarding the status of the province.

4.5. From Negotiations to Submission

After Prime Minister Qavam’s visit to Moscow, Iran’s appeal to the UN, and Stalin’s agreement to withdraw Soviet troops from northern Iran, the political atmosphere in Iranian Azerbaijan started to change. After the agreement on oil concessions, the Soviets
declared a schedule of troop withdrawals and followed through accordingly. Once the Soviet Union was out of the picture, the Iranian government gradually increased its pressure on the representatives of Azerbaijan, culminating in the military occupation of the province on 12 December 1946.

The oil concession and the withdrawal of Soviet troops were intimately linked. Upon Stalin’s insistence, Ahmad Qavam granted oil concessions to the Soviet Union but reminded Stalin of the need for Majlis approval for such concessions to take effect. The two sides agreed to wait for the convocation of the 15th Iranian Majlis. Stalin considered the concession as good as granted and, in spite of the warnings from Tabriz and Baku, ordered Bagirov and Maslennikov to supervise the withdrawal of troops by 10 May 1946. However, “he would not have been Stalin had the withdrawal been completely according to the rules”; the Soviets were not willing to abandon the project completely after such a large investment of effort and resources (Raine, 2001, p. 23). Bagirov, Maslennikov, and Stalin assessed the feasibility of leaving some of the Soviet army’s equipment behind for the Azerbaijani forces. However, “these vague promises of scant military supplies were only a small consolation for Pishevari, who saw his bright hopes of achieving autonomy for Azerbaijan replaced by dire premonitions of government repression” (Raine, 2001, p. 23).

The Soviet decision to withdraw was shocking for the ADP leadership. This was especially true for Pishevari, since he had harbored very different plans for the coming year. He had expressed these hopes in a letter to Bagirov and Stalin:
In order to protect the rights of the Azeri people ... we consider it necessary to found
an independent republic of Azerbaijan. Therefore ... we ask you to render us
assistance and create the conditions to realize the treasured dream of our people,
consisting of the unification of these two republics (Quoted in Raine, 2001, pp. 27-28).

Pishevari, well acquainted with Iranian politics, warned Bagirov that the Iranian
government “would not only short-change Moscow on the oil deal, but also crush the ADP
as soon as the [Soviet] troops left the country, endangering Azerbaijan’s autonomy and its
advocates lives” (Raine, 2001, p. 28). However, there was no choice for the ADP other
than negotiating with the Iranian central government for the most advantageous terms
they could obtain.

A group of Azerbaijani delegates under the leadership of Ja’far Pishevari arrived in
Tehran on 28 April 1946 to discuss the status of the province with representatives of the
central government. Pishevari’s departure speech at the Tabriz airport summarized the
fierce feelings of the Azerbaijani representatives:

No one will be able to take away from us the freedom which has been won by force
of arms by the Feda’iyan. At that time we could have come to Tehran and abolished
the reactionary government of Tehran in order to free the whole of Iran. But
international circumstances caused Azerbaijan to refrain from this (Quoted in
Atabaki, 2000, p. 154)

However, despite Pishevari’s assertive words, the negotiations reflected Tehran's wishes as
set forth in the proclamation of 4 April 1946. In response, the Azerbaijani delegates
presented a proposal of thirty-three articles, which, in the words of Atabaki, “sought to

98 Pishevari’s concerns were validated when the 15th Majlis of Iran refused to grant oil concessions to the
Soviet Union and rejected the deal agreed to by Ahmad Qavam and Stalin.
establish powers for the government in Azerbaijan [that] went far beyond what...could rightly be called the powers of an autonomous region” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 154). The Azerbaijani proposal had the appearance of creating a “sovereign state within Iran, with the autonomous government being in charge of all regional affairs, including the running of the locally based army” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 154). In order to keep the negotiations alive, Ahmad Qavam, the Prime Minister and chief negotiator for the Iranian state, initially accepted some demands he considered excessive, including some parts of the land reform scheme and decisions regarding the status of the Azerbaijani military and security forces. Qavam later submitted the negotiated draft to his cabinet on 10 May, and then informed the ADP that “Irresponsible elements in the government and the commander-in-chief of the country’s armed forces [a reference to the shah] were to blame for failure the negotiations, since they had taken every possible measure to frustrate the government’s efforts to settle the dispute” (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 154).

The second round of negotiations started on 11 June 1946. On 13 June, the Iranian “State” and “the Representatives of Azerbaijan” reached a new agreement, based primarily on Tehran’s earlier proclamation; this agreement again deferred the disputed issues to be “dealt with in some unspecified future negotiations” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 157). As a result, in consideration of the political realities of the situation, the ADP largely had to accept Tehran’s terms. Consequently, the national government of Azerbaijan returned to a provincial administration, and the national assembly of Azerbaijan returned to the provincial council of Azerbaijan.
The third round of negotiations started in Tehran on 21 August 1946 and addressed the status of the Azerbaijani military forces, particularly their fusion with the Iranian army and gendarmerie. This time, Qavam was a more assertive presence; this new attitude reflected his government's rising confidence and the reliance on increased global support, specifically American support (See Ghods, 1988, pp. 541-551). He reportedly stated that “If negotiations broke down, he might have to use force to bring Azerbaijan back into the Iranian Nation” (Atabaki, 2000, p. 160). At the end of the meeting, both sides agreed to an oral (unwritten) deal with the following terms:

— Ten thousand Azerbaijani will be incorporated into the Iranian army and stationed in Azerbaijan. Likewise, four thousand former members of the Azerbaijani Nagehban (the old gendarmerie) will be chosen and stationed in Azerbaijan.

— The commander of the Azerbaijan Division will be an officer from Tehran who will be chosen by the provincial council of Tabriz from among three candidates nominated by Tehran. The commander’s chief of staff will be General Panahiyan, who was the current Commander of the Tabriz Garrison. General Daneshiyan, who was the current commander of the Feda’iyan, will hold the office of under-secretary of the Nagehban forces.

— The Azerbaijani forces will evacuate Zanjan and in return they will be given Sardasht and Takab in Kurdistan.

— All revenues are to be centralized in the Bank-e Melli (the National Bank), and the deposits of all government agencies will be kept there.

— Thirty-five per cent of the custom revenues will belong to Tabriz and sixty-five per cent to Tehran (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 161).

This last meeting signaled the end of the Azerbaijani autonomy venture, indicated especially by Tehran’s preference for an oral agreement rather than a signed document. This lack of a formal accord would have serious repercussions for the fate of the province.

In sum, after increased international pressure and Ahmad Qavam’s granting of oil concessions to the Soviet Union, Stalin agreed to withdraw Soviet troops from Iran; this
signaled the end of the honeymoon for the autonomous government in Iranian Azerbaijan. The withdrawal had two major consequences for Azerbaijan. First, as discussed in this section, the loss of its major external supporter weakened the ADP significantly in its negotiations with the Iranian government. The Iranian government intensified its pressure on the province, shifting its earlier conciliatory tone to a more bellicose one. Finally, Tehran abstained from signing a written agreement with the province. The second major consequence of the withdrawal of the Soviet troops was a decline in the ADP’s popularity in the province. The ADP lost its capacity to keep its coalition alive; and worse, it failed to keep the radical elements under control. This rapid decline in popular support combined with Tehran’s increased pressure on the province finally brought an end to the autonomous government in Azerbaijan.

5. Towards an Early End

Withdrawal of the Soviet troops not only weakened the ADP’s position vis-à-vis the central government of Iran, but it also upset the delicate balance among the social and political forces within the ADP. In particular, the ADP leadership started losing control of the radical elements in administrative positions and the military. Increased pressure from the central government and a weakened capacity to manage provincial politics and the local economy led to a period of recession and decline. These forces culminated in a sad end to the autonomous republic on the very day of its first anniversary, 12 December 1946. This section briefly discusses the dynamics that precipitated the collapse of the autonomous
government, the factors behind the rapid decline in popular support, and the reasons why the people of the province had become apprehensive about secession from Iran.

The ADP’s rise was rapid and unexpected; it was made possible only because of Soviet support. Thus, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union caused a dramatic change in the autonomy project. First, absent the Soviet military presence, the ADP leadership started losing its control over the government and military forces, especially over the radical leftists. Second, the government also failed to maintain the progress in reforms and economic development that had marked its first months in power. Furthermore, the radical elements that moved beyond the control of the Azerbaijani government began to employ brutal and authoritarian measures that alienated people from the party. More importantly, the clergy’s strong anti-ADP propaganda hurt the image and legitimacy of the ADP. Increasing tension in the negotiations with the central government and the rumors regarding secession from Iran caused anxiety among the populace. For the people in the province, secession from Iran was seen as breaking with their historical homeland and, worse, joining a communist regime, the Soviet Union. As a result, the people stopped supporting the party. Moreover, as a result of the economic policies of Shah Reza Pahlavi, Azerbaijanis had become more economically dependent on Tehran. What the people of the province sought was to have their basic rights, including their language and culture, recognized and respected within the borders of Iran.

Pishevari and his colleagues introduced the ADP’s main goal as healing the wounds of Reza Shah’s repressive rule and gaining democratic and national rights for Azerbaijanis under an autonomous government—a government that would not challenge the
sovereignty or territorial integrity of Iran. Indeed, it was these promises that garnered the support of people in the province. As a result of the central government’s mistreatment of the province, there was a pervasive hope among the people and the elite that autonomous governance would be a solution to the problems of the province. However, it did not take long for these hopes to fade in the face of the Soviet Union’s instrumental use of the province and the Iranian government’s harsh response to the province’s claim of autonomy.

The ADP leadership and its supporters came from very diverse social and political backgrounds; the coalition included leftist radicals and religious conservatives, groups that were often political enemies. Uniting these forces and mobilizing them towards a common goal was quite a daunting task. The ADP’s short honeymoon came to an end with the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. The challenge was that the radical leftists, especially the immigrants from the SSR of Azerbaijan, considered the struggle for provincial autonomy to be a first step towards a socialist revolution in all of Iran. On other hand, the majority of the Azerbaijani people were conservative in their religious views and in their strong ties to Iran. Their support for the ADP was pragmatic; they wanted to overcome the cultural and economic hardships caused by the Shah regime. Absent the ADP, it was hard to imagine the two groups cooperating. The conservatives considered the leftists to be infidels, atheists, and communists, while the leftists viewed the conservatives as backwards and reactionaries. In the words of an eyewitness:

[The mohajers [immigrants from the Soviet Azerbaijan], although speaking Azerbaijani, were perceived by the local Azerbaijani population as outsiders. Their political culture was completely different from that of the people of [Iranian] Azerbaijan (Quoted in Ghods, 1988, p. 559).]
Pishevari, as an experienced revolutionary, was aware of this and attempted to keep the diverse coalition together. This became almost impossible after the Soviet Union distanced itself from the province.

One of the crucial consequences of the Soviet withdrawal was the ADP’s loss of control over the radical leftists. These leftists had a strong presence in the Fedai forces. Motivated with a revolutionary zeal, these radical immigrants in the Fedai forces reportedly chanted “Death to capitalism, death to the landlords” (Ghods, 1988, p. 560). Pishevari noted that they “have gone beyond their duties, and interfered in the affairs of the government” (Quoted in Ghods, 1988, p. 560). Robert Rossow, the American vice consul in Tabriz, reported that disagreement about the goals of the struggle in Azerbaijan had even shaken the internal organization of the autonomous government and the party (Quoted in Ghods, 1988, p. 560). On April 5, 1946, Rossow noted a “relaxation of party discipline” after the departure of the Soviet troops and considered this to be a result of the loss of control over the Fedai forces (Quoted in Ghods, 1988, p. 561).

The ADP government’s diminished control over the radicals and the Fedai had serious social repercussions for the province. Drawing upon their power in the military forces, the radical leftists attempted to expand their control over the provincial administration. As a result, the ever-present ideological differences gave way to fierce internal conflicts in province. Ghods describes the period as “reign of terror”:

This reign of terror singled out as enemies Landowners who had assisted the central government earlier in the revolution, and black marketeers and speculators who resisted or ignored the government’s economic controls. Later, peasants who sided with the central government against the Azerbaijan government were also targeted.
Land reform was a project to which the mohajers were devoted, and those who opposed it often became victim of “terror.”

Society in this period was increasingly militarized and regimented. Repeated “border incidents” provoked by General Razmara and the Minister of War, General Ahmad Ahmadi, combined with the central government’s economic boycott, resulted in a siege mentality in Azerbaijan. Military readiness was emphasized throughout the province...(Ghods, 1988, pp. 561-562).

While negotiations with the province were underway, the central government of Iran also applied direct pressure on the provincial government. For example, Tehran imposed a blockade, hindering the province’s interactions with the rest of the country. As a result, the government of Azerbaijan started a food requisition, which further hurt its image and popular support. The food program was designed to take grain from peasants and landlords in order to:

feed the urban population, the army, and the burgeoning bureaucracy in light of the central government’s economic boycott and the bad harvest of the summer of 1946. However, the bad harvest made the imposition on the peasants especially severe, and tension between the urban and rural segments of the population mounted...(Ghods, 1988, p. 562).

One of the segments in Iranian society that remained resistant to the ADP was the clergy. For them, the ADP not only threatened the unity of the believers, but its secularization policies also threatened their social role and influence. Thus, the clergy, with its extensive network, had become one of the proponents of anti-ADP propaganda. As reported by Ghods:
Religious authorities in Qum issued a fatwa declaring a holy war against the Azerbaijani Democrats. Considering the fatwa in the light of their economic hardships, the peasants, always religious, began to view the autonomous government and its secular political education with hostility. In some areas, notably in Zanjan, the religious authorities (in conjunction with their patrimonial landlords and the nearby government troops) had prevented the peasants from taking advantage of the Azerbaijan government’s land reform. In other areas, distant from Tabriz, where religious figures were powerful, the peasants continued to pay the landlord the rent required under pre-revolutionary contracts (Ghods, 1988, pp. 562-563).

Notably, Seqat ol-Eslam, a popular high-ranking mullah accused the Azerbaijani leaders of “not being true Iranians” and called upon the Iranian government to “take every necessary measure to eliminate them” (Quoted in Atabaki, 2000, p. 166).

Last, as a result of Reza Shah’s economic policies, the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie had become integrated with the Tehran-centric Iranian economy. Therefore, the idea of secession from Iran was not welcomed by the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie. Specifically, the upper bourgeoisie had already left the province, and the petty bourgeoisie were “[u]nder heavy religious influence because of the bazaar’s close ties to the clergy” and were “increasingly receptive to the clergy’s picture of the ADP as inimical to Islam” (Cottam, 1979, p. 101; Ghods, 1988, pp. 563-564). As a result, merchants anxious about rumors of secession started transferring their assets and businesses out of the province, which further deteriorated the economy of the province. Pishevari, in an article in Azerbaijan, wrote “There is a need to find trade markets,” acknowledges the existence of “economic and financial crises,” and accuses “the Tehran backwards” and the merchants:
The Tehran backwards who has lost in politics, now try to break the spirit of the people of Azerbaijan through creating economic crisis. This why they try to transfer our assets to Tehran using a variety ways...Everyone needs to know that temporary difficulties will not be able to return us from our way... (*Azerbaijan*, 1325, No: 101).

The British consul in Tabriz also reported on the failure of Tabriz the ADP government to attract new investments, raise new loans from local entrepreneurs, and prevent the local capital from leaving the province (Cited in Abrahamian, 1982, p. 411). The British Consul’s 31 May 1946 discussed these challenges:

> The Azerbaijani Government, faced with the problems of reducing the cost of living and running the factories they have taken over, are beginning by docking the factory workers’ allowances. Whereas under the old regime every factory worker was provided with free bread and charcoal as well as with two suits of clothes and a pair of shoes in the year, now he is to receive his bare pay, with perhaps in some cases, one suit of working clothes. The factory workers are not liking it, but it is their erstwhile champions who are now in power, there is little they can do about it (Quoted in Abrahamian, 1982, p. 412)

On 30 September of the same year, the British consul reported worsening conditions in the province:

> On all fronts, the Democrats [ADP] are embarrassed. Their financial position is desperate, Kurdish activities in Urumieh are keeping them on tenterhooks, while forces of irregulars, equipped, say the Democrats [ADP], by the Persian authorities, have been in conflict with the Feda’is is Ardabel. The Provincial Government scheme, for the collection of grain for winter needs, is meeting with resistance from landowners and farmers alike, and tax defalcations keep the Government tills empty...The scarcity of bread is becoming more acute and the Party has to contend with a populace of which 90 percent are either hostile or completely apathetic. Trade is stagnant, as people who have any money either hide it, or transfer it to Tehran for security (Quoted in Abrahamian, 1982, p. 412).
The end of autonomy came in December. A few days before the elections to the 15th Majlis, Ahmad Qavam informed the provincial government that the Iranian Army troops would enter the province for the purpose of providing security for the elections. The ADP leadership knew that this was no ordinary mission. As a result of the intense debate on how to respond to Tehran, the party leadership split into two camps. A group led by Javid and Shabustari “argued that resistance would cause a senseless slaughter of the poorly armed Feda’is,” while a group led by Pishevari and Biriya “proposed a prolonged guerilla campaign” (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 412). The first group won the support of the majority of the party leadership. The provincial forces were ordered to cease fire and surrender. Despite Qavam’s initial pretext of providing security for the elections, the army’s entrance into the province turned into a “a savage army of occupation” (Douglas, 1951, p. 45), resulting in large numbers of casualties and a mass migration to Soviet Azerbaijan. This migration included the ADP leaders and more than 15,000 people (Atabaki, 2000, p. 175).

6. Conclusion

The declaration of autonomy for the Azerbaijani National Government in 1945-1946 is a very important milestone in Azerbaijani nationalist mobilization in Iran. While Shah Reza Pahlavi’s repression triggered nationalist sentiments, it was the secret Soviet intervention that helped to transform the nationalist feelings into practice. However, the 1945-1946 experience of autonomy demonstrated the limits of Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran, despite significant ethnic grievances and the support of a foreign power. While the Azerbaijani
people in Iran supported the struggle for their ethnic, cultural, and economic rights, they did not imagine themselves separate from Iran. The sense of ethnic distinctiveness did not suffice to separate the Azerbaijani minority from Iran. This signifies the existence of other forces vis-à-vis separatist nationalism. As the Iranian Azerbaijani case illustrates, three of these forces were religion, historical ties, and economic integration. The Azerbaijani minority had lost the political privileges they had enjoyed until the establishment of the Shah Pahlavi regime; however, their affiliation with Shiite Islam and their integration with the Iranian society and economy muted the ADP leadership’s ethnic separatism, limiting these to claims of local autonomy. In other words, while ethnic grievances and an emergent secular nationalist elite mobilized the masses for nationalist action, the religious, historical and economic bonds limited nationalist sentiments to “integrationist nationalism.”

Mammad Amin Rasulzade, the founder of Azerbaijani nationalism in the Caucasian Azerbaijan, argued, “The flag that rises once never descends.” This reflects the pervasive nature of nationalism as stated by a pioneering nationalist. The Azerbaijani nationalism that culminated in the declaration of the autonomous nationalist government in Iran reflected Rasulzade’s beliefs. Interestingly, Azerbaijanis in Iran have preserved both their nationalist claims and the limits of these claims, in other words, an integrationist nationalism. At the time of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Azerbaijanis gathered around Ayatollah Shariatmadari, a venerated religious figure, limiting their claims within the new revolutionary regime to ethnic and linguistic rights. Furthermore, when Iranian Azerbaijanis organized several protest movements in the 2000s, their slogan was familiar: “Azerbaijan is awake and is in defense of its language!”
From a theoretical point of view, while the Iranian Azerbaijani case demonstrates the central role of the elite in nationalist mobilization, it also shows the impact of the two other variables, namely the relationship between host society and the minority group, and the opportunity structure. Iranian Azerbaijan lacked a secular nationalist elite to mobilize people for nationalist action, especially in the years from 1921 to 1941. As a result, the grievances stemming from state repression were never translated into an organized nationalist action. The end of the repression, after the occupation of Iran by the Allied forces, provided certain Azerbaijani elites, chosen by the Soviets, the political opportunity to flourish and to start a nationalist movement. However, even the existence of external support did not suffice to build sustainable popular support for secession. The changing opportunity structure, namely the withdrawal of the Soviets, precipitated the end of the movement for autonomy. The secular nationalist elite was so dependent on external support that it did not survive the changing opportunity structure. Moreover, the relationship between the host society and the minority group proved a crucial variable in this case. Historical, religious and economic ties to Iran ultimately drew the Azeri population away from separatism and towards an integrationist nationalism limited to linguistic and cultural elements. Thus, the 1945-1946 autonomy movement corroborates my argument regarding the central role of the elite in nationalist mobilization, as well as the magnifying or limiting effects of the antecedent conditions --the relationship between host society and the minority group, and the opportunity structure.
Chapter Five: Conclusions

The main goal of this study is to explain the divergence in the political movements of two Azerbaijani communities towards autonomy or secessionism after their split in the early 19th century. The Gulustan (1813) and Turkmanchai (1828) treaties between the Russian Empire and Qajar Iran divided Azerbaijan in two. The area north of the Aras River passed under the control of Tsarist Russia while the area south of the river remained within Iran. The Aras River thus became the symbol of separation and sorrow in both Azerbaijani communities; this has been reflected in poetry and song. This separation has had important social and political repercussions for the two Azerbaijani communities. Northern and Iranian Azerbaijan have manifested considerable divergence, especially in their political movements towards secessionism or self-rule.

Surveying the political trajectories of Northern and Southern Azerbaijan, I detected three different degrees of nationalism, conceptualized as assertive nationalism, integrative nationalism, and the absence of ethnic and nationalist consciousness. Assertive nationalism is a nationalist movement that prioritizes ethnic identity and seeks an independent state. Integrationist nationalism is a nationalist movement that seeks ethnic and national rights but is willing to remain a part of the host society and state. The third situation is an absence of ethnic and nationalist consciousness. From the history of the two Azerbaijani communities, I examined three different episodes that exemplified the three different
degrees of nationalism listed above. To be more specific, the 1918 Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan shows the outcome of assertive nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan. The 1920 Khiyabani Insurgency exemplifies the absence of ethnic and nationalist consciousness. Last, the 1945-1946 Pishevari Movement represents integrationist nationalism in Southern Azerbaijan. Building on the different types of nationalism, I examined the actors, mechanisms, and processes that caused this divergence between the two Azerbaijani communities. To decipher the puzzle, this study offers a threefold framework—secular nationalist elite, relationship between the minority group and host state, and opportunity structures—to explain the divergence between the two Azerbaijani communities. This framework is assessed in the first section below. The second section reviews the theoretical conclusions on nationalism and the interactions of secularism, religion, and nationalism that can be drawn from this study. The third section discusses the limitations of this research. The last section indicates several future research directions.

1. Secular Nationalist Elite, Ethnic Grievances and Opportunity Structure: The Emergence and Transformation of Azerbaijani Nationalism

To explain the divergence in the nationalist mobilizations of the two Azerbaijani communities, this study offers a threefold explanation in which the core actors of nationalist mobilization are the secular nationalist elite. While prioritizing agency, this study introduces two structural factors as antecedent conditions:

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99 An antecedent condition is defined as “A phenomenon whose presence activates or magnifies the action of a causal law or hypothesis. Without it causation operates more weakly...or not at all...” (Evera, 1994, pp. 9-10).
between the minority group and the host state and society, and the opportunity structure. If the relationship between the minority group and the host state is problematic and causes ethnic grievances, then the minority community is more likely to support the elite-led nationalist mobilization. Lack of ethnic grievances or the existence of stronger bonds between the minority groups and the state will likely hinder support for secessionism. The second antecedent condition is opportunity structure. Favorable political opportunities influence the vision and ultimate success of the nationalist mobilization. A lack of structural opportunities, or a shift in opportunities, can prevent a nationalist movement, stop it, or limit its demands.

**Assertive Nationalism: The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, 1918**

The 1918 establishment of the independent Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, the subject of chapter two, was an outcome of assertive nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan. The secular nationalist elite inaugurated a secular nationalist revolution—they separated religious identity from ethnic identity, constructed a new Azerbaijani ethnic identity, and then used media and educational institutions to proselytize the secular nationalist ideology. Meanwhile, ethnic grievances under Russian colonial rule increased popular support for the nationalist movement. Furthermore, the secular nationalist elite used the opportunity structure of World War I and the subsequent revolutions in Russia to the benefit of their nationalist goals. Specifically, the revolutions in Russia weakened and

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100 Please see chapter one for a detailed discussion on the threefold framework.
eventually deposed the Tsar’s regime, resulting in limits on the ability of the central government to control the Caucasus region. In addition, the Pan-Turkist movement that came to power in the Ottoman Empire after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution actively supported the nationalist mobilization and the declaration of the independent state. In sum, without the purposeful efforts of the secular nationalist elite, the Azerbaijan people would not have had a nationalist agenda; without ethnic grievances, the elite would not have been able to obtain popular support; and without the opportunity structures, the establishment of the independent state might not have been possible. Thus, it was the interplay of the three factors that gave birth to assertive nationalism and the independent state in the north.

**Lack of Ethnic Nationalism: The Khiyabani Insurgency and Autonomous Azadistan, 1920**

During the time when Northern Azerbaijan witnessed the rise of assertive nationalism and the establishment of an independent state, Iranian Azerbaijanis gathered around Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani. Under the leadership of Khiyabani, a cleric and political activist, Iranian Azerbaijanis rebelled against the central state and, in 1920, declared the province to be autonomous and renamed it Azadistan. I argue that, unlike the rise of assertive nationalism in the north, the Iranian Azerbaijani people lacked an ethnic and nationalist consciousness at the dawn of the twentieth century and that the Khiyabani Insurgency of 1920 was not a nationalist uprising. Chapter three demonstrates that the insurgency was a constitutionalist and anti-colonial movement, essentially rebelling
against Tehran due to the central government’s relationship with the British and Russian empires. The chapter also uses the threefold framework to explain the lack of ethnic and nationalist consciousness in Iranian Azerbaijan.

Accordingly, the absence of ethnic and nationalist consciousness in Iranian Azerbaijan in 1920 was, first, an outcome of the lack of a secular nationalist elite, who might have launched a secular nationalist revolution. Iranian Azerbaijan, unlike Northern Azerbaijan, remained isolated from and resistant to the West and Enlightenment ideas, the very ideas that had transformed the northern Azerbaijani elite and society. Indeed, while some members of the Iranian intelligentsia advocated constitutional government and democratic rule, a larger coalition of diverse social and political forces were angry about Western colonialism in Iran. Muhammad Khiyabani was a prominent representative of the Iranian Azerbaijani intelligentsia who not only opposed Western penetration in Iran, but also even struggled against the Ottoman Empire’s attempts to spread Turkish Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran.

\[101\] Northern Azerbaijan, a colony of the Tsarist Russia, found itself at the periphery of the modernization process that Russia was experiencing. Northern Azerbaijani elite had the opportunity to study in European, Turkish, and Russian educational institutions, where they were exposed to the Enlightenment ideas of secularism, nationalism, and democracy.

\[102\] I do not disregard the small number of Iranian and Azerbaijani elite who studied in Europe and advocated for Western values and modernization in Iran. However, Iranian society, the ulama, and the state remained more resistant. As discussed in chapter three, Iran’s experience with West, namely Russia and Britain, was through colonialism. Russia fought several wars against Iran and gained possession of its northern territories as a result of humiliating treaties in 1813 and 1828. Again, as discussed in chapter three, British and Russian governments and companies competed for favorable concessions in Iran at the expense of Iranian businessmen and merchants. In addition, according to many ulama and clergy, the West represented heresy against religion, and was, therefore, irreligious. The Iranian people were under the strong influence of religious institutions and the clergy.
In addition, Azerbaijanis in Iran had a distinct relationship with the Iranian state and Iranian society. The founders of two major Iranian empires, Safavids and Qajars, were from Turkic Azerbaijani backgrounds. Furthermore, it was Iranian Azerbaijani leaders who had converted Iran to Shi'a Islam and adopted this as the official state religion. Therefore, Azerbaijanis in Iran were not treated as a minority. As a result, Azerbaijanis considered Iran to be their homeland and they took an active role in the social and political life in Iran in harmony with the rest of Iran.

In sum, Iranian Azerbaijan lacked a secular nationalist elite who might have launched ethnic mobilization and a secular nationalist revolution for separatism. Moreover, Iranian Azerbaijanis in this era had a favorable relationship with the Iranian state and Iranian society, as a result of which they considered Iran to be their homeland and lacked ethnic grievances. Thus, the 1920 Khiyabani Insurgency was more a pro-Iranian patriotic uprising against the Qajar government, a government that was seen as cooperating with foreign powers at the expense of the interests of the Iranian people.

Integrationist Nationalism: The Pishevari Movement, 1945-1946

The third case examined in this study is the Pishevari Movement of 1945-1946. This study considers the Pishevari Movement as an example of integrationist Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran. The threefold explanation illustrates the nationalist transformation in Iranian Azerbaijan.

Seyyid Ja'far Pishevari, a veteran communist and a popular writer, founded the Azerbaijan Democrat Party in 1945 and then declared an autonomous government in
Azerbaijan. Importantly, the ADP was successful in garnering considerable popular support for its autonomy project from diverse segments of Azerbaijani society. However, following rumors of Azerbaijan’s secession from Iran, the Azerbaijani people dramatically withdrew their support from the autonomous government. According to reports, some even welcomed the return of the Iranian Army.

Using the threefold framework, chapter four traces the factors giving rise to integrationist nationalism in Iranian Azerbaijan: a nationalist movement that limited its demands to autonomous self-rule and cultural, economic, linguistic rights. The two decades under Reza Shah led to much repression and discrimination against the province and its inhabitants, resulting in the accumulation of ethnic grievances—this triggered the formation of an Azerbaijani identity in Iran. During World War II, Iran was occupied by Allied forces, and the province of Azerbaijan remained under the control of Russian troops; this was a golden opportunity for the Azerbaijani intelligentsia and a revival of Azerbaijani identity, and both flourished. However, despite their prior grievances, Azerbaijanis maintained their attachment to Iran, religiously, politically, and economically. Thus, while the people supported the ADP’s call for an autonomous government as a panacea to heal the wounds of repression, the bonds that tied the minority group to the Iranian state and society ultimately led them to reject secessionist demands and even secessionist rumors.

To summarize the Pishevari Movement in terms of the threefold framework, the absence of an ethnic nationalist elite and opportunity structures hindered nationalist mobilization during the rule of Shah Reza Pahlavi, 1921-1941. The Soviet occupation of the province during World War II ushered in a new period of opportunity structure for
nationalist mobilization. As a result, the secular nationalist elite flourished and gathered under the auspices of the ADP. The discriminatory policies of the Pahlavi state had led to numerous ethnic grievances and facilitated popular support to the autonomy movement organized by Ja'far Pishevari. However, Stalin's decision, after increased international pressure, to withdraw Soviet troops from Iran affected the pace of nationalist mobilization in Azerbaijan. Consequently, the regional government gradually lost its control over the province. Moreover, the rumors regarding secession from Iran alienated Azerbaijani people in Iran. As a result, deep-rooted historical ties, economic integration, and, especially, the religious affiliation of the Azerbaijani community with Shi'a Islam diminished popular support for the nationalist struggle and hindered the secessionist agenda of the secular nationalist elite. Therefore, examination of the Pishevari Movement confirms the vital role of the secular elite as well as the necessity of the antecedent conditions for the success of nationalist mobilization.

In conclusion, examination of the three episodes in the history of Northern Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan demonstrates the vital role of the secular nationalist elite for nationalist mobilization. Likewise, all three cases also highlight the necessity of the antecedent conditions for the success of a secular nationalist revolution. Building upon the examination of nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan, this study derives important conclusions on nationalism and its relationships with secularization and religion.
2. Nationalism, Secularism, and Religion

One of the goals of this research has been to elucidate the relationships among secularism, religion, and nationalism. This study has provided an opportunity to observe the interaction of religion, secularism, and nationalism at different time periods and within different contexts.

First, my research demonstrates that the interactions of secularism, modernism, and religion were neither monolithic nor exclusive. The emergence and rise of ethnic identity and nationalism was an outcome of secularization, and modernization in general, in both Azerbaijani communities. Previously, religion had been the main source of identity, especially before the introduction of secular nationalism; in both Azerbaijani societies, secularism challenged religion and religious identity. However, even in the case of assertive nationalism in the north, contrary to the expectations of early Weberian modernists, secularism and secular identity were not able to remove religion and religious identity from the social and political lives of the populace. Therefore, the relationships among secularization, modernization, and religion were not exclusive.

The relationships among secularism, nationalism, and religion were not uniform. On the one hand, the secular nationalist elite in Northern Azerbaijan separated secular ethnic identity from religious identity, and then led the populace to adopt the former as a primary

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103 Weber and other modernists expected secularization to expel religion in the social and political lives of modern societies. However, this study, like many others, refutes this expectation. This work demonstrates that religion endured and coexisted with secularization, as observed in the case of integrationist nationalism.

104 As discussed in chapter one, this study adopts Christian Smith’s “agency-centered” approach to secularization.
source of affiliation. On the other hand, Iranian Azerbaijan illustrates a much different relationship between religion and secularism. In particular, a secular ethnic identity had successfully permeated Azerbaijani society towards the middle of the twentieth century, but it ultimately failed to dominate religious identity and affiliation. In Iranian Azerbaijan, both ethnic and religious identities coexisted. In sum, the relationship between secularism and religion is neither monolithic nor exclusive. Moreover, results from the interactions of the two forces are contingent upon other factors, specifically the ones included in the threefold framework: the existence and power of a secular nationalist elite, the relationship between the minority group and the state and society, and opportunity structures.

Second, this study also engages with scholarly debates regarding the roots of nations and nationalism. First, the emergence of Azerbaijani nationalism and the construction of Azerbaijani identity corroborate the modernity of nationalism. The timing of nationalism's origins is the subject of debate among modernist, ethno-symbolist, and primordialist approaches to nationalism (See Özkırımlı, 2010; A. D. Smith, 1998). Before their split in 1828, the primary sources of identity were religion or locality in both Azerbaijani communities. The secular nationalist elite in Northern Azerbaijan separated secular ethnic identity from religious identity, and then led the populace to adopt the former as a primary

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105 Modernists consider nationalism as an exclusive outcome of modernity (Breuilly, 1985; Gellner, 1983, 1994). Ethno-symbolists agree with the modernists about the modernity of nationalism, but also accept the existence of ethnic roots—to use Anthony Smith's terms, "ethnic cores"—of nations in the pre-modern era (See Guibernau & Hutchinson, 2001; A. D. Smith, 1991). Rather than denying the existence of ethnic and linguistic differences in the pre-modern era, this study demonstrates that these factors existed but were not the primary sources of identity. Therefore, this study aligns more closely with the perspective of ethno-symbolism than that of modernism.
source of affiliation. Prior to the actions of the secular nationalist elite, “Azerbaijan” was known only as the name of the land or territory where “Turks” or Turkish-speaking groups of people lived; the Turkish-speaking people in the area were known to the outside world as “Caucasian Muslims” or “Tatars.” The Azerbaijani elite took this general idea of Azerbaijan and went further: in addition to acknowledging that the people in that area belonged to the Turkish ethnic group, the secular nationalist elite then invented the Azerbaijani nation and identity.

Furthermore, this examination of the roots of Azerbaijani nationalism in Azerbaijan and Iran departs from the structuralist approaches to nationalism, observed among modernist theorists of nationalism such as Ernest Gellner and Thomas Nairn. Gellner considers nationalism a result of the “transition to industrialism” (Gellner, 1983). For Nairn, nationalism is an outcome of the “general process of historical development,” what he conceptualizes as “uneven development” (Nairn, 1981b, p. 332). In addition, in his *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson considers nationalism to be a result of the “spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces,” such as change in the conception of time, the decline of religious communities with the expansion of the power and realm of “the secular,” and the decline of the dynastic realm (See Anderson, 1983, pp. 9-31). For nationalism to become a political force capable of constructing a national identity and inaugurating a nationalist mobilization, this

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106 Construction of the secular ethnic identity—its separation from religious identity—in Northern Azerbaijan was the result of the secular elite’s own secular nationalist revolution. In Southern Azerbaijan, while state-led repressive secularization triggered ethnic identity, the Azerbaijani identity flourished in the opportunity structures of World War II.
examination of Azerbaijani nationalism shows that, in addition to structural forces, an elite impetus is necessary. In both Azerbaijani communities, nationalism became a transformative force only in the hands of the secular nationalist elite. However, the threefold framework also acknowledges the necessity of structural factors for a successful nationalist mobilization.

Modernists argue that it is nationalism that invents and constructs the nation. According to Gellner, “nationalism is not a sentiment expressed by pre-existing nations; rather it creates nations where they did not previously exist,” and it sometimes “takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality” (Gellner, 1983, 48-9). For Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger nationalism is one of “many of the traditions which we think of as ancient in their origins were, in fact, invented comparatively recently” (E. J. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 2). Moreover, Hobsbawm, in line with Gellner, argues that “Nations do not make states and nationalism but the other way round” (E. J. Hobsbawm, 1990, pp. 9-10).

Comparative historical analysis of the two Azerbaijani communities challenges and refines this modernist proposition. On one hand, the assertive nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan corroborates the modernist argument regarding nationalism’s power to invent nations. It was the assertive nationalism of the secular nationalist elite that constructed the ethnic Azerbaijani identity and created the Azerbaijani nation and state. On the other hand, in the south, Azerbaijani identity developed primarily as a reaction to the ethnic discrimination and repression of the new Iranian state under Shah Reza Pahlavi. In other words, Azerbaijani identity in Iran took shape before Azerbaijani nationalism gained a foothold in Iran; Azerbaijani nationalism flourished only afterwards, during the occupation of Iran by
the Allies in World War Two. Notably, assertive nationalism failed to ignite an Azerbaijani national identity in Iran during the first two decades of the 20th century, despite the efforts of the Ottomans. Therefore, this study demonstrates that the power of nationalism is contingent upon other factors—primarily the power of the secular nationalist elite—as well as the relationship between the minority group and host state and society, and opportunity structures.

In addition, this examination of the development of Azerbaijani nationalism also demonstrates the dynamic of nature of nationalism. Nationalism changes and takes different forms as a result of interaction with other factors, such as the nationalist elite, the relationship between the state and the ethnic minority, and the opportunity structure. Both Azerbaijani communities lacked an ethnic and national consciousness in the early 19th century; each community’s nationalism took distinct forms, becoming assertive in the north and integrationist in the south. Thus, the threefold framework recognizes the potential that integrationist Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran might transform into assertive nationalism in response to changes in one or more of these factors. To be more specific, in terms of concrete policy implications, secularization in the Azerbaijani community and a worsening of relations with the Iranian state does have the potential to escalate integrationist Azerbaijani nationalism towards assertive nationalism.

Azerbaijani and Turkish nationalists attempted to proselytize Azerbaijani-Turkish nationalism in Iran at different times and contexts. For example, the Ottoman Troops occupied the province two times during the World War I for nationalist propagation. The Musavat Party leadership, the founders of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in north in 1918, attempted to initiate Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran but was rejected (See chapter three). Southern Azerbaijan’s reaction to the ethnic secessionist propaganda diffusing from the north was not accepted either (See chapter four).
The development of integrationist Azerbaijani nationalism in Iran and the interactions of religion and nationalism more generally shed light on an important function of religion as seen by many scholars of the sociology of religion: religion can be a social glue that holds societies together. Azerbaijanis in Iran, despite state repression, refused to consider the idea of secession and independence. From a comparative perspective, the secular nationalist elite and the ethnic grievances that resulted from Russian colonial rule gave birth to an assertive nationalism in Northern Azerbaijan. However, in Iran—even with the existence of an emergent secular nationalist elite, ethnic grievances, and opportunity structures—the Azerbaijanis resisted separatist ideas, and limited their demands to ethnic and linguistic rights. As this study has shown, the primary link that tied the Iranian Azerbaijani community to the larger Iranian society was religious affiliation; historical and economic bonds also played a role. The religious dimension of Iranian Azerbaijanis’ attachment to Iran was also observed during the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In sum, examination of the Azerbaijani community in Iran illustrates the central role of religion in sustaining societal cohesion. Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, religion’s function as social glue for the Azerbaijani community in Iran is a promising future research project.

3. Limitations

There were two limitations to this research project. The first is the limited availability of public opinion data. The historical nature of the three cases investigated in this project means that public opinion survey data is nonexistent, as such surveys were not conducted.

108 Unlike other ethnic minorities in Iran, Azerbaijanis belong to the Shi’a sect. In addition, many Azerbaijani clerics have held important religious and political positions in Iran.
during the time periods in this study. Another challenge is the presence of government restrictions either on the investigation of sensitive issues like nationalism or on the access to available archival data. Indeed, even today it is very hard to conduct surveys of or interviews with the people of the countries examined in this study.\textsuperscript{109} To minimize the impact of the lack of public opinion data, this study relied on available written accounts of local eyewitnesses or reports of foreign emissaries in Iran and Azerbaijan. The lack of public opinion data is mitigated by the elite-oriented explanation of this study. In this regard, I was able to access both original writings and interviews of the key elite persons examined in this project. The leaders of all three cases examined in this study—M.A. Rasulzada, S.M. Khiyabani, and S.J. Pishevari—had published books and articles reflecting their political views and goals. In addition, I was also able to gather transcriptions of many of their speeches and statements.

The second major limitation to this study regards the threefold framework. This study uses the framework to explain nationalist mobilization in two different societies in different time periods and contexts. Nevertheless, both cases represent the same ethnic group, namely the Azerbaijanis. To evaluate the full potential and limitations of the threefold framework introduced in this project, it must be tested with different minority groups in different societies. Some future research directions are presented below.

\textsuperscript{109} During my research trip to Iran in 2005, I attempted to interview several people and invited them to discuss political issues, specifically nationalism. However, people were very hesitant about discussing political issues. I ascribe this hesitancy primarily to fear of the government and the intelligence services.
4. Future Research

The theoretical framework and the empirical research in this study suggest several new research projects. First, building upon the conceptual, theoretical, empirical basis of this dissertation, I plan to examine Azerbaijani nationalism in contemporary Azerbaijan and Iran. Second, I intend to use the threefold framework to examine the nationalism of other ethnic groups, specifically Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. Third, I will conduct further research on the relationship of secularism, nationalism, and religion in other Muslim societies.

**Azerbaijani Nationalism in Contemporary Azerbaijan and Iran**

The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was founded in 1918 and lasted only two years. After consolidating its power domestically, the new Soviet government occupied and annexed Azerbaijan in 1920. Thus began a new era in the history of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani nationalism. Azerbaijan obtained her second nation-state under the Soviet Union in 1936: the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan, which lasted until 1989. During this period, Azerbaijani elite blended ethnic nationalism with Marxism-Leninism, and consolidated the Azerbaijani identity. In 1991, shortly before the formal collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijani nationalism gave birth to the Republic of Azerbaijan. Interestingly, the new Azerbaijani nationalist elite emulated the Democratic Republic established in 1918. Specifically, the founders of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991 considered the new state to be a continuation of the Democratic Republic founded in 1918,
and adopted its flags and official holidays accordingly. In short, northern Azerbaijani nationalism maintained its assertiveness.

In the south, following the collapse of the Pishevari Movement in 1946, a new and more repressive regime emerged under Muhammad Reza Shah. This regime was to last more than three decades. Iran then entered a completely new era with the Iranian Revolution in 1979. As they had in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution in 1906, Azerbaijanis also played an important role in the Iranian revolution, and, interestingly, maintained their integrationist nationalism. In addition to their commitment to the unity of Iran, Iranian Azerbaijanis demanded recognition of their ethnic and linguistic rights, including education and media in their native language. Despite increased tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities, especially in the early years of the Islamic regime, the exercise of even the most basic rights remains a point of contention and the source of numerous grievances. Iranian Azerbaijanis organized a variety of protest movements in the 2000s and their demands to the Iranian government were similar to the demands of earlier protests: education in their native language and more resources for the province. A more robust examination of the recent developments in the two Azerbaijani communities will clarify the dynamics that have maintained northern Azerbaijani nationalism as assertive nationalism since 1920 and the dynamics that have maintained southern Azerbaijani nationalism as integrationist nationalism since 1946.
Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey

Last, a study of additional minority cases will help to further refine and better assess the strengths and weaknesses of the threefold framework used to explain Azerbaijani nationalism in this project. In this regard, I intend to study Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. Kurds in Turkey have manifested two different nationalist tendencies. One group prioritized their Muslim identity. This group advocated loyalty to the Turkish society and state, in spite of Turkey’s repressive and discriminatory treatment of the Kurds, especially until the early 2000s. Another minority group founded a variety of revolutionary political parties, supported the separatist Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), and appealed to the use of force. In other words, Kurdish nationalism in Turkey has two faces: one integrationist, the other assertive. Unlike the Azerbaijani communities, who are part of two different states, both the assertive and the integrationist Kurds remain a part of the same country. Therefore, the case of the Kurds in Turkey is a most interesting test for the threefold framework.

110 The PKK is considered as a terrorist separatist organization, not only by Turkey but also by the European Union and the United States, due to its violence against civilians. Since its establishment, the PKK has killed more than 30,000 Turkish and Kurdish civilians in Turkey.
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