



GOLESTĀN TREATY

GOLESTĀN TREATY (Treaty of Gulistan), agreement arranged under British auspices to end the Russo-Persian War of 1218-28/1804-13 ([Figure 1](#)).

The First Russo-Persian War. The origins of the first Russo-Persian War can be traced back to the decision of Tsar Paul to annex Georgia (December 1800) and, after Paul's assassination (11 March 1801), the activist policy followed by his successor, Alexander I, aimed at establishing Russian control over the khanates of the eastern Caucasus (Atkin, pp. 59-65). In 1803, the newly appointed commander of Russian forces in the Caucasus, Paul Tsitsianov, attacked Ganja and captured its citadel on 15 January 1804; the governor, Jawād Khan Qājār Ziādlu, was killed, and a large number of the inhabitants slaughtered. The Qajar ruler, Fath-ʿAli Shah (q.v.), saw the Russian threat to Armenia, Qarābāḡ, and Azarbaijan not only as a source of instability on his northwestern frontier but as a direct challenge to Qajar authority. He moved the court to Solṭāniya, demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops, and finally ordered an army, said to number anywhere from 30,000 to 60,000 men, across the Aras River under the command of his son, the crown prince and governor of Azarbaijan ʿAbbās Mirzā (q.v.), who would lead the Persian forces against the Russians for the remainder of the war. Meanwhile, Tsiatsianov marched on Erevan, encountering the army of ʿAbbās Mirzā near Ejmiatsin (q.v.). Tsiatsianov, with fewer troops but more artillery, defeated ʿAbbās Mirzā on 7 June but failed to capture Erevan (Donboli, pp. 190-98; Javānšīr Qarābāḡi, p. 111-12; Hedāyat, IX, 390-95; Fasāʿi, tr. Busse, pp. 107-8; Eʿtemād-al-Saltāna, *Montaẓam-e nāṣeri*, ed. Reżwāni, III, pp. 1470-72; Watson, pp. 142-46; Baddeley,



pp. 67-69; Pakravan, pp. 58-72; Atkin, pp. 82-83). Between 1805 and 1806, the Russians persuaded the khan of Širvān to submit; conquered the khanates of Qarābāg, Šakki, Baku, and Qobba-Darband; and had ambitions to annex Koy and even Tabriz (Donboli, pp. 265-93; Javānšir Qarābāgi, pp. 114-27; Fasā'i, tr. Busse, p. 119; Kazemzadeh, p. 332; Baddeley, p. 74; Atkin, p. 86). After the failure of the Russian siege of Erevan and an unsuccessful attempt to invade Gilān, Tsiatsianov was assassinated in 1806 while attempting to negotiate with the governor of Baku, Ḥosaynqoli Khan (Donboli, pp. 249-53; Javanšir Qarābāgi, pp. 121-22; Fasā'i, tr. Busse, pp. 110-11; Hedāyat, IX, pp. 414-16; Watson, pp. 148-52; Kazemzadeh, p. 333; Atkin, p. 72). Russia had thus gained control of all the disputed areas north of the Kura and some of those between the Kura and the Aras, a situation which would not change significantly for the remainder of the war, but was finding it difficult to expand any further. The situation for the Russians was further complicated by the outbreak of war with the Ottoman Empire (1806-12). Tsiatsianov was succeeded by Ivan Gudovich, who sought without result to reach a peace settlement; he then resumed the Russian offensive in 1808, temporarily occupying Ejmiatsin and Nakjavān and laying siege to Erevan, but he still could not capture that city (Donboli, pp. 334-45; Kavtaradze, p. 502; Atkin, pp. 77, 129-30, 132). Under the capable governorship of Ḥosaynqoli Khan Qājār, Erevan remained a bulwark of Persian defenses for the rest of the war (Bournoutian, 1976). The Qajars, having obtained a *fatwā* declaring the conflict to be a Holy War (Fasā'i, tr. Busse, p. 129), and then receiving significant support from Britain, went on the offensive in 1810, invaded Qarābāg, won the Battle of Solṭānābād on the Aras (13 February 1812), and recovered territory in Ṭāleš in 1812 (Baddeley, pp. 80 ff.; Wright, pp. 50-52; Atkin, p. 89).

Diplomatic interventions. Although this first Russo-Persian War was in many respects a continuation of a struggle for supremacy in Transcaucasia dating back to the time of Peter the Great and Nāder Shah, it differed from earlier conflicts between Persia and Russia in that its course came to be affected as much by the diplomatic maneuvering of European powers during the Napoleonic era as by developments on the battlefield. Following the Russian occupation of the various khanates, Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah, strapped for cash and anxious to find an ally, had made a request for British support as early as December 1804 (Ingram, 1992, p. 73). In 1805, however, Russia and Britain allied in the Third Coalition against France, which meant that Britain was not in a position to cultivate its "Persian connection" at Russian expense and felt it necessary to evade repeated requests from the shah for assistance. As the



British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Charles Arbuthnot, put it in August 1806, “To please the Emperor [of Russia], we have thrown away all our influence in Persia” (Arbuthnot to Adair, cited in Ingram, 1992, p. 82). This opened the door for France to use Persia to threaten both Russian and British interests. Hoping to forge a tripartite alliance of France, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia, Napoleon sent various envoys to Persia, notably Pierre Jaubert and Claude Mathieu de Gardane, whose diplomatic efforts culminated in the Treaty of Finkenstein, signed on 4 May 1807 (text in Hurewitz, I, pp. 184-85; see also FRANCE i; GARDANE MISSION), under which France recognized Persian claims to Georgia and promised assistance in training and equipping the Persian army. Only two months later, however, Napoleon and Alexander I agreed to an armistice and signed the Treaty of Tilsit (7 July 1807), which effectively rendered the French commitments to Persia untenable, although the French mission did continue to provide some military assistance and tried to mediate a settlement with Russia. The French efforts failed, prompting Gudovich to resume the siege of Erevan in 1808.

The rise of French influence in Persia, viewed as the prelude to an attack on India, had greatly alarmed the British, and the Franco-Russian rapprochement at Tilsit conveniently provided an opportunity for a now isolated Britain to resume its efforts in Persia, as reflected in the subsequent missions of John Malcolm (1807-8) and Harford Jones (1809). According to the preliminary treaty of Tehran arranged by Jones (15 March 1809), Britain agreed to train and equip 16,000 Persian infantry and pay a subsidy of £100,000 should Persia be invaded by a European power, or to mediate if that power should be at peace with Great Britain. Although Russia had been making peace overtures, and Jones had hoped the preliminary agreement would encourage a settlement, these developments strengthened Fath-‘Ali Shah’s determination to continue the war. Anglo-Persian relations warmed even further with the visit of Abu’l-Hasan Khan (q.v.) to London in 1809 and his return to Persia with Gore Ouseley as ambassador and minister plenipotentiary in 1810. Under Ouseley’s auspices, the preliminary treaty was converted into the Definitive Treaty of Friendship and Alliance in 1812, which confirmed the earlier promises of military assistance and increased the amount of the subsidy for that purpose to £150,000 (Donboli, pp. 444-46; Fasā’i, tr. Busse, pp. 128-29, 137-39; Maḥmud, pp. 124-45; Watson, pp. 157-63; Ingram, 1992, pp. 93-122; Wright, p. 14; see also GREAT BRITAIN ii).

Then, in the third and final twist to this story, Napoleon invaded Russia in June



1812, making Russia and Britain allies once again. Britain, like France after Tilsit, was thus obliged to steer a course between antagonizing Russia and violating its commitments to Persia, with its best option being to broker a settlement of the conflict between the two. The Russians had been periodically interested in finding a negotiated settlement since the setbacks of 1805-6 and as recently as 1810, when Alexander Tormasov, who had replaced Gudovich as commander after his unsuccessful siege of Erevan, and Mirzā Bozorg Qā'em-maqām had sought to arrange an armistice (Donboli, pp. 411-16; Atkin, p. 122). Yet the Russians were unwilling to make serious concessions in order to end the war, and the Persians were also less than eager to settle since from their point of view the war was not going all that badly. Ouseley, however, realized the awkwardness of having Britain's resources deployed against its Russian ally and that the situation for Persia was likely to worsen once Russia was freed from the struggle with Napoleon. He was thus receptive to Russian requests to act as an intermediary and sought ways to pressure the Qajars into accepting a settlement. He proposed revisions to the Definitive Treaty, scaled back British military involvement (leaving two officers, Charles Christie and Lindesay Bethune, and some drill sergeants with the Persian army), and threatened to withhold payment of the subsidy promised to the Qajars (Watson, p. 165; Atkin, pp. 136-37; Ingram, 1992, pp. 176-79; Wright, p. 15).

In February 1812, N. R. Ritschev assumed command of the Russian forces and opened peace negotiations with the Persians. Ouseley and his representative at the talks, James Morier, acted as intermediaries and made various proposals to Ritschev, but they were not accepted (Atkin, p. 141). In August, 'Abbās Mirza resumed hostilities and captured Lankarān. After news arrived that Napoleon had occupied Moscow, the negotiations were suspended (Ramaẓān 1227/September 1812). Then, on 24 Šawwāl 1227/31 October 1812, while Ritschev was away in Tbilisi, the general Peter Kotliarevski launched a surprise night attack on the Persian encampment at Āşlānduz (q.v.), which resulted in the complete rout of the army of 'Abbās Mirzā and the death of one of the British supporting officers (Christie). As it also became increasingly apparent that Napoleon's offensive in Russia had failed disastrously, the Russians were emboldened to pursue a more aggressive campaign in the Caucasus. In early 1813, the Persian fortress at Lankarān fell and its garrison was annihilated, enabling the Russians to occupy most of Ṭāleš again (on this phase of the war see Watson, pp. 165-68; Baddeley, p. 88; Pakravan, pp. 152-54; Atkin, pp. 99, 112, 138-39). Although Faṭḥ-'Alī Shah and 'Abbās Mirzā wanted to fight on after these setbacks, they eventually had to yield to Ouseley, who



assured the shah that either the Russians would make territorial concessions or the British would continue the subsidy they had promised (Atkin, pp. 143; Ingram, 1992, p. 179).

The settlement at Golestān and its consequences. The parties met for talks at the village of Golestān in Qarābāg, with Ritschev representing Russia and Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan and Ouseley as representatives for Persia. Ouseley did little more than use his influence to keep up the momentum for an agreement (and protect British interests), as the actual terms of the settlement were essentially dictated by Ritschev (Atkin, p. 143; Pakravan, p. 156). The Treaty of Golestān was concluded on 29 Šawwāl 1228/24 October 1813 (12 October according to Hurewitz, I, p. 197; 21 October in Pakravan, p. 156) and ratified at Tbilisi in September 1814. It provided for cessation of all hostilities between Russia and Persia (Article 1) and a demarcation of the frontier between them on the basis of the *status quo ad presentem*, i.e., with each side essentially keeping the territory then under its control. The frontier between the two powers was demarcated along a line from “Aduna Bazar [Ādina Bāz’ār], running direct towards the plain of Moghan [Moḡān] to the ford of the Anas [sic, read Aras] at Yuln Bulook [Yedi Boluk], up the Anas [Aras] to the Junction of the Capennuk Chace [Kapanak Čāy] at the back of the hill of Mekri [Meqri]; from thence the boundary of Karabagh [Qarābāg] and Nukshivan [Naḡjavān] is from above the mountains of Alighuz [Āldāguz?] to Dualighuz [Daralagez], and thence the boundary of Karabagh, Nukshivan, Erivand [Erevān], and also part of Georgia, and of Kuzah [Qazāq] and Shums-ud-deen Loo [Šams-al-Dinlu] is separated by Eishuk Meidaun [Išik Meydān]; from Eishuk Meidaun the line is the chain of mountains on the right and the river of Humya Chummun [Ḥamza Čaman], and from the tops of the mountains of [Panbak to Šura-gol and from there along the ridge of] Alighuz [Ālāguz/Aragats] it runs along the village of Shoorgil [Šura-gol] and between those of the village of Mystery [Mastara?] until it reaches the river of Arpachai [Ārpa Čāy].” Since the situation in Ṭāleš was still contested, it was left for a subsequent commission to resolve (Article 2). The Persian shah was obliged to recognize the sovereignty of the tsar over Georgia, Mingrelia, Abkhazia, Ganja, Qarābāg, Qobba, Darband, Baku, Dāḡestān, Šakki, and other territories (Article 3). This not only reflected the Persian loss of sovereignty in the Caucasus, but also undercut Ottoman claims to some of these territories (Atkin, p. 144). The Russians gained the right “to recognize the [Persian] Prince who shall be nominated heir-apparent, and to afford him assistance in case he should require it to suppress any opposing party” (Article 4). This deliberately ambiguous language was intended to get



around a specific Russian demand to support ‘Abbās Mirzā as successor to the throne (having dropped an earlier, and insulting, demand to include formal recognition of Fath-‘Ali as shah in the treaty; see Atkin, p. 143). While this article may have been intended to allay fears that rival princes would try to use the territorial losses incurred under the treaty as a means of discrediting and replacing ‘Abbās Mirzā as heir-apparent, it also set a dangerous precedent in that it laid the groundwork for Russia not merely to “recognize” but in fact to approve (or implicitly to veto) the designation of a Persian crown prince. Russia was also guaranteed the right of access for its commercial ships to Persian ports on the Caspian and the exclusive right to maintain ships-of-war on the Caspian (Article 5). The remaining articles (6-11) arranged for exchange of prisoners, appointment of ambassadors, commercial relations, duties on goods, and other routine matters (text of the treaty in Hurewitz, I, pp. 197-99; but note the variations in the Persian version of the agreement given in E’temād-al-Saltāna, *Montaẓam-e nāṣeri*, ed. Reżwāni, III, pp. 1510-17; Maḥmud, I, pp. 174-85; Ṭabāṭabā’i Majd, pp. 77-83).

The treaty of Golestān was naturally a great disappointment for the Persians and was bitterly opposed by officials such as Mirzā Bozorg. Although Persia had performed reasonably well in the war prior to Āşlānduz and had counted heavily on Britain to protect its interests in the negotiations, it had not only had to recognize the Russian position in Georgia but give up any claim to authority over the khanates of the eastern Caucasus and make other major political and economic concessions. These losses were very difficult for the Qajars to accept, partly because of the religious fervor they had unleashed by encouraging the Shi‘ite ulama to declare the struggle against Russia a holy war and partly because the war had not given them an accurate picture of the force Russia could bring to bear on the Caucasus frontier when it did not have to contend with a larger European conflict. The unsatisfactory terms of the treaty, combined with Ouseley’s failure to persuade the tsar to moderate the territorial provisions as he had indicated he would, as well as continued arguments over the vacillating British promises of subsidies and support, created friction between Persia and Britain. At the same time, the treaty vastly increased the role of Russia in the political and economic affairs of Persia while not fully satisfying the territorial ambitions of the Russians, particularly those of their governors and military officers in the Caucasus.

The most serious immediate defect in the Treaty of Golestān was the ambiguity of its territorial arrangements—for example, regarding the district



of Tāleš, where it was left to the mutually appointed commissioners to “determine what mountains, rivers, lakes, villages, and fields shall mark the line of frontier.” Even the boundaries specified in the treaty were subject to revision if one of the contracting parties held that they had “infringed on” territorial possessions claimed under the principle of the *status quo ad presentem*. This virtually guaranteed that territorial disputes would in fact continue after the signing of the treaty, as indeed they did. One of the most hotly contested areas continued to be the area between Lake Gokča and Erevan, and the Russian military occupation of the Gokča district in 1825 precipitated the second Russo-Persian War of 1826-28 (Watson, pp. 206-7).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Detailed bibliographies and references to archival and other primary sources may be found in the works by Atkin and Ingram (1992).

Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran: 1780-1828*, Minneapolis, 1980.

John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, London, 1908, pp. 57-91.

George A. Bournoutian, “Ḥusayn Qulī Khan, Sardar of Erevan: A Portrait of a Qajar Admin istrator,” *Iranian Studies* 9, 1976, pp. 163-79.

Idem, *Eastern Armenia in the Last Decades of Persian Rule, 1807-1828*, Malibu, Calif., 1982.

Idem, *The Khanate of Erevan under Qajar Rule, 1795-1828*, Costa Mesa, Calif., 1992.

J. Campbell, “The Russo-Persian Frontier, 1810,” *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 18, 1931, pp. 223-32.

Henry William Carless Davis, *The Great Game in Asia: 1800-1844*, Oxford, 1927.



‘Abd-al-Razzāq Maftun Donboli, *Ma’āter-e solṭāniya*, tr. Harford Jones Brydges as *Dynasty of the Kajars*, London, 1833.

E’temād-al-Salṭana, *Montaṣam-e nāṣeri*, ed. Reżwāni, III, pp. 1467-1517.

Fasā’i, tr. Busse, pp. 127-43. Reżāqoli Khan Hedāyat, *Tāriḵ-e rawzat al-ṣafā-ye nāṣeri* IX, Tehran, 1339 Š./1960.

Robert H. Hewsen, *Russian-Armenian Relations, 1700-1828*, Cambridge, Mass., 1984.

J. C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record I: European Expansion, 1535-1914*, 2nd rev. ed., New Haven and London, 1975, pp. 184-201.

Edward Ingram, “An Aspiring Buffer State: Anglo-Persian Relations in the Third Coalition, 1804-1807,” *Historical Journal* 16, 1973, pp. 509-33.

Idem, *Britain’s Persian Connection, 1798-1828: Prelude to the Great Game in Asia*, Oxford, 1992.

Mirzā Jamāl Javānšir Qarābāgi, *Tāriḵ-e Qarābāg*, ed. and tr. George A. Bournoutian as *A History of Qarabagh*, Costa Mesa, Calif., 1994.

Firuz Kazemzadeh, “Iranian Relations with Russia and the Soviet Union, to 1921,” in *Camb. Hist. Iran* VII, pp. 314-49 (especially pp. 330-337).

David Marshall Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 1658-1832*, New York, 1957.

Aleksandr Georgievich Kavtaradze, “Russo-Persian Wars of the 19th Century,” in Aleksandr Mikhailovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol’shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, tr. as *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, New York and London, 1979, XXII, pp., 502-3.

Moḥammad-Taḳi Khan Lesān-al-Molk Sepehr, *Nāsek-al-tawāriḵ: dawra-ye kāmel-e tāriḵ-e qājāriya*, ed. Jahāngir Qā’em-maqāmi, Tehran, 1337 Š./1958.

Maḥmud Maḥmud, *Tāriḵ-e rawābeṭ-e siāsi-e Irān o Engelīs dar qarn-e nuzdahom* I, Tehran, 1328 Š./1949, pp. 47-55, 56-80, 124-45, 151-85.

John Malcolm, *History of Persia*, 2 vols., London, 1815.



James Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople between the Years 1810 and 1816*, London, 1818.

Emineh Pakravan, *Abbas-Mirza*, Paris, 1973, pp. 59-156.

Jahāngir Qā'em-maqāmi, *Taḥawwolāt-e siāsi-e neẓām-e Irān*, Tehran, 1326 Š./1947.

Roger Savory, "British and French Diplomacy in Persia, 1800-1810," *Iran* 10, 1972, pp. 31-44.

Ġolām-Rezā Ṭabāṭabā'i Majd, ed., *Mo'āhadāt wa qarārdādhā-ye tāriqi*, Tehran, 1373 Š./1994, pp. 76-86.

Robert Watson, *A History of Persia from the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to the Year 1858*, London, 1866, pp. 141-69.

Samuel G. Wilson, "The Russian Occupation of Northern Persia," *Moslem World* 3 (1913), pp. 339-49.

Idem, "Some Hitherto Unpublished Dispatches of Captain John Malcolm," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 16, 1929, pp. 428-44.

Denis Wright, *The English amongst the Persians*, London, 1977.