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TÍTULO: El papel de los armenios en la defensa de Irán (desde 1977 hasta 1987).

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RESUMEN: ¿Cómo fue la interacción y la cooperación de los armenios en Irán como un grupo minoritario con el liderazgo de la revolución y los musulmanes iraníes defendiendo al país durante los ocho años de la guerra de Irak contra Irán? ¿Cuánto fue el alcance de tal cooperación e interacción? Estas fueron preguntas del estudio. En los hallazgos del estudio, durante los ocho años de guerra de Irak contra Irán, los armenios, como minoría religiosa, asistieron a los campos de batalla junto con sus compatriotas musulmanes bajo la guía de sus líderes religiosos y la dirección del Imam Jomeini. Como resultado importante del estudio, si todos los grupos de la sociedad, independientemente de sus diferencias religiosas, los intereses personales y de facciones se unen bajo un liderazgo sabio, pueden enfrentarse a los enemigos beligerantes, sin importar lo poderosos que sean y derrotarlos.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Armenios, musulmanes, defensa sagrada, asistencia y cooperación, diferencias religiosas.

TITLE: The role of Armenians in defending Iran (from 1977 to 1987).

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ABSTRACT: How was the interaction and cooperation of Armenians in Iran as a minority group with the leadership of the revolution and Iranian Muslims defending the country during the eight years of Iraq's war against Iran? How much was the extent of such cooperation and interaction? They were questions addressed in the study. In the study findings, during the eight years of Iraq's war against Iran, the Armenians as religious minority attended the battlefields along with their Muslim compatriots under the guidance of their religious leaders and the leadership of Imam Khomeini. As important result of the study, if all the groups in society, regardless of their religious differences, personal and factional interests are united under a wise leadership, they can well stand up against the belligerent enemies, not matter how powerful they are, and defeat them.

KEY WORDS: Armenians, Muslims, sacred defense, assistance and cooperation, religious differences.

INTRODUCTION.

Undoubtedly, the issue of defending the homeland has long been considered as an important duty among all nations, and hardly any ethnic groups can be found to remain silent in the face of the invasion of enemies to their territory and land. The Iranian people are among one of the well-known nations that have defended their homeland well over the course of history and defeated the aggression of the enemies. Although in some periods, due to the incompetence of the rulers, for instance the dark era of Qajar dynasty, some regions of the country have been separated from our homeland. In the great migration of Armenians, which took place during the Safavid period upon the orders of Shah Abbas, a large number of Armenians came to Iran, and since then they have been living in this land as part of the Iranian nation by keeping their beliefs and ceremonies, and along with their countryman did not hesitate to make any efforts for the honor and prosperity of this territory. As a case in point, some prominent Armenian figures played an important role in the Constitutional Revolution Movement in order to achieve the ideals of the revolution. They also fought against the tyranny of Pahlavi Regime by taking part in marches and demonstrations during the Islamic Revolutionary Movement (davoodabadi & Aghajani, 2013; Ajallooeian et al, 2018).

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran, which suffered a lot of damage due to the revolution, suddenly was attacked and cowardly invaded by the Iraqi Ba'ath regime led by Saddam Hussein, and some parts of the Iran's land were occupied by the aggressive forces. In response, the Armenian people, along their Muslim compatriots, following the leadership of the revolution and maintaining unity and integrity, attended the battlefields and bravely defended their national-religious dignity, and eventually, after eight years of sacrifice and resistance, brought away the victory for Iranian people in a way that such a unity and sympathy have been never seen during the contemporary history in other countries (Özer et al, 2018; Shahbazi & Ardalani, 2018).

This descriptive-analytical study try to explain the interaction and cooperation of Armenians in Iran as a minority group with the leadership of the revolution and Iranian Muslims defending the country during the eight years of Iraq's war against Iran in terms of military, technical, engineering, logistic, financial, and supportive aspects.

DEVELOPMENT.

Armenians, Islamic Revolution, and Imposed War.

A large number of Armenians immigrated to the Iranian plateau during the reign of Shah Abbas Safavi and settled in different cities. During the history of their migration, the people faced ups and

downs and have not been indifferent to the events of the country, including the Islamic Revolutionary Movement as one of the most important political-social changes of the twentieth century and they have actively participated in it. Participation in the marches and demonstrations and active attendance in battlefields are the honors of these people from 1977 to 1987. During this period, in addition to suffering heavy financial losses and social damage, Armenians sacrificed many martyrs, veterans and missing people to defend the land of Islamic Iran and some of them have also been captured by the invading enemy.

Armenians and Islamic Revolution.

The history of Iran's nation began with a revolution in 1978 and was culminated in the following year. The mass demonstrations and strikes, and the apparent and hidden campaigns of hundreds of thousands of Iranian men and women, old and young, eventually led to the victory of the Islamic Revolution on February 22, 1979, as one of the most important socio-political changes of the twentieth century, and then, a new ruling system with a religious-Islamic pattern was formed in the world.

The spiritual atmosphere that arose in the Islamic Revolution also had a serious impact on Armenian fellow citizens, such as Shahid Vartan Arakelian, in the wake of the revolution and the fall of the Pahlavi dictator regime. At that time, the Armenian people joined the massive protests of revolutionary Muslim fellow citizens and sacrificed their lives.

The presence of Armenians along with other groups of the Iranian people in the Islamic Revolution is a great event from a religious and substantive perspective, which requires the careful and scientific investigation by religious scholars regardless of its historical narrative. Furthermore, the prudent guidance of the Armenian community of Iran by the late Caliph Ardak Manokian, the Armenian religious leader, ensured the presence of Armenians in the Islamic Revolution. The trust in the religious leadership of the Muslims or the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist was not a new phenomenon for the Armenian Christian community, who, according to the historical evidences, lived for hundreds of years in the same way under the authority of the religious leaders of the Gregory Church. Therefore, they regarded religious leaders as the guardians of their lives, properties, and their honor and accepted the rule of to their leader, Imam Khomeini (RA).

Given the ideological principles and the content of the slogan of "Neither East nor West" of the Islamic Revolutionary Movement which aimed to gain true independence, it was clear to all from the very beginning that difficult days await the Iranian nation and people. The various internal conflicts followed one after another in Kurdistan, Turkmen Sahra, Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchestan, and other regions. The Armenians, like other Iranian fellow citizens, followed these events apprehensively. On the other hand, all national and civil affairs and rules were changing, and on the other hand, colonial and imperial powers, which saw their vital interests at risk, created many problems for the Islamic Republic of Iran day after day.

Armenians and Imposed War.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Saddam Hussein, the ruling dictator of the Iraqi Ba'ath regime, with full support from the East and West and Arab reactionary rulers imposed a full-fledged and unprecedented war on Iran and its nascent revolution. In response, the Armenian minority as the largest group of Christians in Iran, along with the massive wave of its Muslim compatriots, entered into an unwanted and unequal war with a spiritual and epic spirit and after eight years of heroic and unique resistance forced the invading enemy to surround and retreat and abandon its illogical and unreasoned demands. This section briefly discusses the role and the presence of this religious minority during the imposed war.

Armenians and Imposed War (Position Announcements).

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the duration of military service was reduced from two years to one year, and many senior military commanders have been stripped of their work by revolutionary settlement, foreign military advisers have been expelled from the country, and purchase contracts for military equipment and modern weapons were cancelled, and Abolhassan Bani-Sadr (President of the time and head of the Supreme Council of Defense) had serious disagreements with the revolutionary leader and the heads of the legislature and judiciary systems.

The Iranian army was in a difficult and inappropriate situation. In contrast, the army of the Iraqi Ba'ath regime was in very good conditions, so that those who were born in 1955 and 1956 and the army reserve forces were recruited, modern military equipment was purchased, and new bases were built on the border with Iran. In addition, the expansionism nature of Saddam Hussein (the head of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq), and obtaining the approval of the United States and his regional tails, and the assurances of their full support, led the Iraqi Ba'athist regime imposed a full-fledged and unexpected war on Iran and its nascent revolution and began to occupy thousands of kilometers of Iran's land and brought a lot of damages to the country's most important and strategic centers.

At that time, representatives of religious minorities in the Islamic Consultative Assembly as well as institutions, publications, associations, and their affiliated organizations issued some statements and declarations condemning the Ba'athist aggressors, and announcing the readiness of Armenians and other minorities to participate in war and help their Muslim brothers and guardians of the independence of the country.

One of these declarations said:

"Dear Fellow Citizens,

In this difficult and critical situation, the ruthless and treacherous enemy has invaded our country with his brutal attacks on our cities and villages, their bombing, as well as the killing of our

defenseless and unprotected citizens, and at this critical moment we must do our patriotic duty and use all the material and spiritual resources to assist the brave children of our country and to repay our debt to our religion and our beloved homeland" (Arax Monthly Magazine, 1975, 10).

Another declaration said:

"The war imposed by Iraq against the Islamic Republic of Iran is the first and most important issue that we all have to put it at the forefront and address it. It's such an important issue that has overshadowed all other issues before finding a just solution for and putting an end to it" (Ibid).

The Armenian and Assyrian Christian, Zoroastrian, and Jewish Minority Joint Group also published the following statement regarding the invasion of Iraqi Ba'athist mercenaries:

"The Ba'athist regime of Iraq waged a war against the Iranian people and the Islamic regime of Iran to help imperialists to regain their domination over our homeland. The Ba'athists, who have no base among the people and are confronted with the Iraqi people every day and serve the global imperialist and at the top of it the United States on the pretext of border disputes and with the support of other mercenary nations. While expressing its disgust at the invasion of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq's borders, this group calls on all minority citizens to actively participate in the Sāzmān-e Basij-e Mostaz'afin to suppress the Iraqi invasion, and strengthen their unity with other Iranian brothers and defend our country's borders along with our Islamic brothers to the last breath" (Jomhouri-e Eslami Newspaper, 1981, 3).

Religious leaders and officials of the Armenian community of Iran, as the largest Christian religious and ethnic group, immediately after the start of the imposed war, sent a telegram to the leader of the Islamic Revolution and the commander-in-chief and other authorities of the country and declared the full readiness of the Armenian community to safeguard the achievements of the Iranian nation and the territorial integrity of the homeland (Alik Newspaper, 1981, 1).

The Caliphate Council, in a telegram sent to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, criticizing the invasion of foreign forces to Iran, congratulated the accomplishments made by the Iranian Armey and other armed forces, and declared the readiness of the Armenians to defend the country's independence and its territorial integrity. At the same time, the Caliphate Council announced the readiness of the Armenians to donate blood to the wounded by sending telegrams to the Military Governor of Tehran (Ibid).

Armenian and Imposed War (Military and Logistic).

Following the issuance of statements and declarations, the Armenian people started to support the soldiers and troops defending the country as their main dusty and they set up coordinating offices for collecting cash and material donations and sending them to battlefields and war-stricken regions; for instance, to help the Armenian war victims in Khuzestan, they formed a committee called the Central Committee for Relief to War-Stricken Armenians in Khuzestan. The committee was able to provide some of the food requirements such as rice, oil, sugar, cheese, tea, and clothing for the Armenian war victims, using the public help.

Some of the war victims settled in Isfahan and Tehran, and some in other areas. The members of this committee were the active members of the Armenian associations and unions in Tehran. Some of the aid was provided to the committee by the Iran's Red Crescent Organization. The Association of Armenian Physicians also declared its readiness to provide free assistance to the relevant committee. Thus, many of the war victims benefited from the free medical services. Providing some of the drugs that could be made available in the country was also on the agenda (Alik Newspaper, 1981, 1981, 1-2).

In Ahvaz, three Armenian youths launched the Relief and Defense Center a few days after the start of the war. This center was formed at the Armenian Karoon School in Ahvaz, and its activities continued for two years. Dozens of Armenian youth in Khuzestan were working in the center. In

coordination with the Ahwaz Basij Base, the center was equipped with firearms. The association of Armenian soldiers attending battlefields with their families and the protection of Armenian churches and houses were a part of the center's goals. At the same time, members of the center used to help the wounded after the bombings in urban districts of Ahwaz, and after providing first aids took them to the hospital (Boodaghians, 2006, 205).

On Sunday, October 26, 1980, after the Iraqi Army invaded Khuzestan, some of Ahwaz's residential houses and its suburbs were destroyed. During the bombing, Saint Mesrop Church was also hit by shrapnel and a large crack appeared in its dome.

In Tehran, the Armenian youth formed public volunteer committees and established guard posts in various parts of the Armenian neighborhoods. Hundreds of these young people contributed to the establishment of urban order by night-time guarding and helping people in need in their neighborhoods. The headquarters of Narmak, Zarkesh, and Vahidieh were located in the Sipan Cultural Sport Association. The first headquarter was volunteered train the interested people on how to use of firearms and what to do in medical emergencies (Alik Newspaper, 1981, 2).

In a short time, the offices coordinating the collection of cash and goods from Armenians throughout the country were established in Tehran and various cities including Isfahan and Tabriz, and they deposited the costs of New Year's celebrations during the war time into accounts opened at banks by the help centers.

The tripartite caliphate councils of the Iranian Armenians with the publication of official announcements, asked Armenians to avoid holding Christmas New Year celebrations. In an announcement by the Armenian Caliphate Council of Tehran, it was emphasized that due to the warfare situation of the country and in order to respect the martyrs of war, the Armenian community was asked to avoid holding the New Year ceremonies in clubs, public places, and schools and instead hold simple ceremonies in their families.

The Armenians were required to deposit the money that they were going to spend for the New Year celebrations in the account number 499 of Saderat Bank in the name of Armenian Caliphate Council in order to help the war victims, and all Armenian schoolchildren were recommended to deposit the funds they spend on new year gifts into the same account number on the behalf of their schools' officials (Jomhouri-e Eslami, 1980, 11). It was also reported that a Christian mother donated her children's New Year gifts to the Iranian soldiers in the battlefields (Jomhouri-e Eslami Newspaper, 1981, 5). The mother, who referred to the Office of the Islamic Republic Party in Urmia to deposit her children's funds into the account assigned to war-stricken people, whilst expressing her disgust of Saddam and his assistants, stated that those who are fighting in the battlefields are our children and we are living here in comfort because of their brave actions (Ibid).

Armenian schools began collecting cash aids and goods from parents and student associations and various programs were organized in all the associations and clubs, and on various occasions against Iraq's invasion of the Islamic nation. In their marchers on various occasions and their ceremonies in churches, Armenian students repeatedly expressed their solidarity with Iranian soldiers and troops in the battlefields.

Convoys of Armenian gifts sent to the battlefields were also accompanied by a special ceremony. The lectures given at this ceremony shed light on the conditions of that time to a great extent for the younger and future generations. At the ceremony to grant the public aids of the Armenian people to the battlefields held in the presence of the Armenian martyrs' families and a group of representatives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly in the Saint Sarkis Cathedral, the Archbishop of Armenians talked about the Iranian Armenians' solidarity with his Muslim brothers from the first days of the revolution, as well as during the imposed war, and said: "Armenians of Iran have fought in the battlefields along with their Muslim brothers with all their spiritual and material resources, and the

contributions made by Armenian students and artisans have been appreciated for many times by the respective authorities (Jomhouri-e Eslami Newspaper, 1986, 2).

At the ceremony, the head of Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Martyrs Foundation said: "The key to our victory is continuous assistance to the battlefields, and these are our people who give up their lives and help the soldiers in the battlefields, as the dignity and independence of our country depend on this unity and sacrifice, and this is a fact that we will end this imposed war with victory (Ibid).

Blood donation was one of the most beautiful things done repeatedly by Iranian Armenians during the imposed war. The dispatch of doctors and nurses to the battlefields was another important activity of the Armenian Supporting Center of Imposed Battlefields (Alik Newspaper, Special Issue of the War Week, 1986, 2; Jomhouri-e Eslami Newspaper, 1986, 2).

In order to defend the independence and territorial integrity of Iran, the brave Armenian youths did not forget their important responsibility and considered participation in the battlefields and assistance to their Muslim brothers as a patriotic duty. Many of these young people were conscripted to military service, thus performing their duty towards the country. Besides, many volunteered to participate in all battlefields did their best from the front line to support and logistics units.

During the eight years of the holy defense, hundreds of Armenian youths were dispatched to the battlefields in the form of major military units. The voluntary participation of Iranian Armenians in the war was a hard blow to those who were enemies of Iran's unity. In only one case, four hundred Armenian young people who had previously done their military service were voluntarily sent to the battlefields after holding special and magnificent ceremonies at the Church of Saint Gregory (Alik Newspaper, 1980, 1).

The dispatch of Armenian volunteers to war and sacred defense is not an issue that can be easily disregarded. This movement contains a very valuable message that should be transmitted to future generations so that they know that Armenian Christians did not leave alone their nation in defending the territorial integrity of Iran and Islamic values.

Armenians and Imposed War (Organization of Technical and Specialized Groups).

Organization and dispatch of volunteer groups by the Armenian Trilogy Caliphate Council of Iran was one of the most important activities performed by the Iranian Armenians of Iran during the imposed war.

From the beginning to the end of the war, hundreds of the best Armenian technicians went to the battlefields to repair and launch heavy weapons. This group mostly included heavy and light machinery, military, logistics, road construction, power, telecommunication, and refrigeration technicians who used to repair scrap machineries or in need of major repairs, which should have necessarily been sent to cities and well-equipped repair shops. They immediately repaired such equipment and machineries in the same region. In a situation where a military vehicles or heavy road construction machineries, well-equipped refrigeration warehouses, interim power plants, and even military equipment and warfare were vital to combatants and advancement of military objectives, these craftsmen could, in the shortest possible time, meet such requirements. Another group of craftsmen in their workshops, in particular Tehran and Arak, started to build mobile hospitals, mobile baths, mobile toilets and other needed equipment and granted them to the soldiers fighting in the battlefields (Lazarian, 2003, 45).

In one of the repair and operating missions, a group of 23 Armenian engineers and specialists managed to reconstruct more than 140 military and service vehicles during two round-the-clock weeks of hard work in the areas behind the front and send them for reuse in the battlefield (Arax Monthly Magazine, 1995, 10).

Armenian specialists were usually sent the battlefields through special ceremonies. In one of these ceremonies, the Caliphate Armenian Archbishop of Tehran, referring to the statements of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution concerning the extensive participation of various sectors of society in the battlefields, said:

Since the beginning of the imposed war, the Armenians, in addition to the dispatch of manpower, have frequently been contributing many aids to the war support center both in cash and in kind. The Iranian Armenians stated once again their support for the Islamic Republic of Iran and the leadership of Imam Khomeini, and I appreciate all officials in the country for the open political and religious conditions that have been provided for the Armenians (Jomhouri-e Eslami Newspaper, 1983, 2).

Another ceremony for dispatching Armenian craftsmen to battlefields was held in November 1986 in the Saint Sarkis Cathedral accompanied by the passionate welcome of Christian clergymen and Armenian caliphate officials, the Armenian representative in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the families of Armenian martyrs, missing persons, prisoners of war and veterans, and different groups of people. In this ceremony, the volunteers said a special prayer in the church, did homage to the Bible, laid flowers at the monument of the Armenian martyrs, and listened to the speeches of the Armenian great caliph, Ardak Manoukian, the Chairman of the Caliphate Council, and Armenian representative in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and they were dispatched to the battlefields as escorted by the audience. At this ceremony, the Armenian great caliph stated that assisting combating forces is the main duty of every Iranian, including Muslims and religious minorities (Gowshika & Sivakumar, 2017; Madhumathi & Sakthi, 2019).

The Chairman of the Caliphate Council and Armenian representative in the Islamic Consultative Assembly expressed the readiness of all Armenians to participate in the battlefields until the final victory and the satisfaction of the fair requirements of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Jomhouri-e Eslami Newspaper, 1986, 2).

Armenians and Imposed War (Self-sacrifice and Martyrdom).

War is associated with martyrdom, captivity, and injury of soldiers and civilians. Since the onset of the imposed war on September 22, 1980, and the bombing of Iranian cities, the bitter moments of farewell to the rosy-shrouded martyrs was also part of the everyday life of all Iranians. In a special farewell ceremony with the martyrs held in the special section of the Armenian martyrs in the Armenian cemetery of Tehran, thousands of Armenians, families of martyrs, Christian and Muslim figures and representatives from the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the Joint Staff of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army and revolutionary institutions, while holding bouquets and singing songs in honor of the Armenian martyrs, gathered on the graves of the Armenian martyrs in the open space of the Saint Howans Cathedral located in the Armenian Tomb of the Armenian martyrs who were martyred on the battlefields when fighting against Iraqi forces and glorified them.

In an elaborated speech, Bishop Manokaian stated that during these days that will be recorded in the history of Iran, Muslim and Christian brothers together will fight with the weapon of faith to save the territory of their homeland so that their other sisters and brothers will enjoy the blessings of full independence. Iranian Armenians have always been and will be with their Muslim brothers and sisters and will powerfully continue their struggle against those who try to create discord between Christian and Muslim brothers and sisters until the final victory (Jomhouri-e Eslami Newspaper, 1981, 2).

Hujjat al-Islam Alami, the representative of the Joint Staff of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army, Fouad Karimi, a representative of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and "Afjah", representing Islamic Revolution Martyr Foundation appreciated the Armenian martyrs in their speeches addressing the Armenians of Tehran, and stated that faith is the protector of independence, integrity and unity of the people of Iran. In a part of his speech pointing to the common goals of Christianity and Islam, Hujjat al-Islam Alami told the audience: "Your loved ones, as you have struggled so far along with the Iranian nation, in the pursuit of our common goals, you must show to the foreign governments that Christianity also aims to deny polytheism and humans' exploiting each other and ensure their freedom. The Muslim and Armenian youths have signed their goals with their blood and have proved that oppressors will no longer be able to use our nations as a means to reach their goals (Alik Newspaper, 1981, 1).

At the same ceremony, the Army representative said: "I am glad to be with Armenian brothers and sisters, but I'm sorry that I am visiting you in such a situation. Your sisters and mothers are mourning like our sisters and mothers. As representatives of the army, we see the cooperation of Christians and Muslims in this gathering. I must say that Jesus Christ (AS) is also our prophet. Of course, saying this is not to adhere to politeness, but this is one of our religious beliefs. We will confront whoever stands against Christianity".

Fouad Karimi, a representative of the Islamic Consultative Assembly with the permission of the Archbishop Ardak Manokian and the people present at the ceremony, saluted all the warriors who were fighting against oppression and stated: Peace be upon all those who have been martyred in the history of the Shari'a. Peace be upon all those martyrs who fought alongside their prophets and the current martyrs who continue their way. Peace be upon all Armenian martyrs from the beginning to the present and those martyrs who are sleeping in peace here.

CONCLUSIONS.

From the beginning of the imposed war and following the leadership of the Islamic Revolution, the religious leaders of the Armenian community, through their verdicts and fatwas, called on their people to participate actively in various scenes and to safeguard achievements, independence, and territorial integrity of Iran.

The Armenians, following their leaders and mobilizing their material and spiritual resources, attended the battlefields along with their Muslim fellow citizens and by participating in various operations actually showed that they can defend the achievements of the Islamic Revolution and confront the Baathist enemy and force them to surrender. Therefore, it can be suggested that the Iranian people and tribes can, by disregarding their ideological differences and following the wise leadership and maintaining unity and solidarity, overcome the invading enemy through resistance and self-sacrifice, no matter even if the enemy is supported by regional and global powers.

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