

## THE PAN-IRANIAN ZONE AND ELEMENTS OF GEOPOLITICS, DEMOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

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**Rezumat:** Spațiul pan-iranian cuprinde o suprafață care depășește granițele politice ale Iranului. În interiorul lui trăiesc popoare care aparțin culturii iraniene: persanii, azerii, tadjicii, kurzii, osetinii, paștunii, belucii, khazarii. Deci se poate afirma că această mișcare, prin esența ei culturală, este net deosebită de ideologia pan-turcă și cea pan-arabă. Acestea din urmă aveau scopuri expansioniste, teritoriale. Pan-iranismul a apărut ca mișcare în secolul al XIX-lea datorită mișcării clericilor șiiți. El a progresat datorită revoluției constituționale dintre anii 1905-1909 și a ideologiei formulate la începutul anilor 1920 de filosoful Mahmoud Afshar. Abia în deceniul al V-lea al secolului trecut s-a format partidul pan-iranian. El a avut o ideologie clară: lupta pentru apărarea ființei iraniene, contra dominației străine. În fruntea acțiunii au fost clericii șiiți. Ei au reușit, în anul 1979, prin revoluția condusă de ayatollahul Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini. A fost un mare succes. De atunci mișcarea pan-iraniană a renăscut. Iranul a putut să ducă propria sa politică de mare putere zonală. Nu a cedat niciodată presiunilor marilor puteri. El a avut capacitatea de a susține mișcările de independență islamică. Toată această mișcare a avut, are și va avea un rol pozitiv pentru Iran.

**Abstract:** Pan-Iranian area includes a wider space than the one submit to the political boundaries of Iran. Inside this area there are peoples belonging to Iranian culture: Persians, Azeris, Tadjiks, Kurds, Ossetians, Pashtuns, Baluchis, Hazaras. So this movement, and its ideological and cultural essence, differs substantially from the pan-Turkic and pan-Arab movements. Those latter had expansionist territorial aims. The Pan-Iranism emerged as a movement in the nineteenth century due to Shiite clerics, and progressed through the years of the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1909) and the ideology formulated in the early 1920s by the philosopher Mahmoud Afshar. Only in the mid-to-late 1940s was formed a pan-Iranian party. Its clear ideology was the struggle for the defense of Iran against foreign domination. This struggle was leaded by the Shiite clergy. They achieved that goal. In 1979, the revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini was a success. Since then the pan-Iranian movement was revived. The state could lead its own great power policy, without giving up in front of the great powers pressures. Iran has also the ability to support Islamic independence movements. The Pan-Iranism has had, has and will have a positive role for Iran.

**Keywords:** Pan-Iran area, culture, demography, unity.

The Pan-Iranian issue has given birth to a lot of debates so far<sup>1</sup>. When it should

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<sup>1</sup> To discuss the evolution of the Pan-Iranian movement, see, among others, Xavier de Planhol (1993), *Les nations du Prophete, manuel géographique de politique musulmane*, Paris, Fayard, passim; Naser Engheta (2001), *50 years history with the Pan-Iranists*, Los Angeles, passim.

not. It is quite evident if you just consider the matter with some attention. It can be defined as an ideological movement sustaining the solidarity and the unity of all people of the same Iranian spiritual essence living on the Iranian Plateau and its adjacent areas. Consequently, the Pan-Iranian zone expands beyond the political boundaries of the Iranian state. Generally, this area including all the peoples owing their cultural inheritance to the Iranians is known as The Greater Iran. What Richard Nelson Frye<sup>2</sup>, Richard Foltz<sup>3</sup>, the Encyclopaedia Iranica<sup>4</sup> etc. have so far proposed as general concepts is now being completed. By using this personal definition we come to something that exists independently of the ideas concerning it: reality. The Pan-Iranian space includes peoples whose culture have been created or strongly influenced in time by the Iranian spirit: the Persians, the Azeri, the Kurds, the Arabs in the Persian Gulf area, the Belucs, the Tadjiks, the Turkmen, the Osetis, the Abkhaz, part of the Georgians, part of the Armenians, the Afghans, part of the inhabitants in western China<sup>5</sup>. It is easy to prove that in this vast area inhabited by the above mentioned peoples there is a strong Iranian influence<sup>6</sup> which generated the Pan-Iranian ideology and consequently a cultural unification. The Pan-Iranian movement can be compared to the Pan-Romanian one also of a cultural essence. It unites all those of the same Romanian culture. Among them are those living beyond the political borders of Romania, in the south-eastern Europe: in the present-day Republic of Moldavia, in Ukraine, in Bulgaria, in Serbia, in Montenegro, in Macedonia, in Greece, in Hungary etc. The problem arising in this case is very similar to the Pan-Iranism: unity of origin and culture requires unification<sup>7</sup>. This is a completely different from the Pan-

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Nelson Frye, (2005), *The Greater Iran*, Mazda Publish., Costa Mesa, California, passim; idem, (1962), *The Heritage of Persia*, London; Weidenfeld and Nicolson, passim.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Foltz (2000), *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*, Palgrave MacMillan, p.27 et subs.; idem, (2007), *L'Iran, creuset de religion*, P.U., Laval, passim.

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, available at [www.iranica.com](http://www.iranica.com)

<sup>5</sup> Richard Nelson Frye, (2006), *Peoples of Iran*, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica online*, available at [www.iranica.com](http://www.iranica.com).

<sup>6</sup> The Dari language is spoken in the eastern part of Iran and in Afghanistan; in the Afghan Constitution it is declared the official language besides the Pashtu one; the Dari was created as a form of literary language at the court of the Persian Empire in the Middle Ages (cf. Rawan A.G. Farhadi (1975), *The Spoken Dari of Afghanistan: A Grammar of Kaboli Dari (Persian) Compared to the Literary Language*, Kabul, passim).

<sup>7</sup> This problem of the Pan-Romanian-ism was vividly debated within the International Symposium, "Romanitate si Latinitate in Uniunea Europeana", 1<sup>st</sup> edition, May 12, 2007, Craiova; speeches were delivered by prof. Ovidiu Ghidiric, prof. Gh. Buzatu, prof. Tudor Nedelcea, Ivo Gheorghiev – the president of the Union of the Romanian Ethnic in Bulgaria (AVE), prof. Gheorghe Marinov (Bulgaria), Draghisa Radulovici – from the Romanian Democratic Party in Serbia etc.; all of them underlined the idea of the need for a cultural unity of all Romanians as a means of preserving their ethnic being without any territorial claims.

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Turkic and Pan-Arabic ideological movements which clearly pursue a policy of territorial expansion. The two important criteria, the historical and the demographic ones that might lead to a territorial, governmental unification are not taken into consideration. The action taken by The Sublime Porte at the end of the World War One in 1918 stands proof for this. At the time, the Turkish army invaded areas where the inhabitants spoke dialects of the Turkic language. They hoped they might determine a popular demand for unification with Turkey but they did not succeed. There was no such demand on behalf of the speakers of Turkic dialects and in three months the Turkish army was obliged to retreat<sup>8</sup>. One should not look for the origins of the Pan-Iranist movement during the Shah Reza Pahlavi's reign as it has long been sustained. They are of a longer date, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and can be traced in the ideas wisely promoted by the Iranian clerics. They were further developed by the constitutional revolution in between 1905-1911. Eventually, around 1920, as a reverse movement to the Pan-Turkism and Pan-Arabism, a more philosophical "coat" was found to cover the Pan-Iranian ideas thanks to Mahmud Afshar,<sup>9</sup> the philosopher. The main purpose was to save the Iranian essence through what was most typical and representative in their culture promoted and defended by the disciples of Pan-Iranian movement. During the years preceding the world war two, the theories about the superiority of the Arian race became also known in Iran. They were used by the Pan-Arabists in the geopolitical area which they controlled. The ideas helped them to defend the Iranians in front of the offensive led by the Great Powers which were trying to transform the country into a semi-colony. After the world war two broke out in Europe (September 1, 1939), around 1940, Iran was invaded by the English army

<sup>8</sup>Atabi Touraj, (2001), *Recasting Oneself, Rejecting the Other. Pan-Turkism and Iranian Nationalism, in Identity Politics*, in Willem Van Schendel (ed.), *Central Asia and the Muslim World; Nationalism, Ethnicity and Labour in the Twentieth Century*, London, passim.

<sup>9</sup>Mahmoud Afshar (1893-1983), Iranian philosopher and politician, he attended European universities (cf. Ervand Agrahamian, (1982), *Iran: Between the two Revolutions*, Princeton University Press, pp.124-125); Significant for M. Afshar's thinking are the words: "*Our ideal is to develop and strengthen national Unity. The same ideal created the nation-states of Germany, Italy, Poland and Rumania. The same ideal destroyed the multinational state of the Ottoman Empire. What do we mean by "national unity"? We mean the formation of cultural, social and political solidarity among all the people who live within the present borders of Iran. How will we attain national unity? We will attain it by extending the Persian language throughout the province; eliminating regional costumes; destroying local and feudal authorities; and removing the traditional differences between Kurds, Lurs, Qashqayis, Arabs, Turks, Turkomans and other communities that reside within Iran. Our nation will continue to live in danger as long as we have no schools to teach Persian and Iranian history to the masses; no railways to connect the various parts of the country; no books, journals and newspapers to inform the people of their rich Iranian heritage; and no Persian equivalents to replace the many non-Persian place names in Iran. Unless we achieve national unity; Nothing will remain of Iran.*" (cf. M. Afshar, *Our First Desire: The National Unity of Iran*, in "Ayandeh", 1 (June 1925), 5-6).

in the south and by the Soviets in the north<sup>10</sup>. Under the new circumstances the Russian, English, Australian, New-Zealander<sup>11</sup> and American<sup>12</sup> armed forces came into Iran. Then the Pan-Iranism revived becoming a mass movement. It was only natural that such thing should happen because all the Iranian inhabitants were against their being invaded by foreign troops. In 1940 the Pan-Iranian movement was led mostly by students. During 1941 the guerilla fighters started their attacks against the foreigners who wanted to rule over Iran. Towards the fifth decade of the last century when the world war two was already coming to an end, the Pan-Iranian Party was founded. It received immediate support from the people who would not accept foreign interference. The program of the Pan-Iranian Party was a mixture of ideas the dominant one being the belief in the necessity of the unifying and of the solidarity of the entire population living on the Iranian Plateau, that the Iranians could govern themselves and act consciously to revive the "Greater Iran"<sup>13</sup>. The birth of the Pan-Iranian Party was a necessity. It gave a political character to the Pan-Iranian movement unifying the whole population of Iran who would not accept foreign rule<sup>14</sup>. This political action was a binder for those nearly 50 million inhabitants of Iran<sup>15</sup>. At the time there lived here Persians (51%)<sup>16</sup>, Azeri (24%), Gilaki people, Mazandarani people (8%), Kurds (7%), Arabs (3%), Lurs (2%), Baloch people (2%), Turkmen (2%), others (Jews, Armenians, Russians etc.1%). Among these ethnics, obviously the Persians were the more dominant as they were spread all over the country. Owing to their having lived here uninterruptedly, they managed to impose the Farsi language as the official one. The Azeri live mostly in the northern part, towards the Caspian Sea<sup>17</sup>. The Kurds inhabit the area neighboring Turkey, Georgia, Armenia and Iraq. The Arabs, less numerous live in the area towards the Persian Gulf and the boundary

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, (2006), *Istoria relațiilor internaționale*, vol. I, 1919-1947, Bucharest, pp. 291-293.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> The latter ones held key positions especially in Teheran and were represented mostly by the military from OSS.

<sup>13</sup> Abbas Milani, (2008), *Eminent Persians. The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979*, vol. I, Syracuse University Press, New York, pp. 58, 165, 166.

<sup>14</sup> On January 29, 1942 an agreement was signed by Iran, Great Britain and USSR; it stipulated that in six months' time from the end of the war all foreign troops should leave the country; USSR did not observe the agreement (cf. J-B. Duroselle (2006), *op. cit.*, vol. cit, p. 292).

<sup>15</sup> According to the statistic data from June 2009, it is estimated that at present Iran population would count 66,429,384 inhabitants; the ethnic structure remains the same, i.e. the Persians are most numerous.

<sup>16</sup> This name was officially adopted in 1936; it was fully justified as it defined the most numerous ethnic community in Iran; the name "Iranian" evidently designates all the inhabitants of the country, citizens of Iran no matter their ethnic origins.

<sup>17</sup> Being faithful to the Iranian state they brought their full contribution to maintaining its independence and unity against the foreign intervention which had always tried to subdue Iran and rob it of its riches.

with Iraq. This territorial distribution is of relative historical importance. It did not influence the access to political leadership. What was taken into account when promoting political leaders were the individuals' abilities, the way they could better serve the interests of Iran. Thus, the criteria of a very modern synopsis of values, useful for the Pan-Iranians were put into practice. At the end of the world war two, on January 11, 1944, the USSR drew up their plan for territorial expansion expressed in the Maiski report<sup>18</sup>. Joseph V. Djughashvili-Stalin tried to divide Azerbaijan by creating the Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan led by a member of the Tudeh Party, Jafar Pishevari. But his plan failed. He encountered the firm opposition of the Iranians led by ayatollahs and by the Pan-Iranian Party. The Kremlin was obliged to step back, to be content with a small rectification of the pre-war Boundary, "the boundary of serenity" and to sign the beneficial petroleum agreement instead<sup>19</sup>. This meant the success of the Pan-Iranian Party supported by the Muslim clergy. At the same time, almost simultaneously, another successful outcome was achieved in Kurdistan. The Soviets had again interfered. They had assigned the rank of Soviet general to the Kurdish leader Barzaiani. Fortunately, the Kurds' secessionist action could be stopped and the area inhabited by them was reinstated as belonging to Iran. In 1951, the Pan-Iranian Party broke up following the resourceful actions of the Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi's people. One faction of the party led by Moshen Pezeshkpour, which had also kept the party name. Considered it should act on behalf of the monarchic state. A second faction led by Darius Forouhar took the name of Mellat Iran. Forouhar considered the overthrow of the existent monarchic system as necessary because it subordinated Iran to the foreigners. In the country, those who were dissatisfied with the Shah's policy of subordination to the foreigners started preparing a vast movement of popular uprising led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. He acted very wisely. When the Shah's attempts at making Khomeini obey failed, the latter was exiled first in Turkey, then in Iraq. The Ayatollah made good use of the Iranians' work to produce transistor devices. While in the holy city of Najaf, in Iraq, the Ayatollah thought of an intelligent plan: to make good use of Iranians' work to produce transistor devices. As the Iranians were skilled workers, they had been weaving carpets for centuries, so their fingers could easily handle the thin transistor wires which required great precision. Each family had at least one

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<sup>18</sup> Ivan Maiski, ex- ambassador of USSR in London had proposed in his report the rectification of the boundaries of USSR in such a way that a "real no man's land" should be created before one could get to the territories inhabited by the Russians (cf. Vladimir O. Pechatnov, *The Big Three after World War II. New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Postwar Relations with the United States and Great Britain*, in "Cold War International History Project", Working Papers, no.13, July 1995, passim).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Natalia I. Yegorova, *The "Iran Crisis" of 1945-46; A View from the Russian Archives*, in "Cold War International History Project", Working Papers no. 15, May 1996, passim.

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transistor radio in the house. From his residence in Najaf, the Ayatollah would send to Iran thousands of cassettes with his antimonarchic speeches demanding a change in the spirit of the Pan-Iranian doctrine. The Ayatollah became the leader of the Islamic clergy and of the Iranians. In 1979 the revolution broke out. The Shah was removed and the Islamic Republic of Iran was proclaimed.

From this moment on, the Islamic Republic of Iran could assert itself as a fully independent state, in the spirit of the Pan-Iranian doctrine from its beginnings. Consequently, a vast action of achieving the unity and the solidarity of the whole population of the same Iranian culture was initiated with the aim of carrying out a continuous development both on short term and long one.

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