



DARBĀR -E A'ZAM

DARBĀR-E A'ZAM (lit., “the great court”), a council of ministers established in October 1872 as one of several experiments undertaken in the reign of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96) to reorganize and rationalize the Persian administration on the model of Western cabinet government. It was composed of the *ṣadr-e a'zam* (grand vizier) and nine other ministers—of war, finance, justice, foreign affairs, the interior, education, public works, the court, and commerce and agriculture—who were collectively responsible for the entire government (Ṣanī'-al-Dawla [later E'temād-al-Salṭana], pp. 162-66).

The edict establishing the *darbār-e a'zam*, drafted by Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan Mošīr-al-Dawla and approved by Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah on 20 Ša'bān 1289/23 October 1872, defined the authority of the individual cabinet ministers, as well as their relation to the central authority (for the text, see Ṣanī'-al-Dawla, pp. 162-66). The shah was to appoint and dismiss the *ṣadr-e a'zam*, who, as the senior member of the cabinet, wielded extensive authority, appointing and dismissing the other ministers, subject to the shah's approval, and serving as the sole channel of communication with the sovereign. He was empowered to intervene in the internal affairs of each ministry, and no official could be appointed or dismissed without his knowledge. The edict did, however, grant the individual ministers a high degree of autonomy to define and regulate the duties of officials within their ministries. Salaries were determined by the duties of office, rather than by individual rank, as had been the previous practice. Members of the cabinet were to meet in consultation and report to the *ṣadr-e a'zam* twice a week.



The establishment of the *darbār-e a'ẓam* represented the culmination of Western-inspired efforts to strengthen and reorganize the central government. Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan Mošīr-al-Dawla, Persian ambassador to Istanbul, had for some time been urging Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah to adopt such reforms; in December 1870 the shah recalled him to Tehran to undertake the necessary measures (Bakhash, pp. 77-120; Nashat, pp. 43-94). He was named *ṣadr-e a'ẓam* in November 1871 and immediately took steps to eliminate the overlapping jurisdictions and rationalize the unclear lines of authority that had previously prevailed within the government. He also attempted to end corruption by putting the state finances in order. Although at first he enjoyed the full support of the shah, his efforts, particularly to concentrate power in his own hands, angered many powerful courtiers and officials. The opposition took advantage of the crisis generated by the government's grant to Baron Julius de Reuter of exclusive rights to exploit most Persian natural resources (see [CONCESSIONS ii](#)) to bring about Mošīr-al-Dawla's dismissal in September 1873. The shah maintained his interest in reforming the central administration until the end of the decade, but in the remaining years of his rule he grew less enthusiastic. Mostawfī-al-Mamālek and later [Amīn-al-Soltān](#), whom he appointed to the post of *ṣadr-e a'ẓam*, were also not very interested in government by cabinet. As a result, even though the term *darbār-e a'ẓam* survived into the reign of Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah (1313-24/1896-1907), the body was actually an independent ministry with nebulous function. In the absence of a *ṣadr-e a'ẓam* the minister of the *darbār-e a'ẓam* was responsible for calling ministerial meetings and seeing that individual ministries prepared reports for the shah (Afẓal-al-Molk, pp. 57, 83). During the constitutional period cabinet government came to be called *majles-e wozarā'*, or *kābīna* (Amīn-al-Dawla, pp. 235, 273).

Although in the text of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's edict Mošīr-al-Dawla is credited with creation of the *darbār-e a'ẓam*, the principal arguments for ministerial accountability and coordinating the work of the highest state officials had already been set forth in the essay "Ketābča-ye ḡaybī yā daftar-e tanẓīmat" by Mīrzā Malkom Khan in 1276/1859 (Nashat, p. 79).



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