

The Impact of the World War I on Iran's External Trade

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ABSTRACT

Russia's enjoying 5% customs franchise in Golestan and Torkamanchai treaty as well as other European countries' gaining the mentioned franchise, drastically, increased the amount of imported goods from Europe to Iran which changed the consumption model in Iran. Thereupon, consuming different European goods became a routine habit of Iranian lives. However, by the emergence of the World War I, and consequently, Russian Revolution meanwhile the World War, had a great influence on the amount of Iran's external trades; and the difference between the import and the export had a negative effect on Iran's business scale. The findings of this research based on statistical analysis show that although the decrease in production, vast destruction of factories, and lack of security in the transformational routes between Europe and Iran leads to decrease in Europe's export to Iran, its effect on the decline of Iran's export to Europe was much more drastic.

KEYWORDS: War; external trade; import; export; textile; Russia; England; Germany; Ottoman; France

INTRODUCTION & THE STATEMENT of PROBLEM

The beginning of the twentieth century is an important era in Iran's history: on one hand, the Iranians' revival, and on the other hand, the presence of alien governors and in Iran, the deployment of Allies and Allied against each other, the out breaking of the World War I in 1914, and Iran's unintentional exposure in this war. Consecutively, some problems and obstacles have been immersed in Iran's business tasks. Although some of which were international, some parts were related to the special Iran's situation. Some parts of the problems were due to the blocking of transitional routes; the famine, during the war, led to some commercial and social problems too; while, before the war, Iran's trade by its major business partners was growing. Therefore, by the out breaking of the war, Iran's amount of trade decreased which continued during the war. The presence of Russian forces in the north and English forces in the south made some business problems in these areas too. While, as it was mentioned before, Iran's trade had a stable growth before the war; on the other hand, Iran's geographical position, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, had paved the way for the commercial dominance of both Russia and England in the region. These countries were trying to gain dominance in economy, and more particularly, in Iran's trade in order to sell their goods. Although, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Iran's commerce was traditional and its major exports were agricultural products, raw materials (raw silk, cotton, and opium), gold, and silver, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was the turn to product and to export carpet. While, in the twentieth century and by the oil discovery in Iran, the export of non-petroleum goods decreased which caused Iran's economy to revive by merely one product in the following years. Thereupon, Russia's and England's interference on one side, and, on the other, the presence of German and Ottoman army tending Iran to enter the war led Iran to political and commercial crisis.

The present research worked on the external factors of the crisis rather than statistics. Also, in this research, Iran's major commercial partners during the war are analyzed regarding their importance.

A. Iran's external trade's amount and combination during World War I

Along with other economic parts, Iran's trade and commerce during 1915 and 1916 was affected by domestic problems and war's side effects, as a result of increase in foreign debts and deficit of business scale, which led to deflation [1]. Iran's trade, which had a drastic decrease in the years after the constitutional era, stopped progressing in this period. For instance, the amount of Iran's trade with England, which grew 12 times from 1800 to 1914, reached a negative scale [2].

World War's out breaking also led to the decrease of Iran's trade amount [3]. It caused a great loss to Iran's trade; import rate reached from 647 million qiran, at the beginning of war, to 482 million qiran, and export also decreased from 447 million qiran to 138 million qiran, which imbalanced the trade and export of gold and silver and had a negative effect on people's afford and employment [4]. Although, before the war, Russia's demand for the items such as cotton, wool, carpet, dried fruits, wheat, and barley gradually improved Iran's export, trading with

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England was not satisfying because Iran's goods were not valuable in Bombay's market [5]. Iran's whole trade between 21, March, 1913 and 20, March, 1914 was more than 1,103,004,476 qiran which increased by 99,095,566 qiran from the previous year, while, by the out breaking of war, this amount decreased suddenly [6]. Also, taxes on goods' import and export by the most favored nations were two times of tariff, which damaged development of Iran's external trade, for example, cotton dropped to its lowest level [7]. Therefore, in the first year of the war, 21, March, 1914- 20, March, 1915, import decreased by 22% and export by 13%. The whole trade in this year was 89,538,773 qiran which is related to these goods:

In Import

1. Lived animals, increase by 547,570 qiran or 25.5%
2. Drinks and Food, decrease by 7,463,349 qiran or 29.6%
3. Raw materials, decrease by 1,469,000 qiran or 3%
4. Made products, decrease by 83,963,579 qiran or 25.5%
5. Valuable metals and gold and silver coins, increase by 11,675,573 qiran or 77.6%

In Export

1. Lived animals, decrease by 1,062,195 qiran or 9.8%
2. Drinks and food, decrease by 1,575,495 qiran or 1.2%
3. Raw materials, decrease by 18,445,529 qiran or 8.4%
4. Made products, decrease by 35,314,710 qiran or 43.9%
5. Valuable metals and gold and silver coins, increase by 3,383,843 qiran or 19.9%

By comparing above statistics, it is clear that exporting animals decreased because of famine and in order to provide food loss, while its import increased. Decreasing in import of drinks and raw materials was more than its decreasing in export, while made products had a great decrease in export. Import and export of gold and silver show that export is more than import [7].

Also, because of Dardanelles closure, trade to Iran through Black Sea was cut, and cotton texture and other goods, which exported from Russia to Iran in past, were passing from India to Iran and then to Caucasus and countries beyond Caspian Sea [8]. Jamalzade, in Shaygan's Treasury, estimated Iran's decrease in trade in the first year of the war by 19% [9]. Even, Trade's deflation during the war also led to decrease in textile's export [10].

B. Iran's trade with its major business partners

Out breaking of World War I in 1914 caused a temporary compromise between Russia and England which led to sign the contract of 1915. Iran declared impartiality in the war; however, when Ottoman entered the war for Germany, English, Russian, and Ottoman forces invaded to Iran [11]. Though, despite the war, Russia maintained its superiority as Iran's first business partner until 1917, and then England placed itself as the first [12]. However, later, especially in Pahlavi's time, by Germany's gaining power, England's uncontested mastery in Iran decreased [13].

Iran and Russia trades

Among countries suffering Russia's oppression, Iran was one of those whose voice could not be heard by Europeans due to its distance [14]. These trades developed at the beginning of the twentieth century, and Russia became Iran's first external trade partner because Iran's agricultural and mineral areas were near to Russia's treasury [15].

Iran's trade with this country, after signing Torkamanchai treaty, increased which continued until the war. According to Iran custom, this treaty made Russia as Iran's first trade partner [16]. While, in the first year of the war, whole trade amount decreased by 18%, Iran's export to Russia was increasing [17]. Out breaking of the war had a negative effect on Iran's trade with Russia since Iran's import decreased by 21%, and its export decreased by 13% in comparison to its previous year's level. However, Russia was still the best customer of Iran, and also, the best seller of Iran goods. Russia had the 66% of Iran's whole export, and 56% of its whole import [18]. Russia was the most important importing country to Iran until 1915 [19]. Before the war, Iran's export to Russia was increasing, but this amount had a drastic decrease at the end of the war in 1921 [20]. Because of the war, cargo ships movement was also limited, so Russia's import from other countries decreased which was a good chance for Iran to export its citrus to this country and gain a lot of benefit [21]. Due to the war, cotton price decreased from 50 to 32 Tomans and because of the decrease in Manat value, Iranian cotton merchants could not gain benefits [22]. From 1915 to 1916, the amount of Iran's import from Russia was 266,753,827 qiran, and its export was 267,170,346 qiran. By referring to the table of Iran and Russia's trade, one can see the decrease of trade between the two countries in comparison to previous years [23]. The major importing goods in this year were sugar, steel, wood, iron, match, cotton tread, and cotton velvet. However, there was decrease in importing oil, iron tools, and flour because of Russia's prohibition of

exporting these items [24]. By referring to this table, one sees that exporting some goods like wool, leather, tread, fruits, and gum increased for army's need; on the contrary, exporting live animals, egg, wool carpet, and skin decreased as well as exporting silver coins due to Iran's prohibiting it. Between 1916 and 1917, the whole trade between the two countries decreased by 20%, especially in Iran's import from Russia due to the direct effect of war on that [25].

In 1917 and 1918, the trade between the two countries stopped, and England found the chance to trade in Iran with no rival. Bamdad Roshan Newspaper: "Due to the closure of Russian routes, some imported goods like rice, cotton, and raisins spoiled in stocks which weakened the trade between the two countries".

Therefore, import decreased by 52%, and export by 49% [26]. On one hand, because of Russian Revolution in October 1917, it was not able to pay the renting cost of North's fishery; on the other hand, it was abolished due to prohibition of carrying gold money from Russia; it was given again to Russia later, though [27].

Imported goods included silver coins, sugar, oil, haberdashery, tea, glass, cotton tread and texture, and rice. Exporting goods were fruits, rice, raw cotton, opium, raw wool, and raw skin [28]. 1918-1919 was the year of Iran and Russia's trade crisis. Russia, which was Iran's first trade partner, faced a drastic trade decrease in this year from 269,558,508 qiran to 8,632,255 qiran (88% decrease), and the whole trade between the two countries declined to 12% [29]. Torabi Farsani claims the decrease due to Iran's actions in banning export of food, and calls it a catastrophe for North merchants [30]. In this year, importing of clothes, leather, cotton and wool cloth, and grains increased; however, some of them were imported from England, India, or Japan, and were just transited from Iran [31].

According to Iran custom's statistics, the most decrease in export was in 1920-1921, from 754,472,664 qiran to 8,614,931 qiran, it increased a bit, though, at the end of this year and reached to 20,103,147 qiran [32].

Therefore, due to the war and Russian revolution, the trade between the two countries faced disorder.

Iran and England trade

Britain, Iran's second business partner, had the same view as Russia about trading with Iran in order to gain its political goals in this country. Its benefit through trading with Iran was between 5 and 10 million Pounds [33]. After Russia and England, Ottoman, Germany, France, Austria, America, China, and Netherland were the next Iran's external trade partners [34]. Before the war, Iran and England trade was progressing in South [35]. Therefore, English government started building roadway in South, which was not at all beneficial [36]. Also, in order to limit Russia and Germany trade, England bribed Bakhtiari Tribe's masters who had a share in oil benefits [37]. On the other hand, in order to develop trade and to gain benefit, set its army in Makran and Sistan, and started moving in Persian Gulf [38]. According to India's trade council, the value of Iran's trade with Britain was more than 2,490,009 Liras in the first years of the twentieth century, 2,138,112 liras of which was related to import and 351,897 liras to export [39].

Iran's major trade with England was done in four important ports in Persian Gulf and three ports in Caspian Sea [40]. Out breaking of war in 1914, provided England with full commercial exclusiveness in Persian Gulf [41]. Business bounds between the two countries increased a bit, but the import decreased by 17% because England involved in the war [42]. Imported silver bars increased a little by Royal bank in order to coin, and decrease in import was related to some goods like tea, cotton, wooden objects, rice, spice, and chemical products. Also, the export of some goods such as pearl, fruit, medicine, cotton, and gum decreased during the war [43]. However, due to exporting oil as well as opium (mostly from Bandarabbas and Boushehr), and silver coins, Iran's export to England increased to some extent [44]. Iran imports from England included cotton textile, tea, sugar, rice, silver bar, spice, iron, steel, cotton and wool cloth, chemical products, match, and grains. And major exports were opium, oil, fruit, gum, wool, silver coin, woolen carpets, skin, pearl, tobacco, fish, lived animals, flour, and vegetables [45]. If the war finishes, and if there is peace in Persian Gulf, the amount of import and export may be more than its rate before the war. Although the trade in this region did not stopped, it faced many problems including shortage of cargo ships, high transportation cost, decrease in import and export with Europe, wars and unrest in Iran and Mesopotamia area due to war [46]. In 1916-1917, Iran's trade with England increased by 36% in import and 13% in export. In 1917-1918, Iran's trade with England increased, while its trade with Russia decreased. Iran export to England reached to 32% of its whole trade, and its import to 67% which shows the great difference during the war [47].

Major import in this year included grain, tea, wool textile, flour, charcoal, sugar, rice, iron, and cotton textile while export included opium, oil, raw cotton, gum, and raw wool [48].

In 1919-1920, Iran's export to England decreased while the import was still growing and reached more than 448,578,684 qiran [49]. Major imports in this year included grains, sugar, tea, cotton textile, rice, and wood. More than 42% of export was oil, and the rest included gold coins, raw cotton, medicine, opium, fruit, gum, wool carpet, tobacco, and raw wool [50]. In this year, Iran's whole trade rate with England decreased by 10% [51].

According to customs statistics, England maintained its commercial superiority with Iran for some years after the war [52]. Iran's oil export was increasing during these years, and Iran became as a market for English goods.

Iran's trade with other countries

After Russia and England, Ottoman was third in Iran's external trades [53]. Statistics show that some years before the war Iran's import from Ottoman was increasing while its export was decreasing. In the year before the war, Iran's import was 22,338,545 qiran and its export was 36,867,079 qiran [54]. As soon as the war out broke, Iran's import decreased by 14% and its export declined by 41%. Istanbul was transitional area between Europe and Iran. For instance, cotton textile, raw wool, and colors registered as Ottoman's goods were actually from Germany and Austria. Major imports from Ottoman included skin, egg, tobacco, fruit, silver coin, sugar, and lived animals, and exports included wool carpet, oil, opium, grains, gum, fruit, wood, rice, etc. The only increase of export to Ottoman was related to oil due to its gradual progressing [55].

In 1915-1916, trade between the two countries decreased. Whole trade in this year reached 18,204,932 qiran; import decreased by 51% and export by 58% [56].

In 1917-1918, trade between the two countries increased to some extent which was related to Iran's export. Major imported goods included color, cotton, fruit, grains, silver coins, butter, skin, weapon, rice, and copper whose greatest amount was related to color (518,169 boxes) reaching 2,559,424 qiran. Major exports included oil, fruit, tobacco, gum, cotton textile, carpet, grains, opium, and other goods whose greatest amount was related to oil (18,301,413 barrels) reaching 9,575,208 qiran [57].

In 1918-1919, trade between the two countries increased in both export and import. Increase in import included silver coins, tobacco, and metals while the increase in export was related to cotton textile, color, coin, fruit, tobacco, wooden object, rice, and iron [58]. Trade between Iran and Ottoman during the war was less than its amount with Russia and England; however, it was growing in 1922-1923 [59].

Germany was also among the countries which had external trade with Iran, and were growing economically from 1890 to 1914; that is the reason why it became as the world's second industrial country, and its export was growing day after day [60]. Actually, Germany tried to increase its dominance in Iran as a rival to imperialism [61]. In order to obtain this goal, Germany made rhumba from Hamburg to Persian Gulf in 1906, and rented an island in Persian Gulf [62]. It established Vankhouse company to commerce pearl [63]. This country, after Russia, England, and Ottoman, was the fourth power which was able to increase its trades with Iran reaching 33,325,978 qiran approaching to the war [64]. Major exports during this year included lived animals, rice, cocoons, opium, gem, fresh and dried fish, and tobacco among which live animals decreased due to the international war according to Safinia [65].

By referring to trade tables of Iran and Germany, it is concluded that the international war caused trade between the two countries to stop. From 1916 to 1920, there was just little import from Germany; there is no record of export, though [66]. Therefore, this decrease in trade made Germany to fall down from fourth to twentieth country [67]. Even, German factories weakened due to war [68]. However, the trade between the two countries increased after 1921.

France's whole trade with Iran was 2.2% in 1913-1914; while it increased after the war [69]. Export was 4,589,203 qiran, and import was 19,629,020 qiran; both of which were increasing in comparison to its previous year [70]. In 1914-1915, trade between the two countries decreased related to import of sugar, car, textile, gun powder, and drinks, while sugar import merely was more than 11,770,597 qiran in 1907. The amount of export was 112,154 qiran in this very year. Trade's decrease in this year was due to cocoons forestall in Milan, Italy. The decrease was continuing in 1915-1916 which caused France downfall from fifth to eleventh country; which was because of prohibition of France's export [71].

America, who was tenth in previous years, became fourth because of decrease in import and export of Germany, France, Belgium, and Egypt, and that it was able to import wool carpet from Iran. Egypt was able to gain fifth level due to decrease of trade of other countries with Iran, as a result of the war, and because of exporting oil [72].

However, after the war, it lost its position and become one of the countries which have low trade records with Iran.

Conclusion

Out breaking of World War I in 1914 faced Iran's trade with many problems and issues including poor transportation leading its goods to damage. On the other hand, dominance of Russia and England forces in north and south of Iran which made the situation more drastic. Although Iran declared impartiality in the war, Allies parted Iran in 1915 due to Germany's and Ottoman's presence in Iran. It paved the way for England to increase its trade with Iran during the first year of the war, especially in export due to oil export from Iran to England which provided a great benefit for Britain. Meanwhile, Russian revolution of 1917 decreased its import and export rate, letting

England gaining its first place among Iran's external trade partners. The more Russia appealed to buy Iranian goods, the more England tried to use Iran as a market of its goods. Roads' closure also effected decrease in trade of Iran from other countries, especially with Ottoman and Egypt. As mentioned before, due to war, oil became the major exported good from Iran, and Iran's export increased in comparison to its import by the end of the war. However, it does not show commercial power of Iran during the war, but rather much activity of English companies related to oil. The more Iranian oil was exported, the less non-petroleum goods were exported.

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