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RUSSIA I. RUSSO-IRANIAN RELATIONS UP TO THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION

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i. Russo-Iranian Relations up to the Bolshevik Revolution

The relationship between Iran and Russia extends back more than a millennium. Prior to the 18th century, Iran and Russia treated each other as equal in their sporadic trade and diplomatic contacts. During the reign of Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725), Russia started to pursue expansionist designs against Iran, which culminated in the 19th century with the annexation of Iranian lands and aggressive interference in Iranian internal affairs. By the late 19th century, while successfully competing with Britain, Russia was winning concessions in Iran, providing loans to its monarchs, occupying Iranian lands, and manipulating Iranian rulers to satisfy its aspiration for domination of Iran.

Prior to Peter the Great. According to some Arab geographers' reports, contacts between Iran and Russia already existed in the 9th century in the area of trade (Eṣṭaḵri, pp. 221, 226; Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 392; tr., II, p. 382; Ebn Ḵordāḏbeh, p. 154; Bushev, 1976, pp. 29-30). The main trade route connecting Iran with ancient Russia used the Caspian Sea and the Volga River. The Mongol invasions in the

13th and 14th centuries interrupted trade, but in the 14th-15th centuries, a new trade route to Iran and India was established through Tver', Astrakhan, and Central Asia. Revival of economic and political relations between Russia and Iran began by the mid-15th century. Russian merchants traveling to Iran often combined trade missions with diplomatic assignments from their rulers.

The liberation from the Mongols of the cities of the Kazan (Qāzān) Khanate in 1552 and the Astrakhan Khanate in 1556 by Tsar Ivan IV (r. 1533-84) revived trade between Iran and Russia via the Volga-Caspian route and initiated Russian penetration of the Caucasus and the Caspian area. At that time, Iranian exports to Russia included silk and cotton fabrics, embroidered cloth, rice, fruit, and Indian spices; Iranians imported from Russia furs, amber, crystal, leather, paper, metals, and also European wool fabrics (Kukanova, 1957, pp. 244-45). In 1552-53, Safavid Iran and the Moscovy state in Russia exchanged ambassadors for the first time, and, starting in 1586, they established a regular diplomatic relationship (Bushev, 1976, pp. 36, 52). Anti-Ottoman struggle served as the main common political interest for Iran and Russia throughout the period of Safavid rule, with several attempts to conclude an anti-Ottoman military treaty.

By the last quarter of the 17th century diplomatic relations between Iran and Russia diminished, after Iran signed a peace treaty with the Ottomans in May 1639 (Moḥarram 1049), and Russia started to side with other European powers in its struggle against the Ottomans. At the same time, Iran was competing with Russia and the Ottoman empire for control over the Caucasus (Atkin, p. 3). In 1668-69, rebellious Cossacks led by Stenka Razin ravaged the Iranian shores of the Caspian Sea, sacking cities and massacring their inhabitants (Atkin, p. 4). Overall, before the time of Peter the Great, even though there were occasional disagreements, Iran and Russia treated each other as equal, since their level of military and political development was approximately the same.

Under Peter the Great (r. 1696-1725). Peter the Great initiated aggressive policies towards Iran. Although he was mainly concerned with Russia's position in Europe, he also had designs on the eastern territories including Iran, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and India. Already in 1697, Peter sent Vasiliĭ Kuchukov to Iran on an unsuccessful mission to establish a position of a permanent representative at the Safavid court. In 1707, he tried to collect information about the situation in Iran and sent a letter to Shah Solṭān-Ḥosayn through Israel Ori, an Armenian patriot dispatched to Iran by the Vatican

(Bushev, 1978, pp. 8-9; Lockhart, pp. 63-65). In 1712, a magnificent embassy under Fażl-ʿAli Beg arrived in Moscow with a huge consignment of goods and a mission to negotiate rights for Iranian merchants in Russia. Iranian merchants were granted some tax benefits in Russia, but the Russians demanded that Russian merchants be allowed to export silk freely from Iran, mainly Gilan, and that Armenian merchants in Jolfa should direct their silk trade towards and through Russia exclusively (Kukanova, 1957, p. 234). Although Peter tried to extract some information about the internal situation in Iran from this embassy, its members revealed nothing significant (Bushev, 1978, p. 9).

In 1715-18, a young officer, Artemiĭ Petrovich Volynskiĭ, was sent to Iran to gather information about the troops and fortresses and the political and economic situation there. He was also to persuade Shah Solṭān-Ḥosayn to conclude a military alliance against the Ottomans and to promote a trade agreement recognizing Russia's monopoly of the silk trade in Iran and Russia's trade with India through Iran. According to Peter's instruction, Volynskiĭ's task was to gather detailed information about Gilan and other Caspian provinces of Iran, their harbors, cities, and especially rivers flowing into the Caspian (Bushev, 1978, pp. 23-24; Lockhart, pp. 103-4). Volynskiĭ recorded intelligence in a secret daily journal, creating a detailed account that correctly predicted the collapse of the Safavid state. He also successfully negotiated the first trade treaty with Iran, which granted Russian merchants various benefits that included free trade in silk (Kukanova, pp. 245-46; Lockhart, pp. 106-7; Atkin, p. 4). According to the treaty, Russia also sent its consuls to Isfahan and Gilan.

The Ottoman threat to a weakened Iran, combined with the Afghan invasion and deep internal decline, convinced Peter the Great to interfere in order to prevent the Ottomans from appearing on the Russian southeastern borders. Peter had a significant interest in the resources of the Caspian provinces, including silk, fruits, sugar, possibly copper, iron, lead, and saltpeter (Kukanova, 1957, p. 250). An attack by some Caucasian tribes on Shirvan, in which several Russian merchants were killed and others lost property, gave Peter a pretext to attack. Two months before Shah Solṭān-Ḥosayn was overthrown by the Afghans, Peter invaded the Caucasian coast of the Caspian at the head of more than 100,000 Russian soldiers. He captured Darband and intended to join forces with 30,000 Georgian and 10,000 Armenian troops (Kazemzadeh, 1991, p. 318; Atkin, pp. 4-5; Lockhart, pp. 179 ff.). The Russians, however, lost 33,000 men to illness because of the unusually hot and humid climate (Atkin, p. 5): they also lost most of their horses and suffered severe

supply shortages. Therefore, they were forced to withdraw their army, leaving behind several garrisons, and abandoning their Georgian and Armenian allies and their ambitious plans to annex the Caspian provinces.

In 1723, the envoy of Shah Ṭahmāsb II, a son of the late shah, signed a treaty with Russia in St. Petersburg, under which Iran ceded to Russia the towns of Darband and Baku and the provinces of Gilan, Mazanderan, and Astarabad. Shah Ṭahmāsb refused to ratify the treaty, but Russia maintained garrisons in Darband, Baku, and Gilan. In 1724, Russia signed a treaty with the Ottomans, recognizing Ottoman control over Azarbaijan and much of Transcaucasia, while the Caspian provinces remained under Russian control (Kazemzadeh, 1991, pp. 318-20; Hurewitz, I, pp. 65-69; Lockhart, pp. 233-35; Atkin, p. 5). However, much of the territory of Gilan lay outside actual Russian control, and no attempts were made to send garrisons to Mazanderan and Astarabad. Low revenues from silk in Gilan disappointed the Russians. In addition, approximately 100,000 Russian soldiers died, mostly from disease, during the occupation of the coastal provinces (Atkin, p. 5). Peter the Great died in 1725, and Empress Anna (r. 1730-40) agreed in the treaties of Rasht (1732) and Ganja (1735) to withdraw Russian forces from all Iranian territories (Hurewitz, pp. 69-71; Lockhart, p. 348; Atkin, 5). Thereafter, relations between Iran and Russia remained limited until the late 18th century, when Catherine the Great (r. 1762-96) resumed expansionist policies.

Under the early Qajars. The fragmentation of Iran during the 18th century encouraged Russian aspirations to establish its domination in the Caucasus and the Caspian provinces of Iran. The policy of Catherine the Great also included allying herself with Christian Georgians and Armenians in the Caucasus to hold off recurrent Ottoman advances. In 1781, a Russian expedition led by Count Voinovich landed near Astarabad/Estrābād in an attempt to establish a base on the access route to India. They built a fort on the shore of the Bay of Astarabad but within a few months were forced by Āḡā Moḥammad Khan Qājār to level it and depart (Andreeva, 2007. p. 39; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1390-91). Āḡā Moḥammad Khan, the founder of the Qajar dynasty, was at that time consolidating his power and wanted his domain to include both the Caucasian borderlands and the Caspian shore. Trying not to antagonize his Russian neighbors completely, he sent his envoy to St. Petersburg, but Catherine refused to receive him, announcing that she did not consider Āḡā Moḥammad Khan the legitimate ruler of Gilan and Mazanderan (Atkin, pp. 34-35).

The next episode of Russian interference in Iranian affairs came in 1785-86, when the ruler of Gilan, Hedāyat-Allāh Khan Gilāni, who was a rival of Āḡā Moḥammad Khan, asked for Russian assistance when Āḡā Moḥammad Khan tried to take control of Gilan. In exchange, the Russians asked Hedāyat-Allāh Khan to cede the port of Anzali (Enzeli), but since Āḡā Moḥammad Khan did not attack, Hedāyat-Allāh Khan lost interest in Russian protection. At this point, Russian officials in Anzali asked Āḡā Moḥammad Khan to attack Gilan and supported him with weapons. The defeated Hedāyat-Allāh took refuge with the Russians, but they soon surrendered him to his other enemy, who put him to death (Atkin, p. 34; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1399-400). The alliance between the Russians and Āḡā Moḥammad Khan collapsed when a Russian official demanded a large sum of money for his assistance in the conquest of Gilan and refused to share Hedāyat-Allāh Khan's treasures, which he had allegedly seized. The Russians then supported Mortażāqoli, a rival brother of Āḡā Moḥammad Khan, while Āḡā Moḥammad Khan ordered a blockade of the Russian settlement in Anzali, which disrupted Russian trade. The Russians also made a failed attempt to patronize another contender, ʿAli-Morād Khan Zand (Atkin, pp. 35, 37; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1402-405).

Threatened by the Ottomans and Āḡā Moḥammad Khan, the Georgians asked for Russian protection, and in 1783, the Treaty of Georgievsk was signed, which placed the Georgian kingdom under Russian protection (Allen, pp. 210-11). In 1795, Āḡā Moḥammad Khan, trying to reunify the Iranian empire, attacked Georgia and sacked Tbilisi. Due to flawed judgements by local Russian commanders, the Russians did not provide any assistance to their ally, but in the following year Catherine sent an army of 10,000 to 30,000 soldiers on a campaign against Āḡā Moḥammad Khan. Valerian Zubov, who led the army, obtained submission of most khans in the eastern Caucasus, but the occupation lasted less than a year. The combination of poor supplies, inadequate planning, lack of knowledge of the terrain, and the unreliability of the local khans made a decisive attack on Gilan impossible (Atkin, 37-42; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1429-30, 1434; Eʿteżād-al-Salṭana, pp. 46-48; Allen, pp. 213-14). The Russian and Iranian armies never met on a battlefield; in November 1796, Catherine the Great died, and her son and new Russian emperor Paul (r. 1796-1801) immediately ordered the troops back from the Caucasus. The whole campaign was an embarrassing failure for the Russians. The recently crowned shah of Iran, Āḡā Moḥammad Khan, triumphantly returned to the Caucasus but was murdered on 17 June 1797 (Ḏu'l-ḥejja, 1211), before he could recapture Georgia (Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1436-39; Eʿteżād-

al-Salṭana, p. 52). His nephew and designated heir, Bābā Khan, succeeded him on the throne as Fatḥ-Āli Shah (q.v.).

Russo-Iranian wars. Āḡā Moḥammad Khan was the last Iranian ruler who was able to maintain a perception of cooperation with Russia "in terms of an alliance between two sovereigns rather than the submission of a vassal to his suzerain" (Atkin, p. 35). By the 19th century, the balance of power changed, imperialism and colonialism opened a new page in the relations between Russia and Iran. Russia entered the 19th century as a powerful Eurasian empire, with high international prestige and strong influence in European political affairs. It had completed the century of Westernization and adopted Western technology and military skills. Russian territorial expansion was now combined with the extension of political sovereignty over the conquered peoples in the belief that the colonies would enrich the empire and that the empire would in return bring civilization and Christianity to the subject people.

Throughout the 19th century, Russians treated Iran as an inferior "Orient," looking down at its people and ridiculing every aspect of their culture. The Russian variety of the Western attitude of superiority, however, had its unique twist. Since Russian national identity was split between East and West and Russian culture included strong Asian elements, Russians felt ambivalent, and even inferior, towards Western Europeans. In an attempt to compensate for this peculiar complex of inferiority, they often tried to prove their equality to the Western European powers by overemphasizing their own Europeanness and adherence to Christianity, and by overwhelming disparagement of Iranians. This trend is obvious in more than 200 Russian travelogues about Iran published in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as in diplomatic and other official papers (Andreeva, 2007, pp. 24-35).

Under Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah and Emperor Paul, a minor improvement of relations took place. Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah sent several friendly notes to Russia, while Paul took some conciliatory steps, including ending the ban on Iranian naval vessels in the Caspian, a promise to keep Russian warships away from Iranian ports, and measures to improve Russo-Iranian commerce. Uniquely for a Russian ruler, Paul believed that Iranians and Caucasians could have their own legitimate self-interests different from those of Russia. Trying to avoid confrontation with Iran, he sent consul Skibinevskiĭ back to Anzali with instructions not to antagonize Iranians but to win their "trust and love" (Atkin, pp. 54-57).

Simultaneously, a confrontation was impending, since Iran and Russia both claimed the same territories in the eastern Caucasus. Threatened by Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah, Georgia asked Russia for protection in 1799, and the following year Georgia became a part of the Russian empire. In March of the same year, Paul was assassinated, and his son Alexander (r. 1801-25) became the new Russian emperor (Allen, pp. 214-15). Like his father, he believed that the Russian border should align with the Kura and Aras rivers. Unlike his father, he looked at Iranians and other Muslims with contempt and altered Paul's policy of toleration. In 1801, he signed the manifesto of Emperor Paul, according to which territories under the two Georgian Georgian kingdoms became parts of the Russian empire (Allen, pp. 214-15).

In 1803, Alexander put Prince Pavel Dmitrievich Tsitsianov (in Pers. Ešpoḵtor/Ešpoḵdor, Sisiānof) in charge of Caucasian affairs, an appointment leading to the outbreak of the first war with Iran. Tsistianov's notoriously aggressive imperialist policy in the Caucasus was combined with his militant Europeanism and intense loathing for "Asiatic" or "Persian," terms that he used interchangeably (Atkin, p. 75; Kazemzadeh, 1991, pp. 331-32). He exercised a strong influence on the emperor. While imposing Russian rule on the Caucasian territories, Tsitisianov tried to shift the Russian border beyond the Aras and Kura rivers and sought annexation of Khoi, Tabriz, and Gilan. He never seemed to be willing to moderate his intolerably harsh demands on the local rulers and always opposed attempts at any peaceful settlement with Iran. With the exception of the khanate of Shirvan, other khanates were subjected to military conquest, including Ganja in 1804, Qarābāḡ, Šakki, Baku (Pers. Bādkuba), Qobba, and Darband in 1806, Ṭāleš in 1813, and Erevan and Naḵjavān in 1827. Traditional rivalries between local rulers made the Russian conquest easier. When Tsitsianov attacked Ganja in 1803, ʿAbbās Mirzā, the heir apparent to Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah and governor of Azarbaijan, marched to the khan's aid, but he was too late. In mid-January 1804, Tsitisianov stormed the citadel, massacred between 1,500 and 3,000 inhabitants, made Ganja a district of Georgia and renamed it Elizavetpol in honor of the Emperor's wife. Referring to the place by its old name became a crime punishable by a fine, the main mosque was turned into a church, and Russian law replaced Islamic law (Atkin, pp. 82-86, 95, 96; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1468-69; Fasāʾi, I, pp. 686-88; Kazemzadeh, 1991, p. 332).

A direct military confrontation between Russia and Iran became inevitable, since the Qajars saw the Russian aggression in the Caucasus as a direct threat

to their authority there. The first Russo-Iranian war (1804-13) started in June 1804 when Tsitsianov appeared at Erevan with 3,000 troops, but he was beaten back by ʿAbbās Mirzā, who encountered him with a superior force of 18,000 troops. In July of that year, the Russians laid siege to the city but had to withdraw again. In 1805, the Russians undertook an unsuccessful attempt to take Anzali, Gilan, and Qazvin (Atkin, pp. 120-21; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1470-73; Eʿteżād-al-Salṭana, pp. 104-5; Fasāʾi, I, pp. 687-88). The situation for the Russians was complicated by their wars against Napoleon (1805-07 and 1812-15) and the Ottomans (1806-12). The Russian government was ready to negotiate peace in 1806 and 1808, but both sides advanced what the opposite side considered unrealistic demands, and the war dragged on. Since Russia's war with Iran was secondary to its wars in Europe, Russia never had sufficient troops and supplies in the Caucasus, and the quality of the Russian army, including its training and officers, was often inadequate. In addition, the Russians failed to use their Caspian navy to supply troops and attack coastal positions and suffered serious health problems in the harsh climate. The Russian army was better prepared for conventional battles but instead they had to deal with Iranian military guerrilla raids and resistance from various Caucasian tribes (Atkin, pp. 101-9). Additionally, desertion was a serious problem in the Russian army.

For Iran, the war was of primary importance and marked their first exposure to active contacts with the European powers. Hoping to receive assistance against the Russian aggression, Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah became caught in diplomatic intrigues resulting in several agreements with the British, the French, and European diplomatic and military missions sent to Iran, as well as involved in attempts at military reforms in Iran at first under French, and later under British military instructors. Although the European-trained army, with the help of European officers and led by ʿAbbās Mirzā, had some success in their fighting against the Russians in Ṭāleš and Qarābāḡ in 1812, the Iranians could not win the war. They suffered defeats with heavy losses at the battles of Aṣlānduz and Lankarān in 1812 and lost about 5,000 soldiers from their new army. The Russian troops were led by General Kotliarevskiĭ, who was seriously wounded at Lankarān (Atkin, pp. 138-39; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1504-6, 1508; Eʿteżād-al-Salṭana, pp. 351-53; Sykes, II, pp. 313-14). By 1813, Napoleon was expelled from Russia; Russia and Britain became allies again; and, with British mediation, the Treaty of Golestān (q.v.) concluded the first Russo-Iranian war in the same year.

According to the treaty, each party was to keep the lands they occupied at the moment of signing the agreement. Therefore, Iran ceded most of its Caucasian possessions, including Ṭāleš and khanates north of the Aras and Kura rivers with the exception of Naḵjavān and Erevan. In spite of a detailed description, the border was not clearly defined. In a separate act, Iran was allowed to require changing of existing borders and return of some lost territories (Kulagina and Dunaeva, p. 39; Hurewitz, I, pp. 177-79; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1510-16; Kazemzadeh, 1991, p. 334). In addition, only Russia was allowed to have a navy on the Caspian. The treaty had some stipulations for the improvement trade between the two countries. The treaty also provided a pretext for future Russia interference into Iranian affairs by affirmation of Russian support to the legitimate heir to the Iranian throne. Overall, the treaty was vague and did not satisfy either side.

In 1814, Mirzā Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan Ilči, the Iranian representative who had signed the Golestān Treaty, was dispatched to St. Petersburg to negotiate territorial concessions to Iran, but his mission was unsuccessful. In 1817, the Russian government sent General Alexis Ermolov (Pers. Yermolof), a hero of the war against Napoleon and the Caucasian Core Commander and civil administrator of the Caucasus and the province of Astrakhan, to Tehran to settle the lines of demarcation. He was expected to make some minor territorial concessions to Iran, primarily in Ṭāleš or Qarābāḡ, in order to resolve the tense relations between the recent enemies (Kulagina and Dunaeva, p. 41). Ermolov, who was to become infamous for his heavy-handed treatment of the people of the Caucasus, was a strong proponent of aggressive imperial policies of Russia. He was still in a euphoric state after Russia's triumph over Napoleon and looked down, not just on defeated Iran, but also on Western Europe. After having studied the territories conquered by Russia, Ermolov came to the conclusion that none of those territories could be ceded back to Iran without damage to Russia's interests. In addition, his refusal to follow the rules of Persian etiquette, remove his boots, and put on red socks before entering the residence of the shah and crown prince was insulting to his hosts (Andreeva, 2007, pp. 54, 79; Kazemzadeh, 1991, p. 335; Atkin, pp. 65, 153). To make things worse, he favored Moḥammad-ʿAli Mirzā Dawlatšāh, the eldest son of Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah, over ʿAbbās Mirzā. When Ermolov proposed an alliance against the Ottoman empire, suggested that Russian instructors train the Iranian army, and asked for a free passage for Russian troops to attack Khiva, he was refused on all counts (Atkin, pp. 153-54). Ermolov was able to schedule border demarcation for 1818, but it was only in 1823 that special

officials started to work on the border. The process was soon stalled by the Iranian side. Meanwhile, ʿAbbās Mirzā was sending his agents to Shirvan, Qarābāḡ, and Dāḡestān, which had been ceded to Russia, to instigate a rebellion against their new rulers (Kulagina and Dunaeva, p. 42). At the same time, he sent Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan to St. Petersburg with gifts for Alexander I and asked the emperor to recognize him as the heir to the throne, in which he succeeded. In 1825, Alexander I sent an ambassador to Iran, since he needed it to remain neutral in case of a new Russo-Ottoman war. The ambassador offered to return territories in Ṭāleš to Iran, but the shah was unimpressed and refused to yield Qarābāḡ and Georgia (Kulagina and Dunaeva, p. 43; Kazemzadeh, 1991, pp. 335-36).

The relations between the two countries were rapidly deteriorating. ʿAbbās Mirzā was preparing to refight the war and, ignoring the reality of overwhelming Russian military and economic power, hoped to win back all the ceded Caucasian territories. He was encouraged by the anti-Russian sentiment in the lost provinces, and inside Iran he was supported by the ulama. Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah and ʿAbbās Mirzā had high expectations of the treaty with Britain signed in 1814 promising British troops or a subsidy if Iran were attacked by a European power; only British officers were to train Iranian army (Hurewitz, I, pp. 199-201; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1520-24; Algar, p. 89). With British assistance, ʿAbbās Mirzā was continuing his attempts to modernize the Iranian army. Alexander I died in 1825, and, after the attempted coup by the Decembrists, Nicholas I ascended the Russian throne. ʿAbbās Mirzā refused to sign a demarcation act. The Iranians were unilaterally moving the demarcation line farther north in several disputed locations, expelling local inhabitants and replacing them with Iranians, and placing Russian goods and merchants in several ports under arrest. Their British advisers and topographers were drawing misleading maps which further complicated the situation on the border (Kulagina and Dunaeva, pp. 43-44).

In the same year, Nicholas I sent Prince Menshikov to Iran to inform the Iranian sovereign about his ascendance, peacefully negotiate the borders, and return some territories in Ṭāleš. Simultaneously with the Menshikov mission, Nicholas sent Lieutenant Noskov with a famous crystal bed as a gift to Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah. The magnificent bed was placed in the Golestān Palace, but Menshikov's mission failed; Iran was preparing for a war (Andreeva, 2007, pp. 69-70; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1569-70; Kazemzadeh, 1991, pp. 336-37; Eʿteżād-al-Salṭana, p. 153). The British, whose influence on the shah was strong at that

time, were working to provoke an armed conflict and were delivering military equipment to the southern Iranian ports. The Russian embassy was received coldly and encountered serious difficulties on their way back home. On 23 June 1826, the ulama issued a call for holy war (*jehād*) against Russia (Kulagina and Dunaeva, p. 44; Algar, pp. 89-90; Kazemzadeh, 1991, p. 336). Ermolov's actions had also been provocative. In 1825, he had sent troops to occupy the north shore of Lake Gokcha on the way to Erevan and in May 1826 had occupied Mirak in the Erevan Khanate (Kazemzadeh, 1991, p. 337). In July, ʿAbbās Mirzā attacked the Russians in Ṭāleš, Qarābāḡ, and Armenia, captured Ganja, Lenkarān, Shirvan, and some other areas and laid siege to Baku. Inhabitants of many khanates claimed by Russia rebelled against their new masters.

By September, the Iranian advance was stopped and Ermolov was replaced by General Pashkevich. In the fall 1827, the Russian troops advanced and captured Erevan, Naḵjavān and ʿAbbāsābād; the road to Tabriz was open and peace negotiations started soon after. During the negotiations, in December of 1827, a war between Russia and the Ottoman empire broke out. The Ottomans offered Iran military help against Russia. Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah tried to use the situation to his advantage in the negotiations, but the Russians resumed military actions, captured Urmia, Ardabil, and Miāna and advanced towards Tehran. Iran had to accept all conditions put forward by Pashkevich (Kulagina and Dunaeva, p. 46; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, pp. 1571-81; Eʿteżād-al-Salṭana, pp. 376-83; Atkin, pp. 156-58).

The treaty of Torkmānčāy, signed on 22 February 1826 (14 Rajab 1241), reflected the new relations of inequality between the two countries and served as a foundation for their relationship until the Bolshevik coup in Russia in 1917. It clearly defined on the ground the Russo-Iranian border, which remained unchanged until 1991. In addition to the lands yielded under the treaty of Golestān, Iran had to cede to Russia the khanates of Erevan and Naḵjavān (Hurewitz, I, pp. 231-37; Kulagina and Dunaeva, 47; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1581-92; Kazemzadeh, 1991, pp. 338-40; Watson, pp. 239-45). While only Russia was allowed to have a navy on the Caspian, both countries were to use the Caspian for trade. Russia recognized ʿAbbās Mirzā as heir to the throne. An additional commercial treaty allowed Russia to establish consulates in any location in Iran and granted Russian citizens the right to extraterritoriality. To make Iran's humiliation worse, Iran was forced to pay an enormous sum of 20 million rubles in reparations. ʿAbbās Mirzā emptied

his treasury and parted with most of his valuables to pay the reparations (Atkin, p. 159; Eʿteżād-al-Salṭana, p. 382; Eqbāl, pp. 27-28). Extraordinary taxes and dues levied on Iranians further inflamed anti-Russian sentiment in Iran (Kulagina and Dunaeva, p. 49).

Relations after the wars. Anti-Russian feeling was tragically demonstrated in the murder of Russian ambassador Alexander Griboedov (Figure 1) and his whole embassy (with one exception). The author of the famous comedy *Woe from Wit*, Griboedov was appointed Russian minister to Tehran in 1828 and charged with implementing the treaty of Torkmānčāy, including the indemnity and return of Russian prisoners of war. He also attempted to impose on Iran a war against the Ottoman empire to support the Russians. The most commonly accepted version of this controversial event is that Griboedov gave refuge at the Russian Mission to Āḡā Yaʿqub Khan, an important eunuch of Armenian origin in the shah's service and in charge of a large amount of money belonging to the royal household. Griboedov's men would search for women of Georgian and Armenian origin and would take them to Griboedof's residence. Incited by Āḡā Yaʿqub, he demanded that two Georgian women who had converted to Islam and were in the harem of Allāhyār Khan Āṣaf-al-Dawla, a prominent aristocrat related to the royal family, be turned over to him. Allāhyār Khan was so ordered, and the women were taken to Gribaidof's residence. The rumor spread that they had been forced to renounce Islam. On 11 February 1829, a mob instigated by Ḥāji Mirzā Masiḥ Astarābādi, a prominent religious authority (*mojtahed*) in Tehran, stormed the Russian legation and murdered all the members of the mission except for one man who was able to hide. Several of Griboedov's colleagues, including Ivan Simonich and Alexander Diugamel, both of whom served as Russian ministers in Tehran after Griboedov, later accused him of an arrogant and even humiliating behavior towards the shah and his ministers. They claimed that it was both disrespectful and ignorant of Griboedov to keep the women in the Russian Mission building. Ḵosrow Mirzā, one of ʿAbbās Mirzā's sons, was sent to St. Petersburg bearing gifts to apologize to the emperor. The prince received a cordial welcome in St. Petersburg and was granted forgiveness, since Russia, which was then at war with the Ottomans, was not prepared to start another war with Iran (Andreeva, 2007, pp. 147-48; Algar, pp. 94-99; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1594-96; Eʿteżād-al-Salṭana, pp. 160-62, 383-84; Fasāʾi, I, pp. 736-39; Watson, pp. 248-57; Kazemzadeh, 1991, pp. 338-40; T. Ādamiyat, pp. 35-37; Kelly, pp. 183-94).

In the 1830s, an uneasy situation emerged around Herat in western Afghanistan, a city that was the key to strategic and military domination of the region. Encouraged by the Russians, ʿAbbās Mirzā was preparing to attack the city, but he died in Mashad in Jomādā II 1249/ October 1833. His son Moḥammad Mirzā was proclaimed the heir apparent and ascended the throne in 1834, after the death of Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah (Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1614-16, 1620-21; Eʿteżād-al-Salṭana, pp. 172-75, 392-93; Watson, pp. 268-69). Jan Vitkevich, an expert on Central Asian and Middle Eastern languages, was posted to the Russian Minister Plenipotentiary Count Simonich. He was able to form an alliance between Tehran, Kabul, and Kandahar, which Simonich guaranteed in the name of the Russian empire. In 1837, when Moḥammad Shah besieged Herat, Simonich and other members of the Russian Mission tried to assist him. A British officer, Eldred Pottinger, played a notable role in the city's defense.

The British perceived the establishment of an Iranian, and therefore Russian, presence in Afghanistan as a danger to India, therefore they terminated their relations with Iran and threatened war. In June 1838, they occupied Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf. In September Moḥammad Shah withdrew from Herat. Britain also initiated an active campaign against Russia, accusing it of plotting to conquer India. The Russian government tried to explain that their actions had been misinterpreted. Simonich became a scapegoat and was replaced with Alexander Diugamel who was instructed to maintain the status quo in Iran while avoiding a direct confrontation with Britain. "Friendly" relations between Russia and Britain were soon restored (Andreeva, 2007, pp. 70-72; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1638-42; Ḵormuji, pp. 26-27; Rawlinson, pp. 47-49, 56-57; Watson, pp. 296 ff.).

In the same year, 1838, a Russian Captain Albrant was able to bring back to Russia most of the Russian deserters residing in Iran. Russians had started to escape to Iran at the very beginning of the 19th century, when Russia established its military presence there. Soldier desertion was a common problem in the Russian army, where serf peasants were drafted for twenty-five years, served under notoriously harsh discipline, and often endured poor food supplies and starvation. In the Caucasus, it was relatively easy to break away, since the border was porous. In Iran, deserters were readily accepted into service by ʿAbbās Mirzā and other Iranian officials. In the early 19th century, ʿAbbās Mirzā formed the Russian Battalion called Bahādorān from Russian deserters, mainly from the Russian army in Georgia, under the

command of a Samson Yakovlevich Makintsev, who became known as Samson Khan (Andreeva, 2007, p. 60). The Battalion soldiers had a reputation for discipline and fearlessness and were used by the Iranian government in fighting against Turcomans, Afghans, Kurds, and the Ottomans.

After the death of ʿAbbās Mirzā, the Russian Battalion continued to serve Moḥammad Shah. Information about their numbers is imprecise: most probably, the Battalion counted between 1,500 and 2,000 men. For the Russian authorities, the existence of the Russian Battalion was a source of irritation, political embarrassment, and practical inconvenience, and it served as an attraction and inspiration for new deserters. According to the Treaty of Golestān, all prisoners of war were to be returned, while those who had escaped were free to return. In 1826-27, Lieutenant I. Noskov brought back 250 Russian prisoners of war. Unexpectedly, they had been offered to him by Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah as a gift (Andreeva, 2007, pp. 60-63). According to the Treaty of Torkmānčāy, all the prisoners of war were to be released and returned. None of the parties was to demand return of deserters and fugitives, while Iran was not to allow Russian deserters serving in the Iranian military to be stationed near the Russian border.

In 1837, Nicholas I traveled to the Caucasus and, during a meeting with Mirzā Taqi Khan Amir-e Neẓām (future Amir Kabir, q.v.), requested that the Battalion be dissolved and the Russian soldiers returned to Russia. If Moḥammad Shah refused to meet this requirement within six months, the Russian minister in Tehran was to leave Iran together with all the members of the mission. Moḥammad Shah had to agree, and in 1838, Captain Albrant was assigned to travel to Iran in 1838 and escort the deserters back. From Tabriz, he sent a total of 327 people, including deserters and their families. From Tehran, he brought back most of the Russian Battalion, 385 men with their families. Samson Khan continued to serve Iranian rulers and even formed a new regiment of deserters. After his death in the 1850s, there was no other Russian military unit inside Iran. In the second half of the 19th century, only individual deserters escaped, but their numbers were low and counted in tens. Russian officials accused local Iranian authorities of welcoming deserters and spared no effort to return them. An additional Convention to the Torkmānčāy Treaty about deserters signed in 1844 stipulated that citizens of both countries were not allowed to travel across the border without passports and a formal permission from their government; those who violated this rule were to be arrested (Andreeva, 2007, pp. 60-63; see also Berzhe).

After establishing its domination on the western shore of the Caspian, Russia began to look towards its eastern shore. In the 1820s-30s, Russian expeditions were sent to that area to study its social, economic, and political situation. In 1838, the Iranian government asked Russia to send two military ships to Astarabad Bay in order to suppress the rebellion of Qiāt, a Turcoman leader. Seizing the opportunity, Russia sent its navy and, by 1842, founded a station on Āšurāda Island in Astarabad Bay. In 1846, a Russian consulate was established in Astarabad. In the same year, a Russian fort Novo-Perovskoe (Aleksandrovskoe) was built on the Mangyshlak peninsula. In 1849-50, the Russian navigation company "Merkury" began its activities on the Caspian (Kulagina and Dunaeva, pp. 54-55; Rawlinson, pp. 136-39; F. Ādamiyat, 1975, pp. 482 ff.).

The international position of Russia started to shift by the middle of the 19th century. By then, Russia was falling behind Western Europe in its technical and military development. Internal weakness resulted in diplomatic failures, which were followed by the humiliating defeat in the Crimean War against the allied forces of Britain, France, Turkey, and Sardinia (1853-56). The Russian role in European politics was reduced, while its politics towards Central Asia and the Far East acquired more significance. It was only there that Russia was still able to compete successfully with the Western European powers. Russian military advance into Central Asia started in the 1860s, and by 1873 the territories of the Ḵoqand (Kokand), Bukhara, and Khiva khanates became Russian territories. In 1873, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah visited Russia and suggested that Russia and Iran join efforts to "pacify" Turcoman tribes. He offered his assistance again in the next year, according to the Russian minister in Tehran, A. F. Berger, but the Russian government rejected his offer. During the Russian military actions in Central Asia, however, Iran supported the Russian army with supplies of food and forage (Kulagina and Dunaeva, pp. 58-59; Rawlinson, pp. 169-71, 313-15; Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana, III, pp. 1939 ff., 1951). After the fall of Geok Tepe in 1881, most of the Turcoman territories of Transcaspia fell under the Russian rule.

In the same year, a convention relating to Russo-Iranian border east of the Caspian Sea was signed, which drew the border mainly along the Atrak River (text in Krausse, pp. 360-62). The Atrak and Marv oases were now separating Russian Central Asia from Iranian Khorasan and migrations of Yomud Turcomans between Russian and Iranian territories were causing conflicts between the two countries. According to the Convention of 1881, Russia

appointed its representatives to the Iranian border towns Qučān, Bojnurd, and Moḥammadābād. In 1883, in addition to the Convention of 1881, a secret agreement was signed, which granted Russia the right to occupy Khorasan in case of a threat to the Transcaspian railroad. In 1884 Russia acquired Marv, and in the following year Saraḵs. The British were alarmed and tried to interfere to prevent the Russian advance. A Convention of 1893 defined the rest of the Russo-Iranian border and developed further regulations of water resources usage (Kulagina and Dunaeva, pp. 62-66, 68-69; Rawlinson, pp. 169-71, 313-15; Curzon, 1966, I, pp. 193-95; Bakhash, pp. 218-20).

The "*Great Game*." From the 1860s to the early 20th century, Great Britain became Russia's most important rival on the international stage. Russia's increasing presence in the Caucasus and its steady advance into Central Asia alarmed the British, who were primarily concerned about protecting India from other great powers. The rivalry of Russia and Great Britain for domination over Asian politics became known as the "Great Game." Iran's geographical position on the borders of Russia, India, and the Persian Gulf turned it into a natural target in the political struggle between Russia and Britain, one of "the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the domination of the world" (Curzon, 1966, I, pp. 3-4). Political and strategic interests were of primary concern to both Britain and Russia, although they also had an interest in Iranian trade and, in the second half of the 19th century, on concessions and loans. Britain was mainly concerned with preserving the formal independence and integrity of Iran in order to defend India. Russia, after depriving Iran of its Caucasian and Transcaspian territories, had further expansionist designs on northern and northeastern Iran, especially on Khorasan. Both imperial powers were striving to exercise as much influence on the Qajar rulers as possible in order to dominate Iran and to repel their rivals there.

The Qajar monarchs were unable to resist European pressure. Instead, Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah (r. 1797-1834), ʿAbbās Mirzā, and Moḥammad Shah (r. 1834-48) tried, for the most part unsuccessfully, to exploit the rivalries between them. Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96) encouraged foreign concessions in Iran in the hope that they would help to modernize the country, but, similar to the other Qajar rulers, he underestimated the need for radical financial and administrative reform in order for this policy to succeed. Formally, Iran never became a colony, mainly because of the rivalry between Russia and Britain; the balance of power between Russia and Britain was of particular importance in

preserving the integrity of Iran. However, with the passage of time, Iran's sovereignty was growing more and more limited.

The tug-of-war between Russia and Britain for concessions led to the increasing economic encroachment of the two empires on Iran, hampering a balanced development of its economy. One striking example was the blocking of railroad construction in Iran. Starting in the 1870s, both Britain and Russia each pressured Iranian monarchs to grant it a railroad concession and to deny one to the other power. As a result, Iran's interests were completely ignored, and, with the exception of several insignificant branches, railroad construction was under a moratorium until after World War I (see Kazemzadeh, 1957; see also RAILROADS i).

Russian opposition, augmented by British government indifference, led to the cancellation of a broad concession for industrial development granted to a British subject, Baron Julius de Reuter, in the early 1870s (Algar, pp. 174-78; Farhād-Moʿtamed, pp. 210-12; F. Ādamiyat, 1972, pp. 367-69; Kazemzadeh, 1968, pp. 126-34; Frechling, apud Issawi, pp. 178-84). Later, similar Russian projects were effectively blocked by their rivals. In the early 1890s, Nāṣer-al-Din Shah granted a tobacco monopoly to a British subject, Major Talbot. A strong protest movement by Iranian merchants and ulama supported by the Russians forced the shah to cancel the concession. To compensate the company, Iran had to pay a large sum of money, which the shah borrowed first from the British and later from the Russians. Indebtedness to the European powers was becoming an additional tool of Western domination (Kazemzadeh, 1968, pp. 246-51, 260-65, 271-72; Browne, pp. 46-58; Bakhash, pp. 24-44; Lambton, pp. 223 ff.).

In spite of the severe competition with the British, Russians were successful in creating several economic enterprises in Iran, which included Caspian navigation, fisheries, telegraph lines and road construction, Insurance and Transport Company, and the Discount and Loan Bank (la Banque d'Escompte de Perse; Bānk-e esteqrāżi-e Rus). Through the bank, Russian government granted loans to Iranian kings and aristocracy, thus expanding its influence over them (Maḥbubi Ardakāni, I, pp. 99-106).

In 1879, the Russians helped Nāṣer-al-Din Shah to form a Cossack Brigade (*berigād-e qazāq*; q.v.), which was led by Russian officers. It had a reputation of being a well-disciplined modern military unit loyal to the shah (Kazemzādeh, 1968, pp. 166-68; Shuster, pp. xxxviii [photograph], 290, 293). At the same time,

it was a tool of Russian influence.

Russo-Iranian trade started to increase after the Treaty of Torkmānčāy, which granted low tariffs and other commercial privileges to Russia. However, lack of reliable roads and transportation development were serious impediments for trade. The foundation of the Russian shipping company “Kavkas i Merkuriĭ” and new road construction made transportation easier, although delivering goods to and from Iran remained a perilous and risky enterprise. While competing with the British trade, Russians were establishing their mercantile dominance of northern and central Iran. Already by the mid-19th century, Russian exports to Iran constituted between 40 to 60 percent of all Russian goods exported to Asia. Dominant Russian goods included cotton textiles, ironware, leather, furs, glassware, flower and grain, sugar, tea, and oil. Iranian exports to Iran included raw cotton, silk, rice, dried fruits, tobacco, opium. and carpets (Nazem, p. 10; Kulagina, pp. 103, 107, 117).

Russian control over Iran’s internal affairs in the last decade of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century became especially tight in the reigns of Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah (r. 1896-1907) and Moḥammad-ʿAli Shah (r. 1907-1909). When Nāṣer-al-Din Shah was assassinated in 1896, the Cossack Brigade commanded by Colonel Kosogovskiĭ maintained order and secured Moẓaffar-al-Din’s succession (Kosogovskiĭ, pp. 458-63). Since the British were also interested in preventing the chaos that usually accompanied succession of a new shah in Iran, they supported their rivals’ efforts for a peaceful transition of power.

The humiliating defeat of Russia in the war against Japan (1904-05) and the Russian Revolution of 1905 did not slow down Russia’s penetration of Iran. New Russian consulates were opened in Langa (see BANDAR-E LENGA) and Bandar ʿAbbās, Russian subjects were purchasing lands in Mashad and Anzali, and a loan was advanced to Moḥammad-ʿAli Mirzā, the heir to the throne (Kazemzadeh, 1968, pp. 469-70).

The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. In 1905, negotiations opened between Russia and Britain. Russia had been weakened by the war and the revolution, while Britain was concerned about the growing power of Germany and its rising influence in the Middle East (Kazemzadeh, 1968, p. 483). In late 1905, while negotiations were in progress in St. Petersburg, the Constitutional Revolution started in Tehran. It was partly directed against Russian domination of Iran. In early January

1907, one week before his death, Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah signed a constitution and was succeeded by his son Moḥammad-ʿAli Shah, who had a close relationship with the Russians. He could speak some Russian, had a Russian court physician, Dr. Sadovskiĭ, and one Captain Smirnov as a tutor for his heir. A personal friend of the shah, a Russian subject Shapshal (Šāpšāl Khan), was influential in Iranian foreign politics (Andreeva, 2007, pp. 192-93; Browne, pp. 199-200, 418-20).

On 31 August 1907, the most extraordinary and humiliating event in Iran's relations with Russia and Britain took place. The Anglo-Russian Convention was signed, which divided Iran into spheres of influence and reconciled the differences between the governments of Russia and Britain. Though the preamble of the agreement mentioned the integrity and independence of Persia, the Iranian government was not even informed about the convention. According to the first article of the convention, the northern and central areas of Iran were reserved for Russia, with Britain promising "not to seek for herself, and not to support in favor of British subjects, or in favour of the subjects of third Powers, any concession of a political or commercial nature." Britain also promised "not to oppose directly or indirectly, demands for similar Concessions in this region which are supported by the Russian Government" (Hurewitz, I, pp. 538-41; Kazemzadeh, 1968, pp. 499-500; Browne, pp. 172 ff.; Nazem, pp. 20-31). Southeastern Iran came under the British sphere of influence, where Russia undertook similar obligations. The area between the Russian and British spheres of interest was made neutral territory. The agreement confirmed the actual division of Iran into Russian and British spheres of interest, which had developed *de facto* by the end of the 19th century (Andreeva, 2007, p. 52).

Russia was strongly opposed to the Constitutional Revolution from its very beginning. Most of the revolutionary events were taking place in the Russian sphere of influence and were perceived as a threat to Russian economic interests and concessions. Also, for the Russians, the Iranian revolution looked like a continuation of its own revolution of 1905, in which many revolutionaries from the Caucasus participated. On 23 June 1908, an anti-revolutionary coup was launched by Moḥammad-ʿAli Shah with the support of the Cossack Brigade. Led by Colonel Liakhov (Liāḵof), they shelled the Majles until it was closed; many leaders were arrested and executed, others fled into exile (Mamontov, pp. 202-4; Nāẓem-al-Eslām, II, pp. 156 ff.; Malekzāda, pp. 71 ff.; Browne, 198 ff.; Kazemzādeh, 1968, pp. 521-31; Lambton, pp. 319-29). The

coup was successful in Tehran, and Moḥammad-ʿAli Shah managed to remain on the Iranian throne for another year. Opposition to him and his supporters was strong, however, in the south and in the north. In Isfahan, Baḵtiāri tribes took control while in Tabriz Sattār Khan became the head of the opposition. The Russians sent troops to Tabriz, Rasht, and Qazvin. In June 1909, revolutionaries from Gilan and Isfahan advanced towards Tehran. Moḥammad-ʿAli Shah fled to the summer residence of the Russian mission north of Terhan and later into exile in Russia (Kasravi, pp. 22 ff.). He was replaced by his son, Aḥmad, and supported by the newly allied Russia and Britain. Soon thereafter, Colonel Liakhov and Russian officers serving in the Cossack Brigade, were fired by the Iranian government. The Russians had to put pressure on the government to keep the brigade and Dr. Sadovskiĭ and Captain Smirnov at the new shah's court and to reach a financial settlement related to the former shah. The Iranian government asked Britain and Russia for loans in order to restore the order, but the Imperial Bank of Persia (Bānk-e šāhanšāhi-e Irān), established by the British Royal Charter, only agreed to lend money in May, 1911, after Russia succeeded in its own demands and signed a treaty with Iran consolidating its debts (Kazemzadeh, 1968, p. 562; Browne, p. 31). Meanwhile, Russian occupation of the north continued, although the Iranian government was trying to make them withdraw.

In August 1910, the Majles employed an American, William Morgan Shuster, as its economic adviser to help solve the financial crisis in Iran. Acting in accord with the Constitutionalists and quite independently from the Russians and the British, Shuster soon caused Russian hostility. He appointed anti-Russian officials in the Russian sphere of influence and otherwise threatened Russian interests in Iran. In July 1911, when former shah Moḥammad-ʿAli landed in Iran and attempted to regain the throne, Shuster organized resistance and defeated his supporters (Kazemzadeh, 1968, pp. 586-87). On the order from the Majles, he attempted to confiscate property of the former shah's brother, who was a protégé of the Russian government. He also published a letter in *The Times* denouncing Russian and British policies; the letter was also printed in Tehran in a Persian translation as *Maktub-e ruz-nāma* (Eng. text, in Shuster, Appendix-C, pp. 359-71; Kazemzadeh, 1968, pp. 613-15, 631).

Russian officials protested, and the Russian press opened an attack on Shuster. The Russian government presented an ultimatum to the Majles demanding dismissal of Shuster among other demands encroaching on Iran's sovereignty; the British supported the demand (Shuster, pp. 166-68, 169). When the

ultimatum was rejected, the Russians advanced their forces from the north towards Tehran. In December 1911, Baḵtiāri khans and conservative ministers dissolved the Majles and dismissed Shuster, an event often viewed as the end of the Constitutional Revolution (Shuster, pp. 214-15; Kasravi, pp. 234-39). Resistance to the Russian occupation went on in the north. In Tabriz, Anzali, Rasht, and Qazvin, Russian troops were suppressing the revolutionary movement. After the former shah finally left Iran aboard a Russian ship, his followers in Mashad took refuge in the shrine of Imam Reżā. On 30 March 912, after they refused several times to leave their sanctuary, Russian troops surrounded the shrine, shelled and stormed it. At least thirty-nine Iranians were killed (Kulagina, pp. 182-86).

Russian colonization and World War I. In the years between the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 and the outbreak of World War I, Russia played the master in northern Iran, keeping troops in Gilan, Azarbaijan, and Khorasan. Russian consulates concentrated considerable power in their hands, dominated the local Iranian administration, and sometimes even collected local taxes (Kazemzadeh, 1968, p. 676). In 1907, spontaneous Russian colonization started in Mazandaran and Astarabad provinces. Since foreigners were not allowed to purchase property in Iran, land acquisition was made through trustworthy Iranians with the backing of Russian consuls. Starting in 1912, colonization of northern Iran became recognized as an aspect of Russian foreign policy and a complex of special measures was worked out to provide state assistance. Officials of the migration process were dispatched to Iran, and Russian consuls and border commissars were instructed to assist with land purchases for which significant sums of money were allocated. Plans for assisting colonization included foundation of Orthodox parishes, medical services and loans to the settlers, construction of churches, schools, and post offices, and the surveying of lands. The total number of settlers at the beginning of World War I in Astarabad and Mazandaran was most probably around 4,000. There were at least 15 Russian villages in northeastern Iran (Andreeva and Noureai).

There were also some Russian Orthodox churches in Iran, usually founded at Russian missions. In 1864, a permanent Russian Orthodox parish was established in Tehran at the Russian mission to replace a temporary church. In the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Russian churches were founded at Russian missions and consulates in Terhan, Tabriz, Qazvin, Rasht, and Anzali (Alexandr, p. 69-76, 93-95, 104-7).

During World War I, Iran became a battleground for German, Ottoman, Russian, and British troops in spite of the fact that it had declared its neutrality when the war started. Russian troops were stationed in Azarbaijan, Khorasan, Gilan, and Mazanderan and were battling the Ottomans in the northwest of Iran. Under the command of General Chernozubov, they defeated the Ottomans in several battles, including Sefian (Kulagina, pp. 190-91). The Russians occupied northern Iran and attempted to promote further Russian colonization there. In March 1915, Russia agreed to British control over the central area of Iran, which had been defined as "neutral" by the convention of 1907. In return, the British agreed to the Russian annexation of Constantinople (Kazemzadeh, 1968, p. 678). In October 1915, a Cossack corps led by General Baratov landed in Anzali and advanced towards Tehran and Qazvin, while the British landed in Bushehr (see BŪŠEHR). In December, the Russians entered Hamadan and Qom, and in January 1916 Kermanshah. The Iranian army tried to resist the Russian advance but failed completely. By the beginning of 1917, Iran was almost entirely occupied by the Russians and the British (Kulagina, pp. 193-94).

After the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia, the provisional government expressed it opposition to the "Russification" of northern Iran, prohibited the taking of new lands, and withdrew its support from the settlers. In October, the government issued an order to withdraw Russian troops from Iran; the settlers who were willing to leave were to receive government assistance. The Bolshevik coup in October 1917 put an end to Russia's designs on Iran, Russian colonization of Iran, and the Russian empire altogether. The Iranian government was among the first to recognize the new Soviet government. Russian troops were to be withdrawn from Iran. In December 1917, between January and March of 1918, most Russian troops were evacuated, while some troops under Baratov stayed in Iran and entered British military service (Kulagina, p. 194). In 1919, the new Bolshevik government terminated the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 and all concessions granted by Iran to the imperial government and loans provided by Russia to Iran. They also opened negotiations with Iran, laying the foundation for relations between Iran and the Soviet Union.

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