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EʿTEMĀD-AL-DAWLA, ĀQĀ KHAN NŪRĪ

EʿTEMĀD-AL-DAWLA, ĀQĀ KHAN (originally Naṣr-Allāh) NŪRĪ, MĪRZĀ (1222-81/1807-65; Figure 1), prime minister (*ṣadr-e aʿẓam*) of Persia under Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah Qajar (1268-75/1851-58).

Āqā Khan Nūrī was the second son of Mīrzā Asad-Allāh Nūrī, the chief army accountant (*laškarnevīs-bāšī*) under Āqā Moḥammad Khan and Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah. Part of the local nobility of the Nūr region in Māzandarān, the Nūrī family was prominent on the political scene as local governors of Nūr and as officials and army accountants since the middle of 18th century (for the genealogy of the Nūrīs see Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, 1349 Š./1970, p. 233; Qāʾem-maqāmī, 1968, p. 141; Malek Ḵosravī). Āqā Khan began his official career at the age of twenty as an army secretary. Capitalizing on his father's proximity to the Qajar court (ʿAżod-al-Dawla, p. 72) and his own administrative skills, he was promoted to the newly created post of minister of the army (*wazīr-e laškar*) after his father's retirement in 1245/1829. By the mid-1250s/1840s he ranked among the dignitaries of the state. In 1262/1845 Moḥammad Shah's failing health, uncertainties over succession, and the weakening grip of the grand vizier Ḥājī Mīrzā Āqāsī (q.v.) over the administration encouraged Āqā Khan, like other contestants for the premiership, to search for political patronage and build new alliances outside his own family and his army base. He approached the young heir apparent, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Mīrzā, and his mother, Malek-Jahān Ḵānom Qovānlū, later the Mahd-e ʿOlyā (q.v.), to offer his services. In exchange for

supporting them, and possibly for establishing secret contact with the British legation on their behalf, Āqā Khan received a written pledge from the prince promising him a high office once he acceded to the throne. After Moḥammad Shah's recovery later that year, however, Āqāsī removed Āqā Khan from office on the charges of misappropriation, conspiracy, and secret contacts with the British legation in Tehran. He was arrested, bastinadoed, fined ten thousand tomans, and sent in exile to Kāšān, where he remained until the death of Moḥammad Shah.

Āqā Khan returned to Tehran in Ḏu'l-qaʿda 1265/late September 1848, after seeking the assistance of the British chargé d'affaires, Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Farrant. He was warmly received there by Mahd-e ʿOlyā, who invited him to reside in the royal citadel (*arg*) as her advisor. Āqā Khan's return, however, was opposed by Mīrzā Taqī Khan Farāhānī, the new chief of the Azarbaijan army (*amīr-e neẓām*, q.v.) and the strong man in the Nāṣer al-Dīn Shah camp. He ordered Āqā Khan's immediate return to Kāšān. In response Āqā Khan and his brother, Mīrzā Fażl-Allāh, sought refuge in the British legation where they were granted an informal protégé status and in effect removed from the jurisdiction of the Persian government (Watson, p. 411).

The promotion of Mīrzā Taqī Khan to the premiership with the title Amīr(-e) Kabīr (q.v.) dashed Āqā Khan's hopes. Amīr Kabīr did bow to pressure from Mahd-e ʿOlyā and appointed Āqā Khan as his lieutenant but largely excluded him from state affairs. The mutiny of the Qahramānīya troops in Jomādā I 1866/March 1849, however, weakened Amīr Kabīr and brought Āqā Khan into the limelight. Amīr Kabīr had to take refuge in Āqā Khan's residence and relied on his mediation for a peaceful ending to the dangerous mutiny. As a result the prestigious title of E'temād-al-Dawla (q.v.), unused since 1216/1801, was conferred upon Āqā Khan, and he came to be recognized as the "second person" (*šaḵṣ-e dovvom*) below Amīr Kabīr.

By 1268/1851 the political base of Amīr Kabīr had eroded, ironically after he had managed to put down two major threats to Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's throne: the Sālār revolt (1264-68/1847-51) and the Babi insurrection (1265-68/1848-51; see BABISM). When Amīr Kabīr was removed from office in 1268/1851, Āqā Khan was offered the post. His appointment was made public on 22 Moḥarram 1268/17 November 1851, after he had unequivocally renounced his British protégé status. In consultation with Justin Sheil, the British envoy in Tehran, Āqā Khan gave his pledge that he was "under the protection of no state but that of the shadow of His Majesty the shah of Iran" (Ketāb-ḵāna-ye salṭanatī,

album no. 249, cited in Qāʾem-maqāmī, 1968, p. 108).

In order to strengthen his own position in the administration and to relieve the shah's anxieties, Āqā Khan encouraged the fallen Amīr Kabīr to accept a post outside the capital (the governorship of Kāšān) along with British and Russian guarantees of his personal safety. However, the Russian envoy Dmitri Dolgorukov unilaterally offered the protection of his imperial government to Amīr Kabīr and duly dispatched the legation's guards to protect his residence. This action outraged Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah beyond measure and quickly turned Amīr Kabīr's governorship of Kāšān into exile to the same town, where he was murdered on 17 Rabīʿ I 1268/9-10 January 1852 (Watson, pp. 400-404; Ādamīyāt, p. 707-26; see also AMĪR[-E] KABĪR, BĀḠ-E FĪN). More than one source implicated Āqā Khan in this secret execution (see, e.g., Watson, p. 399; cf. Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, 1349 Š./1970, pp. 236-37; Šīrāzī). There is little doubt that Āqā Khan was happy to see Amīr Kabīr dismissed and disgraced if not destroyed. Sheil, naming the instigators of Amīr Kabīr murder, concluded that he could not "exonerate" Āqā Khan from "connivance in the tragedy" since he had given his "implicit approval" at the final hour. Āqā Khan, denying any involvement, retorted that if he had attempted to interfere with the shah's verdict his own life would have been in danger and he could not, therefore, do much beyond informing Sheil a few hours after the departure of the executioners to Kāšān (Amanat, 1997, pp. 162-63).

Conservative by temperament, Āqā Khan stood for most of what Amīr Kabīr had hoped to change. Though relatively young when he took office, he represented the old school of Qajar statecraft. His very appearance, with a long beard, ornamented robes, and lavish entourage, as well as his extensive household, love for extravagance, decorum, titles, decorations and other emblems of power, elaborate forms of address to himself and to others, and the protocol and observance of hierarchical order in the court and the government, all conjured up images of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah's era. His marked humor, deceptive congeniality, and scheming mind sharpened the contrast with his predecessor. Most of Amīr Kabīr's policies and administrative, military, and educational reforms were either abandoned or modified to the haphazard practices of Āqā Khan's term of office. Yet both Dār al-fonūn (q.v.), the military polytechnic initiated by Amīr Kabīr, and *Rūz-nāma-ye waqāyeʿ-e ettefāqīya*, the official government gazette, continued to operate under Āqā Khan and came to leave their stamps on Qajar society during the Nāṣerī period and beyond.

Āqā Khan shared with Amīr Kabīr, however, a desire to maintain the

independence of the office of the premiership (*ṣedārat*) from the court and, if possible, the shah himself, albeit in a different way. Whereas Amīr Kabīr tended to involve the shah in the day-to-day affairs of the government and endeavored to keep him away from court intrigue, Āqā Khan aimed to distract the shah's attention from the government by busying him with women, entertainment, hunting, and excursions while carrying out his policies with soft words, persuasion, and flattery. Yet his success in monopolizing power did not rely solely on the shah's trust. Upon his appointment to the office, he employed many of his dependents, including his brothers, sons, cousins, distant relatives, and fellow townsfolk, who bolstered his sway over the administration and the army. All through his term of office, the chronic ills of Qajar government were rampant: sale of offices, misappropriation of government funds, nepotism, and granting of huge salaries and land assignments to the premier and his aides. Soon after Āqā Khan's appointment, Jules Richard, then a French teacher in the Dār al-fonūn, noted in his diary, "All governmental affairs have returned to the same state that they were under Ḥājī [Mīrzā Āqāsī]" (cited in Ṭaqafī, p. 86).

The first real crisis during Āqā Khan's tenure came in Du'l-qa'da 1268/August 1852, ten months after his appointment, when a group of Babis affiliated with Shaikh 'Alī Toršīzī ('Aẓīm) attempted to assassinate the shah outside Nīāvarān palace, in revenge for the execution of the Bāb two years earlier. The ensuing panic in the capital and fear of further attacks and uprisings prompted the shah to order a round-up of Babis, including at least six citizens of the Nūr region, of whom Mīrzā Ḥosayn-'Alī Nūrī (later Bahā'-Allāh; q.v.), a distant relative of Āqā Khan, was the most prominent (Watson, pp. 407-10; Zarandi, pp. 595-602; Amanat, 1997, pp. 207-11). The alleged involvement of the Nūrī elements was a serious liability for Āqā Khan. Mahd-e 'Olyā accused him of being an accomplice of Mīrzā Ḥosayn-'Alī and thus a party to the plot. His earlier inconclusive contacts with the Babis in Kāšān during his exile there and his advice against execution of the Bāb in 1265/1850 may also have been known to his enemies. To absolve himself and to prove his loyalty to the shah, Āqā Khan thus fully indulged the shah's desire to inflict an exceptionally brutal punishment against the arrested Babis (Watson, p. 410). By allocating the victims for execution to government officials, notables, princes of the Qajar family, army officers and troops, royal guards, members of his own family, as well as the ulama, merchants, and the students of the newly established Dār al-fonūn, Āqā Khan turned the massacre into a collective act of retribution by blood (*qeṣāṣ*).

Āqā Khan then faced a crisis in foreign policy. When the Crimean War (1853-56) broke out, Āqā Khan initially opposed the idea of an alliance with Russia (Watson, p. 415). However, his decidedly pro-British sentiments subsided because of tension with Sheil and his successors, and he was also pressed by the shah to respond positively to a new Russian overture for the conclusion of an alliance. In secret negotiations, the new Russian envoy, A. H. Anitchkov, promised financial benefits and military aid in exchange for an alliance against the Ottoman empire and its allies, Britain and France. Signed in Moharram 1271/September 1854, the treaty stipulated that in exchange for Persia withholding assistance to the Ottomans and their allies and for prohibiting the Ottomans from using Persian soil for military action, Russia would agree to relieve Persia of the balance of the war reparations required under the terms of the 1828 Treaty of Torkamānčāy (Amanat, 1997, p. 254).

The British, who became aware of the secret treaty through their agents in Tehran, saw it as another sign of Āqā Khan's disloyalty toward Britain. Their relations continued to deteriorate from 1854 to 1855 with running disputes between between Āqā Khan and the British chargé d'affaires, William Thomson, and especially his successor, Charles Murray (see ANGLO-IRANIAN RELATIONS ii). In Rabīʿ I 1272/November 1855, tension between Āqā Khan and Murray over the appointment of one of Āqā Khan's political enemies, Hāšem Khan Nūrī Esfandīārī, to a post with the British legation in Shiraz, developed into a major diplomatic row involving the two governments, the shah, and members of the royal harem. Āqā Khan, under severe pressure from the shah to resist Murray, objected to the British granting Hāšem protégé status on the grounds that he continued to be employed by the Persian government and was a member of the royal household. He would not permit Parvīn, Ḥāšem's wife, to remain with her husband, arguing that she, being the sister of one of the shah's wives, would bring disrepute to the crown if residing in a foreign legation. Āqā Khan also fanned the rumors of an illicit relationship between Parvīn and Murray. The outraged British minister, who demanded an official apology from the premier and Parvīn's return to the legation, decided to haul down the legation's flag and declare a severance of relations with Persia in Rabīʿ I 1272/November 1855 (Watson, pp. 419-24). This incident brought Āqā Khan to the gravest test of his career. Murray's conduct flew in the face of Āqā Khan's advocacy of moderation and forced him to agree to the shah's adventurous design for the conquest of Herāt (q.v.; see also ANGLO-PERSIAN WAR).

In Ḏu’l-ḥejja 1272/August 1856 Āqā Khan, heartened by the early Persian successes in Herāt under the command of Ṣoltān Morād Mīrzā Ḥosām-al-Salṭana, dispatched Farroḵ Khan Ḡaffārī Amīn-al-Molk Kāšānī (later Amīn-al-Dawla, q.v.) on a mission to Istanbul and thence to Paris to negotiate resumption of relations with Britain and a peaceful settlement of the Herāt question. He wished to secure Persia’s indirect control over the city in order to insure the stability of Persia’s eastern frontiers against intrusion by Dūst Moḥammad Khan. He entertained no illusion about Persia’s ability to withstand a confrontation with Britain (especially after Britain’s victory in the Crimean War), and the British threat of military retaliation made him more determined to follow a realistic course of action. Farroḵ Khan Ḡaffārī’s instructions for his mission (Farroḵ Khan, I, pp. 11-42) and his extensive correspondence with the premier afterwards delineate Āqā Khan’s foreign policy and his objectives of negotiating a fair settlement with Britain, cultivating Napoleon III of France to benefit from his mediation and support, and expanding Persia’s relations with other powers. In spite of Farroḵ Khan’s diplomatic flexibility, the Persian two-tier strategy of war and diplomacy failed to persuade the British, who declared war on Persia in Rabīʿ II 1273/November 1856 and dispatched a large expeditionary force to occupy Būšehr (Bushire) in December of the same year. The collapse of the Persian defenses in Fārs and Moḥammara jeopardized Āqā Khan’s premiership. Fearing British annexation of southern Persia, he persuaded the shah to give Farroḵ Khan full authority to negotiate a peace treaty. He hoped that a swift and unconditional Persian withdrawal from Herāt would satisfy the British and salvage his own premiership. Āqā Khan’s removal from office was one of Britain’s thirteen conditions for resuming diplomatic relations with Persia, but the Paris Peace Treaty of 4 March 1857, which deprived Persia of Herāt, left Āqā Khan in his post (for the text see Hurewitz, I, pp. 341-43).

As early as 1271/1854, Āqā Khan’s government was periodically in danger of collapse, and the threat increased because of defeat in the war and because of the shah’s desire, under the influence of the harem, to receive a larger share of the government revenue. The question of designating the heir apparent added a new dimension to Āqā Khan’s vulnerability. Āqā Khan hesitated to endorse the candidacy of Amīr Qāsem, the young son of the shah’s favorite wife Jeyrān (entitled Forūḡ-al-Salṭana). He was mindful of Mahd-e ʿOlyā’s disapproval of Jeyrān’s humble origins as well as concerns over the appointment of an heir apparent with non-Qajar lineage on his maternal side. Annoyed by Āqā Khan’s resistance, Jeyrān and her allies began to intrigue against the premier.

Incensed by the prospect of a full fledged coup, Āqā Khan struck back. In Ḏu'l-ḥejja 1274/June 1857 he persuaded the shah to dismiss and exile two of his most influential foes: ʿAzīz Khan Sardār-e Koll (q.v.), the chief commander of the army, and Yūsof Khan Mostawfī-al-Mamālek, the influential chief government accountant. In place of ʿAzīz Khan he made his own young son, Dāwūd, the secretary of the army and commander-in-chief. At the same time, Āqā Khan yielded to the shah's wishes regarding Amīr Qāsem, who was proclaimed heir apparent in Jomādā I 1274/early December 1857 and given the title Amīr-e Neẓām. Āqā Khan's older son, Mīrzā Kāẓem Khan Neẓām-al-Molk was named as tutor and supervisor of the young crown prince. As a sign of royal support Āqā Khan himself was elevated to the position of "absolute authority" (*moḵtār-e koll*). The new position prompted Āqā Khan to claim that he was an "unremovable" (*belā-ʿazl*) premier. For the moment, it seemed, Āqā Khan had outmaneuvered Jeyrān, satisfied the shah, and purged his most dangerous rivals (Amanat, 1997, pp. 316-27).

This victory did not last long. The fatal illness and death of the new heir apparent in Ḏu'l-ḥejja 1274/July 1858 faced Āqā Khan with a new crisis as Jeyrān accused him of poisoning her son. The shah did not go along with this unfounded charge but nonetheless criticized the premier's conduct. Nāṣer-al-Dīn preserved the appearance of congeniality and royal favor toward Āqā Khan while secretly siding with opposition party. On 20 Moḥarram 1275/29 August 1858, the vacillating shah finally put his seal of approval on a *farmān* dismissing Āqā Khan from his post together with his sons, brothers, and other relatives and dependents, on the grounds of the premier's monopoly of power, his negligence, and confusion in the affairs of the state (Eʿtemād al-Salṭana, 1295/1878, II, p. 228). The Russian minister Anitchkov, angry for having been left uninformed about the matter, admonished the shah that he could not without previous reference to St. Petersburg dismiss his own minister if that minister should happen to wear a Russian decoration (Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, 60/233, Secret Intelligence Series, no. 19, Charles Murray to Lord Malmesbury, Tehran, 4 October 1858 and Enclosure no. 1, Minister Anitchkov to [Persia's] Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1 September 1858, cited in Amanat, 1997, p. 346). Nothing came of this protest. Neither did the later pleas of the French minister for leniency have any effect on the shah. Āqā Khan and his family were placed under house arrest. Āqā Khan was subjected to a rigorous governmental review as a result of which he was held liable to a penalty of no less that one hundred forty thousand tumans. Most of his properties were thus confiscated to pay for the penalty (though some were

later returned to his family). Āqā Khan's title of E'temād-al-Dawla was taken away from him and soon bestowed upon the shah's notorious maternal uncle 'Īsā Khan Qovānlū, one of Āqā Khan's enemies. Āqā Khan and his immediate family were then sent into exile, first to his own estate in Āderān, north of Karaj, and shortly after to Solṭānābād, where he remained for two years (Amanat, pp. 338-50).

After Āqā Khan's dismissal, Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah introduced a set of administrative reforms that divided responsibility of the government between six ministries with himself at the top. He temporarily eliminated the post of prime minister and began a period of direct rule free from ministerial mediation. Āqā Khan's government, though suffering from customary inefficiencies, had shared with previous administrations the intention to restrain the interference of the court and to some extent the shah himself. His fall brought to an end an era of powerful Qajar prime ministers beginning with Abu'l-Qāsem Qā'em-māqām and continuing with Āqāsī, Amīr Kabīr, and Āqā Khan and marked the beginning of a period of autocratic rule by the shah.

In 1277/1860 rumors circulated in Tehran concerning Āqā Khan's imminent restoration. In an interview with the shah, the new British minister, Henry Rawlinson, spoke favorably of the fallen premier hence prompting the shah to state bluntly that Āqā Khan's reappointment would cause "embarrassment" and trouble for everybody since he "assuredly [will] ruin every individual of the present cabinet; he might again weave a network of intrigue around me which could place me completely at his mercy" (Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, Rawlinson to Russell, Secret and Confidential, no. 9, Tehran, 9 February 1860, cited in Amanat, 1997, p. 372). Āqā Khan was then removed to a less accessible location, spending two long years of impoverishment and illness first in Kermān and then in Yazd. In 1278/1861, the shah summoned two of Āqā Khan's sons to the capital and gave them low-ranking positions in the administration. He even went so far as to send a ceremonial robe and a golden pen case to Āqā Khan with a favorable autographed letter, in which he returned to him his old title. Facing a revolt of other high-ranking officials, however, the shah backed off and even allowed a more rigorous surveillance of Āqā Khan. Finally, in 1281/mid-1864, in view of his deteriorating health, Āqā Khan was permitted to retire to Qom, where he could be visited by physicians from Tehran though he was adamantly barred from returning to the capital. Āqā Khan died in Qom on 12 Šawwāl 1281/10 March 1865, possibly a victim of foul play organized by his enemies (Amanat,

1997, p. 395 n. 77).

Three weeks later Āqā Khan's wife and family were released and allowed to return to Tehran. His sons, after some years of unemployment, acquired various positions in the administration. Kāẓem Khan Neẓām-al-Molk was appointed a member of the Government Consultative Council and, after Mosta wfī-al-Mamālek's dismissal, served in his place as the chief of the bureau of accounting (*daftar-e estīfā'*). Ḥājī Ḥosaynqolī Khan Ṣadr-al-Salṭana, better known as Ḥājī Vāšangton (Washington), Āqā Khan's fourth son, was Persia's first minister plenipotentiary to Washington. ʿAbd-al-Wahhāb Khan Neẓām-al-Molk, son of Kāẓem, also served in the hereditary post of secretary of the army and later in other capacities.

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