

Iranian Linguistically-Hegemonic or Revolution-Exporting Orientations towards Post-Soviet Tajikistan and its Counter Affects; a Critical Study

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Abstract

Iran and Tajikistan lack a direct geographical link. However, Iranian foreign policy towards the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan has not only complicated Iran-Tajikistan relations, but it has also fostered a strong sense of protection against Iran's Persian-hegemonic or revolution-exporting tendencies in Central Asia, particularly in Tajikistan. This policy appears to have no impact on ethnic communities within Iran, but it has actually fueled significant ethno-national separatisms, mainly among Azerbaijanis and Kurds. Ethno-nationalists argue that if Iran can support independence movements in Gorno-Badakhshan based on shared language, religion, culture, and history, then they too should have the right to receive foreign support based on similar linguistic, religious, and cultural elements. This study aims to analyze Iranian interests in Central Asia, specifically in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan, and examine how the sense of separatism in Gorno-Badakhshan could potentially trigger an ethnic dilemma within Iran. Additionally, the investigation will explore Iranian strategies to indirectly control one of the historical Silk Road branches that traverses the Gorno-Badakhshan region, connecting China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia. The study will also scrutinize the political economy underlying such orientations and their counter-effects.

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Introduction

Iranian linguistically-hegemonic orientations are not a new part of Iranian political strategy. It can be traced back to the ancient Persian Achaemenid Empire where the primary aim of these orientations was to Persianize the non-Persian societies linguistically, literarily, socially and

religiously (after 1979). Initially, the terms “Persianization” and “Iranianization” were creating confusion among modern historians and political analysts. But in 1959, Shah Muhammad Raza Pahlavi announced that the terms “Persia” and “Iran” could officially be used interchangeably¹.

Historically, the process of Persianization or Iranianization affected all the territories which were once become the part of Persian Empire. Currently, the geographical locations of Georgia, Armenia, Turkey, Iraq, Azerbaijan, the Russian federated states of Dagestan and Chechnya, and, all Central Asian states including Tajikistan can be counted as the highly affected regions by the Persianization. Not only the culture, social norms and literature, the Persian language has also left a huge impact on the domestic populace of these regions. One of its best examples is Tajikistan where the Tajik language is also called Tajik Persian. This language is counted as the variety of Persian dialectic in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It is also considered to be close to the Dari dialectic of the Persian language, widely speaks in Afghanistan. Since the beginning of the twentieth century and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajik Persian has been adopted by several writers and researchers than the Russian language².

As the Post-Soviet world politics changed the dimensions of national interests for each country, Iran is also trying to expand its sphere of influence around the globe like the United States. However, Iranian orientations regarding expanding its sphere of influence are based upon common or shared history, culture, language and religion. Therefore, the Iranian major target is the former territories of the Persian empires and Tajikistan is one of them. Tajikistan consists of four administrative divisions and Dushanbe city. In administrative divisions, these are two vilayat (provinces); called Sughd and Khatlon, one autonomous region; called Gorno-Badakhshan, and, the Region of Republican Subordination. Despite the other three divisions, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region has vast ethnic diversity. The majority of the people belong to the Pamiri ethnic group who follow the Ismaili School of Shia Islam. Because of such high diversity, the region is suffering from ethno-national separatism since 1992 when the local government of Gorno-Badakhshan declared its independence from Tajikistan which resulted in five year long civil war. However, the call for independence took back in 1997 but the region is still having sentiments for independence³.

Several state-centric Tajik politicians blamed or still consider the Iranian role in dividing Tajikistan into two states by encouraging ethno-national separatism in Gorno-Badakhshan. Behind

¹ Pense, Joachim. *Why is present day Persia called Iran?* May 09, 2015. <https://www.quora.com/Why-is-present-day-Persia-called-Iran#n=12>

² Dr. Qalb-e-Muhammad Ali Shahani, interviewed by the author, Qom, Iran, November 02, 2016. He earned doctoral degree from Al-Mujtaba Trust Damascus (affiliated with Al-Azhar University), served as a students’ councilor in Pakistan Embassy Damascus during 2005 to 2011, still an active member of ISIC; an organization for the welfare of international students studying in Syria.

³ Hamid Wahed Alikuzai, *A Concise History of Afghanistan - Volume 14*. Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 2013, 756-757

propagating commonalities between Persian and Pamiri people, Iran is actually seeking a puppet state between Central and South Asia for fulfilling its economic and political interests while the reality is; the Pamir languages are a real part of Eastern Iranian languages, local culture of Gorno-Badakhshan has been amalgamated with Russian and Chinese cultures, and, there is also a vast difference between the thoughts and believes of Shia-Twelvers and Ismaili Shias after Imam Jafar Sadiq⁴. The prime motive of this study is actually to investigate such blames that are deteriorating Iran-Tajikistan relations under the Post-Soviet scenario.

Akbar Hashmi Rafsanjani Regime

As the Persian language is an over-whelming speaking language in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and some parts of Uzbekistan, Rafsanjani adopted a policy to promote Persian literature with pro-revolution thoughts in these countries. Similarly, he provided limited support to both ethnic elements in Tajikistan regarding installing a pro-Iranian government during the civil war. To observe such support, the majority of Shia clerics and political leaders became surprised that why Iran was supporting followers of Wahabi Islam in Tajikistan. Similarly, several regional and international scholars assumed that Iran is exporting revolutionary sentiments to Tajikistan through its literature and financial aid. While, Iranian government initially claimed the protection of political and economic rights of the Persian community in Tajikistan but later, it left its support to the Wahabi ethnic group; belonged to Gharm, and, focused on the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan. During five years of claim of independence, local government and warlords of Gorno-Badakhshan had acquired secret moral, financial and military support from Iran on the base of the Persian language and Shia Islam. Although some Iranian officials recognized this support and called Pamiri ethnic group as brother Shia Muslims, the Iranian government officially never accepted its interference in Tajik political affairs or defended the independence of Gorno-Badakhshan. Similarly, several Iranian clerics criticized Rafsanjani's viewpoint to consider Pamiris as the brothers of Shia Muslims. According to them, "There was a lot of difference between the ideology of Twelver Shia Muslims and Ismaili-Shia Muslims. Therefore, the Iranian government must not support them officially"⁵.

On the other hand, Dr. Husnain Sabqi says that "to interfere in Tajik political affairs or supporting independence movement of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan was not the policy designed by Rafsanjani. It was the plan of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards. They also attempted to export revolutionary sentiments in Iraq but failed. And now, they were seeking the opportunity for interfering in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. As the concept of Vilayat-e-Faqih (Supreme Leader) had been criticized by the majority of Iraqi and Lebanese Shia clerics; considered as Iranian-

⁴ibid

⁵Margaret Cormack. *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*. London: Oxford University Press, 2013, 185-186

hegemonic scheme, Iranian support to non-Twelve Shia Muslims was also derided by these clerics". He further argues that, "in fact, Iran wanted to get another Iran in the center of South, Central and Eastern Asia for fulfilling its political and economic interests on behalf of sponsoring Persian"⁶.

Similarly, Dr. Syed Kosar Abbas Najfi states that, "Post-Revolution Iranian history tells that the Iranian president cannot perform independently without the consent of the Supreme Leader. The same was the situation with Rafsanjani who had become a puppet of Ali Khamenei and followed all decisions as his frontman. As Ali Khamenei wanted Gorno-Badakhshan as an Israel of Iran in between South and Central Asia, he triggered President Rafsanjani to propagate the Iranian stance internationally regarding protecting the economic and political rights of the Persian community. Soon, this propaganda became falsified and the Iranian government forced to adopt a policy of reconciliation between the Tajik government and ethnic groups"⁷. Hussain Ali Muntazeri⁸ and the followers of the late Muhammad Kazim Shariat Madari⁹ was also projected the same thoughts for Iranian policy towards Gorno-Badakhshan. According to Muntazeri, "before defending ethnic rights of Persian communities in other countries, the Iranian government must look after its internal policy against ethnic communities"¹⁰. Similarly, followers of the late Shariat Madari wrote slogans in the streets of Tabriz like "Autonomy for Badakhshan but Slavery for Azerbaijan", "Buried Khumeni's Fascism", "Autonomy or Independence, Select One", "Pamiri Tajiks are Brothers but Iranian Azerbaijanis are enemy", "If Persians can be one, Why Azerbaijanis not", etc¹¹.

However, the Iranian policy for reconciliation was welcomed by the Tajik government. Seemingly, it was an idealist step taken by the Iranian government but, it was actually the inauguration of a new neo-mercantilist and neo-colonial policy designed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards. Tajik civil war got an end with the efforts of President Rafsanjani, and, Gorno-Badakhshan took back its announcement for the independence of the region and decided to remain an autonomous part of Tajikistan¹². According to Dr. Iqbal Hussain,

⁶ Dr. Husnain Sabqi, interviewed by the author, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan, June 26, 2016. He got doctoral degree from Najaf in 2000.

⁷ Dr. Syed Kosar Abbas Najfi, interviewed by the author, Kotla Chakar, Jalalpur Pirwala, Punjab, Pakistan, June 20, 2016. He got doctoral degree from Najaf in 2012, serving as a teacher in Alwi Dar-ul-Quran Najaf.

⁸ A proposed successor of Khumeni for the post of Supreme Leader but denounced after criticizing his attitude against ethnic communities by Khumeni and Revolutionary Guards.

⁹ Pre-Revolution supporter of Islamic Movement but anti-Khumeni cleric, belonged to Tabriz, proposed federal system for Iran, favored democracy and enactment of the Constitution of 1906 under constitutional monarchy. He strictly opposed the concept of Vilayat-e-Faqih.

¹⁰ Shireen Hunter, Shireen. *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*. California: PRAEGER, 2010, 61-62

¹¹ Sepehr Zabir, *Iran Since the Revolution*. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012, 77-78

¹² Hooman Peimani, *Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia: The Competition of Iran, Turkey and Russia*. New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998, 32

“Iranian foreign policy towards Tajikistan not only stirred ethnic communities of Iran regarding demanding regional autonomy and ethnic rights once again but also encouraged different political parties to initiate a movement for converting highly criticized Iranian political system towards more freedom and democracy. This movement began on May 23, 1997, that resulted in the victory of Syed Muhammad Khatami as the fifth president of Iran¹³”.

Syed Muhammad Khatami Regime

Khatami is considered the first reformist president of Iran. The basic principles of his reforms were abstaining from violence, non-suppression of critics and opponents, improving the international image of Iran, dialogue among civilizations inside and outside Iran, freedom of political expression, criticism on high ranked authorities even the Supreme Leader of Iran, and, full commitment to Iranian constitution. For this purpose, he attempted to highlight the soft image of his government not only domestically but internationally. Similarly, he focused on Central Asian states and reshaped previous foreign policy towards this region. Now, he had to present the Iranian image in Tajikistan as a well-wisher investor. He also offered thousands of Tajik students to get free admission to Iranian universities¹⁴.

According to Dr. Qalb-e-Muhammad Ali Shahani, “This regime spend millions of dollars to influence Tajik cultural affairs. Khatami, now under the direction of Ali Khamenei, had taken a keen interest in re-discovering Persian culture, history and language in Tajikistan. So, different projects regarding promoting Persian poetry, literature and other educational material were inaugurated under this regime. The basic cause behind inaugurating these projects was to promote pro-revolution Shia Islamic ideology in Tajikistan which was also the fundamental part of Iranian foreign policy since 1979. It was a pragmatic attempt of Iran to highlight its constructive role in Tajik nation-building efforts without confronting the Wahabi segment of Tajik society. Therefore, Iran was favoring Tajikistan as the secular state now”¹⁵.

Similarly, Dr. Fida Hussain illustrates Iranian interests in Tajikistan during this regime as “almost 2,000 Tajik students were enrolled in Iranian universities where they not only inspired by Iranian revolutionary ideology but also opt Shia Islam. During their stay in Iran, the Iranian government took all the responsibility for their every kind of expenditure. The Tajik government knew the threat of such brainwashing of Tajik students when they returned to Tajikistan but, at that time, the Khatmi government had ended. Therefore, it is a general perception among the historians of

¹³ Dr. Iqbal Hussain, interviewed by the author, Bhakkar, Punjab, Pakistan, June 14, 2016. He got doctoral degree from Qum in 2001.

¹⁴ Lena Jonson, *Tajikistan in the New Central Asia: Geopolitics, Great Power Rivalry and Radical Islam*. London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2006, 90

¹⁵ Dr. Qalb-e-Muhammad Ali Shahani, opcit

Iran and Tajikistan that Iran-Tajikistan informal and relaxed relations ended with the end of the Khatmi regime”¹⁶.

Likewise, the reformist orientations of Khatmi inspired all the ethnic communities of Iran initially. They believed that Khatmi could ensure their regional autonomy as promised during the pre-revolution Islamic movement. At the same time, Khatmi’s different speeches on democracy, non-suppression policy towards ethnic communities, provision of fundamental human rights, and, criticism of the Supreme Leader, Iranian Azerbaijanis stimulated to move a resolution towards the central government in Tehran regarding regional autonomy. In 2000, thousands of Azerbaijanis gathered in Tabriz Time Square and signed a resolution for regional autonomy. This resolution was put forward to the central government in Tehran but no one including Khatmi noticed this issue¹⁷. Dr. Syed Kosar Abbas Najfi says that the “actual purpose behind Khatmi’s theory of Dialogue among Civilizations was not only to form a Pan-Persian bloc with Persian speaking countries like Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan but also to propagate artificial Iranian brotherhood just for seeking economic interests. Similarly, this theory aimed to Iranianize/Persianize all the Iranian ethnic minorities with fake unification”¹⁸. Therefore, Iranian-American Professor Azer Nafisi says, “Khatmi was the symptom, not the cause of change in Iran”¹⁹. While, Khatmi himself defended his government as “there have been changes of such an extent in social, cultural and political relations that it is impossible to return to be period of before the reforms”²⁰.

During the last months of his second presidential term, slogans were found on streets in Tabriz that “We Reject Totalitarian Reforms”. Replied Khatami, “I observed several totalitarian countries like North Vietnam, Romania, China and the Soviet Union. People could not express their viewpoints in these countries. They felt hands around their throats. But, this is not in Iran. The majority of Iranians feel free to talk. They can criticize their president easily. As I expected freedom and liberty before my presidency, I found a lot as biggest surprise for me at the end of my term”²¹.

¹⁶ Dr. Fida Hussain, interviewed by the author, Bhakar, Punjab, Pakistan, June 15, 2016. He earned doctoral degree from Al-Mustafa International University Qom in 1998.

¹⁷ Ikhlāq Ahmad Qadri. *History of Iranian Revolutions Since 550 BC to 2011*. Lahore: Tayyab Shamshad Printers, 2011, 341-344

¹⁸ Dr. Syed Kosar Abbas Najfi, opcit

¹⁹ Azer Nafisi. *Mutual Assured Misunderstandings*. August 24, 2016.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/axis/nafisi.html>.

²⁰ Modher Amin. *Analysis: Iran politics turns to right?* August 24, 2016.
http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Security-Industry/2004/05/28/Analysis-Iran-politics-turns-to-right/85021085780591/.

²¹ Qasim Ejaz. *Armenian-Turkish Normalization and Future of Iranian Azerbaijan in the South Caucasian Status-Quo Politics in 2016*. August 24, 2016. <https://eurasianpolitics.wordpress.com/2016/08/27/armenian-turkish-normalization-and-future-of-iranian-azerbaijan-in-the-south-caucasian-status-quo-politics-in-2016/>.

On the other hand, Dr. Imdad Hussain Shirazi discusses that, “ethnic communities including Iranian Azerbaijanis realized the puppet position of Iranian president under Supreme Leader. As no one president can ensure democracy, regional autonomy, economic and political freedom, and, liberty without the will of the Supreme Leader, they declared the post of Supreme Leader in Iran as an indication of the Fascist regime under one segment of Shia Muslims because, the overwhelming majority of Shia Muslims in Iraq, Lebanon and also somewhat in Iran do not accept the concept of Vilayat-e-Faqih that is applying by the post of Supreme Leader”²².

Mehmood Ahmadinejad Regime

Mehmood Ahmadinejad became the 6th president of Iran on August 03, 2005. Complexities in Iran-Tajikistan relations were fully exposed during his presidency while counter impacts of Khatmi’s policy towards Tajikistan especially the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan on Iranian Azerbaijan were also detected a lot during his regime. Tajik officials recorded a lot of incidents between graduates from local Tajik universities and graduates from Iranian universities in different cities. It was observed that Tajik Sunni students who acquired free scholarships from the Iranian government during the Khatami regime had followed Shia Islam, and were preaching pro-revolution and pro-vilayat-e-faqih ideology in different areas that forced Tajik Sunni students to stop them. Such ideological clashes required instant action by the Tajik government, and, closed all the unregistered mosques in Tajikistan. Almost 90 students were arrested on accuses of promoting pro-revolution and anti-government sentiments in their localities. Similarly, President Imam Ali Rahmon showed his concern against Iran as “young people studying Islam in other countries have fallen under the influence of extremism and turned into enemies. Therefore, the government ordered them to return immediately to their homeland”. Approximately, 1,400 students were forced to leave their studies in the Middle East including 200 students in Iran. At the same time, the Iranian government decided to revise the Tajik language and ordered the removal of “technical problems” which have been generated by the teachers who graduated from Iranian universities. Historically, this was the first time when the Tajik government differentiated between Iranian Persian and Tajik Persian languages officially. In the same month, the Tajik government banned Tajik children to attend the school run by the Iranian embassy in Dushanbe^{23 24}.

Subsequently, to see such behavior of the Tajik government, several Iranian high officials canceled their visit to Tajikistan. Scheduled meetings regarding industrial corporations between the two countries were also canceled. Even Iranian Minister of Industries and Mines; Ali Akbar

²² Dr. Imdad Hussain Shirazi, interviewed by the author, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan, June 23, 2016. He got doctoral degree from Najaf in 1999.

²³ Vladimir Fedorenko. *Timeline of Central Asia*. Washington D.C: Rethink Institute, 2015, 35-36

²⁴ Kamoludin Abdullaev. *Historical Dictionary of Tajikistan*. Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2010, 187

Mehrabian asked Tajik officials the reason of cancellation these meetings but he got a last-minute reply about the busy schedule of the president and other officials. Iranian vice-resident Hamid Baqai, then, came forward and tried to hold a meeting with President Imam Ali Rahmon but failed. He planned to invite the Tajik president on the advice of Iranian president Ahmadinejad regarding attending celebrations of Nouroz in Iran but President Imam Ali Rahmon did not meet. Another displeasure was shown by the Iranian government when Tajik Air reduced its flight operation between Tehran and Dushanbe. Later, the Tajik government resisted Iranian calls during the Khatami regime regarding visa-free traveling between both countries²⁵.

In the end, President Mehmood Ahmadinejad coerced himself to visit Tajikistan in 2007, described Iran-Tajikistan relations as “two bodies, one soul” and explained the Iranian position against Tajik's blame. This visit restored the warm relations between both countries but still Tajikistan had several reservations against Iranian hegemonic policy towards Tajikistan. Several Tajik scholars quoted that “Ahmadinejad has believed in Greater Iran because once he said to Tajik delegation that I am not feeling that I have non-Iranian guests with me, thanks to many commonalities our countries share”²⁶. However, Ahmadinejad also visited Tajikistan in 2010 and 2012 and attempted to play a vital role in the growth of the Tajik economy with the construction of the Sangtodeh-2 Power Plant, Istikol Tunnel, Anzob Tunnel, Shurabad Hydroelectric Power Plant and Rogun Dam. Similarly, he signed to restore the historical Silk Road connecting East and Central Asia via Tajiksitan, Afghanistan and Iran with Europe. He further planned a railroad connecting Tajikistan with Europe via Afghanistan and Iran. However, Tajikistan has still several objections to installing Tehran's planned Pan-Persian television channel jointly for Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Even the Iranian ambassador in Tajikistan guaranteed that the basic aim of this television channel is to promote and protect Persian culture but the majority of Tajik officials were still seeking any kind of planning behind such economic ties regarding promoting pro-revolution, pro-vilayat-e-faqih or pro-religious in Tajikistan like before. Therefore, during the 10th ECO Summit on March 10-11, 2009, the 1st Nouroz Festival on March 27, 2010, the 2nd Nouroz Festival on March 27, 2011, and, the 16th Non-Alliend Summit on August 26-31, 2012, Tajik President Imam Ali Rahmon even visited Iran but had formal meetings with Ahmadinejad²⁷.

Dr. Imdad Hussain Shirazi articulates that, “After exposing Iranian orientations in Iraq and Tajikistan, both countries had become conscious in continuation of their relations with Iran while Iran had also been coerced to change its policies towards both countries On the other hand, Iranian Azerbaijanis, among which, the majority was the follower of anti-vilayat-e-faqih ideologist; Muhammad Kazim Shariat Madari were encouraged regarding demanding pure

²⁵ Vladimir Fedorenko, opcit, 36

²⁶ Qasim Ejaz, opcit

²⁷ Brenton Clark. *Iranian Foreign Policy Towards Tajikistan and Afghanistan During the Ahmadinejad Presidency: the Rising Salience of Persian National Identity*. Poland: USAK, 2012, 76-77

democracy and regional autonomy under federal structure in Iran soon after observing such huge international criticism on Iranian policies and the position of Vilayat-e-Faqih (Supreme Leader). Similarly, they realized the worth of their region after signing Iran-Tajikistan agreements regarding the revival of the historical Silk Route and the construction of railway tracks. They knew that Iranian Azerbaijan is only a short way to connect Asia and Europe. So, they must avail the geopolitical importance of their region. Thus, it should be simply considered that Iranian strategies to neo-colonialize Tajikistan during the Ahmadinejad regime proved more harmful for Iran itself than the Rafsanjani and Khatami regime because it officially described the worth of Iranian Azerbaijan region that cheered Iranian Azerbaijanis about demands”²⁸.

On the other hand, several Iranian Azerbaijani ethno-national journalists including Anar Bayramli and Ramil Dadashov reported that “Tabriz experienced a series of protests after Iran-Tajikistan agreements. Participants in the protests demanded true provision of Articles 9 and 15 in the Iranian Constitution that clearly describe the rights of ethnic communities in Iran. Article 09 emphasizes that no one official in Iran can snatch the personal freedom of any individual on any pretended issue for national integrity and sovereignty. Similarly, Article 15 defines that education in regional languages is allowed in schools along with the Persian language. Similarly, media is also allowed to publish or broadcast different content or programs in regional languages without any restriction according to this article. Therefore, protesters argued in their speeches that, if the Iranian government can initially defend the economic and political rights of the Pamiri ethnic community during the independence movement of Gorno-Badakhshan and later support regional autonomy of this region within Tajikistan, then, why it does not practice the same attitude within Iran according to the constitution”²⁹.

However, Ahmadinejad along with other political elites of Iran recognized the counter impacts of Iranian strategies towards other countries on ethnic communities in Iran, and, they planned to be neutral from the further political affairs about Tajikistan while economic relations will be focused more than previous. Similarly, he ordered Mr. Hoseyni; head of Tabriz Press under the Ministry of Islamic Culture to ban literature published in the Azerbaijani language. The “Asr-e-Azadi” newspaper was also banned just because of publishing half page for children in the Azerbaijani language³⁰. Dr. Iqbal Hussain describes this state of affairs as “Islamic regime was considering Iranian Azerbaijanis as responsible for the failure of Iranian strategies in Tajikistan

²⁸ Dr. Imdad Hussain Shirazi, opcit

²⁹ Farid Huseyn. *Call for end to Hostage-Taking after Iran Frees Two Azerbaijani Journalists*. August 14, 2016.
<https://rsf.org/en/news/call-end-hostage-taking-after-iran-frees-two-azerbaijani-journalists>

³⁰ Ozgur Sinema. *Iran SOuth Azerbaijani Turkish Political Refugees in Turkey*. June 30, 2016.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SlyUd21uuw>

because their protests delivered the message to Tajik nation about what actually the hidden objectives of Iran. Therefore, it was pouring out its anger against them”³¹.

Hassan Rouhani Regime

Hassan Rouhani became the 7th president of Iran on August 03, 2013. Although Tajik President Imam Ali Rahmon attended the inauguration ceremony of Hassan Rouhani in Tehran on August 04, 2013, the unceremonious relations could not be restored till now. However, Hassan Rouhani met the Tajik president firstly on September 12, 2013, during the SCO Head of States Summit, secondly on March 27, 2014, during attending the Nouroz Festival in Kabul with other officials of Persian-speaking countries, and, thirdly on September 10-13, 2014 during SCO Summit in Dushanbe and unveiling ceremony of Sangtodeh-2 Hydroelectric Power Plant. During all these meetings, both countries showed their orientations to strengthen their historical, cultural and linguistic ties but actually the facts showed quite opposite relations among both countries^{32 33}.

Afghan journalist Hamid Safdari presented Iran-Tajikistan relations in the scenario of the Gorno-Badakhshan independence movement, “Iran is a theocratic but stable country where the majority of people are Shia Muslims, following Supreme Leader while, just 30 percent population of Afghanistan is practicing Shia Islam; having little if any sense of patriotism. On the other hand, Tajikistan is even a secular country but the majority of its population is following Wahabi-Sunni Islam while the inhabitants of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region are practicing Ismaili-Shia Islam which has cohesion with Twelver-Shia Islam till the seventh Imam Jafar Sadiq. Though, the post-Revolution Islamic regime desired to unite these three countries but it faced some hard problems like security problems in Afghanistan, differences in religious beliefs, and, economic weaknesses of Afghan and Tajik regimes. Likewise, the basic objective of the Islamic regime was to apply Iranian pro-vilayat-e-faqih ideology to other countries but on the other side, Afghans always hate foreign powers while Tajiks are now welcoming only economic ties with other nations on secular bases after experiencing foreign involvement in Gorno-Badakhshan independence movement”³⁴. While, Swedish-Iranian writer Benyamin Jamshideyan adds in this essay, “As the Islamic regime realized that Iranian Azerbaijanis’ protests in the reaction of offering North Iranian land to Afghanistan and Tajikistan regarding connecting them to Europe via road and railway became the reason of failing its unification policy, it is now wishing to annex Republic of Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan on historical bases with giving an example of Arab League in this regard. However, it would not be possible because of several reasons. Firstly, Post-

³¹ Dr. Iqbal Hussain, opcit

³² Ilan Berman. *Iran's Deadly Ambition: The Islamic Republic's Quest for Global Power*. Washington D.C: Encounter Books, 2015, 79

³³ Dr. Iqbal Hussain, opcit

³⁴ Hamid Safdari. *Should Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan unite together?* July 03, 2016.

<https://www.quora.com/Should-Iran-Afghanistan-and-Tajikistan-unite-together>

Soviet Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Tajikistan never experienced romantic politics. Secondly, Tajikistan has become too close to Russia while Afghanistan is experiencing a democratic transition with the assistance of the United States. And, thirdly, the Republic of Azerbaijan never considered its historical roots with Iran. It always proud to be a Turk nation that has unfortunately been divided into two parts in 1828; having desired a unification of Iranian Azerbaijan with the Republic of Azerbaijan. Thus, the Islamic regime in Iran is not able to fulfill its hegemonic interests in South and Central Asia and the Caucasian region on the base of common history”³⁵.

Conclusion

Global politics in the 21st century is moving around the economy. Every country is trying to seek its economic interests first. In this scenario, Iranian hegemonic orientations towards former territories of Persian empires especially Tajikistan and Azerbaijan are just seemingly based on common history, culture, language or literature. In fact, this is the game of occupying historical trade roots or natural reserves. As China has announced the revival of all three routes of the historical Silk Road (Kashgar-Dushanbe-Moscow, Kashgar-Kabul-Mashad and Kashgar-Gilgit-Gwadar), the Kashgar-Dushanbe-Moscow route is passing through the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan. While, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia can never tolerate any hurdle in the revival of the Kashgar-Dushanbe-Moscow trade route. Therefore, several political analysts consider that the slogans of United Azerbaijan, sovereign South Azerbaijan, or Eastern Kurdistan are also a Russian-supported reaction against Iranian involvement in Gorno-Badakhshan. So, President Hassan Rouhani and Supreme Leader Ayatullah Khamnai have been forced to change their orientations towards Tajikistan because they cannot compromise on losing the Asia-Europe trade route (linking the West Azerbaijan province of Iran to the Van Province of Turkey) at the cost of getting a puppet state in between the Kashgar-Dushanbe-Moscow route of historical Silk Road.

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³⁵ Benyamin Jamshideyan. *Do Iranians wish to annex Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan?* July 03, 2016. <https://www.quora.com/Do-Iranians-wish-to-annex-Azerbaijan-Afghanistan-and-Tajikistan>

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