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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, administration and ministry.

Under the Safavids (1501-1736) there was no special bureaucratic institution designated to deal with foreign affairs. Relations with foreign powers were the domain of the shah and the grand vizier as far as the decision-making process was concerned. In cases which required the use of envoys, the shah invariably appointed an ad hoc personal representative who had clear instructions as to what needed to be achieved. Such a representative was not a plenipotentiary but a mouthpiece. Foreign ambassadors visiting the Safavid court were received by the shah. During most of the Safavid period the shah would usually also interact with the embassy. However, after ʿAbbās II (1052-77/1642-66; q.v.) the royal audiences granted to ambassadors became sterile pantomimes which had a purely ceremonial character.

During the entire Safavid period the point-man for all foreign affairs was the grand vizier. “Nothing can be done without his say-so, both with regards internal and external relations and affairs” (Kaempfer, p. 62). The grand vizier, however, would delegate the dreary task of negotiations to other courtiers. He would only be involved in the initial and final stages of negotiations, where his guidance and decision were required. The actual negotiators and/or diplomatic agents for the state could be both civil and military dignitaries. Often the main “diplomatic” representative was the government official who was most concerned with the subject matter that was being discussed. For example, Europeans trying to obtain better commercial privileges, in particular for the silk trade, usually dealt with the *mostawfī-e*

ḵāṣṣa, who was the financial comptroller in charge of the revenues of the silk producing areas. However, other officials invariably also were involved, since there was no formal institutional responsibility for foreign affairs and, besides, anybody who was somebody tried to make his weight felt to score fine points in the political game, thus advancing his own position in court politics.

Nevertheless, two officials stood out as being in particular responsible for dealing with certain aspects of foreign relations. First there was the *mehmāndār-bāšī* (an official in charge of receiving and entertaining a foreign envoy). Neither the shah nor foreign powers having relations with Persia kept permanent diplomatic missions. Only the Netherlands and England had some kind of permanent missions in Persia, through the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie and East India Company, but these missions only dealt with ongoing commercial affairs. If there were a trade problem, a political or dynastic event, either the shah or the ruler of the foreign power would send an ambassador with an appropriate message. This also held for the European trading companies who would send an ambassador to resolve major conflicts that had arisen. An ambassador or foreign visitor, therefore, automatically became a guest of the shah as soon as he had crossed the Persian border. On announcing his presence to the governor of the frontier town (usually Erivan, Herat, or Bandar ʿAbbās) he formally would be welcomed by a *mehmāndār*, who had to see to it that the ambassador was lodged and fed en route and to guide him to the royal court. The rank of the *mehmāndār* depended on the importance of the person and how much respect the shah wanted to show. The *mehmāndār* remained responsible for the ambassador during his entire stay in Persia as well as the return journey to the border, though a different *mehmāndār* was often selected for the return journey. Whilst in the royal residence, the *mehmāndār* accompanied the ambassador to court to present him to the shah, to present his official gifts, and introduce him to other important government officials. He also made sure that the visiting delegation had proper seating and/or standing arrangements in the royal council. After Shah ʿAbbās I (996-1038/1588-1629), the shah usually would not hold any conversation with the ambassador, which was left entirely to the grand vizier. As to the presents brought by the ambassador, the *mehmāndār* had to see to it that these were properly valued and listed, in which task he was assisted by the *pīškešnevīs* (see GIFT; Chardin, VII, p. 137; Tavernier, p. 220; Mīrzā Rafīʿā, p. 48; Floor, pp. 197-98; della Valle, pp. 54-55, 64-65, 77; Richard, II, p. 297; Olearius, pp. 672-73).

The other official having a foreign-relation responsibility was the *majlesnevīs* (or *waqāyeʿnegār*), also referred to as *wazīr-e čap*, who was in charge of the administrative aspects of foreign affairs. Apart from his function to keep the shah and the privy council informed on what was happening in the country, the *majlesnevīs* also had to monitor how relations were with foreign powers and what treaties existed with them. Therefore, ambassadors of foreign nations always called upon the *majlesnevīs* and left relevant documents with him for recording. The *majlesnevīs* also recorded their time of arrival, the purpose of their visit, the nature of their requests, and the decisions taken and replies given to them. He also read their letters in the public royal council. The *majlesnevīs* usually also participated in negotiations between the grand-vizier and the visiting ambassador. The *majlesnevīs* also wrote the correspondence that was sent to foreign powers. To that end he was assisted by a staff of scribes from the secretariat (*dār al-enšā*ʾ). In particular the so-called *nāmanevīs* wrote the letters to foreign rulers, while the *ṭoḡrānevīs* wrote the *intitulatio* (Chardin, V, pp. 343-44; Richard, II, p. 270; della Valle, p. 65; Hotz, pp. 148, 150, 163; Kaempfer, p. 80; Sanson, p. 24; Valentijn, V, p. 277; Mīrzā Rafīʿā, pp. 61-62, 81, 116).

The situation did not change under the successors of the Safavids, whose administrative arrangements were but a continuation of Safavid practice. There was only one authority in the Afsharid state created by Nāder Shah. Some of his officers, such as Mīrzā Taqī Šīrāzī, may have had more power than anybody else, but in the final analysis all decisions had to be made by the shah. This state of affairs did not change under the Zands, where any diplomatic contact was handled by Karīm Khan himself and his grand vizier (Lockhart, p. 272 ;Šaʿbānī, passim; Perry, pp. 246-71).

As in previous times, under the Qajars (1193-1344/1798-1925) foreign affairs was under the grand vizier's cognizance. In 1808, foreign relations was placed under the Ministry of the Interior. However, the hostilities with Russia in the years 1804-13 made the need for a separate institution dealing with foreign affairs clear. In 1821, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was created with an acting minister. Only in 1824 a full minister was appointed. The first minister charged with foreign affairs was Mīrzā ʿAbd-al-Wahhāb Našāṭ Mo ʿtamad-al-Dawla Eṣfahānī (q.v.), though he did not have the title. It was in 1824 that Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah appointed Hājī Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan Šīrāzī in charge of the Ministry for [Affairs of] Foreign States (Wezārat-e dowal-e ḵāreja). He remained in office until Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah's death in 1834. Because Šīrāzī chose the wrong side in the

succession war, no minister for foreign affairs was appointed by Moḥammad Shah until 1835. Then Mīrzā ʿAlī, the son of Qāʾem-maqām, was nominally appointed as minister, but in reality the function was carried out by Hājī Mīrzā Masʿūd Anṣārī Garmrūdī, first in 1254/1838, and then once again from 1262/1846 to 1265/1848. Mīrzā Abu'l-Ḥasan was again appointed as minister from 1840 until his death in 1846 (Šamīm, pp. 267-71; Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan Īlčī, p. 19; Qāʾem-maqāmī, ed., II, pp. 187, 192, 236). There also was still a *waqāyeʿnegār* who had duties related to foreign affairs (Qāʾem-maqāmī, II, pp. 134, 141, 146, 329-30; see also Ādamīyat, pp. 212, 214, 377).

Consequently, as of the 1830s, some foreign powers established permanent embassies in Persia with ambassadors or envoys (*wazīr-e moḵtār*, *īlčī*, *safīr*), and some such as Great Britain, Russia, and Ottoman Turkey in addition also established a number of consuls (*qonsol*, *bālyūz*, *šāh-bandar*). Persia did likewise as of the mid-19th century. This meant that foreign subjects formally only could have contacts with the Persian government via their embassy or consul such as in the case when they needed to ask the minister for foreign affairs, e.g., for permission to hire post horses, who then issued the required order (Bassett, p. 121).

Ambassadors were still accompanied by *mehmāndār*s and were met at each city by the governor, and its omission was considered a slight. The Russians even went so far "as to make a treaty on the subject, defining all the honours, the sweetmeats, the sugar, the visits from the prime minister downwards, which they are entitled to exact" (Lady Sheil, p. 81).

In 1881, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (henceforth called Wezārat-e omūr-e ḵārejī) was reorganized following the European model with a full charter. The new ministry consisted of four departments dealing respectively with Great Britain, Russia, Turkey, and the non-neighboring countries. In addition there were five supporting sections: commercial affairs, protocol, records, translation and decipherment, and accounting. Persia had ambassadors and/or consuls in the capitals of its major trading partners as well as in cities where large Persian communities lived. The ministry also had representatives or *kārgoḏār*s inside Persia in those cities where foreign powers had consuls and/or where minorities or border traffic played a major role.

The organization of the ministry reflected the nature of the foreign relations that Persia had. It is of interest to note that there is no major change between the situation in 1881 and 1905. First, it is noteworthy that the most prominent

sections were those for Great Britain, Russia, and Ottoman Turkey. Further, there was a section for concessions (*emtīāzāt*; q.v.); a section on consular courts reflecting the capitulatory rights that many foreign powers had with Persia. This is also clear from the number of ministry representatives in twenty-four towns in Persia, mainly in those towns where foreign powers had consuls. Further, under the Visa Department (Edāra-ye koll-e taḏkera) functioned some forty-five *omanā-ye taḏkera*, who were stationed all over Persia, but mainly in the border areas, in particular in Azarbaijan. There also was an office for the Ottoman-Persian border commission and a *sarḥadd-dār* for Baluchistan. Persia further had ambassadors and consuls in Ottoman Turkey, the United States, Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Belgium, Russia, France, Netherlands, and one for the Balkans. These same places also had diplomatic representatives in Persia (see the various *sāl-nāma*s appended to lithographed publications by Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana listed in Bibliography; Šamīm, pp. 269-71).

The role and importance of the minister depended on the leeway that he received from the grand vizier, who, as in all other matters, had ultimate say over foreign affairs. It also depended on the personalities of the grand vizier and the minister, who, as in the case of Mīrzā Ḥosayn Khan, played a more pronounced role than his predecessors or successors. The ambassadorships and consulships, like other offices, were sold to the highest bidder. The amounts offered were sometimes quite high. These posts offered important sources of revenue through the sale of passports and other travel papers, distribution of medals, and use of the diplomatic mail for commercial purposes (for a picture of different types of *taḏkera*s see Lacoin de Vilmorin, p. 45; Mahdawī and Afšār, pl. 150). The posts in Tbilisi, Baghdad, and Istanbul were very much in demand because of the large Persian community in these cities as well as the judicial functions that were performed by the ambassador or consul, which were very remunerative.

Under the Pahlavis (1925-78) the nature of the management of foreign affairs did not change much. The decision-making process was centered in Tehran, where Reżā Shah made all major decisions. Between 1941 and 1953, the shah's power was curtailed due to foreign occupation until 1945 and thereafter when foreign affairs were out of the shah's control. However, after the coup d'etat of 1953 (q.v.), when royal power was restored, the shah established control over all policies. Through state visits, or receiving dignitaries, the shah took a direct hand in negotiations of important matters. The foreign minister therefore was

of less stature than other cabinet members. Usually he either was a diplomat or a politician (United States Army, 1963, pp. 280, 394).

However, there was substantial change in institutional terms under the Pahlavis. It was in 1934 that the charter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs underwent a major revision (United States Army, 1963, p. 300). The fact that capitulatory right was abolished in 1928, and that migration to Russia came to a standstill, the composition of the ministry also changed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to be headed by a minister, assisted by a deputy. Further, there was a cipher office, and inspection section, four political directorates numbered 1-4. Also, there was a section for information, publication, and translation; a correspondence section as well as protocol, passports and seals; and records and accounting. The number of ambassadors had increased and included Japan, Latin America, Poland, Sweden, and Egypt. Likewise the number of foreign representatives in Persia also had increased, with representatives from countries such as Lithuania, Finland, Iraq, and Rumania (*Sāl-nāma-ye Pārs*, 1315, pp. 104-7).

After 1934 a number of minor amendments were made to adjust the task and the ministry to new challenges. Some thirty years later, for example, the number of political departments had increased to six, while a separate department on Persian Gulf affairs and on international organizations and international cooperation had been created. Also, the number of Persian ambassadors had increased, reflecting the fate of new independent states having come into being after 1945 (*Iran Almanac*, 1963, p. 135).

Henceforth, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in charge of all diplomatic representatives to foreign nations and international organizations. Foreign representatives in Persia dealt with the government through this ministry. For administrative purposes the ministry was divided into political departments dealing with contiguous Muslim countries, the USSR and Eastern Europe; Western Europe; the United States and Latin America; Arab states and India; Pakistan and Southeast Asia (United States Army, 1963, p. 280).

Although the number of ministries fluctuated, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was always a part of the cabinet. Despite this it was the smallest ministry. Its personnel, however, was highly trained, and received better pay than other civil servants. Many of them were members of the elite families, a large proportion from the previous Qajar dynasty (see, e.g., Arfa, pp. 419-38). In 1959 there were 345 permanent employees, 294 of whom were diplomatic and 51

administrative staff. The ministry also hired local staff abroad. Until 1954 diplomatic staff remained abroad for many years without returning home. This practice was changed so that for every four years spent abroad, one year had to be served in Persia to sustain the Persian country focus (United States Army, 1963, p. 394).

In 1970 there were about 400 staff, excluding 75 administrative and other staff. The latter included staff on economic missions which were specialists recruited from other ministries. These missions were responsible to the prime minister or the Plan Organization (Sāzmān-e barnāma wa būdja). Persia had diplomatic representations in some forty countries, especially in Europe and the Middle East, and the United Nations. It had relations with Taiwan, South Vietnam, and South Korea, but not with China, North Vietnam, and North Korea. Since 1968 there was also increased coverage in Africa.

Jobs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were highly prestigious and drew members from the highest level of society. From 1970, the organization of the ministry was a minister assisted by a deputy and four undersecretaries (each responsible for political affairs, parliamentary affairs, international affairs, and economic affairs). These were supported by a chief of protocol and his small office. At the next level there was an Asia-Africa directorate, Europe-America and five function-oriented directors general (administration; economic affairs; cultural and social affairs; information and press; and inspection and financial affairs) and chief of consular affairs. These directors general were subdivided into nine political divisions covering smaller geographical divisions. Further, there were divisions for treaties and legal affairs; international organizations; international cooperation; economic affairs; and office of inspector general. The career diplomats were screened and examined before being accepted. Entry conditions included age of maximum thirty years, baccalaureate degree in political science, law, economics, or languages. Since 1950 most candidates originated from the Institute of International Relations (Markaz-e moṭālaʿāt-e ʿālī-e bayn-al-melalī) at the University of Tehran. After the initial screening candidates had to undergo a five day written exam followed by a five day oral exam in law, history, political sciences, languages, international relations, and psychological suitability. Based on these tests the final selection was made to fill the vacancies. After acceptance the new officer was employed as a trainee and rotated between various departments of the ministry. After this two-year period he became an attaché and was transferred to a fixed department where

he would have to serve for another two years. After this four year period staff were considered for postings abroad. In principle, promotion took place based on ability, experience, and age (United States Army, 1980, pp. 300-302).

Under the Islamic Republic (since 1978), a major change took place in the staffing of the ministry. Many diplomats who had not resigned voluntarily or had not fled abroad were dismissed being suspected of having a politically incorrect past and/or attitude. To reflect the political change, an International Relations College was established in 1983 to train diplomats and staff for the ministry. In addition, the Institute for Political and International Studies became the ministry's think-tank. Likewise, a change took place in Persia's traditional focus on development of ties with western countries. Rhetorically the government emphasized its relations with its neighboring countries, particularly in the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Better relations with Third World countries was second in importance. Also, because of the severance of its relations with the United States, Israel, and until recently also with South Africa, the government sought ties with all countries that had similar stance. In addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs there are other organizations who play a role in exporting the Revolution. These activities are not always in line with the policy pursued in the normal international forum. Persia has relations with more than 120 nations, which numerically is not a major shift from the situation before 1978, though the Islamic Republic has more embassies as part of its foreign policy objectives in hitherto under-represented such as Africa and Latin America.

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