

# RUSSIANS IN IRAN

Diplomacy and Power  
in the Qajar Era and Beyond



EDITED BY  
RUDI MATTHEE & ELENA ANDREEVA

I.B. TAURIS

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“Highly original in its focus, and often making use of completely new source material, *Russians in Iran* offers fascinating glimpses into the encounter between two Eurasian empires, far beyond the established narrative of the ‘Great Game’.”

Moritz Deutschmann, author of *Iran and Russian Imperialism: The Ideal Anarchists, 1800–1914*

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*To the Memory of Firuz Kazemzadeh*

# CONTENTS

*List of Figures*

*List of Contributors*

Introduction

*Rudi Matthee*

PART I WAR AND DIPLOMACY: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

1. The Early Stages of Russo–Iranian Relations

*Muriel Atkin*

2. The Khan, the Shah and the Tsar: The Khanate of Talesh between Iran and Russia

*Soli Shahvar and Emil Abramoff*

3. Alexander Sergeevich Griboedov: Russian Imperial James Bond *Malgré lui*. In Memory of the 225th Anniversary of his Birth

*Firuz Melville*

4. Russian Government Action against Russian Deserters in Iran in the Nineteenth Century: Russian Orientalism at the State Level

*Elena Andreeva*

PART II INTELLIGENCE AND INTRUSION: THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

5. Nest of Revolution: The Caucasus, Iran, and Armenians

*Houri Berberian*

6. The Loan and Discount Bank as an Agent of Russian Interests in Iran

*Irina Pavlova*

7. Infidel Aggression: The Russian Assault on the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza, Mashhad, 1912

*Rudi Matthee*

PART III OFFICERS AND ORIENTALISTS: THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

8. A Russian Officer's Letters on Russian and British Activities in Iran during World War I  
*Nugzar K. Ter-Oganov*
9. Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966) and the Iran–Iraq War (1980–8): The Centenary of “Minorsky's Frontier”  
*Denis V. Volkov*
10. Reconstructions of a Native in Exile Cossack Brigade Fighter and Architect of Tehran – Nikolai L'vovich Markov (1882–1957)  
*Lana Ravandi-Fadai*

#### PART IV IDEOLOGY AND OCCUPATION: THE 1930S AND 1940S

11. From the Imperial Periphery to the Boundaries of Power: Soviet Diplomatic Officials in 1930s Iran  
*Mary Yoshinari*
12. Convenient Comrades: Re-assessing the Relationship between the Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party during the British–Soviet Occupation of Iran, 1941–5  
*Rowena Abdul Razak*
13. The USSR and the Allied Occupation of Iran in August 1941: The Untold Story of a Difficult Decision  
*Nikolay A. Kozhanov*

# LIST OF FIGURES

**Figure 3.1** Georgy Savitsky, Petrograd, 1920, *Reading of the Poem* (Alexander Griboedov and Nino Chavchavadze). © Moscow auction Kupitkartinu.

**Figure 3.2** Marcin Zaleski (?), *Signing the Torkmanchay Treaty*, 1829 (?). © Palace of the Paskewicz and the Rumyantsevs.

**Figure 3.3** The 40-kopek post stamp: “A. S. Griboedov – Great Russian playwright and poet”, USSR, 1959.

**Figure 3.4** Ciphred and deciphered reports to A. S. Griboedov from his agent N. Dolgofsky from 28 December 1827. © Russian Central State Archive, Paskevich folder (1018), No. 2, 423–2.

**Figure 3.5** Muhammad Ja`far, Insignia of the Order of the Lion and the Sun (collar, star and plaque) presented to John Kinneir MacDonald for his assistance during the signing of the Torkmanchay Treaty, gold with painted enamels, set with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, Tehran, 1242H/1826–7, on loan in the Victoria and Albert Museum (LOAN:KHALILI.1-2013). © Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art.

**Figure 3.6** Vladimir Beklemishev, Monument to A. S. Griboedov, 1900. © Embassy of the Russian Federation, Tehran. © Firuza Melville, 2015.

**Figure 7.1** Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad at the turn of the twentieth century from Major Percy Molesworth. Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia or Eight Years in Iran* (London, 1902).

**Figure 7.2** Mashhad street plan in the late nineteenth century, from C. M. MacGregor, *Narrative of a Journey through the Province of Khorassan and on the N. W. Frontier of Afghanistan in 1875*, 2 vols. (London, 1879).

**Figure 7.3** Sir Percy Molesworth Sykes, British Consul in Mashhad in 1912. © Sykes House, London.

**Figure 7.4** Prince Aristid Mikhailovich Dabizha, Russian Consul in Mashhad in 1912, from Mohammad Hasan Adib Haravi and Setar Shahvazi, *Enqelab-e Tus* (Tehran, 1388/2009).

**Figure 7.5** Yusof Herati (left) and Mohammad Qoreysh Abadi (right), from Mohammad Hasan

Adib Haravi and Setar Shahvazi, *Enqelab-e Tus* (Tehran, 1388/2009).

Figure 7.6 Mortaza Qoli Khan, *motavalli* of the Shrine, from Mohammad Hasan Adib Haravi and Setar Shahvazi, *Enqelab-e Tus* (Tehran, 1388/2009).

Figure 7.7 The Dome of the Shrine after the Russian shelling, from Dwight M. Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion. A History of Islam in Persia and Irak* (London, 1933).

Figure 7.8 Cartoon of the Russian assault on the Shrine. © British Museum.

Figure 8.1 Konstantin Nikolaevich Smirnov.

Figure 8.2 General Baratov and Captain Smirnov in Tehran, 1916.

Figure 9.1 The Russian Legation in Tehran on 6 December 1907. © Georgian National Center of Manuscripts.

Figure 9.2 “Smirnov's explanations to the photo.” © Georgian National Center of Manuscripts.

Figure 9.3 Page 4 of Minorsky's letter (St Petersburg) to Smirnov (Tehran). © Georgian National Center of Manuscripts.

Figure 9.4 Page 3 of Minorsky's letter (St Petersburg) to Smirnov (Tehran). © Georgian National Center of Manuscripts.

Figure 10.1 Markov in Tbilisi, Georgia, where he was born and raised. © Russian State Historical Archive.

Figure 10.2 The Cossack Brigade circa 1921. © Institute for Iranian Contemporary Studies.

Figure 10.3 Alborz College. © *Ettela`at* Newspaper Archive.

Figure 10.4 Markov took the layout of the Qajar garden into account when planning the shape and location of his penitentiary. © Google Maps.

Figure 10.5 Reinventions of the penitentiary form over the course of a century. © Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania; Qasr Garden-Museum.

Figure 10.6 The 8-ribbed vaulted ceiling of the Qajar-style vestibules that Markov used to connect cellblocks gave rise to coded expressions in Farsi. © Kevin McNeer.

Figure 10.7 Church of St Nicholas and the no longer extant Church of the Annunciation on Zhitny Court. © Lana Ravandi-Fadai.

Figure 10.8 “Princess Ashraf Mosque” with “sleeping dome” and faux minarets (note the

loudspeaker in the center of the curtain wall). © Lana Ravandi-Fadai.

**Figure 11.1** Far left, front row: Tsukerman, Shostak, Sa'id, Eliava, and various other officials in a photo taken with the Moscow Chamber of Commerce. “Hey'at-e e`zami-ye Iran dar mowqe`e pazira`i-ye otaq-e tejarat-e Mosko,” *Otaq-e Tejarat*, Nos. 130–31 (Esfand-Farvardin 1314–15/March 1936), 16. Image reproduced with permission from Dr. `Ali Tatari, Manager of Project, Compilation, and Scientific Regulation of *Gozari-ye panjah saleh bar majalleh-ye Otaq-e Tejarat ta Otaq-e Bazargani va Sanaye` va Ma`aden-e Iran 1308–1357 khorshidi*, published by the Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament in cooperation with the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture.

**Figure 11.2** A dapper Communist functionary, Shostak in a passport photo from 1928, taken in London. © Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE), f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068.

**Figure 11.3** Far left, Shostak, reading a newspaper. Other officials, left to right: Vakili, Qovanlu, Zahedi (aka “Napoléon”), Belgorodskii, Schatz, Vernusi, Sepanlu, and A`lam. “Hey'at-e e`zami-ye Iran hengam-e bazdid-e mo'assesat-e eqtesadi-ye Shuravi,” *Ettela`at*, No. 2494, 6 Khordad 1314/May 28, 1935, 1. © Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament.

**Figure 11.4** Left to right, foreground: Shostak, Chernykh, and Kazemi at the signing of the 1935 Treaty. An Iranian translator stands in the background. “Dar `emarat-e vezarat-e omur-e kharejeh: marasem-e emza-ye `ahdnameh'ha-ye tejarati fimabeyn-e dowlateyn-e Iran va Shuravi,” *Ettela`at*, No. 2571, 5 Shahrivar 1314/August 28, 1935, 1. © Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Rudi Matthee*

This volume is premised on the notion that Russia's historical involvement in Iran is as pervasive and longstanding as it is understudied and – often – misunderstood.

Instinctive anti-colonialists, Iranians continue to be very much preoccupied with what they consider the wholly negative, devious and even destructive interference of the British in their country's affairs over the past two centuries. Yet many are hardly aware of the fact that, throughout the nineteenth and far into the twentieth century, the Russian presence in especially northern Iran was far more direct, invasive and consequential than that of the British. Indeed, they would be startled to hear and, likely unwilling to accept, that in some ways the presence of the British and the balance and “protection” they provided may even have prevented a more drastic Russian role in Iran's affairs.

Russia's role in Iranian history since the nineteenth century is well known, to be sure; but especially for the period until World War I, it tends to be narrated in a patterned and somewhat reductionist manner, typically through the lens of the “Great Game,” with Iran a mere buffer state between Russia and Great Britain, a hapless victim of great power politics (a notion cherished by many Iranians, who often see themselves as victims rather than as active participants in their own destiny). The chronology of this narrative along center-periphery dynamics begins with the two wars the countries fought in the early nineteenth century, is followed by the humiliating treaties imposed on the losing party – Iran, in both cases – continues with Russian high-level machinations and the Iranian reaction in the form of attempts to play off the British and the Russians against each other, and ends with Russia's opposition to the establishment of an Iranian parliament in 1908. The actors in this story are, on the Russian side, the successive tsars, from Alexander I to Nicholas II, various Russian generals who are famous or infamous depending on one's perspective, most notably Aleksey Petrovich Ermolov and Ivan Fedorovich Paskevich, and the poet-diplomat Alexander Sergeevich Griboedov, who met a tragic end in Tehran in 1829. On the Iranian side, we have Crown Prince `Abbas Mirza, Iran's first official “reformer,” Fath `Ali Shah and Naser al-Din Shah, as the most prominent and longest-ruling Qajar monarchs, various high-level envoys, and Naser al-Din Shah's well-known reformist chief minister, Mirza Taqi Khan Farahani, a.k.a. Amir Kabir. War and high-level diplomacy are almost invariably the main subjects of discussion and analysis.

This volume sets out to thicken as well as to complicate this narrative by examining the

intensive encounter between Russians and Iranians between the early Qajar period and the middle of the twentieth century on various levels. Its contributors look at Russia's influence in Iran between 1800 and 1950 not simply as a story of inexorable “intrusion” and one-sided “domination,” but as a complex, interactive process of mostly indirect control but also of constructive engagement. Their essays seek to open a window into the power and influence wielded in Iran not just by the “Russian government” through its representatives, but by Russian nationals, state and non-state actors, who operated in Iran in a variety of capacities. It steps down from the customary focus on official policy makers, diplomats and high-level military personnel, to consider those alongside, mid-level officials as well as private citizens who became caught up in the convulsions of war, revolution and occupation that marked the interaction between the two countries to the point of leading to life-long migration and the adoption of new identities.

The contributions to this collection have also been selected to present the Russian–Iranian encounter as a continuum, stretching well beyond the moment in 1908 when Russia brusquely intervened in Iran's parliamentary experiment by shelling the parliament. The aim is to connect Russia's involvement with Iran under tsarist rule to the role that the Soviet Union played in the politics and society of the country under the Pahlavis, by looking for continuity as much as for rupture and interruption.

Each of the essays in this volume deals with an aspect of the Russian–Iranian interaction by considering the activities of Russian individuals, diplomats, military men, intelligence officers, bankers, entrepreneurs, and architects active in Iran. Some of the chapters concentrate on a single person, a diplomat, or an advisor and agent, using biographical information about the individual as a prism to highlight a facet of Russo–Iranian relations. Others take a more structural approach by analyzing an aspect of the military, economic, and cultural entwinement between the two countries. Based on an array of sources, which include archival Russian and Iranian ones, they paint a rich tableau of the multifaceted role Russians have played in modern Iranian history.

The volume presents its material chronologically yet follows a thematic approach as well. Part I deals with the nineteenth century, the period when the military and diplomatic confrontation and interaction between the two states intensified, creating conditions of Russian dominance and Iranian subordination following military defeat, but also of the mutual imbrication characteristic of adjoining territories with permeable borders. The overall conclusion of the essays presented here is that the Russian involvement in Iran, before as well as after the Bolshevik Revolution, was varied and complex, and can certainly not be summarized as just brutal and overbearing. Indeed, the various authors argue and demonstrate that the Russians were shrewd and calculating rather than doggedly single-minded in expanding and maximizing their influence over Iran, their most consequential neighbor to the south, and that they were more driven by pragmatism than by ideology, even following the creation of the Soviet Union.

Muriel Atkin opens this part and the volume as such with an overview of the origins of Russia's involvement in Iran in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She argues

that this was an unlikely time for Russia to undertake the projection of its influence into the southern Caucasus. After all, Russian foreign policy at that time had more pressing concerns elsewhere, including recurrent battles with a perennial rival, the Ottoman Empire, the partitions of Poland, the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic wars. Peter the Great's successors had abandoned his ambition to gain territory on the Caspian coast and in the southern Caucasus decades earlier. Russia did not share a border with a reconstituted Iranian state under the new Qajar dynasty, and the lack of control over much of the Caucasus together with weak naval power in the Caspian Sea made gaining access to Iran difficult. Despite all this, the Russians chose to lay claim to the eastern Georgian kingdom and several other principalities of the southern Caucasus. That led to two wars with the newly acceded Qajar rulers, who also claimed those territories. Russia's victories in both wars, Atkin further argues, established a pattern of political and commercial involvement in Iran that would grow for the remainder of the tsarist era. Russia embarked on this path for reasons that included the desire to be acknowledged as a major power, the hope to use some of the disputed territories against foes in other conflicts, the determination to maintain a policy once embarked upon, regardless of difficulties, and the personal ambitions and methods of the officers on the ground.

Soli Shahvar and Emil Abramoff next address the Russo–Iranian struggle for dominance in the Caucasus in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They do so in the form of a well-researched case study of conditions in Talesh/Lankaran, the khanate that hugs the southwestern Caspian, between 1747 and 1826. Using first-hand Russian sources and Persian local chronicles, the authors pay particular attention to the political maneuverings of the khanate's rulers, especially Mir Mostafa Khan (r. 1786–1814), in their pursuit of maximum autonomy over a frontier zone subject to intrusion by the Qajars, the Russians and even a far-away power like Napoleonic France.

The figure of Alexander Sergeevich Griboedov, the legendary poet-diplomat who in 1829 met a tragic death at the hands of the Tehran mob, looms large in early nineteenth-century Russo–Iranian relations. Whereas in his homeland Griboedov is celebrated more as a national poet and a musician than as a diplomat, Iranians tend to see him as a symbol of Russia's heavy handedness vis-à-vis their country. Firuza Melville discusses the invariably negative “Iranian” perception of Griboedov but, above all, sheds new light on the Russian side of the dichotomy on the basis of new archival material and recently published studies and biographies in Russian. Rather than narrating Griboedov's mission separately, she also analyzes its fate in conjunction with the role played by the representatives of the other significant outside power active in Iran at the time, Great Britain, intimating that the Russian envoy may have worked in collusion with the British representative John MacDonald against the latter's rivals, Henry Willock and Dr John McNeil.

Elena Andreeva next examines the frequent occurrence of Russians deserting to Iran in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Using Russian archival sources, among them stories of specific deserters, Andreeva focuses on the reaction of the Russian government to the presence of Russians who had fled to Iran and now served there. The desertion of Russian soldiers to Iran, and their friendly reception by Qajar officials, created such a stir in Russia's diplomatic and military circles that Emperor Nicholas I became personally involved in the matter. The way St

Petersburg overreacted to this phenomenon, the pressure it exerted on the Qajar authorities by way of threats and demands for the arrest and extradition of deserters, must be seen, the author argues, as another manifestation of Russia's ambivalent, insecure type of Orientalism – highhandedness in its treatment of Iran as a way to compensate for its own inadequacy as a power on a par with Western Europe.

The theme of Russian intervention and intrusion is further developed in Part II, which moves the investigation to the turn of the twentieth century, and more particularly to the period up to World War I. The first of the three essays in this part addresses the crucial role played by the Caucasus as an incubator of ideas and a springboard for action in the adjacent empires; the others explore instances of actual Russian commercial, diplomatic and military encroachment on Iran.

Houri Berberian shows us how the Russian-ruled Caucasus, long a crossroads between empires and the East–West traffic of people, goods, and ideas, became the nursery of a set of revolutionary ideas that germinated at the turn of the century and that came to fuel the revolutions erupting in rapid succession in Russia, Iran and the Ottoman Empire between 1905 and 1909. Uniquely multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual, the Caucasus in some ways remained peripheral to these empires. Yet as a center of both cultural reception and transmission, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Caucasus also became the playground and battleground of socialist and nationalist revolutionary ideas that subsequently permeated both Iran and Anatolia.

Irina Pavlola reminds us of the economic dimension of Russia's entanglement with Iran at the turn of the century, a topic that is as important as it remains under-researched. Her essay discusses Russian investment in Iran in the late Qajar period, and more specifically explores the operations of Russian loan operations in Persia in the 1890s by way of a Discount and Loan Bank that was established as a Russian State Bank branch. Opening up a new chapter in Russo–Iranian relations, the bank offered the prospect of substantial investments in Iran's economy, including road construction and a revival of trade. The author singles out its sponsorship of cinema for the shah and his entourage as a particularly good example of the bank's role as a facilitator of Russia's economic and cultural penetration of late Qajar Iran.

My own essay concentrates on politics and military matters and explores the sequence of events culminating in the shelling of the Astan-e Qods-e Razavi, the holy shrine of the eighth Shi`i Imam in Mashhad, by Russian troops on 31 March 1912. It presents this incident less as a simple confrontation between the Russians and the Iranians than as an evolving story of foreign intervention and machination in collusion as well as tension with local and regional forces. It also seeks to sort out the various, rather contradictory readings of the incident, by identifying the forces behind the actions and reactions that led up to the assault for their motives and objectives. These include the Russian and British governments and their respective local representatives, the Qajar authorities, and various local and regional non-state actors.

Part III puts a more focused lens on the theme of image-making and representation by way of Russia's intelligence gathering in Iran in the early twentieth century. Its subjects are the military men, engineers, and scholars who, in their diaries, reports and research findings, described

and mapped Iran, making it intelligible and domesticating it for themselves, their employers and their superiors.

N. K. Ter-Oganov uses the letters of the Russian military Orientalist, Konstantin Nikolaevich Smirnov, as a source of information on Iran's military and political conditions on the eve of World War I. Smirnov spent seven years (1907–14) on an official mission to Tehran at the shah's court, serving as a tutor of the crown prince, the young Soltan Ahmad Shah. Smirnov's handwritten archival materials, including his private letters addressed to his spouse, Xenia Karlovna Smirnova, and sent from Qazvin, Kermanshah, Kerind and Qasr-e Shirin, give us a real feeling of contact with many historical events. In addition to enriching our information about the careers and opinions of Iranian politicians as perceived by Russian observers, Smirnov's letters allow us to draw portraits of Russian military, diplomatic and politicians active in Iran during World War I.

Intelligence gathering is the topic of Denis Völkov's chapter as well. Völkov highlights the military and diplomatic dimension of the professional career of Vladimir Minorsky, who remains best known for the important scholarly contributions he made to the history of early modern Iran once he had left Russia for the West following the Bolshevik Revolution. Völkov examines Minorsky's leading role in the activities of the Russo-Anglo-Turkish-Iranian Quadripartite Boundary Commission on the eve of World War I as an example of a Foucauldian knowledge/power collaboration between administrators and scholars.

Minorsky's career combined diplomacy and military matters with a deep knowledge of Iran and its borderlands, especially Kurdistan. The main character in Lana Ravandi-Fadai's study, Nikolai Markov, translated his fascination with things Iranian into a professional career. Born in Georgia, and having fallen in love with Iran during a brief stay in Tabriz, Markov served in the Russian Cossack Brigade and at the onset of the Reza Shah period settled in Tehran, where he became a successful architect. Between 1922 and 1940 he designed many of the government buildings and ministries that still stand in southern Tehran, in addition to several mosques and landmark buildings like the Jeanne d'Arc girls' school and its male counterpart, Alborz College. The author discusses Markov's career, showing how he strove to create a harmonious blend of traditional Iranian architecture and a modernist style commensurate with twentieth-century needs. She also demonstrates that the Church of Saint Nicholas built by Markov in Tehran is a replica of the Church of the Annunciation of the Holy Virgin in the Kremlin destroyed by the Bolsheviks in 1932, and argues that Markov – the orthodox tsarist in exile who fought Bolshevik forces while serving in Iran's Cossack Brigade – thus intended to “resurrect” the church that his foes had destroyed.

Finally, Part IV takes the discussion to the period following World War I and the creation of the Soviet Union. Looking at the period between 1920 and 1950, it explores the lives of a number of Russian subjects who, through fate and circumstance, ended up in Iran and in some cases stayed and built up a new life in that country. Two of the essays in this section also examine the seriously understudied episode during World War II, when Iranians experienced four years of direct Russian occupation.

Mary Yoshinari tries to make sense of the fact that many of the early Soviet officials who

spent all or part of their professional lives in Iran hailed from the middling and even lower classes, came from the ethnically diverse Russian periphery, and were often Jewish. She identifies what she calls a “double immersion in the East” among those who joined the ranks of the foreign service and served in far-away lands, formative years spent in an environment in which the familiar blended with the often Muslim exotic, the enduring lure of this environment, and a fervent belief in progress and the transformative power of scientific government in a country like Iran, akin to what they had experienced in their own ancestral backwaters.

The next essay, by Rowena Abdul Razak, addresses the relationship between the Iranian Communist Party and the Soviet Union. Its good intentions and genuine desire for change notwithstanding, the reputation of the Tudeh has always been that of an entity closely associated with the Soviet Union and willing to do its bidding – giving the Pahlavi state as well as the Islamic Republic ample excuse to suppress it. A reassessment of the party and its perceived closeness with the Soviet Union, particularly during the Tudeh's early years, however, reveals a more complex picture. Using Russian archival sources, the author revisits the Tudeh–Soviet association during World War II – the period of the British-Soviet occupation of Iran as well as the time of the party's foundation and formative years – to conclude that the Tudeh actually served an important role within the alliance. Shrewd and practical, the Soviets – like the British – vied for the hearts and minds of the Iranians by engaging in cultural and political propaganda. At the start of the occupation, they used the Tudeh to spread an anti-Fascist message. But as the war evolved in favor of the Allies, the Soviets became more confident and this in turn saw the Tudeh also displaying more political influence.

In the book's final essay, Nikolay Kozhanov offers a revisionist interpretation of Russia's motives for occupying the northern half of Iran during World War II. He first argues that the reason for their intervention bore little relationship to the officially stated one of Iran's refusal to expel its German “spies.” While Great Britain intended to protect the property of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the Soviets were primarily interested in the creation of a safe route for military supplies through Iran. Yet, in contrast to the British, the Soviet Union tried to avoid a military confrontation with its southern neighbor. In the early summer of 1941, Moscow made several efforts to persuade Tehran to allow the Allies to use Iran's infrastructure for the delivery of lend-lease consignments to the USSR. It partly succeeded in this: the Iranian government agreed to the passage of non-lethal munitions and goods. Faced with a negative response to the request for weapons transit, Moscow was still having doubts about the necessity of a military invasion. This hesitance turned to determination, with reports of Soviet diplomats and intelligence officers warning the Russian authorities that London was prepared to invade Iran without the assistance of Moscow. Unwilling to let its traditional opponent seize complete control over Iran, at that point Moscow agreed on the joint military operation against Iran.

In the transliteration we have opted for the Library of Congress system for Russian and for the system used by the *Journal of Persianate Societies*.

# PART I

## WAR AND DIPLOMACY: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

# CHAPTER 1

## THE EARLY STAGES OF RUSSO–IRANIAN RELATIONS

*Muriel Atkin*

Russia's long-term involvement in Iranian affairs began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an unlikely time for Russia to undertake the projection of its influence in a new direction. By then Russian foreign policy had more pressing concerns elsewhere, including recurrent battles with a perennial rival – the Ottoman Empire – the partitions of Poland, the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic wars. If Leo Tolstoy's reconstruction, half a century later, of the attitudes of the elite is to be believed, Iran and the contested territories in the Caucasus had captured the imagination of the upper levels of society before and during the epochal struggle against the Grande Armée in 1812. He depicts one officer as having affected “Persian” attire while living in Moscow, although the man switched to the uniform of a guards officer when he went off the fight the French. A young nobleman filled with dreams of military glory named his horse “Karabakh” (after Qarabagh, one of the khanates that was a bone of contention between Russia and Iran), although the horse was actually from Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

Even if Russia had not been engaged in other, more pressing developments, its expansion in the direction of Iran faced serious obstacles. It did not share a border with a reconstituted Iranian state under the new Qajar dynasty. Moreover, access to the disputed territories was difficult for the Russians. Most of the Caucasus remained outside Russian control; sea links via the Caspian were a poor alternative to the overland route because of the deterioration of the Russian navy. Despite all this, Russia chose to lay claim to the eastern Georgian kingdom and khanates of the southeastern Caucasus. That led to two wars with the Qajar realm, which also claimed those lands (1804–13 and 1826–8.) Russia's victories in both wars established a pattern of political and commercial involvement in Iran that would grow for the remainder of the tsarist era. Russia embarked on this path for reasons that included the determination to be acknowledged as a major power, the hope to use some of the disputed territories against foes in other conflicts, the preference for maintaining a policy once embarked upon, regardless of difficulties, and the personal ambitions and methods of the officers on the ground. For the fledgling Qajar dynasty, the wars with Russia had significance beyond that of a war with a powerful neighbor. The borders of the realm were still in the process of being determined. The Qajars aspired to expand their kingdom to the dimensions of the Safavid realm (1501–1722).

That entailed asserting a claim to territory beyond that, what they then ruled, including the lands Russia now claimed, as well as other territories elsewhere. In addition, the prospects for the heir to the throne, `Abbas Mirza, governor of Azerbaijan, were linked to the outcome of the two wars with Russia. Those wars also brought Iran into increased contact with the British and French because of those countries' alternating hostilities and alliances with Russia.

Long before this era of confrontation, the tsardom of Muscovy and Safavid Iran had dealings with each other. This became possible after Muscovy acquired the full course of the Volga River in the mid-sixteenth century. That made trade between the two countries by a Volga–Caspian route possible. Ivan the Terrible (r. 1533–84) made an alliance with the ruler of Kabarda, in the northern Caucasus, and established a military presence in the area.<sup>2</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite periodic disruptions, luxury goods from Iran and transshipped goods from India found a market in Muscovy and also attracted western European merchants there. Iran bought raw materials from Muscovy.<sup>3</sup> The two countries' recurrent problems with the Ottoman Empire led to increased diplomatic contacts between them, without producing a formal alliance.<sup>4</sup> Part of the reason lay in factors that resembled the causes of conflict between Russia and Iran more than a century later: Safavid concerns over Muscovite territorial ambitions along the Caspian coast and in the Caucasus, as well as its support for the aspirations for independence from Iran or the Ottoman Empire by the king of one of the Georgian states, Kakheti.<sup>5</sup> In addition, when the Safavids looked for European allies against the Ottomans, they often preferred to look farther west.<sup>6</sup> Muscovy's own problems limited how far its relations could grow in those years. It faced repeated episodes of internal turmoil and wars with its European neighbors, which required its attention and drained its human and material resources. Even the value of the silk trade declined as other European countries established their own commercial presence in various places in Asia.<sup>7</sup>

Russia turned its attention to Iran anew in the latter years of Peter the Great's reign (r. 1682–1725), when it concluded a treaty with Safavid Iran. The attraction was both commercial and military. Peter hoped to establish a trading presence in the southeastern Caucasus and on the southern coast of the Caspian as a way to make his country a player in East–West trade. He also saw Iran as a useful ally against the Ottoman Empire. The alliance did not lead to the growth of peaceful relations between St Petersburg and Isfahan. On the eve of the Safavids' collapse, tribesmen from the High Caucasus attacked Shirvan in the southeastern Caucasus, killing and robbing Russian merchants as well as Iranian officials and other Shi`i inhabitants. In 1722, weeks before the fall of Isfahan to the Afghans, Russian troops took part of the western and southern coast of the Caspian. The results were not what Peter had hoped. The economic gains did not happen and Russian troops occupying points on the Caspian coast died in large numbers from disease. After Peter the Great's death at the beginning of 1725, his successors had no grand ambitions regarding that part of the world. By 1735, the last of the Russian troops had left the area.<sup>8</sup>

Not until the late eighteenth century did Russia seek to assert itself once more in the Iranian sphere, although there were some commercial relations and occasional diplomatic exchanges even before then. Catherine the Great (r. 1762–96) made unsuccessful attempts to establish

trading outposts on the southern coast of the Caspian in the 1780s. In the same decade, Russia rebuffed attempts by the ascendant Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (shah, 1796–7) to reach an accommodation with it. Tentative efforts by Russia and one of the Zands, `Ali Morad Khan, ruler of Isfahan, to cooperate in military matters had made little progress by the time `Ali Morad died in 1785.<sup>9</sup> The direct cause of Russia's more aggressive involvement in Iran lay in relations with the kingdom of Georgia (consisting of the eastern Georgian principalities of Kartlo and Kakheti, now united under a single ruler.) St Petersburg came to see it as a strategically useful base of operations against the Ottoman Empire. This fit not only with Catherine's empire-building ambitions, typical of European political elites of that era, but also with her determination to assert that Russia, too, was a civilized European country. Moreover, Georgia's King Erekle (r. 1762–98) had sought an alliance with Russia for years. This led to the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783, according to which Russia would protect Georgia.<sup>10</sup> Russia followed this with an attempt to arrange for others in the area to orient themselves toward St Petersburg. As was so often to be the case in this region, Russian officials' disdain for those whose goodwill they sought led to the failure of negotiations. The Russian negotiator proposed a treaty with non-negotiable terms to the khan of Qarabagh and threatened to conquer the khanate unless its ruler accepted what Russia offered. At the same time, the negotiator made separate contact with the khanate's Armenian inhabitants, in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade them to break away and put themselves under Russian authority. This might have led to armed conflict but for the fact that St Petersburg was unwilling to authorize such an operation at that time.<sup>11</sup> When protecting Georgia against Qajar claims to parts of the southern Caucasus became a pressing concern in 1795, Catherine was in no hurry to comply with her treaty obligation. King Erekle's request for help was less important to her than other concerns at that time, not least of which was the suppression of the uprising in Poland, followed by the third and final partition of that country. The danger to Georgia came not from the Ottoman Empire, as had been expected in 1783, but from the state being built by Agha Mohammad Khan. After years of political fragmentation and power struggles in the former Safavid lands, he made gains at the expense of other contenders. By the 1790s, he was able to campaign against Georgia and several khanates in the southeastern Caucasus. Georgia, which refused to recognize Agha Mohammad as its overlord, suffered heavy loss of life as well as the enslavement of thousands of inhabitants when he attempted to impose his will by force of arms in 1795. Catherine retaliated by sending troops to the area the following year, in a campaign intended not only to secure Georgia but also to acquire khanates between it and the Caspian and depose Agha Mohammad. The plan was not to conquer Iran but to put a brother of Agha Mohammad on the throne. Little came of all this. There was no decisive battle with Agha Mohammad, whose campaigns took him elsewhere that year. Many of the khans of the southeastern Caucasus submitted to Russia during the expedition but switched to the Iranian side when Agha Mohammad returned to the region in 1797. The Russian expedition barely outlasted Catherine herself, who died in November 1796. Her son and successor, Paul (r. 1796–1801), cancelled the campaign immediately.<sup>12</sup>

For a few years, relations between Russia and Iran became less strained. After the assassination of Agha Mohammad in 1797, his successor, Fath `Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834), had

to secure his claim to the throne, after which he devoted more of his attention to fighting in Khorasan than the Caucasus. Russia, under Paul, saw Iran as a less serious threat once Agha Mohammad was removed from the scene. Paul and Fath `Ali Shah each made some conciliatory diplomatic gestures toward the other. The small force that the shah sent to the Caucasus in 1800 attacked khanates that Russia did not claim and then withdrew, having failed in those operations; it did not have the opportunity to advance on targets that could have led to conflict with Russia.<sup>13</sup> At the end of 1800, Russia annexed Georgia. A corollary of that was Russia's claim to influence – or something more – over the khanates up to the Aras and Kura rivers, as a message to Tehran stipulated. Russia saw this territory as a necessary buffer for Georgia's security but to the Qajars this meant a claim to territory that they wanted for their realm.<sup>14</sup> Within months, Paul was assassinated, leaving his son, Alexander I (r. 1801–25), to grapple with the territorial disputes with Iran that could not be reconciled, as well as a host of problems closer to home. The new tsar followed the expansionist policy in the southern Caucasus of his grandmother and father, often listening to the people who had advocated those policies in the earlier reigns. Thus, he reaffirmed his father's annexation of Georgia and accepted the idea that khanates up to the Aras and Kura should also be acquired. His approach to the region included the assumption of his predecessors: that Iran was fragmented and weak. He saw Fath `Ali Shah as someone who might challenge Russia's expansion in the area, but also as someone whom Russia could readily keep in check by assertive military means. He assumed that the khans of the disputed territories would find vassalage to Russia attractive, although that proved to be wishful thinking.<sup>15</sup>

Once Russia launched its drive to acquire Caucasian territory as far as the Aras and Kura, war with Iran was virtually inevitable. Part of the reason was the symbolic significance of that territory to the new Qajar dynasty. After the fragmentation and power struggles in Iran since the fall of the Safavid capital in 1722, the Qajars sought to legitimize their rule by borrowing some of the prestige of the fallen dynasty. They sought to do this in part by pointing to their tribe's membership in the Qizilbash confederation, which had been crucial in the Safavids' rise to power, but also by adding to their domains as many as possible of the lands that had been part of the Safavid Empire. Agha Mohammad did this explicitly when he claimed Georgia on the grounds that it had been subject to Safavid Iran. He took the title “shah” only after his Georgian campaign in 1795, and at his coronation wore the sword of the Safavids' progenitor. He had intended to conquer former Safavid territories in the east as well. His successor, Fath `Ali Shah, also claimed Georgia and the khanates in its vicinity on the grounds that they were historically part of Iran.<sup>16</sup> Every Qajar ruler from that time until the mid-1850s, during the reign of Naser ad-Din Shah (r. 1848–96), wanted to acquire some formerly Safavid territory that lay beyond the current borders of Iran. Another cause of the war was the Iranian perception that Russia posed a threat to the survival of Qajar rule. Tehran worried that Russia's territorial drive would keep expanding farther and farther, not only into territory Iran claimed but also into areas it considered already subject to its authority. Furthermore, in Catherine's time, Russia had talked of overthrowing at least the current shah, and perhaps the Qajars as a dynasty.<sup>17</sup> As tensions escalated over competing claims to Caucasian territory, the Russian commander in the area, Paul Tsitsianov, some of his officers, and some of the policy

makers in St Petersburg were eager for war, certain that it would bring easy victory over a contemptible foe and demonstrate Russian superiority.<sup>18</sup>

The war began in 1804 with a mixture of Russian successes and failures and ended with decisive Russian victories in 1812 and 1813. It overlapped not only with European wars of the Napoleonic era but also with battles with rebellious Georgians and khans who did not want to submit to Russia, in addition to yet another Russo-Ottoman war (1806–12) during which troops in the Caucasus were used against the Ottomans as well as Iranians. The Russian forces suffered from a host of problems, including a shortage of manpower, difficulty delivering supplies, illness, low morale, desertion, the poor quality of some of the officers, and the inexperience of many of the rank-and-file troops. The Iranian army was far larger than the Russian in this theater. The traditional forces consisted primarily of tribal cavalry supplemented by infantry drawn from the settled population. Despite fighting well in a number of battles, their weaponry was haphazard and provided by the soldiers themselves; their firearms were far inferior to the Russians'. Their low pay made collecting booty a common method of supplementing their income, but it was a distraction from the demands of battle. The quality of military leadership ranged from the determined and capable to the unqualified. The government was able to obtain a declaration from several prominent religious figures that this war was a jihad. The Iranian war effort was underfunded. Given the range of serious economic and administrative problems Iran faced in the early Qajar era, Tehran shifted most of the burden of paying for the war, including the new military units, to the province of Azerbaijan, which, for all that it was traditionally prosperous, could not produce sufficient revenue to cover all the costs. British aid in the last years of the war did not fill the gap.<sup>19</sup>

The Iranian military also included a European-style contingent. At first, Iran tried using a few Russian deserters to train Iranian soldiers but the results were inconsequential. After failing to obtain aid from Britain at the outset of the war, Iran looked to France. In 1807 the two countries made a treaty that included provisions for France to send Iran arms and officers. A French delegation trained a few thousand soldiers, both infantry and artillery. Little came of this, however, for a host of reasons, capped off by the changing course of the war in Europe, which saw France and Russia become allies.<sup>20</sup> This led to revived British–Iranian relations and a larger-scale effort to train and arm Iranian infantry and artillery units. Those efforts faced many of the same problems that had plagued the French-trained units, with the further complication that the French units still existed and resented the creation of new units by the British. The British-trained units began to see action in 1810 and experienced both successes and failures in the last years of the war. Thousands of soldiers in the new-style army died in the battles that marked the war's end.<sup>21</sup>

Dynastic politics further complicated the Iranian war effort. The heir to the throne, `Abbas Mirza, was governor of Azerbaijan and had primary responsibility for the war, although there was occasional involvement by troops of the central government. For him, the war with Russia was important not only as an end in itself but also for its potential impact on his prospects for the succession to the throne. A half-brother, Mohammad `Ali, was less than a year older, martial and ambitious, but Agha Mohammad had decided to bypass him in the succession. He

was `Abbas's rival for the throne; therefore, he could use `Abbas's conduct of the war as a weapon in his competition with the designated heir. As `Abbas began to develop his new military units, Mohammad `Ali declared his commitment to the traditional approach. More broadly, he also claimed that he could fight the war against the Russians better than his half-brother, even though, when given the chance in 1809 to show what he could do, he did not engage the Russians but let his soldiers plunder local inhabitants of part of the war zone.<sup>22</sup>

The Russian side did not have an automatic advantage. Problems included difficulties with supply, operations in an environment that sometimes posed serious health problems for the soldiers, and the fact that service in the Caucasus held low status for Russians; officers were sometimes posted there as punishment. In addition, some of the high-ranking officers there were, through a combination of ambition, belligerence and contempt for Iranians and others, prompted to be more aggressive than St Petersburg intended. For example, Paul Tsitsianov held both military and civilian leadership positions in Georgia, the northern Caucasus, and Astrakhan at the start of the war. He was the descendant of a Georgian prince who had moved to Russia in the early eighteenth century; the widow of the last king of Georgia was his cousin. He wanted to take not only the territory as far as the Aras and Kura rivers, but to go further – to Tabriz and Gilan. He despised Iranians and Asians in general. He argued that Persians were inherently dishonest, that therefore force was the only way to deal with them. In 1805, when St Petersburg wanted to scale back its war with Iran in order to concentrate on the fight against Napoleon, Tsitsianov ignored the capital's wishes, which he justified by arguing that Iran would never agree to cede the territory Russia wanted unless compelled to do so by military means.<sup>23</sup>

The first Russo–Iranian war ended because of a combination of military and diplomatic setbacks for Iran. Iran suffered major defeats in 1812 and 1813. Although Fath `Ali Shah would have preferred to continue the war, his British allies were now also Russia's allies against Napoleon and pressed him to make peace; the British ambassador withheld the subsidy money until the shah agreed to comply. The ambassador, perhaps with British encouragement, was wildly over-optimistic about the prospects for Russia agreeing to terms that would be acceptable to Iran. However, Fath `Ali Shah did not expect Russia to make any concessions regarding the disputed territory.<sup>24</sup> Russia's approach to setting the peace terms illustrates a recurrent characteristic of its relations with Iran: a combination of contempt and misinformation. There had been intermittent chances to negotiate an end to the conflict between 1806 and 1810, beginning with an Iranian overture. Nothing came of any of this. Russia's insistence that Iran cede all the territory Russia claimed, even those parts not yet under Russian control, was one of the reasons but not the complete explanation. For example, Ivan Gudovich, who was in charge of Russia's military and civilian affairs in the southern Caucasus from 1806 to 1809, was sure that he was dealing from the position of strength because he was certain of things which were not so: that Iran would not make an alliance with France; that there was a rebellion in eastern Iran against the central government; and that the British had invaded southern Iran. A successor of Gudovich, Alexei Ermolov, considered him a man of “boundless pride, opinionated,” whose pride kept him from listening to the advice of others (although the same could be said of Ermolov himself).<sup>25</sup> The peace prospects ended when Gudovich

launched a campaign to take Yerevan; the campaign failed. In renewed attempts at negotiations in 1810, Russia temporarily dropped its claim to Yerevan and Nakhichevan, neither of which it controlled at the time, but insisted on its claim to Talesh, where the ruler had at times pledged himself to Russia, at other times to Iran. Furthermore, Russia's official communications with Iran at the time deliberately referred to him by the name Baba Khan, by which Fath `Ali Shah had been known before becoming shah. The Russians even contemplated using Afghans against Iran to force it to accept Russia's terms.<sup>26</sup>

In the negotiations leading to the Treaty of Golestan in 1813, Russia insisted on Iran ceding all the territory Russia had taken by force of arms, but offered the false hope that Tsar Alexander might choose to return some of it in response to a request from Iran. Specific details about various parts of the border were vague, or were left for definition at a later date – a source of future problems. Russia gained the border along the Aras and Kura rivers it wanted, with the significant exceptions of Yerevan and Nakhichevan, and also gained Talesh, which lay to the south. In the aftermath of the war, some of the Muslim inhabitants of territories now under Russian rule emigrated to Iran. The Tehran government's authority within the country was damaged by the loss of the war.<sup>27</sup> Despite the official end of hostilities, the governor of Yerevan, Hoseyn Qoli Khan, staged a series of cross-border raids.<sup>28</sup>

Iranian attempts in the ensuing years to obtain a border settlement more to its liking ended in failure. After the Napoleonic wars, Tsar Alexander's attention in foreign policy focused on designing the new European order, so he did not want problems with Iran. Therefore, he was willing to make some small territorial concessions to Iran that he saw as being of scant cost to Russia. The tsar seems to have seen no pressing need to retain all of Talesh or to insist on Russia's claim to a small, remote part of the khanate of Qarabagh that Iran kept; Russians had considered it not worth the cost in lives to continue occupying it. Despite that, an Iranian diplomatic mission to St Petersburg soon after the war was unable to gain even a token restoration of lost territory.<sup>29</sup>

The representative Alexander subsequently sent to Iran to resolve the border disputes did not share the tsar's conciliatory attitude. Alexei Ermolov, a veteran of Catherine the Great's campaign in the southern Caucasus as well as the Napoleonic wars, received military and civilian positions in the Caucasus in 1816 and simultaneously became Russia's ambassador to Iran. Like his predecessor, Tsitsianov, he took an aggressive stance on border issues and seemed to make it a point of pride to be rude to high-ranking Iranians during his mission there in 1817. He was not pleased to undertake this diplomatic assignment. Moreover, he embarked upon it having “heard about the Persians' cunning, treacherous characteristics.”<sup>30</sup> He was suspicious that Iran might be plotting something while he was in their country for the negotiations. He also perceived the British as hostile to Russia and doing their utmost to thwart Russian objectives in Iran. He considered the existing Russo–Iranian border too difficult to defend. A man with such views was not going to make the slightest territorial concession to Iran. Instead, he believed that Russia ought to conquer Yerevan and Nakhichevan as soon as possible in order to ensure the security of the south Caucasian territory it already held. What he proposed during the negotiations in Tehran was not what the Iranian government wanted. That

included an alliance against the Ottoman Empire and free passage for Russian troops through northeastern Iran to make contact with Khiva. He dismissed the selection of `Abbas Mirza as heir to the throne on the spurious grounds that it violated Iranian law, according to which he assumed that the prince's elder half-brother was the rightful heir. He was angry that `Abbas Mirza was trying to stir up inhabitants of Russian-ruled Caucasian territory against Russia (which was true) and believed that the prince relied on anti-Russian “rogues” and “scoundrels.” Although `Abbas Mirza expressed goodwill toward Ermolov, the general remarked, “knowing `Abbas Mirza, I never believe a word of his.”<sup>31</sup> The general assumed that Fath `Ali Shah's regime was widely unpopular and that inhabitants of areas near Russia's Caucasian territories would welcome a Russian takeover. He gratuitously insulted the important people he met on his journey to Tehran in such ways as refusing to remove his boots when going indoors and dismissed such gestures of respect for local customs as demeaning.<sup>32</sup>

Not surprisingly, the negotiations to determine the border did not go well. Ermolov's representatives faulted Iranians for raising objections to what the Russians wanted and for adopting what Russians deemed a haughty stance. Ermolov blamed `Abbas Mirza in particular for the Iranians' conduct in the negotiations. The general was displeased with Iranian authorities for doing nothing to curb raids into territory conquered by Russia by people who had emigrated from there to the Iranian side of the border. In 1825, `Abbas Mirza sent an emissary to Tbilisi in another attempt to negotiate a resolution of the border issue. Ermolov was satisfied with the result of the talks but `Abbas Mirza was not, because he thought that territory which ought to have been restored to Iran had not been.<sup>33</sup>

In the wake of this, Ermolov became more convinced than ever of `Abbas Mirza's belligerence towards Russia. The general concluded that war with Iran was inevitable. Yet he also made another attempt to settle the border dispute when he sent a representative to Fath `Ali Shah for the official purpose of informing him of the death of Tsar Alexander. One of the territories the Iranian leadership wanted to get back was Talesh. Ermolov considered it of little value to Russia and recognized that, according to the Treaty of Golestan, most of it ought to have been restored to Iran. However, he would not agree to that because the previous khan of Talesh had submitted to Russia, for which he had been attacked by Iran. He glossed over the fact that the former khan had at various times submitted to both countries. In Ermolov's opinion, to return that territory to Iran would send the wrong message to Muslims living under Russian rule in the Caucasus. He also believed that St Petersburg would not agree to that or to a compromise that would make Talesh independent of both states.<sup>34</sup> Ermolov's stance on Talesh rankled powerful political figures in Iran.<sup>35</sup>

On the Iranian side there were powerful people who saw war with Russia as serving their interests. `Abbas Mirza hoped to achieve new victories in order to repair the damage done to his standing by defeat in the first war. The khans of Baku, Shirvan, and Qarabagh had emigrated to Iran in reaction to the Russian conquest of their lands. `Abbas Mirza allocated lands to them near the post-war border in the expectation that they would encourage their former subjects to take up arms against the Russians. Even without such encouragement, many inhabitants of those territories were discontented with their situation under Russian rule.

`Abbas Mirza made sure that stories of Russian mistreatment of Muslim inhabitants of the lands lost in the war circulated in Iran. That led to several prominent religious figures advocating a jihad against Russia. Several other prominent 'olama not allied with the heir to the throne also used this issue in an attempt to discredit him in his father's eyes.<sup>36</sup> `Abbas Mirza reacted to Ermolov's obvious attempts to undercut his position during the mission to Iran by sending Prince Alexander, a member of the Georgian royal family, now dispossessed of its throne, close to the border in the hope that he could rouse Georgians to turn against Russian rule. Another way `Abbas Mirza reacted to Ermolov's hostility toward him was to appoint the man who had killed Ermolov's predecessor, Tsitsianov, to be governor of part of Talesh that both states claimed.<sup>37</sup> And `Abbas Mirza was not the only powerful figure in Azerbaijan who was eager for a new war against Russia. The governor of Yerevan, Hoseyn Qoli Khan, had been a staunch supporter of Fath `Ali Shah's for years, had fought in the first war with Russia, and saw renewed fighting as a way to further enhance his military reputation.<sup>38</sup>

As the tensions mounted, Ermolov sent troops to occupy two positions on the shores of Lake Gokcha. This had significance far beyond the value of the places themselves because they could serve as a staging point for an attack on Yerevan, as the Iranians well knew. Ermolov acknowledged that this was Iranian territory but justified his move by saying that Iran was holding on to a broad swath of territory in Qarabagh. The Russians also built a small fort on the border with Yerevan, something `Abbas Mirza objected to. In mid-1826, troops of the governor of Yerevan attacked that fort and raided in the vicinity.<sup>39</sup> On top of all this, news reached Iran in 1826 of Tsar Alexander's sudden death late in the previous year, although the accounts that reached Iran exaggerated the turmoil associated with the transition of power. This centered on the Decembrist Uprising (December 1825–January 1826) in which a group of young men, mostly military officers, attempted to force political concessions by interfering with the succession of Alexander's second younger brother, Nicholas, to the throne. Troops loyal to Nicholas quickly suppressed the uprising. Around the same time, Ermolov sent troops toward Yerevan. The accumulation of factors was sufficient to persuade Fath `Ali Shah to let his heir launch an attack on the Russians.<sup>40</sup>

The strengths and weaknesses of both sides in the second war were much as they had been in the first, albeit with a few changes. This time `Abbas Mirza had to face a rivalry not with his half-brother, who had died several years earlier, but with Hoseyn Qoli Khan of Yerevan, who sought to use the war to enhance his own military reputation and did not coordinate operations with the prince. The Russians did not have to worry about the threat posed by Napoleon, but they faced uprisings in several of the khanates they had conquered in the first war as well as in parts of Georgia. This time there was no foreign assistance to Iran from the British or anyone else. `Abbas' attack caught Ermolov off guard. In the opening months of the war, the Iranians made substantial gains. However, in 1827, the Russians, under new leadership (Ermolov having been recalled and replaced by Ivan Paskevich, one of his subordinates), turned the tide and took not only the territory they had gained in the first war but also Yerevan, Nakhichevan, and Tabriz, capital of Azerbaijan. An attempt by `Abbas Mirza to launch a new offensive in 1828 was an utter failure and resulted in the Russian occupation of additional Iranian territory.<sup>41</sup>

At that point, Iran had no realistic alternative but to end the war on Russia's terms. At the same time as the Treaty of Torkmanchay, which established peace, Russia concluded a commercial treaty with Iran. Under the treaty, Russia was allowed to establish consulates wherever it wanted in Iran, something Fath `Ali definitely had long opposed.<sup>42</sup> By the Treaty of Torkmanchay not only did Russia acquire Yerevan and Nakhichevan at last, but Iran was also saddled with a heavy indemnity payment to Russia (later fixed at twenty million rubles.) The funds to pay this came almost entirely from the province of Azerbaijan and `Abbas Mirza's personal wealth, with a small amount coming from the British, but none from the shah. The reparation debt gave Russia a means to exert pressure on Iran. The treaty gave Russia another means to intervene in Iranian affairs in that it stipulated Russia's recognition of whomever the shah designated as the heir to the throne. That turned out not to be `Abbas Mirza, who died in 1833, the year before his father. As a reflection of the symbolic significance to the Qajars of regaining territory that had formerly been subject to the Safavids, he was planning a campaign to take Herat at the time of his death. `Abbas's eldest son, Mohammad, succeeded his grandfather to the throne in 1834, with Russian and British backing in the face of a competing claim from another of Fath `Ali Shah's sons.<sup>43</sup>

There was a final, grim chapter in this phase of the development of Russo–Iranian relations: the diplomatic mission of Alexander Griboedov to Iran in 1829 to resolve issues raised by the Treaty of Torkmanchay. The losses to Iran that this treaty represented made the undertaking extremely sensitive. The most inflammatory aspect for some in Tehran was the repatriation of people who had been carried off from what was now Russian territory in the Caucasus at any time since Agha Mohammad's 1795 campaign. The people involved included an Armenian who held a position of trust in the shah's entourage and several Georgian and Armenian women in the households of members of the Iranian elite. Griboedov was an accomplished author but in his disdain for Iranians he resembled many of the other Russian officials assigned to deal with Iran from the Caucasus in that era. As rumors about what the repatriation would entail exacerbated tensions and a *mojtahed* expressed his opposition, a Tehran mob attacked the Russian mission and killed Griboedov and all but one of those with him.<sup>44</sup> This bloodletting did not lead to a new war because neither St Petersburg nor Tehran wanted further conflict.

Although the Qajar realm that emerged in the early nineteenth century was larger than any state on the Iranian plateau since the mid-eighteenth century, it was neither strong nor secure. In addition to serious domestic problems, it also faced external challenges, most notably from countries that had previously played a lesser, intermittent role in Iranian affairs: Russia and Britain. Although Russia might occasionally contemplate Iran's utility as an ally against the Ottoman Empire, the days when Iran might be an equal partner in such an alliance, as in the Safavid era, were long gone. Iran's rulers still attempted to pursue their own foreign policy objectives, but their ability to do so was increasingly constrained. At the same time, foreign intervention in Iran's internal affairs also grew. By the early twentieth century, even the survival of Iran as a sovereign state was cast into doubt.

## Notes

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## CHAPTER 2

# THE KHAN, THE SHAH AND THE TSAR: THE KHANATE OF TALESH BETWEEN IRAN AND RUSSIA

*Soli Shahvar and Emil Abramoff*

### **Transcaucasia between Three Empires**

The southern Caucasus or, as the Russians call it, Transcaucasia, has been an arena of rivalry for many regional and global actors since ancient times, and various Iran-based states, from the Achaemenids to the Qajars, have sought to gain control over this territory. In the second half of the fifteenth century, two successive leaders of the Safavids, Sheykh Jonayd (d. 1460) and Sheykh Heydar (d. 1488), tried unsuccessfully to secure predominance in the Caucasus for their militant Sufi order. After establishing his power over a large part of Iran, Heydar's son and the first Safavid shah, Esmā'il I (d. 1524), launched a series of effective campaigns against the Shervanshahs, the rulers of Shervan, a state in the north of the modern Republic of Azerbaijan. The Safavid–Shervan feud resulted in the subjugation of the Shervanshahs and the extension of Safavid influence over the eastern Caucasus. In 1538, Esmā'il's son and successor, Shah Tahmasb I (d. 1576), abolished the last signs of Shervan's independence, and the province was given to Tahmasb's brother, Alqas Mirza (d. 1550).

Safavid expansionist policies in the Caucasus faced animosity from the Ottoman Empire. After years of war, the two powers came to terms on the basis of division of the disputed lands. The eastern Caucasus – the territories that roughly coincided with the modern-day Republic of Azerbaijan, Armenia, eastern parts of Georgia and southern parts of Daghestan – were granted to the Safavids by the treaty signed at Amasya on 29 May 1555. In 1578, after about two decades of peace, a new bloody war flared up between the two empires. The Treaty of Istanbul (1590) brought Iran a humiliating peace at a heavy cost – the Safavids lost the southern Caucasus and large parts of Azerbaijan. In subsequent wars the Safavids tried to regain these territories. The Treaty of Serav/Sarab (1618) ended the conflict by ceding to the Safavids the eastern Caucasus and other forfeited territories lost by Iran according to the Treaty of Istanbul.<sup>1</sup>

By the time of the signing of the Treaty of Amasya, however, a new power – Russia –

appeared in the Caucasus. After the capture and destruction of the Tatar khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan (1552 and 1556 respectively), the Russian Muscovite state was not slow to intervene in Caucasian affairs. Initially, Moscow's interests were restricted to the northern Caucasus.<sup>2</sup> Despite a military dispute between the two states in 1651–3, Iran and Russia maintained smooth, almost friendly relations, with both states being more concerned with checking the Ottoman danger than the Caucasian ambitions of each other.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1720s, by which time the Safavids had sunk to their nadir, the situation changed dramatically. Exhausted by the war with the Afghans, the Safavid state had virtually ceased to exist. By October 1721, Isfahan, the capital of Safavid Iran, together with much of the country, had been captured by the Afghans. Concurrently, the Ottomans invaded Iran and captured her western provinces. The situation was aggravated by Christian Russia's desire to take advantage of the situation. After gaining victory over Sweden in the Great Northern War (1700–21), Russia felt strong enough to take over Iran's Caucasian provinces.<sup>4</sup> In 1722/3, Peter the Great launched a victorious campaign that resulted in the establishment of Russian rule over Daghestan and the coastal areas between Darband and Gilan. Through French mediation, the Russians and the Ottomans signed the Treaty of Constantinople (1724), which divided the neighboring territories of Safavid Iran between the Russians and Ottomans, resulting in Russian domination over Daghestan, lands in the southern Caucasus, east of the conjunction of the Kur and Aras rivers, and the provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran, while large parts of Iranian Azerbaijan, Kermanshah and the rest of Safavid-ruled Transcaucasia were given to the Ottomans.<sup>5</sup>

The success of the Russians and Ottomans was brief, however. Nader Qoli (Nader Shah from 1736 to 1747), the effective Afshar ruler of Iran under the weak Safavid successors, Tahmasb II and `Abbas III, set out to reconquer and reunite the Safavid realm. Desiring to secure their border with Iran before launching a new war against the Ottomans, the Russians signed the Treaties of Rasht (1732) and Ganjeh (1735) with Iran and returned all the lands in the Caucasus they had seized from the Iranians.<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, Nader's armies succeeded in routing the Ottomans, and thus the eastern parts of Transcaucasia came back under the rule of Iran.<sup>7</sup>

In 1747, however, Nader Shah was assassinated, and the Muslim lands in Transcaucasia were split into several khanates and petty sultanates under nominal Iranian suzerainty. Although the history of Russo–Iranian relations has become the topic of a large body of research, the history of the Transcaucasian khanates and their role in the relations between the two states remain scantily explored. This essay discusses one of these khanates: the Khanate of Talesh/Tavalesh/Talysh. The history of this khanate, its development and the manoeuvrings of its rulers, are fruitfully understood only in the broader context of Russo–Iranian relations and local developments in the southern Caucasus.

## **Sources and the State of Research**

The study of the Khanate of Talesh faces serious obstacles. The first problem is the paucity of

primary sources and secondary material concerning the history of the khanate. The primary sources for the study of the Khanate may be roughly divided into three groups: chronicles, documentary material, and travel accounts.

In contrast to other regions of the Persianate world, no Talesh-based chronicles were written during the Safavid or the preceding periods. Two Persian-language chronicles were produced after Talesh became a Russian province. The first is the *Akhbar-nameh*, written by Mirza Ahmad b. Mirza Khodaverdi, who served as a vizier for two last khans of Talesh.<sup>8</sup> Another local chronicle is *Javaher-nameh-ye Lankaran*, authored by Sa'id `Ali b. Kazem Beyg Baradgahi whose family was linked to the dynasty of the khans of Talesh. There are two copies of the *Javaher-nameh-ye Lankaran* – the longer (B-3049) and the shorter (B-7815), and both are retained at the Füzuli Institute of Manuscripts in Baku. The Persian text of the shorter copy was published by `Ali `Abdali.<sup>9</sup> Another source that may be added to the chronicle-type sources is the Russian-language survey entitled “Istoriia Talyshskogo khanstva” (The History of the Khanate of Talesh) written in 1885 by Teymur-bek Bayramalibekov (1862–1937), one of the most brilliant Azerbaijani educators, who was born in the vicinity of Lankaran.<sup>10</sup> Many facts related to the history of Khanate are scattered throughout various chronicles produced by local and Qajar historians.

Another relevant chronicle, written in Persian, is from the hand of `Abbas-Qoli Agha Bakikhanov's.<sup>11</sup> Although not dealing directly with the Khanate of Talesh, it contains useful information on the region up to 1845, the year in which it was completed.

The major body of correspondence of the khans of Talesh is preserved in Russian archives and has been published in various collections of documents. The most important of these collections is the *Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi komissiei (Acts Gathered by the Caucasian Archeographic Commission)*.<sup>12</sup>

Travelogues and reports by merchants, agents, informers, etc., are another type of primary sources that is potentially useful for the study of the Khanate of Talesh. Among this type of source, one may mention accounts written by two Poles in Russian service: Count Jan Potocki (1761–1815), and Aleksander Chodźko (1804–91).<sup>13</sup> Another account relating to Talesh that was discussed in the research literature, is a report made by C. A. Trézel (1780–1860), a French officer who served under Count Cl. M. de Gardane (1766–1818), Napoleon's envoy to the Qajar court.<sup>14</sup>

The uncertainty surrounding the history of the Khanate of Lankaran is not due only to the paucity of sources: a further hindrance is the rarity of studies about it. As other Transcaucasian khanates, the Khanate of Talesh has not been adequately investigated. Western research literature concerning the Khanate of Talesh is non-existent. Several studies and short surveys appeared in Russian, Azerbaijani Turkish, and Persian.<sup>15</sup> Regrettably, some of these studies are tenuous and contain erroneous and biased interpretations.<sup>16</sup>

## **Talesh before the Creation of the Khanate**

The land of Talesh comprised lands in the southwestern part of the current Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as some territories in modern Iran. The exact definition of Talesh boundaries has varied over time. Talesh is a mountainous region located between Gilan and the Caspian Sea in the east and Ardabil and Khalkhal in the west. It is a narrow strip of land extending from Rudbar in the south to Astara in Iranian territory and on to the north of Lankaran, located in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The northern half of Talesh is one of the seventeen provinces that were cut from Iranian territory as result of the Treaties of Golestan and Torkmanchay.<sup>17</sup>

In Safavid times, the population of Talesh was a mixture of Iranian and Turkic elements. Taleshis – an ethnic group speaking the Iranian language – were autochthonous, while the Turks settled the region in several waves beginning in the eleventh century.

At the end of the fifteenth century many Talesh leaders provided solid support to the Safavids, who rewarded them with honors and land. At the same time, the Safavid Shahs tried to control local chiefs and placed them under faithful officials. However, despite its policy of centralization, the Safavid government never succeeded in suppressing local “autonomy” in the South Caucasus. Theoretically, the local rulers (*hakems*, *mahalbeygs*) were not hereditary lords but officials whose position was confirmed by a royal *firman*; but in fact, this confirmation represented a recognition of their local “autonomy.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, familial succession led to the appearance of dynasties who gained great power in local affairs and, whenever the central government weakened, the local rulers attempted to gain more power.

With the weakening of the Safavid Empire at the turn of the eighteenth century, Talesh leaders tried to create autonomous principalities. During the Russian presence in the Caspian provinces, Mir `Abbas – one of the local potentates who claimed *seyyed* (descendant of Prophet Mohammad) lineage – established contacts and cooperated with M. A. Matiushkin (1676–1737), commander of the Russian forces. Even after the withdrawal of the Russians, Mir 'Abbas continued to maintain ties with the Russians. At the same time, Mir `Abbas, who enjoyed Nader Shah's support in local affairs, sent his son, Jamal al-Din, as a hostage to the shah's court as a token of his allegiance to him. Jamal al-Din, nicknamed Qara (i.e., the Black) Beyg for his swarthinness, reached prominent positions in Nader's army, and in 1744 he was sent to crush the rebellion of Kalb Hoseyn Beyg in southern Talesh.<sup>19</sup>

## **Jamal al-Din Khan and the Creation of the Khanate of Talesh**

In 1747, the year that Nader Shah was murdered, Jamal al-Din succeeded his father as ruler of Talesh. The empire created by Nader quickly disintegrated after his death. As with other rulers in the southern Caucasus, Jamal al-Din established his power as a semi-independent ruler and transferred the capital of his khanate from Astara to Lankaran. Against the background of the chaos and rivalry that engulfed Iran, Jamal al-Din Khan tried to secure his position by seeking rapprochement with the Russians. He established contacts with the Russian consuls in Anzali, first with P. Chekalevskii and later with I. Igumnov.<sup>20</sup> Jamal al-Din Khan kept communications open with the Russian authorities in Astrakhan and wrote a letter to the Russian Empress

Catherine II in which he expressed his loyalty to Russia and even offered to place Russian forces on his lands.<sup>21</sup> Zohrab Beyg, one of the Talesh magnates, brought this to the notice of Karim Khan Zand, the Zand ruler of Iran (1750–79). At the orders of Karim Khan, Jamal al-Din was captured and imprisoned in Shiraz, the Zand capital. However, when Karim Khan found out that Zohrab Beyg had come to an understanding with Hedayatollah Khan Fumyani, the ruler of Gilan and an adversary of the Zands, he changed his policy toward Jamal al-Din, appointing him as the governor of Talesh. Jamal al-Din destroyed Zohrab's troops and took possession of Uluf and Dashtvand. Jamal al-Din now set his sights on Astara. Jamal al-Din seized and killed its ruler, Shoja` al-Din, but Karim Khan did not allow Jamal al-Din to strengthen his position too much, and transferred Astara to Shoja` al-Din's son. However, Jamal al-Din managed to subjugate various localities in Talesh and expand his power over a large part of the region.

At this stage, the main threat to Jamal al-Din's power came from Hedayatollah Khan. After reconciliation with Karim Khan in 1767, Hedayatollah Khan was approved as ruler of Gilan. In 1768, Hedayatollah's troops invaded Talesh. Jamal al-Din and his allies did not succeed in resisting the army of the khan of Gilan. Jamal al-Din was imprisoned in Rasht. After four years of captivity, he managed to escape and returned to Talesh. During the turbulent years that followed Karim Khan's death (1779), Jamal al-Din Khan was given an opportunity to avenge his humiliation. In 1779, he and Nazar `Ali Khan Shahsevan of Ardabil, a bitter enemy of Hedayatollah Khan, invaded Gilan and devastated Rasht. Hedayatollah Khan appealed to `Ali-Morad Khan Zand, who sent an army to Gilan. But by the time the Zand troops arrived in Gilan, Jamal al-Din Khan and Nazar `Ali Khan had already retreated from Gilan. During this period, Fath `Ali Khan of Qobbeh (Quba) – the most powerful of the Caucasian khans – played a major role in the Caucasus. He annihilated a number of khans and gathered under his rule lands from Darband to Salyan, and actively intervened in the affairs of other khanates. In 1781, he lent his support to Hedayatollah Khan against the Qajars, who tried to gain a foothold in Gilan. In 1784, Fath `Ali Khan attacked Nazar `Ali Khan and conquered Ardabil. On his way back, the khan of Qobbeh invaded the Khanate of Talesh and seized its capital, Lankaran. Thus, Talesh became Fath `Ali Khan's dependency. Jamal al-Din Khan was captured and sent to Baku under custody of its ruler, who was Fath `Ali Khan's kinsman and ally. As a result of coercion of Russia, however, Fath `Ali Khan released the khan of Talesh. In 1786, Jamal al-Din Khan died, to be succeeded by his son, Mir Mostafa Khan.

### **Talesh under Mir Mostafa Khan**

The death of Fath `Ali Khan of Qobbeh in 1789 permitted Mir Mostafa Khan to operate more independently. But now a new danger appeared. Mir Mostafa Khan's reign coincided with the beginning of the Qajars' attempts to restore Iranian empire under their own rule. Upon the death of Karim Khan in 1779, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar escaped from Shiraz, where he had been kept hostage, became emplaced in Mazandaran and openly opposed the Zands. Thus began a new wave of internal struggles in Iran.

While Agha Mohammad Khan struggled for power in Iran, the Russians strengthened their

influence in the south Caucasus. These developments resulted in rapprochement between the Russian empire and King Erekle II of Kartli and Kakheti (reigned as the king of Kakheti, 1744–62, and of the unified regions of Kartli and Kakheti, 1762–98). In August 1783, Prince Ioane Bagrationi (1755–1801) and Prince Garsevan Chavchavadze (1757–1811), the representatives of Erekle, and P. S. Potemkin (1743–96), who represented the Russian side, signed the Treaty of Georgievsk. According to the treaty, Erekle accepted protectorate status under Russia, while the Russian side guaranteed the independence and territorial integrity of Kartli and Kakheti. In other words, Kartli and Kakheti were detached from the Iranian sphere of influence. Of course, Agha Mohammad Khan was displeased with such developments, but for the moment he had little means to counteract Russian policy in the Caucasus; he first needed to consolidate his own power and rule within Iran.

In 1785, Agha Mohammad Khan sacked Isfahan and ravaged it with great cruelty. In 1789, he gathered troops and marched against Lotf `Ali Khan and defeated the Zand army near Shiraz. Nevertheless, Lotf `Ali Khan retained Shiraz, and Agha Mohammad Khan returned to Tehran. In 1791, however, he took and destroyed Shiraz, and in 1794, after a five-month of siege, Kerman, the last stronghold of the Zands, fell to the Qajars. Lotf `Ali Khan was blinded and then quartered. It is only then, having established his power in the Iranian heartland, that Agha Mohammad Khan turned his eyes toward the south Caucasus.

In 1793, as evidenced from the correspondence of Erekle, the Caucasian rulers were somewhat disquieted by rumours of Agha Mohammad Khan's designs to restore Iranian rule in the south Caucasus.<sup>22</sup> In 1795, Agha Mohammad Khan sent ambassadors to I. V. Gudovich (1741–1820), commander-in-chief of the Russian forces in the Caucasus. The ambassadors, claiming that they had been sent by the shah, presented their credentials from the shah's vizier. Gudovich replied that the Russian government did not recognize any such person as shah (of Iran and probably not of the south Caucasus either).<sup>23</sup> No doubt, Gudovich's answer insulted Agha Mohammad Khan. He dispatched letters to the Caucasian rulers demanding they recognize his rule and send hostages to Tehran. The designs of Agha Mohammad Khan resonated with those of Sheykh `Ali Khan (Khan of Qobbeh, 1791–1806 and Khan of Darband, 1791–99, 1802–06), who was promised a position of *nayeb* (deputy ruler) of Shervan. Desiring to prove the seriousness of his intention, Agha Mohammad Khan invaded Talesh by land and by sea, but the naval attack was repelled by the Russian fleet stationed at the island of Sari, so that the Qajar troops retreated to Gilan.<sup>24</sup> In response to the Qajar danger, “the *vali* of Tiflis, the lofty Erekle Khan; the governor of Yerevan, Mohammad Khan; and the governor of Talesh, Mir Mostafa Khan, had all sworn with the late Ebrahim Khan not to accept Agha Mohammad Shah's suzerainty, but to remain united and assist each other.”<sup>25</sup>

Mir Mostafa Khan of Talesh had good reason to be wary of Agha Mohammad Khan's advance into Transcaucasia. During the period of turmoil in Iran, the Khan of Talesh proved himself as Agha Mohammad Khan's enemy. Mir Mostafa Khan lent support to Agha Mohammad Khan's rebellious half-brother, Mortaza-Qoli Khan Qajar, who with Russian help tried to gain control over Gilan. On a number of occasions Mir Mostafa Khan fought with Mortaza-Qoli Khan against Agha Mohammad Khan.<sup>26</sup> In one such case, in 1790, the joint

forces of Mir Mostafa Khan and Mortaza-Qoli Khan took Rasht. A year later Agha Mohammad Khan encroached on Talesh. His forces came back laden with spoils, but did not succeed in subjecting Talesh to Agha Mohammad Khan's rule.<sup>27</sup> However, Mortaza-Qoli Khan broke down and escaped to Russia, where he ended his days in 1798.

Mir Mostafa Khan was thus left without his main ally. Also, during the clashes with Agha Mohammad Khan, he lost many other allies, including two of his own brothers – Mir `Isa Khan and Mir Qasem Khan – who were kept as a guarantee of good conduct, and executed by Agha Mohammad Khan.<sup>28</sup> Left without allies or powerful patrons, Mir Mostafa Khan tried to protect himself against Agha Mohammad Khan's wrath by tightening links with the Russians.

In March 1795 Mir Mostafa Khan sent Asadollah Karbala'i to St Petersburg as head of a delegation carrying a letter from him to Catherine the Great (r. 1762–96). In the letter, Mostafa Khan talked about the good relations between his ancestors and Russia, stressing that he wished to continue to maintain such relations. Catherine bestowed upon him the title of Polkovnik (Colonel) and sent him presents and a military uniform. In return for Russia's friendship, Mir Mostafa Khan took it upon himself to cover all the expenses of the Russian army in Talesh and to secure their supplies.<sup>29</sup>

In May 1795, and probably in order to prepare for his joint military cooperation with the Russians, Mir Mostafa Khan sent his envoys, Zaman Beyg and Asadollah Beyg Karbala'i, to Georgievsk, the headquarters of Gudovich. However, the Russians acted slowly. Only at the beginning of September 1795 did Gudovich receive Catherine's instruction to provide military aid to Erekle. In addition, she proposed to recognize Agha Mohammad Khan as the shah of Iran in return for his renunciation of any rights over the south Caucasus.<sup>30</sup> But it was too late: in summer 1795, Agha Mohammad Khan's armies invaded Transcaucasia and a most disturbing scenario materialized. As a result of St Petersburg's tardiness, neither the Muslim ruler, nor even the Christian king of Kartli and Kakheti, received any help from the Russians and they were thus compelled to face the Qajar armies alone.

In September 1795 a large Qajar army, with auxiliaries sent by Javad Khan of Ganjeh and Mohammad Khan of Yerevan, invaded Erekle's kingdom. In the Battle of Krtsanisi (8–10 September), the Georgians were totally annihilated. On 11 September Agha Mohammad Khan seized and utterly destroyed Erekle's capital, Tbilisi. In the brutal and murderous assault, the invaders massacred thousands of inhabitants and enslaved many others.

The news of the devastation of Tbilisi created the utmost consternation in the Caucasus. It seems that for Agha Mohammad Khan the conquest of Tbilisi and the khanates symbolized the accomplishment of his efforts to re-create the Iranian empire, for he adopted the imperial title of Shahanshah (King of Kings) only after the subjugation of Transcaucasia.<sup>31</sup> The Russians, however, were not ready to accept the loss of their newly acquired influence in the south Caucasus. In November 1795, Catherine ordered Gudovich to send military aid to Erekle. At the same time, Gudovich was ordered to prepare, by the spring of 1796, a massive punitive campaign. The command of the expeditionary corps was entrusted to Count V. A. Zubov (1771–1804).

In May 1796 the Russian army, under the command of Zubov, embarked upon a campaign down the western shores of the Caspian. On 14 May they besieged Darband. On 21 May the city fell to the Russians and its ruler, Sheykh `Ali Khan, was captured, although he later managed to escape and incited the Caucasian mountaineers against the Russians. The news of the fall of Darband spread rapidly throughout the Caucasus and many of the local rulers hastened to the Russian camp, expressing their loyalty to the Empress Catherine. Some of them (Salim Khan of Shaki, Mostafa Khan of Shamakhi, or Shervan), however, conducted a Janus-faced policy and betrayed the Russians on the first occasion. On 26 June 1796, the troops of S. A. Bulgakov (d. 1824) took Qobbeh, while G. I. Rakhmanov (1757–1827) entered Baku. In keeping with other rulers in the south Caucasus, the khan of Talesh was not an indifferent onlooker. He maintained a pro-Russian position and sent an envoy equipped with a letter to Zubov (at the end of July 1796), who was camped near Baku. Mir Mostafa Khan reported that there were rumors about Agha Mohammad Khan's preparations for a new invasion of Talesh, and asked Zubov to send part of his army to Talesh. Zubov ordered Counter-Admiral N. S. Fedorov (1745–96), the commander of the Russian Caspian fleet, to send aid to Mir Mostafa Khan. The Russian navy established control over the western shores of the Caspian, while the ground forces (mostly Black Sea Cossacks) encamped near Lankaran.<sup>32</sup>

By the end of 1796 the troops of A. V. Rimskii-Korsakov (1753–1840) reached Ganjeh. In the meantime, the main Russian forces entered the Khanate of Javad at the confluence of the Kura and the Araxes (Aras) rivers. Count Zubov decided to establish here a fortified town. In a relatively short time, Russia managed to conquer most of the southern Caucasus, and controlled the coast of the Caspian from the mouth of the Terek River to the mouth of the Kura River. The Cossack cavalrymen of M. I. Platov (1751–1818) crossed the Kura and conducted raids as far as Gilan. The road to Tehran was now open. But on 17 November 1796 Catherine II died. Her son and successor, Paul I (r. 1796–1801), ordered Count Zubov to cease operations against Iran and return to Daghestan. Nevertheless, the Russians conformed to retain their influence in Transcaucasia. Paul desired to create under a Russian protectorate a kind of confederation of loyal rulers, i.e. the Shamkhal of Tarki, the khans of Darband and Baku, and others whose domains were located on the western shores of the Caspian.<sup>33</sup>

When the news of the retreat of the Russian army reached Iran, Agha Mohammad Khan decided to launch a new campaign against the Transcaucasian rulers. In May 1797, his army crossed the Aras and entered Qarabagh. Ebrahim Khalil Khan fled to Shervan. The Qajar army captured Shusheh and prepared to invade Erekle's kingdom. He also sent 10,000 riflemen (*tofangchis*) – under the command of Mehdi-Qoli Devellu Qajar, Pir Qoli Khan and Mohammad `Ali Khan Devellu Qajar – against Mir Mostafa Khan's army, which was easily beaten. Lankaran fell, and after the punishment of Mostafa Khan's supporters, they headed for Shusheh. But after the fall of Shusheh, Agha Mohammad Khan was assassinated in his tent by his servants. His death put an end to the campaign and the Iranian army returned to Tehran.<sup>34</sup>

With his main rival dead, Mir Mostafa Khan attempted to regain his losses. He managed to take control of southern Talesh, from Salyan to Dinachal, and declared independence.<sup>35</sup> Then, he turned to Rasht and managed to take control of it, causing much looting and confusion, as a

result of which many escaped from their homes.<sup>36</sup>

Fath `Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834), the nephew and successor of Agha Mohammad Khan, did not intend to abandon suzerainty over the south Caucasus, including the Khanate of Talesh. Mir Mostafa Khan's behavior was too much and could have emboldened others to imitate him. He therefore sent forces from Tehran, Khamseh, Fuman, Sheffat and Gaskar against Mir Mostafa Khan in Rasht. Upon hearing this, Mir Mostafa Khan escaped to Lankaran.<sup>37</sup> The growing threat of Fath `Ali Shah's invasion prompted Mir Mostafa Khan, as well as some other south Caucasian rulers, to seek the help and protection of the Russian Empire. Mir Mostafa Khan sent a number of embassies to Russia. In his letters to the Russian government, the Khan of Talesh wrote of his fidelity to the Russians and asked for military aid against the possible inroad of Fath `Ali Shah. In one of these letters, he writes:

I swear by the Almighty and the Holy God and the Great Prophet Mohammad and the Holy Qur'an, that I, with my descendants and my dependent people, desire to be a faithful subject of the All-Russian Imperial throne.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the Russian government decided to take the Khanate of Talesh under its protection. Decrees issued by Paul in February and March of 1800 ordered General Baron K. F. Knorring (1746–1820), the Governor of Astrakhan, to enhance the security of the Khanate of Talesh and to provide military aid to Mir Mostafa Khan.<sup>39</sup>

Granting protection to the Khanate of Talesh was part of a general policy pursued by the Russian Empire. For example, in September 1799 Sheykh `Ali Khan of Qobbeh received similar status.<sup>40</sup> The most serious change, however, occurred in the status of the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti. The death of Erekle and the accession of his son Giorgi XII (r. 1798–1800) were followed by internal struggles between the members of the reigning house. The strife within the royal family allowed the Russians to intervene in the internal affairs of the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti. On 28 December 1800 King Giorgi XII died, and Davit declared himself King of Kartli and Kakheti, as Davit XII. However, the Russian government refused to recognize him as ruler. Moreover, on 18 January 1801 Emperor Paul issued the manifesto by which the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti was incorporated into the Russian Empire. On 15 September 1801 the Emperor Alexander I (r. 1801–5) confirmed the annexation. Thus, Eastern Georgia became a province of Russia.

## **Talesh and the Two Wars between Iran and Russia in the Nineteenth Century**

To solidify her positions in the Caucasus, Russia sought to establish communication between her forces in Eastern Georgia and Astrakhan. Russia's strategy for achieving this goal was to bring under her control the Caspian littoral and the territories lying between the Caspian and Eastern Georgia. Alexander I ordered Baron Knorring to increase the number of Russia's adherents among the local rulers in the Caucasus.<sup>41</sup> In September 1802, at Russian instigation,

delegates of several Caucasian rulers gathered together in Georgievsk. By the end of December, after four months of negotiations, a collective agreement between them and the representatives of Emperor Alexander I was signed. Sheykh `Ali Khan of Qobbeh and Darband, Mahdi II of Tarki (r. 1794–1830), Mir Mostafa Khan of Talesh, Rostam of Qaytaq (r. 1795–1806) and a number of other rulers pledged, *inter alia*, to act conjointly against Iran if she invaded the Caucasus.<sup>42</sup>

The growing Russian influence in the Caucasus filled Fath `Ali Shah, whose ambition was to revive the Iranian empire, with great anxiety. The Qajar ruler tried to muster support from the European powers, who at the time were engaged in a bitter struggle for mastery in Europe. While Europe was the main scene of this struggle, a secondary scene soon developed in the Middle East and India. The strategic position of Iran between the three main European powers – Britain (in India), France (in Egypt) and Russia – made it attractive for any possible French or Russian attack on British India while, for the British, Iran was a potential buffer. Fath `Ali Shah, and his able regent, `Abbas Mirza, sought to take advantage of this European strategic interest in their country and to use it in their own struggle against Russia in the Caucasus.<sup>43</sup> With the outbreak of the First Irano-Russian war (1804–13), Fath `Ali Shah sought to muster also local support against the Russians.<sup>44</sup> He even tried to make Mir Mostafa Khan his ally through marriage diplomacy by marrying the khan's daughter to one of the shah's sons. But Mir Mostafa Khan found his interests better served by being on good terms with Russia, rather than with Iran, and he therefore refused Fath `Ali Shah's proposal. This caused greater animosity between him and the Qajar ruler of Iran.

After the Russian takeover of Georgia, Russia became ever more keen on conquering the rest of Iran's possessions in the Caucasus. General Pavel Dimitriovich Tsitsianov (1754–1806), the new commander of the Russian forces in the Caucasus, headed for Ganjeh. Contrary to Christian Georgia and Sunni Daghestan, Ganjeh was predominantly Shi`i. Tsitsianov first demanded from Javad Khan Ziyadlu, the governor of Ganjeh, payment to Russia of the taxes collected, but the governor and the people opposed this. Next, in December 1803, Tsitsianov ordered an attack on Ganjeh. Ganjeh managed to hold out against the Russian attack but, due to betrayal by a number of locals, it finally fell in January 1804, leading to a bloodbath of the local population and much looting.<sup>45</sup> Having captured Ganjeh, Tsitsianov divided his 52,000-strong army into three columns, one of which moved along the west coast of the Caspian Sea towards the confluence of the Kura and Aras rivers. In March 1804 this force entered northern Talesh, where it camped at Salyan.<sup>46</sup> Mir Mostafa Khan, who had already sworn allegiance to the Russians, reiterated this allegiance, welcomed Tsitsianov's forces and used their backing to consolidate his own rule over northern Talesh.<sup>47</sup>

In the summer of 1805, `Abbas Mirza – the prince regent and governor of Azerbaijan, who was in charge of the Iranian forces fighting the Russians<sup>48</sup> – positioned part of his forces in defensive formation in Lankaran and Salyan.<sup>49</sup> Mir Mostafa Khan's position seemed quite fragile in Lankaran, but Tsitsianov sent a force to assist him to Enzeli on board twelve war ships equipped with guns. This brought great relief to Mostafa Khan and he supplied this Russian force, which went ashore, with all their necessary supplies, as he had promised.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, Russian and Iranian forces were positioned against each other in both Salyan and Lankaran.

On 11 October 1805 the Iranian forces, together with guerrilla fighters from Talesh, inflicted heavy casualties on the Russian forces in Anzali, causing them to flee with their ships to the island of Sari near Lankaran, leaving behind much military equipment and weapons, including four guns. A messenger from the commander of the Russian force on Sari met with Mostafa Khan, after which it was decided to ask Tsitsianov for more reinforcements.<sup>51</sup>

Having learned about this development from one of Mostafa Khan's servants, `Abbas Mirza sent his chief advisor and minister (*pishkar*), Mirza `Isa Farahani (known as Mirza Bozorg and the Qa'em-maqam I) (d. 1822), to meet with Mir Mostafa Khan, in an attempt to win him over and put an end to his cooperation with the Russians. Mirza `Isa asked Mostafa Khan not to be fooled by Russian promises, warning him that if he continued cooperating with the Russians it would be the end of him and his family, whether at the hands of the Russians (whose promises should not be trusted once they have secured their ends) or the Iranians (who would be revengeful). Mirza `Isa's words had the desired effect and Mir Mostafa Khan asked Mirza `Isa to convey his apology and obedience to `Abbas Mirza.<sup>52</sup>

It seems that Mir Mostafa Khan's *volte face* could be explained not only by the initial successes of the Iranian forces against the Russians but, also, by the influence of his mother as well as the impudent attitude of Tsitsianov toward him.<sup>53</sup> In order to prove his sincerity, Mir Mostafa Khan not only ceased supplying the Russian force stationed on the island of Sari but also blocked any such attempt by others. The cold winter weather and shortage of supplies caused the Russians to leave the region.<sup>54</sup>

With Mir Mostafa Khan now secured as ally, `Abbas Mirza could plan an offensive further north, namely towards Baku. He made the necessary preparations, which included fortifications in Lankaran and the positioning of a 300-strong force under the command of Mir Baqer Beyg, brother of Mir Mostafa Khan, at Salyan.

Mir Mostafa Khan's change of position – from a pro-Russian to a pro-Iranian ally – provided an opportunity for another local warlord, Mostafa Khan of Shervan, to further consolidate his position as the main pro-Russian local ruler. Assisted by Russian forces and the treachery of a number of people from Salyan (who were unsatisfied with `Ali Khan, the governor of Salyan and friend of Mir Mostafa Khan), Mostafa Khan of Shervan was able to take over Salyan, taking Mir Baqer Beyg and the force under his command as prisoners.

Mostafa Khan of Shervan sent a letter to Mir Mostafa Khan, demanding that he change sides again and that he give up Moghan, threatening that, should he fail to do so, then he (Mostafa Khan of Shervan) would execute his brother and the entire force under his command. Faced with such an ultimatum, and with no prospect of help from `Abbas Mirza (who was engaged in fighting further north), Mir Mostafa Khan capitulated and sent a delegation to Tsitsianov, acknowledging his renewed pro-Russian position. Tsitsianov welcomed this and in order to show that it was in the interest of Mir Mostafa Khan to be on the Russian side, he hastened to order Mostafa Khan of Shervan to evacuate northern Talesh. With his supply lines disrupted by

such conditions, and with the cold weather settling in, `Abbas Mirza was forced to retreat from his strategic position in Baku. The Russians, however, were unable to translate this Iranian setback into a major advantage mainly because they were still engaged in a major war against France in Europe.

A considerable change in the region occurred in early 1806, when Tsitsianov was shot dead during the siege of Baku by the forces of Hoseyn-Qoli Khan, the governor of the city, who was loyal to `Abbas Mirza. Tsitsianov's head was cut off and sent to Fath `Ali Shah in Tehran.

With Tsitsianov – the much-dreaded strong commander of the Russian forces in the Caucasus – dead, the vast majority of the local khans, including Mir Mostafa Khan, moved their allegiance back to the Iranians. This was a clear demonstration of how the loyalties of the khans shifted according to who they perceived as the stronger side.

Much of the military activity after Tsitsianov's death could be summed up as a measure of Iranian advances on land balanced by Russian attacks from the sea. A major change occurred in July 1807 with the Franco-Russian Treaty of Tilsit.<sup>55</sup> Relieved from the intensive war against the French, the Russians could now concentrate more forces at the Caucasian front, including the Taleshi front. This development sufficed for Mir Mostafa Khan to tilt once again towards the Russians. Probably in order to better protect himself from a possible revengeful act by `Abbas Mirza, he asked General Ivan Vasilyevich Gudovich (1741–1820), the new commander of the Russian forces in the Caucasus, to post his brothers-in-law, namely Nazar `Ali Khan, Governor of Ardabil, and Farajollah Khan Shahsevan, chief of the Shahsevan, with the forces under their command, in Talesh; but Gudovich refused and only agreed to their being posted in the Qarabagh region.

Following Mir Mostafa Khan's renewed shift towards the Russians, the Qajar regent ordered Amir Khan Qajar, the commander (*sardar*) of Ardebil, to attack northern Talesh. This development, combined with Gudovich's refusal to send the desired troops to his assistance, caused Mir Mostafa Khan to seek `Abbas Mirza's apology, which was immediately given. It seems that while Mir Mostafa Khan was aware of his weak position in relation to both the Russian and Iranian forces, in the stalemate that developed in the southern Caucasus between the Russian and Iranian forces, each of the latter sought to win him over to their side in order to break the deadlock. And indeed, following Mir Mostafa Khan's latest tilt towards the Iranian side, the Russian bombarded Lankaran (21 March 1809) and moved forces to the Talesh front. This sufficed for Mir Mostafa Khan to come, once again, under the protection of Russia.

Mir Mostafa Khan's betrayal of Iran aroused much opposition among his family, influential leaders in Talesh and even amongst the local population. Some of those, who had pro-Iranian inclinations, rose against him, and Mir Mostafa Khan sent Mir Hasan Khan, one of his sons, to crush the rebellion, which he succeeded in doing. However, it was a clear signal to Mir Mostafa Khan that his rule was not safe enough. He therefore made a number of preparations in order to protect himself from a possible Iranian attack and/or revolt of his own people: he sent his own family, accompanied by 3,000 of his men and supporters, to Sari, while he, with another part of his army, moved to the strategically located Qal`eh-ye Gamesh on the Caspian shore. He also asked the Russians to send a force to Lankaran and asked Mostafa Khan of

Shervan to send a force of riflemen to his aid. The Russians, who apparently needed him no less than he needed them, supplied him and his forces with arms and supplies, and were ready to move in with their ships in the event of an Iranian attack against him.<sup>56</sup>

Such an attack indeed took place at the beginning of September 1809 when, by order of `Abbas Mirza, a 2,000-strong Iranian force under the command of Farajollah Khan Afshar Nasqchi-bashi (head of the imperial bodyguard) attacked Lankaran and defeated the Taleshi–Russian force therein, taking many of them prisoner, with many others being killed, injured or defecting to his side. After burning Qal`eh-ye Lankaran, Farajollah Khan moved against Qal`eh-ye Gamesh (the place to which Mir Mostafa Khan had escaped), laying siege to it.<sup>57</sup> Mir Mostafa Khan sought assistance from Aleksandr Tormassov, the new commander-in-chief of the Russian forces in the Caucasus, but the latter failed to send any reinforcements to Mir Mostafa's assistance due to the engagement of his own forces elsewhere. This development became known to `Abbas Mirza, who, tired of Mir Mostafa Khan's repeated treacheries, decided to finish him through a joint land and maritime attack. Learning about such designs, Amir Guneh Beyg b. Tahmasb Khan, the cousin of Mir Mostafa Khan, who usually acted as the latter's envoy to the courts of the shah and the tsar, hurried to initiate a meeting between Mir Mostafa and Mirza Bozorg, in which the former apologized for his previous actions and expressed his loyalty to Iran.<sup>58</sup>

`Abbas Mirza sought to put Mir Mostafa's loyalty to the test. He ordered him and his forces, as well as a number of other warlords from the southern Caucasus, to attack the Russian forces in northern Talesh, a task which they successfully accomplished, routing the Russians completely from that region. However, the Russians, recognizing the importance of Mir Mostafa Khan's position and influence over other warlords in his region, decided to force Mir Mostafa Khan back to their side. They therefore took advantage of their maritime superiority and bombarded Lankaran continuously from the sea. At the beginning of 1812 (1227 AH), the Russians intensified these bombardments, causing such heavy casualties that Mir Mostafa Khan was forced to capitulate. However, this was not the only reason for his change of heart: he was recognized as the governor of Talesh, and received the title of major-general with a stipend of 5,000 rubles.<sup>59</sup>

The British, whose concerns were focused on the war in Europe and the defence of British India, were supportive of the Iranians in their struggle against Russia. This support was further intensified after the signing of the Franco-Russian Treaty of Tilsit (July 1807), under which France pledged to aid Russia against Ottoman Empire, while Russia agreed to join the war against the British in Europe and move against British India. Iran was important as a buffer to the British in India, and thus, from 1808 to 1812, a number of British missions – equipped with presents and draft treaties that were to supply arms, military training and funds – arrived in Tehran with the purpose of making an ally of Iran, and keeping both European enemies away from India as far as possible. Thus, the British supported the Iranian side in their war against Russia, and objected to Mir Mostafa Khan's being under Russian protection. Sir Harford Jones, who headed one of those British missions to Iran, even demanded that Mir Mostafa end his relations with Russia.<sup>60</sup> However, French invasion of Russia in June 1812 changed the

situation completely. Suddenly, Russia became a potential British ally against France. It was therefore in the British interest that Russia concentrate as many as her forces against the French as possible, and that meant that the war in the Caucasus needed to be brought to an end as soon as possible.

In the meantime, on the Caucasus front, both the shah and his regent became fed up with Mir Mostafa's crisscrossing tactics and, when all attempts to win him over failed, they decided to bring an end to him and his rule in Lankaran. In August 1812 a combined Iranian force from various directions and regions attacked Lankaran, defeated Mir Mostafa Khan's forces and the Russians who aided him. Mir Mostafa managed to escape to Gamesh Avan. The Iranian forces then laid siege to this latter place. Mir Mostafa turned for help to General Nikolay R. Rtishchev, the commander-in-chief of the Russian forces in the Caucasus (between 1812 and 1816), and the latter sent General Peter Kotliarevskii – who previously had defeated `Abbas Mirza's forces in the battles of Qarabagh and Aslanduz – and a force of 3,000 soldiers, accompanied from the sea by three battleships, to Mir Mostafa's help in northern Talesh. They arrived on 21 December 1812. They laid siege to Lankaran, where the main body of the Iranian forces were encamped. On 1 January 1813, and in spite of fierce Iranian opposition, Kotliarevskii managed to defeat the Iranian forces, killing all 2,000 people who were in the fortress, taking many weapons, much equipment and money as booty. Kotliarevski was injured in this battle and brought before Mir Mostafa Khan in Lankaran, where the latter provided him with medical treatment and many thanks for saving him from Qajar revenge and helping him to keep his position as governor.<sup>61</sup>

The defeat in Lankaran on the one hand, and the British pressure to end the war in the Caucasus on the other, persuaded Fath `Ali Shah to agree to and sign the Treaty of Golestan (12 October 1813), which stipulated that each side would keep the territories in its possession. Thus, most of Talesh fell to Russian hands. Although Mir Mostafa Khan was recognized as the Governor of Lankaran, he was now under Russian rule, whose forces occupied large tracts of the region and whose commanders were his new masters.<sup>62</sup>

For Fath `Ali Shah the end of the war with Russia did not mean the end of war with Mir Mostafa Khan. Since the shah could not punish him by force (given the fact that he was in Russian occupied territory), Fath `Ali Shah sought to punish Mir Mostafa in a different way. The end of the war still left southern Talesh in Iranian hands so, in order to prevent the entire Talesh province being under Mir Mostafa's rule, Fath `Ali divided southern Talesh between the local warlords. He made use of their animosity and hostility towards Mir Mostafa, gave them land and the title of “khan” as a hereditary title and encouraged them to be independent of Mir Mostafa Khan.<sup>63</sup>

## **Mir Hasan Khan**

Mir Mostafa Khan had 14 children: 10 sons and four daughters. It was his elder son, Mir Hasan Khan, who mostly commanded his forces in battle. It was therefore natural for Mir Hasan Khan to take over as the new governor of Talesh after his father's death on 26 July 1814.

The Russians also approved of this. Soon, however – and mainly through the instigation of their mother – Mir Hasan Khan's brothers, in particular Mir Hoseyn Khan, Mir `Abbas Khan and Mir Hedayat Khan, who sought the same position, protested and a bitter struggle ensued. General Nikolai Rtishchev, the commander of the Russian army in the Caucasus, regarded these struggles as a source of disorder and disturbance, and therefore decided to withdraw Russian support of Hasan Khan, who was regarded as the strongest leader in northern Talesh. Such a strong local leader was against Russian designs for the region. In as much as the region was not under their full control, the Russians needed a local strong leader, and this was Mir Mostafa Khan; but, once the war had ended and they had established their control of the region, a strong leader, such as Mir Hasan Khan, would be against their interests. They therefore used the “divide and rule” policy in order to weaken the local players. General Ilinskii, commander of the Russian forces in northern Talesh, implemented this policy with much ability. He managed to establish and increase Russian control of the region by feeding into the family feuds. He missed no opportunity to entice Hasan Khan's family against him. Ilinskii also succeeded in engineering and bringing about the division of lands formerly under Mir Mostafa Khan, between Mir Hasan and his brothers, with part of the land being given to him and a number of high Russian generals. Furthermore, with the passing of Fakhr-ol-Nesa', Mir Mostafa's wife and Mir Hasan's mother (9 April 1825), Ilinskii took personal control of her inheritance. It seems that all means for securing Russian control of the region and his personal gain were legitimate for Ilinskii. He removed a number of local leaders and took control of the possessions of the population, mainly the rich ones (such as major merchants) by simply killing them, leaving no trace of their bodies (he used to attach heavy weights to their bodies and sink them in the Caspian).<sup>64</sup>

The maltreatment of the Russians towards the local population created much popular resentment, a situation which `Abbas Mirza wished to take advantage of. As the commander of the Iranian forces in the war against Russia, he felt responsible for the loss of land and people to Russia. He could use this popular resentment in the Russian-controlled territories in the southern Caucasus to win back lost lands and thus save face. He therefore managed to secure Fath `Ali Shah's permission for the declaration of *jihad* (holy war) against the Russians by the `olama.<sup>65</sup> The fact that Christians conquered Muslim territory was enough of a trigger to declare *jihad*.<sup>66</sup>

Once the war with Russia resumed, it was important for the Iranians to secure the cooperation of the strong man of Talesh, namely Mir Hasan Khan. The latter received a letter from Fath `Ali Shah inviting him to join forces with Iran. He also was well aware of the maltreatment by the Russians of the local populace of northern Talesh, and probably knew that he would not be able to maintain his autonomic rule under the Russians. He therefore accepted the Iranian invitation.<sup>67</sup>

Having learned about Hasan Khan's reunion with the Iranians, the Russians tried, in concert with his rival brothers, to capture him. Hasan Khan was informed about this and he, with part of his family, servants and followers, managed to escape to Iranian-controlled territory, arriving in Ardabil in mid-April 1826.<sup>68</sup>

In late July 1826 the Russian forces crossed the lines into the Iranian-held territories on the northern Talesh front and conquered the provincial town of Garmi.<sup>69</sup> A few days later, `Abbas Mirza sent an advanced force under Mohammad Khan Qajar Devellu to repel the advances of the Russians in that direction. In early August, and with additional forces, the Iranian forces managed to push the Russian force back to Adineh-Bazar River, to the southwest of Ardabil, taking seven guns and dozens of rifles and prisoners.

Another force, under Mir Hasan Khan, was sent by `Abbas Mirza against the Lankaran fortress, which was held by a Russian force aided by some local Taleshis. The Iranian force, composed of many irregular infantry and regular cavalry regiments, and equipped with heavy, medium and light guns, besieged the town. The attack began on 10 August and by the 13 August, after heavy fighting, the Iranians managed to take control of the fortress, taking 600 prisoners, seven guns and many supplies as booty. Mir Hasan Khan was given governorship over all Talesh.<sup>70</sup>

The loss of Lankaran was not the end of Russian attempts to re-take this strategic town. Having lost on the ground, they now tried to capitalize on their supremacy at sea. Thus, they pounded Lankaran day and night from their warships in the Caspian Sea. Although Mir Hasan Khan had no maritime force to challenge the Russian attacks, he still managed to position heavy guns with greater range along the shores in order to push the Russian ships further into the sea and to a greater distance from Lankaran. Additionally, he built fortifications around the town and fortresses on the coast and, by employing guerrilla warfare and smart tactics, his forces managed to take many Russian soldiers as prisoners, acquire large quantities of Russian supplies, booty, weapons, and even small ships and boats, and to push the Russians out of Talesh completely.<sup>71</sup>

The Russian losses and setbacks brought Tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825–55) to appoint his favorite general, Ivan Paskevich (1782–1856), first (1826) as deputy-commander and later (1827) as chief commander of the Caucasus. On 11 September 1826, only one day after his arrival in Tibilisi, Paskevich led a force of 8,000-men and 24 guns. On the banks of the Aqstafa River, some 30 km west of Ganjeh (Elizavetpol from 1804), the Russians met an Iranian force estimated at 60,000 soldiers with 26 guns but, in spite of the overwhelming numerical advantage, the Iranian force was routed.<sup>72</sup>

On the Taleshi front, the Russian attack was both from land (forces crossing the Kura River into northern Talesh) and sea (Russian warships bombarding Lankaran). They managed to conquer parts of northern Talesh and to concentrate their main forces opposite Adineh Bazar, where Mir Hasan Khan had his main forces and headquarters. The main Russian attack, however, took place in late April–beginning of May 1827. They attacked concurrently Adineh Bazar, Garmi, Lankaran and Astara, and managed to re-take the Lankaran fortress, with part of the force reaching the Aras River.<sup>73</sup>

Although the Aras River seemed a good natural and defensible final border for the Russians, still they continued well towards Tabriz – the provincial capital of Azerbaijan and the seat of `Abbas Mirza – in order to inflict a heavy blow on the Iranians and thus to force

them to end the war. By mid-October 1827 Paskevich, heading a 15,000-strong Russian force, entered Tabriz with little opposition, with the demoralized Iranian force of 6,000 fleeing for their lives. He was ready to enter negotiations with the Iranians, but Fath `Ali Shah's hesitation to accept Paskevich's demands brought a resumption of the fighting, with Paskevich adding Ormiyeh and Ardabil to his conquests. It was then that the Iranians were left with no choice but to negotiate.<sup>74</sup>

In the ensuing negotiations, the main demand of Paskevich was to get northern Talesh, but `Abbas Mirza opposed ceding any part of Talesh. However, when faced with the ultimatum of renewed warfare and the danger of losing more territories, he was left with no choice but to capitulate.<sup>75</sup> Thus, by the Treaty of Torkmanchay (February 1828), northern Talesh, together with the provinces of Yerevan and Nakhichevan, were ceded to Russia.<sup>76</sup>

When Mir Hasan Khan learned of this development, he sent his *vazir*, Mirza Khodaverdi, to `Abbas Mirza to make enquiries. The Qajar prince explained that all his efforts to keep northern Talesh under Iranian rule had proved futile. Thus, and because he regarded Mir Hasan Khan as his own son, he would not be angry with him if he preferred to settle with the Russians; but if no such settlement would be possible, then he should settle in southern Talesh, and the Iranian government would give him and his children the territories of Ardabil, Kargan Rud, Asalem and Vilkiy as *toyul*.<sup>77</sup>

Upon learning of the Iranian position, Mir Hasan Khan immediately convened all the khans, leaders and elders of Talesh, to seek their opinion. They soon divided into two groups, one supporting remaining in northern Talesh (and thus coming under Russian suzerainty), the other preferring to leave that region (and thus coming under Iranian suzerainty).<sup>78</sup>

As to Mir Hasan Khan himself, he preferred to remain in northern Talesh, but under Iranian, not Russian, control. This seemed an impossibility as the Iranians had already given up that region in the treaty, and all the forces he had under his direct command totalled no more than a thousand men. Still, and in spite of the slim chances, he laid siege to Lankaran, which had already passed into Russian hands. The Russian government complained to their Iranian counterpart, and orders were sent by the latter to Mir Hasan Khan to lift the siege and retire to southern Talesh, and satisfy himself with what had been proposed to him by the Iranian government.<sup>79</sup>

Mir Hasan Khan decided to retire to southern Talesh, but skirmishes often erupted between these two parts of Talesh and thus between Mir Hasan Khan in the south and mainly his brother, Mir `Abbas Beyg, to whom the Russian gave the governorship of northern Talesh. The Russians complained again, demanding that the Iranian government move Mir Hasan Khan away from the border. He was indeed moved to Ardabil and, in recognition of his local patriotism, `Abbas Mirza gave his own daughter to Mir Kazem Khan, son of Mir Hasan Khan, in marriage. However, the Russians found this insufficient and demanded that Mir Hasan Khan should be taken further away, to the environs of Rasht. The Iranian authorities ordered Mir Hasan Khan to do so but, when he declined, `Abbas Mirza gave the order that a number of Mir Hasan Khan's family be kept in Ardabil as a guarantee of his good conduct and obedience. This

made relations between the Qajar prince and the Taleshi Khan very tense.<sup>80</sup>

Mir Hasan Khan kept relatively quiet, waiting for an opportunity to rise up against the Russians in order to re-take northern Talesh. He did not have to wait long, for an opportunity presented itself when A. S. Griboedov, the Russian minister to the court of Fath `Ali Shah, and a member of the embassy's staff, was murdered on 11 February 1829 by an angry mob in Tehran. The massacre brought the already tense relations between Iran and Russia to a new low. Mir Hasan Khan contacted his brothers, Mir `Abbas and Mir Esma'il Beyg, believing that if they joined forces they would be able to re-take Lankaran and northern Talesh. But his brothers betrayed him and delivered him to the Russian commander of Lankaran.<sup>81</sup>

The activities of Mir Hasan Khan, who was an Iranian official in Russian territory, and during the tense relations following the murder of Griboedov, were extremely dangerous. `Abbas Mirza therefore apologized for Mir Hasan's conduct before the Russian authorities and asked them to extradite him.<sup>82</sup> This was done and Mir Hasan Khan was brought to Tabriz, where he was kept under watchful eyes. However, after a while he managed to escape, hiding in the jungles of the area. Finally, at the beginning of April 1831, he was caught in Mazandaran, and sent to Tehran, where he died in the same year from dropsy.<sup>83</sup>

With Mir Hasan Khan out of the picture, the Russians hurried to consolidate their power in northern Talesh. They destroyed the houses of Mir Hasan Khan and some of his supporters, took control of his and his father's properties and estates, deported three of Mir Hasan Khan's brothers to Baku, arrested some of his main supporters, destroyed a number of communal buildings, made passage into and out of the region subject to permits only, and settled the area with a number of Armenians and Turks. In addition to all these measures, they commandeered local resources for other parts of Russia (such as the local trees for wood or the local beehives, which was one of the main income sources of the local people), and inflicted heavy taxes on the local population. All these measures caused many Taleshis to flee from the northern part and settle in the southern part of Talesh, under Iranian rule.<sup>84</sup>

After Mir Hasan Khan's death, his children came under `Abbas Mirza's patronage, with Mir Kazem Khan becoming the governor of Vilkiy, Astara, Ajarud and Namin. His rule, and that of his children, over those areas lasted a century, ending with the fall of the Qajars and the rise of the modern nation state under the Pahlavis.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusions

The meeting of the borders of Iran and Russia left no room for an autonomous or semi-independent Talesh. The two Irano-Russian wars of the early nineteenth century caused each side to strengthen its hold over the border area in order to prevent further eruption of war between them. The irredentist desires of Qajar rulers were now diverted eastwards, towards Afghanistan, a desire that was encouraged by the Russians in their cold war – labeled the “Great Game” – with British India.

Northern Talesh was strategically, geopolitically but also economically important for the

Russians, as it provided them with a longer coast on the Caspian Sea, a territory south of the Aras and Kura rivers and access to useful products such as rice, honey, wood and fish, to name a few. Control of northern Talesh gave the Russians a better position with regard to any future Iranian military moves, and the Caspian Sea basin, with the conquest of its eastern shores, practically became a Russian *mare nostrum*.

For Iran, the loss of northern Talesh, like the loss of her other Caucasian territories, was a visible sign of its military weakness and a wake-up call for her need to modernize, not only in the military field, but in a range of other fields as well. Losing territories that were part of former Iranian empires was a major blow to the new ruling dynasty. It created among the earlier Qajars a desire to compensate for their losses in the Caucasus in other regions, an irredentist aspiration that brought only further losses of territory.

As for the Taleshis themselves, they prized their autonomy or semi-independence, and for many years their rulers were able to retain this status by playing off Russia and Iran. This was possible as long as the borders between their two powerful neighbors were distant; but with the two sides closing towards each other, the possibilities of maneuvering and maintaining a sort of autonomy or semi-independence diminished. However, as with similar cases of other local warlords situated between two powerful states, shifting sides was a common feature.<sup>86</sup> This is clearly seen in the conduct of both Mir Mostafa Khan and his son, Mir Hasan Khan, and not only them but also their rivals.

## Notes

1. S. Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843–1914* (New York, 2013), 20–2.
2. M. B. Broxup, “Introduction: Russia and the North Caucasus,” in *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World*, ed. M. B. Broxup (New York, 1992), 1–3.
3. On the Safavid-Muscovite conflict in 1651–3, see A. E. Khumigov, “Rossiisko-iranskii otnosheniia i Vostochnyi Kavkaz v 50-60-e gg. XVII veka,” *Nauchnye problemy gumanitarnykh issledovaniï* 12 (2011): 61–7.
4. For a discussion on the reasons and the course of the Russo-Persian War of 1722–3, see I. V. Kurukin, *Persidskii pokhod Petra Velikogo. Nizovoi korpus na beregakh Kaspiia (1722–1725)* (Moscow, 2010), 14–113.
5. T. Mustafazade, “Iz istorii russko-turetskikh otnoshenii v 20-kh godakh XVIII veka,” *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 2 (2002): 15–30. For the text of the treaty, see *Treaties, &c. between Turkey and Foreign Powers. 1535–1855* (London, 1855), 445–50.
6. Kurukin, *Persidskii pokhod*, 325–360. For the texts of the Treaties of Rasht and Ganjeh see, *Dogovory Rossii s Vostokom. Politicheskie i torgovye*, ed. T. Iuzefovich (St Petersburg, 1869), 194–207.
7. For Nader Shah's relations with the Ottomans, see S. Shaw, “Iranian Relations with the

- Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7: *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, ed. P. Avery, G. Hambly and C. Melville (Cambridge, 1991), 301–9.
8. Ahmad b. Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh: Tarikh-e khanat-e Talesh dar zaman-e jangha-ye Rusiyeh `aleyh-e Iran*, published under the title *Akhbar-nameh: Tarikh-e Taleshan*, ed. `A. `Abdali (Tehran, 1380).
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  10. T. Bairamalibekov, “Istoriia Talyshskogo khanstva,” in id. *Izbrannyye proizvedeniia* (Baku, 2012), 29–66.
  11. `Abbas-Qoli Agha Bakikhanov, *Golestan-e Eram*, ed. `A. `Alizadeh, Baku, 1970, trans. by Willem Floor and Hasan Javadi as *The Heavenly Rose-Garden: A History of Shirvan & Daghestan* (Washington, DC, 2009).
  12. *Akty, sobrannyye Kavkazskoi Arkheograficheskoi komissiei* [henceforth AKAK], 12 vols, (Tiflis, 1866–1904).
  13. See, for instance, the discussion on the accounts relating to Talesh, composed by the Poles in Russian service, Count Jan Potocki (1761–1815) and Aleksander Chodźko (1804–91), in I. Mirzalizade and I. Abilov, “Svedeniia pol'skikh uchenykh o Talyshe i talyshakh,” *Vestnik Talyshskoi Natsional'noi Akademii* 1 (2011): 72–89; A. Krasnowolska, “Aleksander Chodźko's Reports on the Peoples of North Iran,” in *Poland and Persia: Pages from the History of Polish–Persian Relations* (Tehran, 2009), 24–32.
  14. [C. A. Trézel,] “Notice sur le Ghilan et le Mazenderan, ” in P.-A. Jaubert, *Voyage en Arménie et en Perse, fait dans les années 1805 et 1806* (Paris, 1821), 417–63.
  15. F. Əsədov F. *Talış xanlığı*, Baku, 1998; `A. Purşafar, *Hokumatha-ye mahalli-ye Qafqaz dar `asr-e Qajar* (Tehran, 1377/1998), 158–63; H. Ahmadi, *Taleshan (Az dowre-ye Safaviyeh ta payan-e jang-e dovjom-e Iran va Rus)* (Tehran, 1380/2001), 95–168; F. Aboszoda, *‘Nesostoiavshaiasia nezavisimost’ Talysha* (Minsk, 2011).
  16. For an overview of Talesh studies, see G. Asatrian and H. Borjian, “Talish and the Talishis (The State of Research),” *Iran & the Caucasus* 9 (2005), 43–72.
  17. See, Baradgahi, *Javaher-nameh*, 31–3, for a detailed description of the boundaries of Talesh.
  18. I. P. Petrushevskii, *Ocherki po istorii feodal'nykh otnoshenii v Azerbaidzhane i Armenii v XVI – nachale XIX vv.* (Leningrad, 1949), 126–7.
  19. Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 94–5.
  20. On Chekalevsky and Igumnov and their consular activity, see V. A. Ulianitskii, *Russkie konsul'stva za granitseiu v XVIII veke*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1899), 1: 590–613.
  21. Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 52–6.

22. *Gramoty i drugie istoricheskie dokumenty XVIII stoletia, otnosiashiesia k Gruzii*, ed. A. A. Tsagareli, 2 vols (Tiflis, 1891–1902), 2: 76–7.
23. It should be noted that Agha Mohammad Khan crowned himself shah only later, in 1796.
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26. Pursafar, *Hokumatha-ye mahalli-ye Qafqaz*, 160.
27. M. Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780–1828* (Minneapolis, 1980), 19.
28. Seyyed Taqi Soleymani Namini, *Tarikhcheh-ye Khavanin va marzdaran-e Tavalesh* (Tehran: 1351/1972), 3, as quoted by Pursafar, *Hokumat-ha-ye mahalli-ye Qafqaz*, 160.
29. Zeyn al-`Abedin Shervani, *Bostan al-siyaheh*, National Library of Iran, manuscript no. 9424, 524, as quoted in Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 112.
30. *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 265–6.
31. M. Eskandari-Qajar, “Between Scylla and Charybdis: Policy-Making under Conditions of Constraint in Early Qajar Persia,” in *War and Peace in the Qajar Era: Implications Past and Present*, ed. R. Farmanfarman (London, 2008), 28–9.
32. Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 60–1. On the Black Sea Cossack Host and its participation in the campaign of 1796, see F. A. Shcherbina, *Istoriia Kubanskogo kazach'ego voiska*, 2 vols (Ekaterinodar, 1913), 2: 619–24.
33. For the text of Paul's instruction to Gudovich dated 17 January 1797, see E. I. Kozubskii, *Istoriia goroda Derbenta* (Temirkhan-Shura, 1906; repr. Baku, 2012), 247–8.
34. Mohammad Fathollah b. Mohammad-Taqi Saru'i, *Tarikh-e Mohammadi: Ahsan al-tavarikh*, ed. Gholam-Reza Tabataba'i-ye Majd (Tehran, 1371/1992), 297–9; Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 3.
35. Gaspar Drouville, *Voyage en Perse fait en 1812 et 1813, Paris, 1825*, trans. into Persian by Manuchehr E`temad Moqaddam as *Safar beh-Iran* [A Journey to Iran] (Tehran, 1370/1991), 30. Drouville was a French officer who was employed in the early nineteenth century to train the Iranian army.
36. Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 114.
37. *Ibid.*, 115; Saru'i, *Tarikh-e Mohammadi*, 307–8.
38. Cited by Dzh. M. Mustafaev, *Severnye khanstva Azerbaidzhana i Rossiia (konets XVIII – nachalo XIX v.)* (Baku, 1989), 189.
39. *AKAK*, 1: 641–2.
40. Mustafaev, *Severnye khanstva*, 190.
41. *AKAK*, 1: 436.

42. For more details, see D. S. Kidirniiazov and K. Z. Makhmudova, “Georgievskii dogovor 1802 g. [The Georgievsk Treaty of 1802],” *Voprosy istorii* 9 (2012), 148–53. For the text of the agreement, see N. Dubrovin, *Zakavkaz'e ot 1803 do 1806 goda* (St Petersburg, 1866), 485–91.
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45. Abadiyan, *Ravayat-e Irani-ye jang-ha-ye Iran va Rus*, 35–8; `Ali-Akbar Bina, *Tarikh-e siyasi va diplomasi-ye Iran*, 2 vols (Tehran, 1344/1965), 1: 93; John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London, 1908), 67.
46. Jamil Quzanlu, *Tarikh-e nezami-ye Iran*, 2 vols (Tehran, 1315/1936), 2: 710, 725.
47. Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 65; Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 40.
48. On `Abbas Mirza and his role in the Irano-Russian wars, see: Amineh Pakravan, *`Abbas Mirza va Fath-`Ali Shah: Nabardha-ye dah saleh-ye Iran va Rus*, trans. from the French by Safiyeh Ruhi (Tehran, 1376/1997–98); Naser Najmi, *Iran dar miyan-e tufan ya sharh-e zendegani-ye `Abbas Mirza “Nayeb-ol-Saltaneh va jangha-ye Iran va Rus* (Tehran, 1363/1984).
49. Quzanlu, *Tarikh-e nezami-ye Iran*, 2: 727.
50. `Abdol Razzaq Maftun Donboli, *Ma'ather-e soltaniyeh: Tarikh-e jangha-ye Iran va Rus*, ed. Gholam-Hoseyn Sadri Afshar (Tehran, 1206 Solar/1827–28; new edn, Entesharat-e Ebn Sina, 1351/1972), 158–9; Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 65–6.
51. Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 118–19.
52. Donboli, *Ma'ather-e soltaniyeh*, 165.
53. Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 119; Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 65
54. Donboli, *Ma'ather-e soltaniyeh*, 165; Mirza Mohammad Sadeq Vaqa`eh-negar Homa Marvazi, *Tarikh-e jangha-ye Iran va Rus: Yaddashtha-ye Mirza Mohammad Sadeq Vaqa`eh-negar Homa Marvazi az aghaz ta `ahd-nameh-ye Torkmanchay*, collected by H. Azar and ed. by Amir Hushang Azar (n.p. [Tehran], 1369/1990), 126–7.
55. The Franco-Russian Treaty of Tilsit, which was aimed against Great Britain, was signed only one month after the signing of the Irano-French Treaty of Finkenstein (4 May 1807), which was aimed against both Great Britain and Russia. The Iranians saw this move as French treachery but, for Napoleon, Russia was a more powerful ally against the British than Iran. For the text of the Treaty of Finkenstein, see J. C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, 2 vols (New Haven, 1975), 1: 77–8.
56. Donboli, *Ma'ather-e soltaniyeh*, 227; Quzanlu, *Tarikh-e nezami-ye Iran*, 2: 795.

57. Donboli, *Ma'ather-e soltaniyeh*, 220–1; Marvazi, *Tarikh-e jangha-ye Iran va Rus*, 177–80; Mirza Mohammad-Taqi Lesan al-Molk Sepehr, *Nasekh-al-tavarikh-e salatin-e Qajariyeh*, ed. Mohammad Baqer Behbudi, 2 vols (Tehran, 1353/1974), 1: 191–2.
58. Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 126; Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 68; Donboli, *Ma'ather-e soltaniyeh*, 227.
59. Donboli, *Ma'ather-e soltaniyeh*, 227; Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, 1: 225; Sa`id Nafisi, *Tarikh-e ejtema`i va siyasi-ye Iran dar dowreh-ye mo`aser*, 2 vols (Tehran, 1368/1989), 1: 322.
60. B. A. H. Balaoğlu and M. H. Talışlı, *Lənkəran*, ed. F. Əsədov, Baku: n.p., 1990, 23, 33 as quoted in Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 125.
61. Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, 1: 234, 236, 239, 242; Drouville, *Safar beh-Iran*, 25, 28–9, 34, 228, 262; Reza-Qoli Khan Hedayat, *Tarikh-e rowzat al-safa-ye Naseri*, 10 vols (Qom, 1339/1960), 9: 481, 483–6; Baradgahi, *Javaher-nameh*, 54; Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 52–3; Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 75–8; Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 129–35; James B. Fraser, *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces on the Southern Banks of the Caspian Sea* (London, 1826), 144–5; Marvazi, *Tarikh-e jangha-ye Iran va Rus*, 209; Nafisi, *Tarikh-e ejtema`i va siyasi-ye Iran*, 1: 332; Quzanlu, *Tarikh-e nezami-ye Iran*, 2: 708.
62. Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 78; Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 54; Baradgahi, *Javaher-nameh*, 55.
63. Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 137–8.
64. Baradgahi, *Javaher-nameh*, 56–7; Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 48, 55–9, 82, 131; Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 79, 81–4; Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 139–43; Nafisi, *Tarikh-e ejtema`i va siyasi-ye Iran*, 2: 107.
65. Nafisi, *Tarikh-e ejtema`i va siyasi-ye Iran*, 2: 109–15, 118.
66. Ibid., 115–16; Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, 1: 351.
67. Ibid., 358–60; Jahangir Mirza, *Tarikh-e now: Shamel-e havades-e dowreh-ye Qajariyeh az sal-e 1240 ta 1367 qamari*, ed. `Abbas Eqbal Ashtiyani (Tehran, 1327/1948), 5.
68. Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, 1: 360; Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 145–46; Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 60–4; Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 83.
69. Garmi is located between the Moghan plain and the towns of Ardabil and Meshgin-shahr.
70. Hedayat, *Tarikh-e rowzat al-safa-ye Naseri*, 9: 645–9; Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, 1: 358, 362, and 2: 54; Marvazi, *Tarikh-e jangha-ye Iran va Rus*, 238, 241; Quzanlu, *Tarikh-e nezami-ye Iran*, 2: 853–4, 859–62; Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 39, 79; “Moqaddameh,” *Chahar resaleh*, 13; Mirza Mostafa Afshar (Baha' ol-Molk), *Safarnameh-ye Khosrow Mirza beh Peterzburgh*, and Haji Mirza Mas`ud Mostowfi Ansari, *Tarikh-e zendegi-ye `Abbas Mirza Nayeb al-Saltaneh*, ed. Mohammad Golban (Tehran, 1349/1970), 39–40.
71. Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 79–80, 87, 95, 139; Quzanlu, *Tarikh-e nezami-ye Iran*, 2: 800–1, 851–2, 863; Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 148–52; Marvazi, *Tarikh-e jangha-ye Iran va Rus*, 241–2, 272–3; Afshar, *Safarnameh*, 53; Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, 2: 54; Jahangir

Mirza, *Tarikh-e now*, 72–9.

72. `Abbas Mirza ordered three of his sons, who were commanders in the Iranian force, to flee the battlefield. He was concerned for their lives but the orders were understood to be a retreat of their forces, which resulted in mayhem and the loss of the battle; Gholam Reza Varahram, *Nezam-e siyasi va sazman ha-ye ejtema`i-ye Iran dar `asr-e Qajar* (Tehran, 1367/1988), 54. Ahmadi mistakenly states that Paskevich's attack came after Russia “managed to bring [additional] forces after the signing of the Hünkâr İskelesi Treaty with the Ottomans” (Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 152). The Hünkâr İskelesi Treaty was signed on 8 July 1833, some seven years after the start of the second Russo-Iranian War in the Caucasus (1826–8).
73. Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, 1: 317; Quzanlu, *Tarikh-e nezami-ye Iran*, 2: 902–5, 912–13, 917.
74. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, 173–4; Jahangir Mirza, *Tarikh-e now*, 93–9; Hedayat, *Tarikh-e rowzat al-safa-ye Naseri*, 9: 647–79; R. Mignan, *A Winter Journey through Russia, the Caucasian Alps, and Georgia, thence into Koordistan*, 2 vols (London, 1839), 1: 92, 107–8.
75. Afshar, *Safarnameh*, 67–8; Hedayat, *Tarikh-e rowzat al-safa-ye Naseri*, 9: 676–8, 683; Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 154–5; Afshar, *Safarnameh*, 67–8; Mirza Abu al-Qasem Farahani, *Nameh`ha-ye siyasi va tarikhi-ye Seyyed-ol-vozara Qa'em-maqam Farahani*, ed. Jahangir Qa' em-maqami (Tehran, 1358/1979), 46; Nafisi, *Tarikh-e ejtema`i va siyasi-ye Iran*, 2: 192; Mohammad Hasan Khan E`temad al-Saltaneh, *Mer'at al-boldan-e Naseri*, ed. `Abd al-Hoseyn Nava' i and Mir Hashem Mohaddes (Tehran, 1368/1989), 651–2.
76. For the text of the Treaty of Torkmanchay, see Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa*, 1: 231–7. Article IV of the “Treaty of Peace” defines the exact demarcation of the new border between Iran and Russia.
77. Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 95. *Tuyul* (Turkish) refers to the grant of a track of land by the ruler to someone (usually, large landlords or tribal leaders) in return for the military service of that person's people (i.e., their private army).
78. Baradgahi, *Javaher-nameh*, 60–1; Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 96–7.
79. Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 97–100, 132–3, 142; Jahangir Mirza, *Tarikh-e Now*, 117.
80. Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 103–7.
81. *Ibid.*, 113–15.
82. Articles XIII and XIV of the Torkmanchay Treaty stipulated the extradition of subjects; see: Hurewitz, *The Middle East*, 1: 234–5.
83. Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 115–16, 118, 120–7; Jahangir Mirza, *Tarikh-e now*, 126–7, 139, 143; Hedayat, *Tarikh-e rowzat al-safa-ye Naseri*, 9: 739; Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, 2: 54–5; Pursafar, *Hokumat-ha-ye mahalli-ye Qafqaz*, 162. Dropsy is an old term for oedema, which is the swelling of soft tissues due to the abnormal accumulation of excess of fluid in the interstitium, located beneath the skin and in the cavities of the body, which causes severe pain; <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?>

[articlekey=13311](#). Pursafar states that Mir Hasan Khan died “in a mysterious way.”

84. Farahani, *Nameh 'ha-ye siyasi va tarikhi*, 273; Khodaverdi, *Akhbar-nameh*, 132–3, 138–9, 147–9, 154, 174–5; Əsədov, *Talış xanlığı*, 84–6, 90; Ahmadi, *Taleshan*, 165–7.
85. Pursafar, *Hokumat-ha-ye mahalli-ye Qafqaz*, 162–3; “Khanat-e Talesh: Khandani-ye hokumatgar dar Lankaran az 1160 ta 1339 [1747–1921],” *Daneshnameh-ye Jahan-e Eslam*, at: <http://rch.ac.ir/article/Details/8356>.
86. See, for example, the case of the Baban Kurdish Emirs and their maneuvering between the Ottomans and the Qajars during the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER 3

# ALEXANDER SERGEEVICH GRIBOEDOV: RUSSIAN IMPERIAL JAMES BOND *MALGRÉ LUI*. IN MEMORY OF THE 225TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTH<sup>1</sup>

*Firuz Melville*

Tatyana Yuryevna once mentioned  
On her return from Petersburg  
That you had some kind of relation  
With ministers. It didn't work ...<sup>2</sup>

This essay by no means intends to give a complete account of the enigmatic life and the exceptionally rich legacy of Alexander Sergeevich Griboedov (1790–1829). Since his tragic death in Tehran on 11 February 1829, his professional career as a diplomat and his private life as a poet, playwright, composer, revolutionary and businessman, have been the subject of countless publications in Russia, Iran, the Caucasus and partly in the West. I shall instead attempt to explain the paradox of an extremely diverse perception of the Griboedov phenomenon as a person and as a professional, while concentrating on his relationship with his British counterparts in Persia.<sup>3</sup> Inevitably, I shall also mention those possible reasons for his death that are the most relevant to the subject of the essay.

### **Paradox of Perception: from “Wunderkind, Author of Waltzes” to Christian Martyr and Colonialist Villain, Zoroastrian Spy and Russian National Emblem**

The most recent Cold War flavored anti-Russian propaganda in the West, which matches a new wave of Russian nationalism, is similar to that which has accompanied such reciprocal campaigns in the past. The figure of Griboedov has been actively exploited in such propaganda as one of those who fundamentally contributed to the shaping of the Russian Empire during its Golden Age. At the same time, it reveals a profound general ignorance about the circumstances

of his life and his role in the diplomatic history of his own country.<sup>4</sup>

The mystery of Griboedov's martyr-like death launched a whole mythological cycle around him. Such legends can be found in print in the genre of so-called investigative journalism,<sup>5</sup> or in film series of varied quality. According to some of the most phantasmagoric tales, he was, like Mozart, killed by his fellow Freemason lodgers, or sacrificed his new family life to his career as a spy by abandoning his 16-year-old heavily pregnant wife, Princess Nino Chavchavadze (1812–57), whom he had married in Tiflis in August 1828 on his way to Tehran to take up his appointment as minister plenipotentiary to the court of Fath `Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834).



**Figure 3.1** Georgy Savitsky, Petrograd, 1920, *Reading of the Poem* (Alexander Griboedov and Nino Chavchavadze). © Moscow auction Kupitkartinu.

According to this myth, he staged his death and penetrated Iranian society under the guise of a “Zoroastrian,” i.e. Zervanist (*sic.*) sage, or a Sufi saint, which enabled him to become an agent, a kind of Russian Lawrence of Arabia, under the nickname of the “White Bedouin,” and to serve the Russian government in Iran.<sup>6</sup> Such an extraordinary legend may have its genesis in Griboedov's own idea, as expressed in one of his letters to Stepan Begichev, about coming to Persia as a prophet to effect its complete transformation<sup>7</sup>. This pattern was later followed by another Russian “literary spy,” the poet Pushkin, who also “staged his death and turned up in France under the name of Alexander Dumas-Sr.” (*sic.*).<sup>8</sup> Curiously, in 2015, the anniversary of Griboedov's birth, a list of 55 scholarly and popular publications dedicated to the enigma of his life and death was published by the Central Library of Krasnoyarsk.<sup>9</sup>

The main paradox regarding Griboedov revolves around the fact that an extremely ambitious and talented diplomat, who was instrumental in Russia gaining its important Caucasian territories, is now known in his own country mainly as a rebellious poet and

sometimes a composer which is, in fact, what he always wanted to be.<sup>10</sup> Griboedov received the most ridiculous and symptomatic treatment in the TV program *Name of Russia*, which nominated him in the category “national identity symbol” as “Wunderkind, and the author of waltzes” (*sic.*).

At the same time, in the country where poets are treated as saints, Griboedov is known only as a villainous colonialist, responsible for a catastrophic military and political defeat on a national scale due to his involvement in drafting and executing the Treaty of Torkmanchay, which was signed on 10 February 1828, exactly a year before Griboedov's death.



**Figure 3.2** Marcin Zaleski (?), *Signing the Torkmanchay Treaty*, 1829 (?). © Palace of the Paskewicz and the Rumyantsevs.

In Western literature Griboedov and his diplomatic and political role in Russian-Persian-British relations during the earliest period of the Great Game is almost unknown.

### **Stereotypical Perceptions of Griboedov in Russia**

In Russia Griboedov's image is subject to various interpretations, depending on the political situation in the country.<sup>11</sup> The only feature that remains constant is his poetic genius, due to his aphoristic *Woe from Wit*, which helped shape the modern Russian language and became a part of gentleman's lore for the next two centuries. However, even this talent has been questioned by those who have called him a noble dilettante, the author of one work, which he never saw performed.<sup>12</sup> Such critics ascribe the exceptional fame of his play to its illegal, provocative and politicized populism as it was censored and prohibited but secretly copied and spread by and among the revolutionary officers participating in the anti-monarchist uprising of December 1825, as if it were their political manifesto.

Regardless of one's assessment of the work, Griboedov's *Woe from Wit* was conceived in Persia, and the story of why and how this happened very suspiciously reminds one of the famous legends about Persian medieval poets getting divine inspiration for their new

masterpieces in their dreams. Griboedov, longing for the lost splendor and fun of his St Petersburg life, may have experienced such a prophetic dream in the summer of 1821 when he fell asleep in a garden of the Russian mission in Tabriz. In that dream he saw himself back in St Petersburg, telling his friends the plot of his new play.<sup>13</sup>

The main role in shaping the stereotype of Griboedov's image in the Soviet Union belongs to Yu. Tynyanov and his novel *The Death of Vazir Mukhtar* (1928).<sup>14</sup> Among the Russian émigré milieu of Europe, Tynyanov and his protagonist embodied the idea of moral degradation, betrayal and treachery.<sup>15</sup> Such critics saw Tynyanov's Griboedov constantly suffering from a double identity crisis, being presented as both his own protagonist Chatskii, a nuisance and troublemaker, and a haughty and snobbish careerist who was eventually punished for his own sins.<sup>16</sup> Despite several other attempts to present Griboedov's biography as belletristic, it was Tynyanov's interpretation that was exploited the most.<sup>17</sup> Quite symptomatically, both known cinematographic versions follow very closely Tynyanov's novel.<sup>18</sup>

In a film about the history of the Hermitage Museum,<sup>19</sup> the aftermath of the massacre, i.e. the Persian Redemption mission of 16-year old Prince Khosrow (1811–83),<sup>20</sup> was shown: it was a period of temporary diplomatic disruption when the shah was tempted to join the Ottomans against the Russians to try to regain the recently lost territories instead of sending his apologies to St Petersburg with the remainder of the indemnities.

Recent scholarly publications include two comprehensive and academically reliable monographs by Sergey Fomichev,<sup>21</sup> in which he analyzes a huge number and variety of sources, both well known and new studies, from Griboedov's contemporaries<sup>22</sup> to Adolph Berzhe,<sup>23</sup> I. K. Enikolopov,<sup>24</sup> E. K. Pksanov,<sup>25</sup> O. I. Popova,<sup>26</sup> S. V. Shostakovich,<sup>27</sup> E. V. Tsymbal,<sup>28</sup> E. N. Tsimbaeva,<sup>29</sup> L. M. Arinshtein,<sup>30</sup> N. A. Tarkhova,<sup>31</sup> A. T. Adamova,<sup>32</sup> and many others.<sup>33</sup> Of special importance are the annual scholarly gatherings at Griboedov's former family estate in Khmelita, the only known Griboedov Museum. The proceedings of such meetings are published in the *Khmelitskii Sbornik* series. There are also “local” (or Crimean, or Caucasian) studies of Griboedov, which are conducted by scholars in the places visited by him during his life.<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 3.3** The 40-kopek post stamp: “A. S. Griboedov – Great Russian playwright and poet”, USSR, 1959.

### The Perception of Griboedov in Iran

In Iran the attitude towards Griboedov is stable and openly negative.<sup>35</sup> One of the latest publications in Iran, the huge, comprehensive two-volume *Political History of Iran during the Qajars* published by Ibrahim Teymuri in 2014, is an excellent example of this attitude.<sup>36</sup> In most cases even academics in Iran refer to the twisted image of Griboedov presented in Tynyanov's fictionalized interpretation as if it were a historical document. It has become a tradition for newly appointed Iranian ambassadors to Moscow to express their protest against the monument to Griboedov<sup>37</sup> erected in 1959 outside the Chistye Prudy metro station,<sup>38</sup> close to the Sovremennik Theater.

One of the most curious films among the recent media productions reflects the common attitude in Iran towards the Torkmanchay Treaty, and Griboedov in particular. It is the 28-episode film *Tabriz in Fog (Tabriz dar meh)* produced by Mohammad Reza Varzi in 2011 for Iranian state TV.<sup>39</sup> The plot of this extraordinary serial is not based on Tynyanov's interpretation. Quite the opposite: sometimes the producers treat the historical facts quite freely. Varzi's cinematographic epic is focused on the life of Crown Prince `Abbas Mirza, who is presented as an all-round positive saintly figure, loving son and husband, wise politician, brave champion and defender of his nation, and a handsome man with an elegant short beard à la Nicholas II, who is destined to suffer from the unfairness of the circumstances, his father's inconsistent politics and personal behavior. If `Abbas Mirza lost only half of his beard, his father, Fath `Ali Shah, lost all his glamor, including his luxurious long beard, the symbol of his masculinity, which he had to prove to his substantial harem. In contrast with his well-known portraits, where he is depicted with a wasp-like narrow waist and fluffy black beard, Varzi's shah is a chubby grey-bearded man, still a cunning schemer but quite tired of life. Even his romance with a Georgian lady does not seem to be either convincing or exciting.

As for the Griboedov episode, the historical facts are even more obviously misrepresented. In 1828, by the time of Griboedov's appointment as plenipotentiary minister in Persia, he was 38 years old.<sup>40</sup> On the way to his destination he stopped in Tiflis and managed to marry Princess Nino Chavchavadze, who at that time was only 16. In Varzi's interpretation, Nino does not look any younger than her husband, if not older due to her odd looks and constant attempts to teach her husband how to behave and respect the Iranian people, while Griboedov is depicted as a carefree *bon vivant*, poet and composer. In the film, Nino does not stay in Tabriz with the MacDonalds (as she did in reality) but follows her husband to Tehran. Seeing that her sermons do not work, she runs away from her husband and hides in a village outside Tehran where Griboedov eventually finds his wife and orders the destruction of the village and its inhabitants for hiding her.

According to Varzi, there is also another person in Griboedov's entourage, Ivan Maltsev, the first secretary of the mission, who is constantly trying to restrain his boss from being haughty and arrogant towards the Iranians. Both characters are so caricature-like that it seems that the true intention of the filmmaker is to ridicule their exaggerated didacticism. In the case of Nino this impression is reinforced by the most awkward outfit of the actress (as well as the other European lady in the film, Madame MacDonald), who is wearing a European-style hat over the hejab.<sup>41</sup>

In real life Maltsev was a 21-year-old young man whom Griboedov agreed to employ as his first secretary only at the insistence of his superiors in the Foreign Office in St Petersburg, as well as Maltsev's millionaire uncle, the owner of the glass and crystal factories, with whom he most likely was going to start a serious business in Persia and Georgia as part of his Trans-Caucasian Company. To make Maltsev's wisdom and advice more convincing, the prototypical rich youth was turned in the film into an old, obviously over 60, grey-haired experienced civil servant, who has all the right to preach and teach his boss a lesson. It is quite farcical that Maltsev, the only survivor of the massacre, who fled the mission at the most critical moment, in the Iranian film is turned into a dignified and wise diplomat, while in the Russian sources his role in the tragedy has always been considered exceptionally ambiguous. It was he who, being warned, cowardly hid during the attack instead of defending the mission, and it was he who later was speedily promoted in the Foreign Office to the highest rank,<sup>42</sup> becoming the personal advisor to Count Karl Nesselrode, Russian Foreign Minister, later State Chancellor. However, the civil service and public recognition were not as important to him as his crystal and paper empires, which by the time of his death in 1880 were fully industrialized and most profitable.<sup>43</sup> It is likely that Maltsev's reports from Tehran, compared with those by Griboedov, were reaching St Petersburg and Nesselrode in person.

The most notable aspect of the depiction of Griboedov's image in the film is that he is represented not as a villain but rather as an irresponsible, self-confident and dashing handsome young man, with a happy round face, not at all as a mature statesman and playwright constantly and severely suffering from fever.

In the film, Griboedov and his wife are allocated a luxurious European-style mansion. This by no means resembles the description of the rather miserable temporary accommodation that

was offered to Griboedov and his mission for the very short period of his visit to the shah in order to present his credentials as the new envoy of the Russian emperor before returning immediately to his heavily pregnant young wife staying in Tabriz. In contrast to the accusations published in the *Edinburgh Magazine* of Griboedov misbehaving in the shah's presence, in the film it is the shah, not Griboedov, who behaves appallingly during their meeting; it is the shah who insults the new ambassador for no apparent reason, calling him an idiot (*ahmaq*) to his face.

As for the British diplomats, Varzi shows them as cunning spies, bribing the high-ranking courtiers, while MacDonald's wife is performing wild séances of spiritualism and black magic, scaring Nino to death and making her flee from their house.

However, it would be wrong to think that the Russians are depicted with overall sympathy. In the film there are several episodes when groups of Russian soldiers, dressed up in the white colonial uniform adopted in the Russian army during the military expeditions in Central Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century, attack passersby. Remarkably, these groups of soldiers are neither wandering in a relaxed way along the tiny narrow streets of the old Tehran, nor even marching as they might have done when they were supposed to drill. Instead, the Russian Cossacks guarding the mission in 1829 are shown as if they were a special regiment of contemporary forces in Africa and the Near East, with the fully equipped soldiers moving in a very peculiar manner and jumping synchronically.

The finale of the film betrays the author's lack of interest in what is going to happen after the death of the great hero of the nation, `Abbas Mirza: no serious attempt is made to develop the Khosrow Mirza story, while Mohammad, having become shah, is shown as a handsome villain suffering the influence of his entourage, as a result of which the main defender of the nation, Mirza Abu'l-Qasem Farahani Qa'em Maqam, has to be sacrificed and assassinated.

The title of the film is reminiscent of the two-volume novel by Mamed Sa'id Ordubadi, *Foggy Tabriz (Tabriz-e meh-alud)*,<sup>44</sup> originally written in Azeri (in 1930) and twice translated into Persian. Although the narrative is placed in Tabriz, the time is the beginning of the twentieth century and the novel concerns the events surrounding the role of the Russians and the ideas of communism in the constitutional movement.

## **Griboedov in Western Literature**

A much more complicated attitude towards Griboedov can be traced in the Caucasus during Soviet times and particularly in the post-Soviet period. In Azerbaijan he is treated as a representative of the Russian colonial system, responsible for resettling Armenian families in the Qarabagh region; in Armenia as a great supporter of local statehood; in Georgia, both as an imperialist and, through his father-in-law, as a member of the local nobility, attempting to promote the region as a more or less independent province through his Trans-Caucasian Company project based in Tiflis.<sup>45</sup>

In the West the role of Griboedov in the history of Russo–Iranian–British diplomacy and

politics remains almost unknown. My very brief “field work” in the Cambridge University Press shop in Cambridge produced a striking result. In their reference books on Russian literature, history and the history of Russian theatre, Griboedov is described as a playwright,<sup>46</sup> and partly as a diplomat. In the textbooks on Russian history,<sup>47</sup> and even those that specifically focus on the Caucasus,<sup>48</sup> his name is not even mentioned. In one of the most recent and comprehensive monographs on this period, namely the 641-page biography of Sir John Malcolm (1769–1833),<sup>49</sup> British envoy in Persia and the powerful brother-in-law of Griboedov's counterpart, John Kinneir MacDonald (1782–1830), there is only one reference to Griboedov: where the massacre of the Russian mission is mentioned.

Edward Ingram's *In Defence of British India* should be mentioned as one of the most extraordinary examples of the deliberate ignoring of the whole episode of the massacre in the Russian mission. The author describes in great detail the conflict between the Malcolmite MacDonald, Griboedov's British counterpart, and the Harfordians Willock and McNeill. He even lists Harden's publication on Griboedov in the bibliography; however, his name is never mentioned in the narrative. Instead of at least mentioning the reason why Griboedov's successor, Count Simonich, arrived in Persia with a reinforced entourage, in the context of the tragic story in the Russian mission, Ingram explains it by “the fallacy of MacDonald's claim that he needed only one assistant,” by means of which MacDonald tried to get rid of his nasty subordinates. It seems that this happened because this extremely biased book was written by the most consistent and aggressive anti-Malcolmite.

Among the most important studies are still those by Desmond Costello<sup>50</sup> and Evelyn Harden,<sup>51</sup> known for their scrupulous archival work. There are recent studies by Moritz Deutschmann and Leyla Rouhi with Julie Cassaday, though they still point to the arrival of the Armenian women as the main reason for the attack and massacre of the mission, the version that was coined much later.<sup>52</sup> There is only one academic monograph, which is a study of Griboedov as *litterateur* by Witold Kosny,<sup>53</sup> and a book by Lawrence Kelly better known to the wider public.<sup>54</sup> The rest consists of articles authored by Russianist literary critics mainly from North America, who identify Griboedov as a classical Orientalist,<sup>55</sup> applying various post-colonial or even neo-Freudian<sup>56</sup> theories. Most recently John Hope has suggested that although Griboedov sincerely believed in the civilizing mission of the West, he realized that after the failure of the Decembrist uprising Russia was not in a perfect position for it.<sup>57</sup> Hope seems to be right: Griboedov's poetry of his Georgian period represents both romantic and erotic perception of the East as paradisiacal utopia (*Tam, gde vietsa Alazan* – “Where the Alazan is whirling”)<sup>58</sup> as well as the violent subconsciousness of the exotic Orient (*Gruzinskaya noch*, “Georgian Night”).

Possibly, Griboedov's passionate condemnation of what he calls the slave mentality of the Persians<sup>59</sup> could be said to be his Montesquieu-like Persian letters, representing a reflection on the evil of serfdom in his own country. As for Georgia, Griboedov obviously perceived it as a much more “civilized” Orient than Persia, mainly at a personal level, through his wife's relatives.

## Griboedov: Playwright, Composer, Bon Vivant, Revolutionary ..., and Diplomat

Griboedov was by far the most educated figure among the Europeans who happened to be in Persia during his time. Traditionally, his British counterparts were almost all former or current soldiers, mainly Scottish victims of the majorat law, arriving in Iran after many years of colonial experience, serving in the army of the East India Company, most of them brothers (Willocks, MacDonalds, Campbells). Only John McNeill, of exactly his age, had a university education in medicine. Unfortunately, he was destined to become Griboedov's most serious enemy. On the other hand, he also had a lot in common with his ally in the British Legation, John MacDonald: despite the difference in age they both shared a passion for writing<sup>60</sup> as well as an ambiguous origin,<sup>61</sup> and both owed their appointment as minister plenipotentiary in Iran to their powerful brothers-in-law: Ivan Paskevich, Governor of the Caucasus, and John Malcolm, Governor of Bombay, respectively.

It seems that a more veritable date of Griboedov's birth would be 17 January 1790 (not the officially accepted 1795), which would mean that his mother, Nastasia Fedorovna Griboedova, a wealthy estate owner, gave birth to her only son before her marriage in 1791. This would also explain why she was so determined to give him the best education possible: as a university graduate he was entitled to the noble title and the status of a civil servant of the twelfth rank, which he received in June 1808.<sup>62</sup> He stayed on at Moscow University until its closure in 1812, studying mathematics and natural science, after he had obtained his degree in law (1810). In 1812 he joined the army and moved with his regiment to Kazan and Brest-Litovsk, but at that point the war with Napoleon was already over.

Griboedov started his career in the Foreign Office in 1816 although he was still dedicating most of his time to writing. Some of his plays were staged in private and professional theaters in St Petersburg, which allowed him to thoroughly enjoy the life of an upper-class young *littérateur*. On 25 November 1817 a scandalous quadruple duel involving the ballerina Avdotia Istomina took place (with Griboedov as a second). Following the duel, which resulted in the death of young Prince Sheremetev, Griboedov accepted his first appointment abroad in spring 1818 as an obligatory favor. He was even offered a choice: either to go to Philadelphia as a secretary to the Russian mission, or to Tehran. He preferred Tehran; possibly he was seduced not only by the fashionable Orientalist romantics but also the promised career jump of two levels. He did not get the promised promotion, though; his service as the secretary to a doctor turned diplomat, Simeon Mazarovich (d. 1852),<sup>63</sup> did not bring him satisfaction, and he ended up in Georgia serving under Alexey Ermolov (1777–1861). At some stage, namely in 1822, Ermolov was hoping to keep Griboedov in the Caucasus as the director of the School of Oriental Languages, which was expected to be opened shortly in Tiflis, but this project was postponed.

In December 1825 the anti-monarchist uprising failed in St Petersburg – and although against expectations Ermolov did not bring his army to support it, Nicholas I (1796–1855) replaced him at the earliest opportunity with Ivan Paskevich. This happened in April 1827, in

the middle of the second Russo-Persian war. The new tsar never trusted Ermolov, suspecting him of separatist ideas.<sup>64</sup> Paskevich had arrived in the Caucasus in September 1826 with a strong fresh contingent for the battle at Ganja, but he was fighting not only against the Persians: according to his reports to the tsar, he was quite busy collecting compromising information against Ermolov for his dismissal.<sup>65</sup>

It is well known that Ermolov rescued Griboedov from a hopelessly dangerous situation during his arrest; however, it is also possible that Ermolov was worrying not only about Griboedov but about his own career, and possibly his life: Griboedov seems to have performed as Ermolov's messenger liaising between the centers of the main secret societies: the Northern Society in St Petersburg (founded in 1822), its branch in Moscow, the Southern Society in Kiev (founded in 1821), and the Caucasus, where there was the greatest concentration of the anti-government rebels exiled from Russia. Most of them enjoyed Ermolov's support as he by that time had accumulated great military might, authority and independence from central power.

In May 1825 Griboedov, summoned by Ermolov, suddenly had to change his plans to go to Europe and went back to the Caucasus. His route was most unusual: from St Petersburg he traveled to Tiflis via Kiev and the Crimea. In June 1825 he arrived in Kiev, where he met the key members of the Southern Society: M. P. Bestuzhev-Riumin, S. I. Muraviev-Apostol (both hanged as main organizers of the Decembrist uprising), S. P. Trubetskoi, A. Z. Muraviev, M. I. Muraviev-Apostol and others. After spending the summer in the Crimea traveling extensively (Simferopol, Alushta, Bakhchisaray, Feodosia, Kerch) in September he arrived at Ermolov's headquarters. On 4 February 1826 Feldjäger<sup>66</sup> Uklonskii came to Ermolov with the emperor's order to arrest Griboedov and send him to St Petersburg together with his entire archive. Ermolov offered Uklonskii a long supper during which Griboedov was able to destroy all his personal documents except a manuscript of his play and a couple of books.

What happened next was hardly possible to predict. Having spent half a year under arrest in St Petersburg Griboedov was released. Not only was his reputation completely cleared but he was promoted to Court Councillor and repaid a lump sum of his annual salary (250 gold *chervonets*<sup>67</sup>). On 19 June 1826 he, together with other exonerated suspects, was received by the emperor.

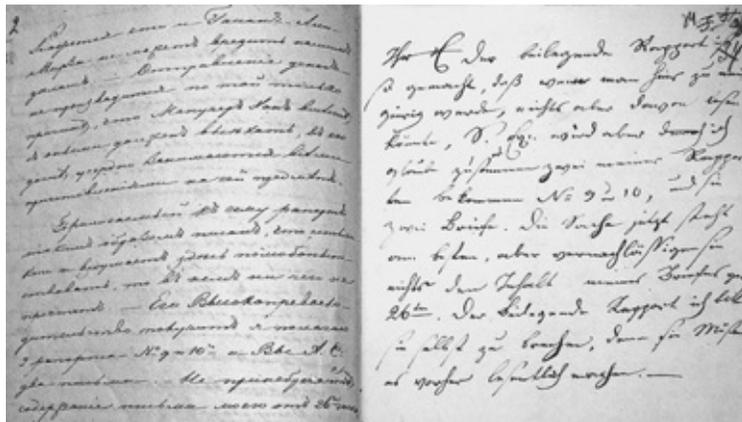
Among the members of the High Investigation Committee was Ivan Paskevich. It was on his recommendation that Griboedov, after his release and against his will,<sup>68</sup> was appointed his secretary, responsible for Russia's affairs with Persia in Tiflis, where he eventually arrived in September 1827. Griboedov could not refuse: he owed Paskevich his salvation, possibly his life (this time he had to be rescued not just from a duel but from an anti-government plot). However, the price was high: exile from everything he loved and saw as the purpose of his existence: music, literature, theatre, high society in glittering St Petersburg, and his literary fame. He had to abandon his comforts and the intellectual pleasures of the "civilized world" and sign himself for life on the road, in the "wilderness."<sup>69</sup>

However, in his "exile" he managed to make use of his exceptionally sharp intellect as

admitted by all his contemporaries, both friends and enemies. It was during this time in Tiflis that Griboedov became deeply involved in, and in many cases responsible for, the intelligence work of the Russian legation in the Caucasus and Persia, improving his Persian, learning Turkish, collecting data, conducting secret and ciphered correspondence, easily competing with his much more experienced British counterparts.

## Trans-Caucasian Company Project, or British–American Liberties in the Russian Caucasus

Driven by his creative mind combined with the strongest ambitions and an excellent education, Griboedov went beyond his direct heavy duties related to the various procedures involved in the preparation for and signing of the Treaty of Torkmanchay. The deal of his life became his own project of establishing the Russian Trans-Caucasian Company<sup>70</sup> in Georgia and the territories newly annexed from Persia,<sup>71</sup> aiming to cultivate these fertile lands, following the pattern of Catherine the Great in the Crimea. The Proposal was co-authored with Petr Zaveleiskii (1800–43), treasurer and the civil governor of Tiflis, and submitted to the tsar via Paskevich on 7 September 1828. Griboedov by that time was already the envoy to Persia.<sup>72</sup> The Proposal was not supported for the following possible reasons.<sup>73</sup>



**Figure 3.4** Ciphered and deciphered reports to A.S. Griboedov from his agent N. Dolgofsky from 28 December 1827. © Russian Central State Archive, Paskevich folder (1018), No. 2, 423–2.

1. Griboedov followed the pattern of both the existing Russian colonies in California (Russian American Company) and, more so, the English East India Company, which enjoyed a very special independent status, including the right to have their own army, to mint money, start wars, and send diplomatic missions without consulting the London Foreign Office but on behalf of the king. This could have given rise to unfortunate associations with Ermolov's almost uncontrollable authority in the Caucasus.
2. Compared with the rest of Russian economics based on serfdom, the idea of the free farmer's labor adopted *de facto* in the Russian settlements and colonies in California was

unacceptable. Griboedov must have borrowed this idea from the young and charismatic adventurer, naval officer Dmitrii Zavalishin<sup>74</sup> who, in 1823–4, singlehandedly brought under the Russian crown the lands around San Francisco and with whom he shared a room while under arrest in the winter and spring of 1826.

3. His sudden marriage to the daughter of the newly appointed governor of Erivan province, the key person in the region, without the permission of his superiors in the Foreign Office, which was a compulsory rule, enhanced their suspicion of Griboedov's separatist intentions.

If Zavalishin was Griboedov's source of inspiration regarding the American liberties, the English influence most likely came from his British counterpart, Colonel MacDonald, who started his career in the Madras native infantry of the East India Company (EIC) in 1804. Griboedov and MacDonald worked closely together in November 1827 on the Torkmanchay Treaty. Griboedov was sent by Paskevich to St Petersburg to present it at the court. In March 1828 he had an audience with the tsar in the Winter Palace. The ceremony of Griboedov's presentation of the treaty was punctuated by a 201-gun salute, as a result of which he was promoted to the rank of State Councillor, awarded the order of St Anne, with diamonds and 4,000 gold rubles.

The month in St Petersburg that followed, and before his appointment as envoy to Persia, was easily the happiest time of his life. During this time he even agreed with Pushkin, Krylov and Vyazemsky, to go to London and Paris in July 1828, meet their fellow literati and subsequently publish their collective travelogue, which they anticipated being a great success. However, this plan was already ruined in April when Griboedov was appointed to go back to Tehran. Again, he could not refuse. Paskevich needed him there, and he owed Paskevich a lot.

### **John MacDonald: A Stranger at Home**

John MacDonald's appointment on behalf of the EIC caused the most vicious rivalry between him and Henry Willock, who by the time of MacDonald's arrival had been in Persia for eighteen years, having come from London as a part of Gore Ouseley's entourage, although never promoted higher than chargé d'affaires. The support of John McNeill, the mission's doctor and interpreter, was invaluable for Willock, as he had an almost monopolistic influence on the shah, who, together with all his harem, was his medical patient. This gave McNeill unlimited, direct and intimate access to the monarch to the point where he even had his own rooms in the Golestan Palace. As a result, the shah was persuaded not to accept MacDonald's credentials for about two years, which made him reside not in Tehran, like his subordinates, but in Tabriz.

Fath `Ali Shah had already had a similar experience with MacDonald's predecessor and supporter, John Malcolm,<sup>75</sup> who himself had failed to become the EIC ambassador to Persia twice, the second time in 1810 due to his serious contest with Gore Ouseley: a vicious rivalry now being played out again by the next generation of British diplomats in Persia.

Willock left Persia in 1826, when the shah eventually accepted MacDonald's credentials; he spent more than a year in London where he schemed against MacDonald.<sup>76</sup>



**Figure 3.5** Mohammad Ja`far, Insignia of the Order of the Lion and the Sun (collar, star and plaque) presented to John Kinneir MacDonal for his assistance during the signing of the Torkmanchay Treaty, gold with painted enamels, set with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, Tehran, 1242H/1826–7, on loan in the Victoria and Albert Museum (LOAN:KHALILI.1-2013). © Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art.

Willock's activities bore fruit: he was knighted and sent back to Persia, traveling not via Odessa, as was originally planned, but via St Petersburg, where he met the Russian Foreign Minister Nesselrode, to whom he falsely introduced himself as the new British ambassador to Persia. Without checking his credentials, Nesselrode wrote to Griboedov recommending Willock as his new counterpart. Griboedov, however, instead of welcoming Willock in his

new capacity, wrote to MacDonald about the situation. MacDonald's wife Amelia,<sup>77</sup> having received Griboedov's letter, immediately wrote to Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India about the "Willock affair," while MacDonald wrote to Malcolm and Lord Ellenborough, who had just been appointed the president of the EIC Board of Control and demanded Willock be replaced by Campbell, his second secretary.<sup>78</sup> All this was happening just several days before the massacre of the Russian mission. MacDonald received Griboedov's warning when the latter was already dead.

Only seven days before the murder of Griboedov, Amelia wrote to MacDonald's brother William. She was sending him some important documents, "to be kept perfectly quiet unless obliged to produce them in MacDonald's defence should any secret attack be made upon him,"<sup>79</sup> and asking William to introduce her to Lord Heytesbury, British ambassador in Russia, as she was planning to go to St Petersburg in May.

Amelia's enclosures have not survived. Griboedov was killed a few days later, and all his documents disappeared in the looting that accompanied the murder. Amelia managed to go to St Petersburg not in May but only in September 1829. In Moscow, in the company of Captain James Alexander, who had served under her husband's command in Persia, she watched the most splendid entrée of Khosrow Mirza after his diplomatic triumph in the capital.<sup>80</sup> In St Petersburg, Amelia spoke to the empress. However, half a year later her husband died from a sudden disease, in the presence of Dr McNeill. MacDonald's archive, sent to England, perished on its way.

### **Griboedov: At Home among Strangers**

It was probably MacDonald's awkward position in the British Legation that made him rather vulnerable and close to Griboedov both professionally and personally, to the point where the latter left his heavily pregnant wife with the MacDonalds rather than Amburger, the Russian consul in Tabriz, while MacDonald was openly discussing and criticizing British policy in Persia, and more particularly the treaty signed by Gore Ouseley,<sup>81</sup> or even sharing quite confidential information about the embassy's expenses:

... Autant que j'ai eu l'occasion de l'observer, leur influence ici n'est plus aussi exclusive qu'elle l'a été jadis ... Une menace, une démonstration de bienveillance au nom de sa Majesté l'Empereur ne sont plus toujours mises en balance avec l'opinion des Anglais et les trois millions de liv[re]s ster[ling] qu'ils not jusqu'ici dépensés en Perse, depuis l'ambassade de Malcolm.

On ne saurait s'expliquer des prodigalités de ce genre, et je n'y aurais pas cru, si les registers de leurs dépenses ne m'avaient été confidentiellement montrés par m[onsieur] Macdonald lui-même ...

[... As far as I could observe, the influence of the English here is not as exceptional as it used to be ..., a threat, or expression of benevolence on behalf of his Majesty the

Emperor is not measured anymore against the opinion of the English and their three million ster[ling] pounds, which they have spent by now in Persia since the embassy of Malcolm.

It is difficult to justify this sort of generosity, and I would have never believed it myself if it was not m[ister] MacDonald himself who showed me discreetly the list of their expenses.<sup>82]</sup>

Griboedov's friendship with MacDonald would normally have been treated in St Petersburg as yet another diplomatic success, which does not fit the common opinion about his poor professional skills. However, when Griboedov was sending this report to Nesselrode he had no idea that his superior had established a similarly close relationship with MacDonald's subordinate and rival in the British Legation, Henry Willock.

Nesselrode was widely known as a most fervent anglophile. With his father a count of the Holy Roman Empire of German descent who served as the Russian ambassador in Portugal, and his mother Jewish by origin but Protestant by faith, Karl was baptized as an Anglican on the grounds that he was born on an English ship moored off Lisbon. In St Petersburg he was a regular attendee of the Anglican Church in the English quarter, and an active member of a rather closed English community of the Russian capital. Willock came to visit him in St Petersburg on his way from London to Tehran and spent several months enjoying his close company. It is possible that during their meetings in St Petersburg, Nesselrode and Willock agreed on a joint plan of action against Griboedov and MacDonald. As noted above, Griboedov sent MacDonald a warning about Willock's plot against him only on the eve of the attack and his own death, which was his last surviving letter. By that time Griboedov realized that his correspondence was not only intercepted but had disappeared, and was in a hurry to get out of Tehran, but it was too late.

It is remarkable that the only proper attempt to investigate the circumstances of the mass murder in the Russian mission right after the incident was undertaken not by the Russian government but by Captain Ronald MacDonald, Kinneir's brother, who arrived from Tabriz specially to interview those involved and collect fresh evidence. It is similarly remarkable that the only survivor of the massacre, the first secretary of the Russian mission Ivan Maltsev,<sup>83</sup> refused to meet him and assist with the investigation. It is notable that according to his reports to the Russian Foreign Office, the version with the Christian women appeared much later but became the official one in McNeil's interpretation. To stop the attempts of Paskevich to investigate the reasons for the tragedy he received a letter from Nesselrode dated 15 March 1829, where the officially approved verdict was expressed on behalf of the tsar: "These inhuman and despicable events must be attributed to the impulsive and excessively zealous efforts of the deceased Griboedov and his misunderstanding of the crude and vulgar customs of the Persian rabble."<sup>84</sup>

## **The Famous *Narrative* and its Targeted Audiences**

It seems that the main document that helped create the opinion that Griboedov was unsuitable

for his duties was the well known *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Russian Mission to Persia from 20th December 1828 to 11th February 1829*.<sup>85</sup> This document was passed to the publisher by the first secretary of the British embassy, Henry Willock. It was ascribed to a generic secretary of Griboedov's *mehmandar* (the official host and minder of foreign envoys) Nazr 'Ali Khan whose original notes in Persian “did not survive.”

Having studied it again I have come to the conclusion that it had more than one “targeted audience.”

Until now the *Narrative* has been understood as a belletristic document for consumption by the Russian Foreign Office, although Nesselrode was the first to admit that it was Griboedov's “own unnecessarily excessive zeal that caused the massacre,” meaning that he was guilty of his own death and there was no need to waste time and effort investigating the case. However, to be able to prove Griboedov's incompetence as a diplomat, create the public opinion based on “eyewitness” accounts and “close the case,” he needed the details, which were indeed provided by the “anonymous” author of the *Narrative*. It is unlikely that Willock was directly commissioned by Nesselrode to produce such a document; however, it served their mutual purpose to discredit Griboedov. It is remarkable that the *Narrative*, published in 1830, was immediately printed in a French periodical,<sup>86</sup> whereas it took a full fifty years for the Russian reduced version to be published as a part of Griboedov's works.<sup>87</sup> It took another hundred years before the full text became available.<sup>88</sup>

The *Narrative* would have even more use on the “internal market.” It seems that its main addressees were both the London Foreign Office and the East India Company, particularly its anti-Malcolm group,<sup>89</sup> and it was composed as a witness against the accusations of Amelia and John Kinneir MacDonald mentioned in their letters to Bentinck, Malcolm, Ellenborough and others, as well as the results of Ronald MacDonald's investigation.

The text of the *Narrative* reveals that its author had access to Russian financial records, i.e. the everyday expenses incurred during the mission's journey from Tabriz and their stay in Tehran. These itemized records related to the mission's food and travel expenses but also contained confidential accounts of the diplomatic gifts to the shah and members of the Persian court, as well as of payments to the Iranian staff of the mission, etc. If these details were not made up to give the text more verisimilitude, it means that the “secretary” had access to the secret archive of the mission, which disappeared during the massacre together with many valuables, including the gold to be paid to the mission's staff as salary for the whole year; the shah's presents to the tsar and the tsar's presents to the shah; eunuch Mirza Ya`qub's<sup>90</sup> most precious possessions that he had acquired during more than a decade of service as the main treasurer of the shah's harem, and which he brought with him asking for asylum; the millionaire Maltsev's capital that he had brought with him to start his crystal business in Persia; and other less important items. It is worth noting that most of the objects had arrived at the mission at night, only several hours before the massacre.

It is possible that the archive left the mission together with the *mehmandar* only several

hours before the first attack, very early in the morning of 11 February 1829. According to the *Narrative*, the *mehmandar* left the premises when the embassy staff and the envoy were still asleep. Against the rules, he did not ask for permission to leave the mission since he “did not want to disturb the envoy”.<sup>91</sup>

To conclude: until now the story of the two envoys in Tehran and their fate has been told separately. This was understandable since, by definition, they were supposed to be players separated by the chessboard of the “Great Game.” However, it seems that both the Russian and the British envoys were playing this game together on one side, and lost it all, even lost their lives, having been betrayed by their own sides. Indeed, on n'est jamais mieux trahi que par les siens (No worse betrayal than by those you trust).

In summer 2014 I attended a memorial service for Sir Nicholas Browne – the first British ambassador to Tehran after the Islamic Revolution, who had served there for four years in the 1970s as chargé d'affaires and for about three years, between 1999 and 2002, as ambassador. Although he had other postings apart from the British embassy in Tehran, most of the high-ranking Foreign Office officials and civil servants speaking in St Margaret's Church at Westminster were talking mainly about his appointment in Iran. His daughter, Jasmine, read out his notes, which he made on 15 February 1989 when the embassy was stormed by a mob chanting *Marg bar Nick Browne!* (“Death to Nick Browne!”). The personal anger against the British envoy was caused by the fact that Ayatollah Khomeini had offered a two-million-dollar reward to anyone who killed Salman Rushdie – the reward to be tripled if the killer was Iranian .... Thousands of demonstrators gathered to throw stones at the British Embassy. Browne and his staff left Tehran. When the embassy was reopened he was already in Washington.

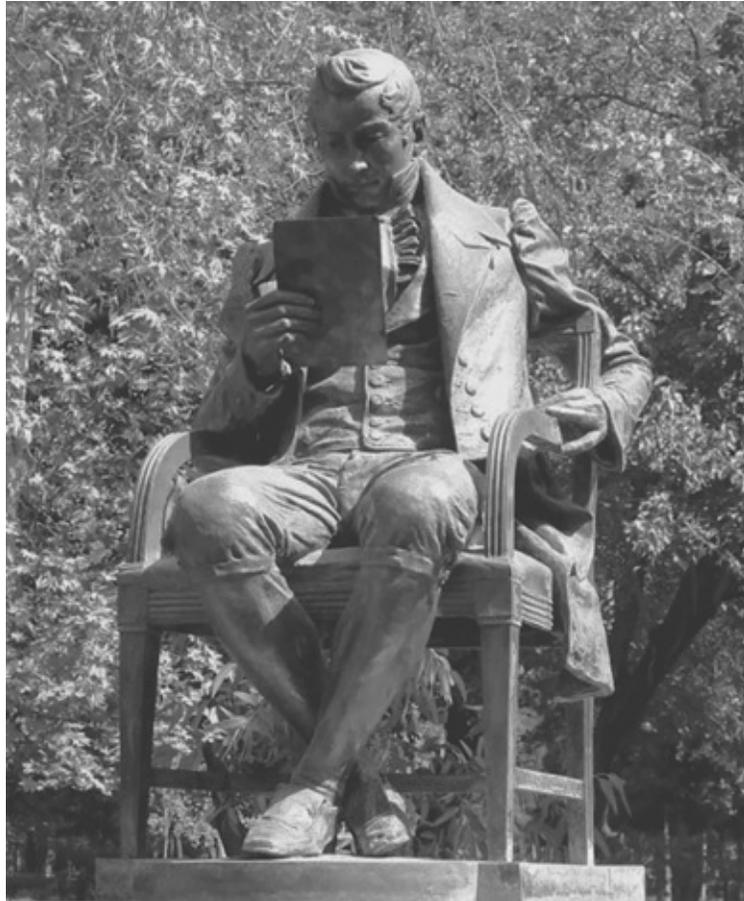
After the tribute we sang the hymn by Sir Cecil Spring Rice who, while serving as ambassador in the United States during World War I, had convinced the Americans to join Britain in the war against Germany:

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,  
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;  
The love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,  
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;  
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,  
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.  
I heard my country calling, away across the sea,

Across the waste of waters she calls and calls to me.  
Her sword is girded at her side, her helmet on her head,  
And round her feet are lying the dying and the dead.  
I hear the noise of battle, the thunder of her guns,  
I haste to thee my mother, a son among thy sons.

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,

Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;  
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;  
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;  
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,  
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.



**Figure 3.6** Vladimir Beklemishev, Monument to A. S. Griboedov, 1900. © Embassy of the Russian Federation, Tehran. © Firuza Melville, 2015.

It might seem rather unfair to use another poet's words to conclude this essay about Griboedov. However, I hope I shall be forgiven as there is so much in common between the two poet-diplomats whose service to their countries was “whole and perfect.” Griboedov, a poet by nature, a diplomat by destiny, trapped in the fatal circumstances, did “have some kind of relation with ministers” but it indeed “did not work ....”<sup>92</sup> as his devoted service was turned into his “final sacrifice,” instead of him becoming the benevolent prophet transforming the countries “whose pride is still suffering.”<sup>93</sup>

Such a diverse perception of Griboedov's life, his literary works and, most of all, his tremendous contribution to the political and diplomatic services, remain still to be studied, rightly evaluated and properly appreciated.

## Notes

1. The official date of Griboedov's birth is 1795. However, I am convinced by the study of Nadezhda Tarkhova, who brings primary sources and materials to prove that he was born five years before this official date. See below, footnote 40.
2. Alexander Griboedov, *Woe from Wit*, act 3, scene 3, transl. by A. Vagapov, 1993, [http://samlib.ru/a/alec\\_v/woehtm.shtml](http://samlib.ru/a/alec_v/woehtm.shtml)); accessed 21 April 2016; see also the VGBIL edition (Moscow, 2001).
3. Firuza Melville, "Paradox Griboedova," in *Na pastbishche mysli blagoi*, ed. M. Pelevin (St Petersburg, 2015), 299–314.
4. Griboedov's play in verse, *Woe from Wit*, is a part of the secondary school program. It is extremely popular among students in spoof-like fan fiction versions, third only after Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Paper given by N. Zagrebel'naia, "Fanfics of the *Woe from Wit* as an example of reception of classics in mass culture," Griboedov annual conference, Khmelita, 8 October 2015.
5. S. Dmitriev, *Persidskie napevy: ot Griboedova do Esenina i XXI veka* (Moscow, 2014).
6. I. Kholodkov, *Vam i ne snilos': Shpiony ego velichestva*, REN-TV, Channel 3 (Russia, 2014). More moderate cinema versions were also produced over the years: *Aleksandr Griboedov, Oslepitel'no korotkaia zhizn'*. Tainy veka s Sergeem Medvedevym (Russia, 2009); Irakli Kochlamazashvili, *Bolshe chem liubov': Aleksandr Griboedov i Nina Chavchavadze* (Russia, 2010).
7. Letter of Griboedov to his old friend, Stepan Begichev: "... It has been a while that I have been thinking about coming to Persia as a prophet to effect its complete transformation." S. N. Begichev, "Zapiska ob A. S. Griboedove," in Z. Davydov, ed., *A. S. Groboedov v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* (Leningrad, 1929), 27.
8. R. Kuz'mina, *Pushkin i Griboedov. Istoriia odnoi mistifikatsii*, GTRK-Kultura channel (Moscow-SPb., 2014).
9. V. M. Lazuto, *A. S. Griboedov. 220 let so dnia rozhdeniia. Bibliograficheskii ukazatel'* (Krasnoiarsk, 2015).
10. Channel Russia, TV company V&D, Moscow, 2008; see also S. A. Fomichev, "Fenomen Griboedova i sovremennost'," in *A.S. Griboedov: epokha, lichnost', tvorchestvo, sud'ba*, Khmelitskii sbornik, no. 16 (Viaz'ma, 2014), 209–19.
11. Fomichev, "Fenomen Griboedova," 209.
12. M. P. Bestuzhev-Riumin, *Sledstviia komedii 'Gore ot um'a* (St Petersburg, 1827); W. Kosny, *A. S. Griboedov – Poet und Minister. Die zeitgenössische Rezeption seiner Komödie "Gore ot uma," 1824–1832*, Band 58 (Berlin, 1985), 371–91; Countess E. Rastopchina, *Vozvrat Chatskogo v Moskvu, ili vstrecha znakomykh lits posle dvadtsatipiatiletnei razluki. Razgovor v stikhakh* (St Petersburg, 1865).
13. V. Potto, *Persidskaia voina (1826–1828)*, vol. 3, in *Kavkazskaia voina* (St Petersburg, 1888; repr. Moscow, 2007), 424.
14. Yu. Tynyanov, *Smert' Vazir Mukhtara* (Moscow, 1928).

15. *Zarubezhnaia Rossiia i Griboedov. Litso i genii. Iz nasledii russkoi emigratsii*, compiled by M. D. Filin (Moscow, 2001; A. Aydynyan, "Oriental Journeys in Yuri Tynianov's Novel The Death of Vazir-Mukhtar," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2009): 357–79.
16. Among the recent publications with such a negative attitude towards Griboedov the following should be mentioned: Valery Yarkho, "Neudavshaiasia kar'era poeta-diplomata. Mog li A. S. Griboedov izbezhat' gibeli?" *Istoriia: Pervoe sentiabria* 14 (2005): 14–19.
17. A. D. Timrot, *Bunt serdtsa i uma: moskovskie gody zhizni A. S. Griboedova* (Moscow, 1965); K. Gaivoronskii, *Pogovori mne o sebe. Novella-essay. Pushkinskaia epokha (Pushkin-Nikolay I-Griboedov-dekabristy)* (Almaty, 1998); V. Esenkov, *Griboedov. Duel' chetyrekh* (Moscow, 2004).
18. R. Sirota and V. Retsepter, *Smert' Vazir Mukhtara*, Leningrad TV, 1969; S. Vinokur, *Smert' Vazir Mukhtara*, ten one-hour episodes, Aurora, 2009, RTR TV, 2010. In 2015, there was an attempt by the well known Russian filmmaker, N. Mikhalkov, to restart his thirty-year old Griboedov project after very substantial research, but later it was announced as being postponed. Last year, Mikhalkov, after his meeting with the Iranian ambassador in Moscow, enthusiastically declared in the media that he would start again shooting the film, and the main venue now would be Iran while originally it was planned to be elsewhere.
19. A. Sokurov, *The Russian Ark*, The Hermitage Bridge Studio & Egoli Tossell Film, 2002.
20. Firuza Melville, "Khosrow Mirza's Mission to St Petersburg in 1829," in *Iranian–Russian Encounters. Empires and Revolutions since 1800*, ed. S. Cronin (London, 2013), 69–94; G. Bournoutian, *From Tabriz to St. Petersburg: Iran's Mission of Apology to Russia in 1829* (Costa Mesa, 2014).
21. S. A. Fomichev, *Griboedov. Entsiklopedia* (St Petersburg, 2007); *ibid.*, *Aleksandr Griboedov, Biografiia* (St Petersburg, 2012).
22. *Griboedov. Ego zhizn' i gibel' v memuarakh sovremennikov*, ed. and annot. by Z. Davydov (Leningrad, 1929); G. M. Petrov, "Novye materialy ob ubiistve A. S. Griboedova," *Uchenye zapiski instituta vostokovedeniia*, vol. 8 (Moscow, 1953); I. K. Enikolopov, *Griboedov v Gruzii*, ed. O. Popova (Tbilisi, 1954). It is remarkable that D. Fickelmon, the wife of the Austrian ambassador to Russia and Kutuzov's granddaughter, who in her diary described in detail her meetings with Khosrow Mirza, never mentioned the reasons for his mission. See D. Fickelmon, *Dnevnik 1829–1837. Ves' Pushkinskii Peterburg*, ed. S. Mrochkovskaia-Balashova (Moscow, 2009), 60–3, 65.
23. A. P. Berzhe, "Griboedov v Persii i na Kavkaze. Smert' Griboedova. Khosrow Mirza," *Kavkazskaia starina, Istoricheskie ocherki, stati'i i zametki*, compiled by N. V. Markelov (Piatigorsk, 2011), 152–252.
24. I. K. Enikolopov, 1929.
25. N. K. Pksanov, *Griboedov. Issledovaniia i kharakteristiki* (Leningrad, 1934).
26. O. I. Popova, *A. S. Griboedov v Persii (1818–1823) po novym dokumentam* (Moscow,

1929).

27. S. V. Shostakovich, *Diplomaticeskaiia deiatel'nost' A. S. Griboedova* (Moscow, 1960).
28. E. Tsymbal, "Posmertnye dokumenty griboedovskogo posol'stva." *Problemy tvorchestva A. S. Griboedova* (Smolensk, 1994).
29. E. Tsimbaeva, *Griboedov* (Moscow, 2011).
30. L. Arinshtein, *S sekundantami i bez. Ubiistva, kotorye potriasli Rossiiu. Griboedov, Pushkin, Lermontov* (Moscow, 2010).
31. *A. S. Griboedov v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, ed. Z. Davydov (Moscow, 1929), 198–200; *Griboedov v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* eds. P. S. Krasnov, S.A. Fomichev, N. A. Tarkhova, A. S. (Moscow, 1980); P. S. Krasnov, S. A. Fomichev, N. A. Tarkhova, *A. S. Griboedov. Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Moscow, 1994); N. A. Tarkhova, "K probleme izucheniia biografii Griboedova segodnia," *Voprosy literatury* 4 (June–August 2013): 130–50.
32. A. T. Adamova, G. A. Printseva, *Panorama Persii P. Ia. Piasetskogo ot Enzeli do Tegerana* (St Petersburg, 2015), 46–53. See also *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Los Angeles and New Haven, 2011).
33. Some publications, although recent, are based on quite outdated information; see, for example, I. Bazilenko, "Gibel' missii A.S. Griboedova v istorii rossiisko-iranskih otnoshenii XIX v.: prichiny i sledstviia," *Na pastbishche mysli blagoi*, 220–42.
34. A good compilation of such research was published by N. Tarkhova, *Griboedovskie mesta* (Moscow, 2007); see also S. Minchik, *A. S. Griboedov v Krymu* (Simferopol, 2011), and the books by the Publishing House Sneg in Pyatigorsk, i. e. Berzhe, *Griboedov in Persia and in the Caucasus*.
35. A good example is a very curious aftermath of the most recent Societas Iranologica Europaea conference in St Petersburg (Hermitage, 15–19 September, 2015), which was a great success. The organizers received an email from a colleague in Iran who felt dissatisfied with the image chosen as a logo for the conference (Bactrian camel depicted on the silver ewer from the Hermitage collection). In his message, he accused the Russians (*sic.*) of being racist, treating the Iranians as camels. In the third line of this message the upset gentleman mentioned the Russian envoy killed "like a dog," which is treated in Iran as the greatest honor (*qatl-e safir-e Rus dar Iran bozorgtarin eftekhar-e ma ast mesle sag koshtimesh*). That the image of a camel is not considered very flattering in Iran is suggested, *inter alia*, by a huge rather ugly anti-British poster, which was erected during the Iranian elections of March 2016. The poster, covering half a building on Ferdowsi Square in Tehran, depicted the Queen as a camel. The text around the camel–queen featured the proverb "shotor dar khab binad [pambah daneh] – Englis be dombal-e dekhlat dar entekhabat-e Iran ast" (The camel dreams about [a cotton seed] The English [dream] about interfering in the elections in Iran).
36. *Tarikh-e siyasi-ye Iran dar dowreh-ye Qajar*, 2 vols (Tehran, 1392/2014).
37. L. Ravandi-Fadai, "Perception of Griboedov in Iran," paper given at the Round table

“Winning and Losing the Great Game: Literature, Art, and Diplomacy between Russia and Iran,” Pembroke Centre for Persian Studies and Mershon Center for International Security Studies, Ohio State University, 8 November 2014.

38. Public monuments are always a political statement, especially in the case of Griboedov. Both monuments to Griboedov in Moscow (sculptor A.A. Manuilov, architect A. A. Zavarzin) and in St Petersburg (sculptor V. V. Lishev, architect V. I. Iakovlev) were erected in 1959 to commemorate the 130th anniversary of Griboedov's death. In Tbilisi, apart from his gravestone on Mount Mtatsminda (V. I. Demut-Malinovskii, 1832), in 1961 another monument was put on the bank of the Tkvari River (sculptor M. Merabishvili, architect G. Melkadze). In Erevan the monument appeared only in 1975 (sculptor O. Bezhanian, architect S. Kndekhtsian). There are also monuments in Vladikavkaz, Alushta, Ekaterinburg, and Saransk. However, the earliest and the most modest in size was commissioned by the Russian community in Tehran by subscription and discreetly erected on the territory of the Russian embassy in 1900 (sculptor V. A. Beklemishev). The latest monument was erected on 28 May 2016 on the territory of the former estate of Griboedov's mother near Vyazma, the only known Griboedov Memorial Museum in the world. As far as Griboedov is concerned, most likely he spent only his childhood there. The monument depicts him as a romantic youth reading a book (sculptor I.N. Chumakov).
39. <http://www.ifilmtv.ir/English/Serie/18/#.VuVKlIKUUF8>; accessed 21 April 2016.
40. Otherwise his age should be 33, if we accept his official date of birth, which was convincingly rejected by N. Tarkhova in her several publications (see above).
41. It must have been quite a challenge for the film costume designer to marry the Islamic dress code with post-Napoleonic fashion for ladies.
42. Between 1855 and 1864 Maltsev was three times appointed temporary head of the Russian Foreign Office.
43. The annual income of only one of his glass factories, the famous Gus, was more than 900,000 rubles (with a rate of £1=R 6.25 at the time)
44. Curiously, once the serial began to be filmed, the announcement was made by the Azerbaijan media in Russian saying that the 20-episode film was going to be shot based on the novel by the Azerbaijani writer Mohammad Sa'id Ordubadi (<http://www.trend.az/life/culture/1762128.html>; accessed 21 April 2016).
45. This rich topic is the subject of a forthcoming publication by me.
46. Laurence Senelick, “Theatre,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*, ed. Nicholas Rzhevsky (Cambridge, 2012), 167, 281; *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, eds Evgeny Dobrenko and Marina Balina (Cambridge, 2013), 245; *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, ed. Charles A. Moser (Cambridge, 1992), 100; Laurence Senelick, “Riccoboni Family,” in *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (Cambridge, 1995), 950.
47. P. Bushkovich, *A Concise History of Russia* (Cambridge, 2012); A. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge,

2012).

48. J. Forsyth, *The History of the Caucasus* (Cambridge, 2013).
49. John Malcolm, *Malcolm: Soldier, Diplomat, Ideologue of British India. The Life of Sir John Malcolm (1769–1833)* (Edinburgh, 2014), 327.
50. D. P. Costello, “The Murder of Griboedov,” *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 8 (1958): 66–89.
51. Evelyn Harden, “Griboedov and the Willock Affair,” *Slavic Review* 30/1 (1971): 74–92; eadem, *Murder of Griboedov: New Materials* (Birmingham, 1979). I thank A. Brintlinger for introducing me to this scholar.
52. See Moritz Deuschmann, “‘All Rulers are Brothers’: Russian Relations with the Iranian Monarchy in the Nineteenth Century,” *Iranian Studies* 46/3 (2013): 383–413; and Leyla Rouhi and Julie A. Cassaday, “Persian Cargo on a Russian Ark: The Role of Iran in Sokurov's Russian Ark” *International Journal of Persian Literature* 2 (2017): 57–86.
53. W. Kosny, *A. S. Griboedov*.
54. L. Kelly, *Murder in Tehran* (London, 2002).
55. A. Brintlinger, “The Persian Frontier: Griboedov as Orientalist and Literary Hero,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 45/3 (2003): 371–93; E. Andreeva, “Russian Travellers’ Views on the Death of Griboedov,” paper given at the Ohio Round Table, 8 November 2014; John P. Hope, “The Self in the Other: Aleksandr Griboedov's Orient,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue canadienne des slavistes* 57/1–2 (2015): 108–23. I thank D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye for bringing this paper to my attention.
56. S. Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: The Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge, 1994).
57. Hope, “The Self in the Other,” esp. 116.
58. It is possible that it was Griboedov's eroticism that Yakov Polonsky had in mind in his poem of 1874 dedicated to Griboedov's widow: “... Ne tam, gde slyshat valuny Plesk alazanskikh strui, Vpervye prozvuchal ee Zavetnyi potselui ...” (N. A. Griboedovoi, in *Stikhotvoreniia*, Moscow, 1981).
59. Letter of A. S. Griboedov to S. N. Begichev from 10–13 February 1819, A. S. Griboedov, *Sochineniia*, ed., preface and annot. by V. Orlov (Moscow–Leningrad, 1959), 412.
60. J. K. MacDonald, *Narrative of Travels in Asia Minor, Armenia, and Kurdistan in 1813–14, with Remarks on the Marches of Alexander the Great and of the Ten Thousand Greeks* (London, 1818).
61. MacDonald was also born out of the wedlock. See H. M. Chichester, “Kinneir, Sir John Macdonald (1782–1830),” Rev. James Falkner, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15637>; accessed 21 April 2016).
62. Paper by N.A. Tarkhova, “Did Griboedov have a coat of arms?” Annual Griboedov conference, Khmelita, 8 October 2015.

63. Simeon Smiloevich-Mazarovich, son of a Venetian admiral, served as a physician at the Moldavian court, in 1817 joined Ermolov on his mission to Persia as a doctor. From 1818 he was the Russian envoy in Persia although he became a Russian subject only in 1836.
64. Potto, *Persidskaia voina*, 130: 177; Iz anekdotov ob A. P. Ermolove, in *Russkii arkhiv*, 2, 1893: 185–7; M. N. Pokhvistnev, “Aleksey Petrovich Ermolov,” in *Russkaia Starina*, 1872, 11: 475–607.
65. Central State Military Archive, f. VUA, No. 4291, f. 36.
66. *Feldjäger* – senior officer of the military police.
67. *Chervonets* – 10-ruble gold coin.
68. There is a note in his diary describing how his mother forced him to promise her to join Paskevich in Tiflis (*Besedy v OLRs*, vol. II (Moscow, 1868), 25; N. K. Pikanov, *Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva A. S. Griboedova, 1791–1829* (Moscow, 2000), 89–90.
69. *Griboedovskie mesta*, 3–4; A. Brintlinger, “Puteshestvennik malgré lui: The Road in the Letters of A. S. Griboedov,” Ohio Round table, 8 November 2014.
70. A. S. Griboedov, “Zapiska ob uchrezhdenii Rossiiskoi Zakavkazskoyi kompanii,” *Sochineniia*, critical edition, preface and commentaries by V. Orlov (Moscow-Leningrad, 1959), 471–7; N.A. Tarkhova, “O proekte Rossiiskoi Zakavkazskoi kompanii (po materialam arkhiva I.F. Paskevicha v RGIA),” *Problemy tvorchestva A.S. Griboedova*, ed. by S.A. Fomichev (Smolensk, 1994), 285–95.
71. See more on this below.
72. On 21 May 1828 Griboedov was officially appointed the Russian envoy in Persia, Amburger appointed consul general in Tabriz, Maltsev his first secretary, Adelung his second secretary and Ivanov was appointed secretary to Amburger.
73. Although the original has not survived, some details were mentioned in the memoirs of Griboedov's contemporaries.
74. Dmitrii Zavalishin, naval officer, member of Admiral M. Lazarev's 1822–4 expedition around America. His proposal to establish a new Russian colony in California was rejected by Alexander I, which perhaps was the reason for Zavalishin joining the most extremist wing of the Decembrist movement. See *Istoriia Russkoi Ameriki (1732–1867)*, vol. 2, *Deiatel'nost' Rossiisko-amerikanskoi kompanii 1799–1825*, ed. by N. N. Bolkhovitinov (Moscow, 1999), 257–74.
75. Apart from London–EIC rivalry, there was a Bombay–Punjab rivalry, inside the EIC, as a result of which Malcolm was accused of “packing the Persian mission with his family” (Malcolm, *Malcolm*, 323, 328; E. Ingram, “Family and Faction in the Great Game in Asia: The Struggle over the Persian Mission 1828–1835,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 17 (1981): 283–309; K. Ekbal, “Campbell, John,” *EIr* online <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/campbell-john-1799-1870-british-envoy-to-persia-1830-35>; accessed 21 April 2016.
76. Harden, “Griboedov and the Willock Affair,” 91; eadem, “Murder of Griboedov.”

77. Amelia Macdonald, daughter of Baronet Sir Alexander Campbell, lieutenant-general of the Madras army of EIC, younger sister of Charlotte, who married Major-General Sir John Malcolm, Governor of Bombay.
78. Harden, "Griboedov and the Willock Affair," 91.
79. Ibid.
80. Captain James Edward Alexander, *Travels to the Seat of War in the East through Russia and the Crimea in 1829* (London, 1830), 84.
81. AKAK (Akty, sobrannye Kavkazskoi arkheograficheskoi komissiyei), VII (Tiflis, 1878), 572.
82. "Report of A. S. Griboedov to Count K.V. Nesselrode No 212 from Tabriz, on 30 November/13 December 1828," *A. S. Griboedov, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh, Pis'ma, dokumenty, sluzhebnye bumagi* (St Petersburg, 2006), 286–93.
83. Twenty-one-year-old Ivan Maltsev (1807–80) joined the embassy as the mission's first secretary, at the last minute, on its way to Tehran, replacing Kiselev whom Nesselrode sent to Paris against Griboedov's will. Maltsev, the only "miraculous" survivor and "witness," was a super-rich heir of his uncle, a glass and crystal tycoon. Later he established glass trade with Persia and finished his extremely successful career as a chamberlain in the Asiatic Department of the Russian Foreign Office.
84. Letter of K. Nesselrode to I. Paskevich from 15 March 1829 (*Kavkazskii sbornik*, т. 30, (Tiflis, 1910), 171.
85. "Narrative of the Proceedings of the Russian Mission to Persia from its departure from Tabreez for Tehran on 14 Jummada II [20 December 1828] until its destruction on Wednesday 6 Sha'ban [11 February 1829]," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Edinburgh, September, 1830, 496–512.
86. "Relation des événements que ont précédé et accompagné le massacre de la dernière ambassade russe en Perse," in *Nouvelles Annales des Voyages des Sciences Géographiques* (Paris, 1830) 314–45.
87. E. Serchevskii, *A. S. Griboedov i ego sochineniia* (St Petersburg, 1858).
88. *A. S. Griboedov. Ego zhizn' i gibel' v memuarakh sovremennikov*, ed. Z. Davydov, Leningrad, 1929, 151–8.
89. The so-called Bombay school, of which Malcolm was the most prominent advocate, saw Persia as a bulwark against Russian imperial expansion southwards and toward India. The other group, the so-called Punjab school, felt that supporting Persia against the Russians was a lost cause. Instead, they proposed to strike an alliance with the Afghans and the Singh Kingdom in Punjab. See Malcolm, *Malcolm*, 323.
90. Traditionally, he is considered to be the main reason, or even a provocateur of the tragedy, as he arrived at the mission seeking sanctuary (when Griboedov was literally ready to leave) on the basis of his new status as a Russian subject according to the Torkmanchay Treaty. Since he was the eunuch of the shah's harem, his property legally belonged to the shah while Mirza Ya`qub was hoping to take his possessions, which he

had accumulated during his long service at the shah's court as harem treasurer to his family in the Caucasus.

91. "Narrative of the Proceedings," 510.
92. Griboedov, *Woe from Wit*, 77
93. See endnote 6.

## CHAPTER 4

# RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT ACTION AGAINST RUSSIAN DESERTERS IN IRAN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: RUSSIAN ORIENTALISM AT THE STATE LEVEL<sup>1</sup>

*Elena Andreeva*

This essay analyzes the presence and activities of Russian deserters in Iran in the nineteenth century and the dilemma they posed to the Russian government, an issue that, despite its importance, has received only limited attention from modern scholars.<sup>2</sup> The essay maintains that the Russian government's over-reaction to the presence of Russian deserters in Iran, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, can be interpreted as a way of compensating in Asia for what ultimately became a failed aspiration in Europe – the desire to prove Russia's equality with the Western European empires and Russia's natural affinity and affiliation with the West. It builds upon the concept of Russian Orientalism as developed by the author in her previous publications, mainly in relation to individual Russians in Iran. Analyzing this concept at the state level, this essay also elucidates the trajectory of growing Russian domination in the northern provinces of Iran throughout the nineteenth century. These issues are investigated from the Russian perspective using untapped Russian archival sources in Russian, Persian and French.

The issue of deserters and the Russian Battalion formed from their ranks was a cause of concern in Russian diplomatic and military circles, involving the Emperor and high-ranking diplomats. Russians started to escape to Iran through the Caucasus at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, when Russia established its military presence there. Two Russian–Iranian wars, in 1804–13 and 1826–8, further increased the number of deserters. The story of Russian deserters in Iran in the first half of the nineteenth century – including its high point, the creation of the Russian Battalion under the patronage of `Abbas Mirza (1789–1833) and commanded by Samson Makintsev, or “Samson-khan” – is told by Adol'f Berzhe in his article “Samson Iakovlev Makintsev. Russkie begletsy v Persii,” and in several Russian travelogues.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Berzhe presents a somewhat idealized image of Samson Khan and the Battalion,

trying to compensate, perhaps subconsciously, for what was considered an embarrassment for Russia insofar as the deserters were seen as having “branded memories of themselves with a vile betrayal, escaped to the strange government, as if for an everlasting shame and insult to their compatriots.”<sup>4</sup>

Desertion was a common problem in the Russian army. Prior to the military reform of 1874, serf peasants were drafted for 25 years; they had to serve under the notoriously harsh discipline of the cane with unreasonably severe punishments for even insignificant violations; endure endless drills; and often suffered poor food supplies to the point of starvation. Desertion was “a gesture of passive protest, undertaken at great personal risk,” “not just a means of self-help but also a blow against the absolutist military system, in the same sense as the flight of peasants to the borderlands was a silent indictment of serfdom.”<sup>5</sup> At least since the time of Peter the Great, severe punishments were in place for desertion. This was especially true for those who joined enemy forces. Depending on the location, time period, state of war or peace, and discretion of the local military authorities, punishments included death by hanging or firing squad, running the gauntlet, or beating with a knout. For example, in the early nineteenth century, the usual penalty for desertion was one to three passes through 500 men for the first offense, six passes through 500 men for the second offense, and five passes through 1,000 men for the third, fourth or fifth offenses.<sup>6</sup> Other punishments included posting in remote parts of the empire, being sentenced to forced labor for life, or exile to settlements in Siberia. Harsh sentences were sometimes commuted and amnesties to deserters were granted periodically, as we shall see in the case of deserters in Iran. Russian authorities took the problem of desertion seriously, especially during periods of war, and most deserters were usually recaptured quickly, using the resources of the civilian administration. The units stationed close to the frontier, however, were an exception.<sup>7</sup>

In the Caucasus, it was reasonably easy to break away since there the border was porous and “Russian authority was confined to a few garrisons in strategic locations and villagers often helped soldiers make good their escape.”<sup>8</sup> According to Berzhe, additional reasons for escaping included fear of punishment for committed crimes, rumors about great benefits awaiting deserters in Iran, and alleged activities of Persian spies sent to seduce soldiers.<sup>9</sup> Lev Al'brant, who in 1838 was able to bring most of the deserters back, also pointed out that it was “an easy service and a good salary [compared to the conditions of Russian service]” that were attracting Russians to Iran.<sup>10</sup>

Russian deserters in Iran were sometimes treated in a manner similar to prisoners of war. Sometimes they “endured poverty and neglect or occasional harassment.”<sup>11</sup> More often, however, Iranian officials, and crown prince `Abbas Mirza in particular, readily accepted Russian deserters into their service as military advisers because of their superior military training and discipline. General Aleksei Ermolov, a special envoy to Iran in 1817, quoted Mirza `Isa Qa'em Maqam, Fath `Ali Shah's prime minister, as saying: “`Abbas Mirza really relies on them: he has formed them into his personal guard and entrusted himself to them.”<sup>12</sup> Another reason was the military confrontation with Russia during two wars in the first half of the nineteenth century and the desire to learn more about Russian military tactics and training

that would be useful in case of future military confrontations with Russia. According to `Abbas Mirza, “Russians are our neighbors and enemies; sooner or later, a war with them is inevitable, and therefore it is [more important] for us to get familiar with their military tactics than with those of the British.”<sup>13</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, the Russian Battalion was formed out of Russian fugitives under the command of Samson Iakovlev Makintsev, who became known as Samson Khan. He deserted in 1802 from the Nizhnii Novgorod Battalion.<sup>14</sup> At first, Samson Khan was enlisted by `Abbas Mirza into the Erivan Battalion in the rank of ensign, later to be promoted to captain and major. Samson Khan dedicated his energy to gathering Russian deserters, mainly in the Erivan khanate. He was also recruiting a number of officers from Transcaucasia. He even created a choir initially led by three musicians who had escaped from Aleksandropol – the number of singers soon reaching 30. When, during a military parade, Russian soldiers demanded that `Abbas Mirza make Samson commander of the battalion, the crown prince formed a separate battalion, which became known as *bahadoran* (unbeatable) under the command of Samson Khan, who was promoted to colonel. Later Samson Khan started to recruit local Armenian and Nestorian Christians in addition to Russian deserters. Allegedly, he would also send his agents to seduce Russian soldiers on temporary assignment in Iran by talking them into escaping, making them drunk and even abducting them. According to Berzhe, Samson Khan looked after his soldiers well. He strongly encouraged them to maintain their Orthodox Christian faith and to marry local Christians. With that purpose, he used to station the battalion in predominantly Christian areas, such as Maragheh, Ormiyeh and Salmas. He also encouraged them to send their children to Armenian schools, and enlisted those interested in military service into the battalion, encouraged others to learn a trade, and supervised their behavior. The Russian Battalion's uniform was similar to the Russian military uniform. He also used to make sure that his soldiers' salaries were paid on a regular and timely basis, and at times even used his personal funds for this purpose.<sup>15</sup> In 1843, probably as a result of that, he was unable to pay off his own debt to a Russian subject, so that taxes collected from his peasants had to be directed towards debt payments.<sup>16</sup> By the end of his life, he had fallen into debt since he had paid salaries to his soldiers from his own pocket. He left no inheritance; the Iranian government refused to return 12,000 gold pieces to his heirs and instead ordered his village and house in Tabriz to be sold to satisfy his creditors.<sup>17</sup>

The Russian Battalion soldiers had a reputation for discipline and fearlessness and were used by the Persian government in fighting against Turcomans, Afghans and Kurds. They also distinguished themselves during the war against the Ottoman Empire in 1820 and 1821 and accompanied `Abbas Mirza in his campaign against Herat in 1832. During the Russo–Iranian war of 1826–8, Samson Khan refused to fight against the Russians.<sup>18</sup> Some Russian deserters and prisoners of war also formed honor guards at the courts of the shah and several of his sons.<sup>19</sup> After the death of `Abbas Mirza in 1833 and Fath `Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834) the following year, Samson Khan and his Russian Battalion continued to serve the new ruler of Iran, Mohammad Shah (r. 1834–48). The Russian Battalion included a significant contingent of Polish soldiers: after the defeat of Napoleon, the Poles who had served in his army were sent for lifelong service to the faraway garrisons in Siberia and the Caucasus. They deserted to Iran

mainly for political reasons.<sup>20</sup>

The available information about the numbers of deserters, including those serving in the Russian Battalion, is imprecise. According to Al'brant, in 1829, the Russian Battalion consisted of 1,400 men but later the number decreased, especially after the cholera epidemic in 1830 and the death of `Abbas Mirza in 1833; by 1838 it counted only about 500 men.<sup>21</sup> Al'brant also claims that by the time of his visit to Iran in 1838, there were at least 200 deserters residing in Tabriz, Salmas, Khuy, Maragheh and other cities of Azerbaijan, who constituted the battalion reserve.<sup>22</sup> Berzhe's estimate of the total number of Russian fugitives in Azerbaijan during the same period of time was much higher and reached 1,000 men.<sup>23</sup> According to Diugamel', quoting Nicholas I, the battalion had counted approximately 2,000 men at some time prior to 1837 but, by that year, the number had declined to nearly 400.<sup>24</sup> Muriel Atkin quotes a French visitor to Iran during the 1830s, C. Masson, who claimed that at one point the number of Russian deserters in Iran had reached 6,000.<sup>25</sup>

For the Russian authorities, service by Russians with the Iranian government, and in particular the existence of the whole Russian Battalion in Iran, was a source of irritation, a great political embarrassment and a practical inconvenience – it served as an attraction and inspiration for new desertions from the military units stationed on borders with Iran. It became a political issue of importance and, therefore several high-level attempts were made to bring the deserters back. According to Article VI of the Treaty of Golestan signed after the conclusion of the first Russian–Iranian war in 1813, all prisoners of war were to be returned, while those who had escaped were “free to return to their mother country if they ... [were] willing to voluntarily do so; those who ... [were] not willing to return, [were] not to be forced to do so.” An amnesty was also granted to the fugitives on both sides.<sup>26</sup> In 1817, General Ermolov, Caucasian Corps commander and civil administrator of the Caucasus and the province of Astrakhan, was sent to Iran as a Plenipotentiary Ambassador Extraordinary on a mission to settle the lines of demarcation between Russia and Iran in accordance with the Treaty of Golestan. He tried to negotiate the repatriation of the Russian prisoners of war and of those deserters who were willing to go back but his efforts were futile. He accused Iranian officials of sabotaging the return of deserters and even of keeping them by force.<sup>27</sup> Also, upon his arrival in Tabriz, he learned that, the previous day, the Russian Battalion had been urgently dispatched to fight against rebellious Kurds, while the remaining deserters were locked up: “Enraged, Ermolov refused to discuss this subject at all.”<sup>28</sup> Further attempts made by his successors as commander of the Caucasian Corps, Count Paskevich and Baron Rozen, also failed to return any fugitives.<sup>29</sup>

In 1826–7, Lieutenant I. Noskov happened inadvertently to bring back approximately 250 Russian prisoners of war, when the second war between Iran and Russia was about to break out. Unexpectedly, they were offered to him by Fath `Ali Shah as “a gift” and “a proof of how much ... [the shah was] pleased with [Noskov] and how far ... [the shah was] from thoughts about hostilities with Russia.”<sup>30</sup> According to the Treaty of Torkmanchay, signed at the conclusion of the war in 1828, 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 army to be stationed near the new border.<sup>31</sup>

Russian consul in Tabriz, K. A. Amburger, and the Russian minister in Tehran, Alexander Griboedov, complained about the evasiveness of the Iranian government in the matter of returning Russian deserters and war prisoners; Amburger quoted the fifth article of the additional convention to the Treaty of Torkmanchay in regard to the temporarily occupied areas of Iran, according to which Russian deserters were to be returned.<sup>32</sup> Griboedov was able to persuade the Iranian government to agree to return them, including Samson Khan, but the murder of Griboedov in 1829 postponed the resolution of the problem until good relations between the two countries were restored. In 1830, while Prince Dolgorukov was the Russian Ambassador to Iran, the Russian government issued pardons to the deserters and granted them permission to return home.<sup>33</sup>

In 1837, Nicholas I traveled to the Caucasus and, while there, met with the Iranian prime minister. The tsar requested that the Russian Battalion be dissolved and the Russian soldiers returned to Russia. If Mohammad Shah refused to meet this request within six months, the Russian minister in Iran, Count Simonich, was to leave Iran together with all members of the Russian Mission.<sup>34</sup> This unveiled threat to break off diplomatic relations is evidence of how serious the tsar considered this issue to be. Simonich was further informed that Samson Khan was to be spared any punishment and was to receive a monetary award if he brought the battalion to the Russian border and transferred it to the Russian authorities. He himself would have a choice to stay in Iran or return to Russia.<sup>35</sup> When later the same year Simonich was replaced by A. Diugamel', Nicholas I instructed him before his departure for Iran:

There is nothing surprising in the fact that the deserters are able to hide and avoid government control in a country which is as poorly governed as Persia. However, I don't want regularly organized units to be formed out of them right next to us, which can serve as an encouragement and enticement for any soldier who decides to desert .... If our deserters are returned to us, in the future we have to take care that similar units are not to be created.<sup>36</sup>

Mohammad Shah agreed to return the deserters – he did not have much choice. As a result, Captain Al'brant, “an able, intelligent, brave and energetic officer,”<sup>37</sup> was assigned to travel to Iran in 1838 and escort them back. In his fascinating account, Al'brant described how he was able to accomplish his difficult mission with a lot of enthusiasm and the confidence of a representative of a powerful empire. His passionate appeal to the deserters' sense of Russian patriotism inseparable from their devotion to Russian Orthodoxy had a great effect on the majority of them. Without hesitation, he applied force to those who resisted and tried to instigate others to resist their blandishments: troublemakers were arrested and sent back by force. From Tabriz, he sent a total of 327 people, including 69 single deserters, 64 married ones, 74 wives and 111 children. Nine people were sent back under arrest.<sup>38</sup> From Tehran, he brought back most of the Russian Battalion, 385 men with their families, including those few who had converted to Islam.<sup>39</sup> Berzhe, however, gives different numbers: the total number of people brought back to Russia by Al'brant was 1,084, including 597 deserters, 206 wives and

281 children.<sup>40</sup> Samson Khan pretended to be sick and did not try to prevent Al'brant from convincing his soldiers to return to Russia. He himself stayed behind but even his son-in-law, Colonel Skryplev, married to his favorite daughter, assisted Al'brant in his mission and then departed together with his family. In Russia, he was appointed a lieutenant of Cossacks in recognition of his service.<sup>41</sup> All the returned deserters were appointed to serve in Finlandia and Arkhangelsk battalions with subsequent transfer of the married ones to the Cossack army. As for those who had become Muslim, they were only subjected to a church penance.<sup>42</sup> According to Berzhe, the whole operation cost the Russian treasury 19,971 silver rubles.<sup>43</sup>

Samson Khan, the founder of the Russian Battalion, never returned to Russia and continued to serve Iranian rulers. In spite of the death of his main patron, `Abbas Mirza, in 1833, and the return of the majority of deserters to Russia in 1838, he formed a new regiment, which included the deserters who had refused to return to Russia. They mainly resided in Hamadan, Kermanshah, Khorasan and Azerbaijan. Samson Khan died at the age of 73, most likely in the 1850s<sup>44</sup> and, after that, there was no other Russian military unit inside Iran. For some Russian fugitives, their experience in Iran became a disappointment. Berzhe tells a story about an old deserter whom he met in 1853. The old man had served in the battalion and, by the time of their meeting, did not have means to support his large family, bitterly regretted his repatriation and blamed Samson for having “seduced” him to “flee to the *basurmans* [infidels].”<sup>45</sup>

In 1843, the Russian consul in Azerbaijan reported to Tehran that the combined number of fugitives who remained in Iran after the Russian Battalion ceased to exist together with recent deserters was more than 150. They mainly resided in cities such as Ormiyeh, Maragheh, Sowjbulak and Salmas. It was impossible to capture them by force since “they ... [were] secretly protected by all classes of the society starting with the Muslim authorities, to the extent that at a slightest alarm they changed their lodging or went into hiding;” meanwhile, it “would be a shame” to leave them in Persia, according to the consul. He also mentioned Polish deserters who, under threat of being captured and returned to the Russians, were traveling to Baghdad from where the French consul would transfer them to Paris. In Ormiyeh, the Russian consul recruited a certain Mr Nicolas, a native of Odessa, fluent in Russian and in frequent contact with the deserters, to advise the deserters “as though it came from himself,” “to return to their native land rather than live as beggars in continual fear of capture.” This approach proved to be so successful that the consul claimed that all fugitives in Ormiyeh were begging the provocateur to take them back to Russia and the consul was asking permission to spend some minimal funds in order to send the deserters back. He even expressed hope of being able to apply the same tactics in the other cities under his jurisdiction.<sup>46</sup>

The pattern of desertion from Russian military units to Iran changes dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century. Available archival documents only refer to recent individual deserters, most of whom escaped to two Iranian provinces, Azerbaijan and Khorasan, heading for such cities as Tabriz, Rasht and Mashhad. Those deserters were soldiers or Cossacks belonging to the military units stationed on the borders with Iran, including the Georgian Battalion, 65th Battalion in Tiflis, the Kuban' Cossack Army, the Baku Brigade of the Frontier Guards, and the 5th Transcaspian Infantry Battalion. The numbers of

deserters were now relatively low and numbered in the tens: in 1891, a list of Cossack deserters in Azerbaijan included 11 names, with one having been returned and one having returned voluntarily.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, a similar draft list of deserters from 1894 includes 10 names from the earlier list of 1891. Out of 17, four were returned, one died and one, named Illarion Grekov, had petitioned for amnesty, was denied by the emperor, and was allegedly sent to the United States by an American doctor.<sup>48</sup> According to a letter from the general consul in Tabriz to E. K. Biutsov, Russian minister in Tehran, and to Count D. A. Kapnist, the head of the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 1894 the total number of Russian deserters from the military units located along the border, was 11.<sup>49</sup> As for Khorasan, according to a letter from the head of the Transcaspian Region to Biutsov, in 1896 “out of nine low ranking personnel who deserted to Persia in several recent years, no one has been returned to us.”<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the absence of war between Iran and Russia, the decreasing numbers of deserters in the second half of the nineteenth century were related to the abolition of serfdom in Russia in 1861 and the military reform introduced in the Russian Imperial Army in the 1870s. It replaced the former system of recruiting levies among peasants and long-term service with a universal conscription, shortened the term of active service, emphasized the educational aspect of service and limited physical punishments. Therefore, military service was made more tolerable.

Reasons for desertions, however, were similar to those in the first half of the nineteenth century. Interviews with returned deserters suggest that the main reasons for their escape included being overworked,<sup>51</sup> being depressed,<sup>52</sup> and the significant material benefits and comfortable life promised them by the local Iranian officials.<sup>53</sup> According to Russian officials involved in the deserters’ affairs, the main reasons for desertion were the strict discipline in the Russian military and fear of responsibility for committed crimes<sup>54</sup> (or sometimes only insignificant violations). A letter from the Russian Consulate in Khorasan from 1896 also quoted “seduction by one of our Caucasian Muslims who purposefully recruit[ed] our inexperienced peasants for religious purposes,”<sup>55</sup> while a letter in the same year from General Aleksei Kuropatkin, commander-in-chief of the Transcaspian military district, to Biutsov, blamed “gossips among the Cossacks that in Persia fugitive Cossacks ...[were] held in high respect and ... [were] offered to train Persian Cossacks for a good salary.”<sup>56</sup>

The interviews conducted with the deserters also reveal that most were illiterate and in their early twenties. Many of them took their guns and ammunition with them when they crossed the border. Those guns were regarded as an asset when they entered Iranian service. There is one case when two fugitives, named Svetlavskii and Petkevich, came back to Russian Serakhs and tried to commit a burglary in order to steal guns from a storeroom. Captured and interrogated, they testified that they had been accepted into the service of an Iranian general in Mashhad whose name they did not know and who, according to them, had ordered them to go back to Serakhs and bring back as many guns as they could. Allegedly, he even sent with them as a guide another Russian fugitive named Rovda.<sup>57</sup>

In some cases, returned deserters were so determined that they would escape again after having been captured – for example, two soldiers named Dolgalev and Zakharskii were captured in early August 1896 and returned but almost immediately deserted again to Mashhad.<sup>58</sup> In other cases, however, Russian fugitives returned voluntarily, such as the two unnamed Cossacks mentioned in one of the official letters,<sup>59</sup> or a person calling himself Aleksei Volkov who returned in 1866 and claimed that he had deserted during the second war against Iran.<sup>60</sup> A Cossack named Ivan Avsienko (also spelled as “Ovsienko”) returned voluntarily from Iran in 1890.<sup>61</sup> A senior non-commissioned officer of the Aslanduz Reserve Battalion, Filipp Sidorov Karabutov, deserted in January 1898 and returned in August of that year.<sup>62</sup> Since none of those voluntarily returned left a recorded explanation of their decision, we can only suppose that not all deserters found easy conditions and profitable employment in Iran, especially since the Iranian authorities became much less welcoming under pressure exerted by the Russians. For some, perhaps, living in an “infidel” land away from home turned out to be unbearable.

According to Russian officials, local Iranian authorities welcomed Russian deserters, gave them refuge and took them into their service in cities or villages.<sup>63</sup> There seems to have been at least some local networks among the former Russian soldiers, based on a letter to the general consul in Tabriz about a funeral for Cossack Stepan Efremenko, who died in the village Nedipal-Khan, which was attended by at least four other Russian deserters all of whom were residents of different villages.<sup>64</sup> According to a letter from the general consul in Khorasan to Biutsov, the former possessed some secret information showing that a Cossack sergeant captured by the Russians had been taken into service in the Cossack Hundred in Mashhad. The author concludes by accusing the shah's government itself of being involved in recruiting Russian fugitives for the Iranian army as cheap instructors.<sup>65</sup>

Russian authorities in Iran and the Russian regions bordering Iran spared no effort to return the fugitives and to make clear to the Iranian authorities what their duties were vis-à-vis the Russian government. The tone of the official letters dealing with the deserters and the Iranian authorities' alleged reluctance to capture and return them is one of annoyance expressed by those in a superior power position toward their disobedient subordinates. Though the numbers of deserters in the second half of the nineteenth century were insignificant and there was no longer any Russian military unit in Iranian service, they considered the status quo to be embarrassing to Russia's imperial prestige. It was especially true in the northern provinces of Iran, which by the second half of the century were under strong Russian domination and would become part of the Russian sphere of influence according to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Russia became particularly aggressive in its policy toward Central and East Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century after losing its influence and prestige in Europe, and was trying to compensate for those defeats by focusing on Asia, where it was easier to catch up with Western European powers. Great Britain was now the main rival of Russia for domination of Asian politics in what became known as the “Great Game.” In this new geopolitical situation, the disagreements between the Russian and Iranian authorities over the return of Russian deserters seem to have been more of symbolic than practical significance.

Though deserters had been pursued and punished in the Russian army since its early days, the apparent disparity between the insignificance of the problem by the late nineteenth century and the aggressive reaction of the Russian officials may be observed to be a manifestation of Russian Orientalism,<sup>66</sup> defined as the Russian variant of the theory and practice of representing, and thereby dominating, the “Orient.” Russian Orientalism, as distinct from the familiar concept of Western European Orientalism, derives from the peculiar Russian national identity that combined Western and Eastern elements. This duality of national identity led to multiple consequences, the most profound being a sense of inferiority – especially relevant in Iran where Russians had to directly confront the Oriental “Other” and compete with the British, who symbolized the true European “Self.” Subconsciously, the Russians were trying to conceal this sense of inferiority – and one way to do it was to treat the Iranian authorities in a disproportionately and overwhelmingly superior manner. We clearly detect this attitude reflected in the official Russian correspondence about Russian deserters. In their obsessive pursuit of the fugitives, Russian authorities were using threats and implying that there was an organized network in Iran plotting to integrate the Russian fugitives and resist the well-justified Russian demands for their return. At the same time, they were acknowledging the low numbers of those fugitives. This coordinated and exaggerated reaction by Russian diplomatic and military officials in Iran suggests what can be defined as a state policy of Russian Orientalism. Demands for the return of the deserters turn into an excuse to exercise and demonstrate Russia's perceived superiority in power and authority in order to prove themselves as truly European – to themselves, to the Iranians and, of course, to the British.

Russian officials embarked on a well-organized campaign to make their point about the deserters. While demanding from Iranian authorities the arrest and return of their deserters, they often quoted the additional Convention to the Torkmanchay Agreement about deserters, signed by Russia and Iran on 3 July 1844. It contains four Articles including one stipulating that “citizens of both countries ... [were] not allowed to travel across the border without passports and a formal permission of their government” and that “those who... [had] no passports... [were] to be arrested.”<sup>67</sup>

Letters from the Russian Consulate and personal ones from consul Petr Vlasov in Mashhad describe how Russian deserters were smuggled to Mashhad, put under protection of one of the local *mojtaheds*, and found refuge either in their houses or in *bast* at the Shrine of Emam Reza, afterwards to be converted to Islam and even circumcised.<sup>68</sup> If they appeared in the streets, they only did so under protection of religious figures; three or four months later they were sent to faraway parts of Khorasan, or to Yazd, Kerman or Shahrud. Russian authorities demanded that the Khorasan authorities capture and return them according to the Convention of 1844, but they claimed that the Iranian officials tended to sabotage those requests since they were afraid to cause “serious displeasure of the religious authorities in Mashhad and consequently an explosion of popular rage in defense of the newly converted Muslims.”<sup>69</sup> In April 1896, when this letter was written, there were five such requests about return pending.<sup>70</sup> Biutsov then asked the Iranian prime minister to influence the religious leaders in Mashhad and remind them that they were expected to be grateful to the Russians who had “pacified” the region through which thousands of pilgrims could safely proceed to Mashhad “enriching the local shrine with

their gifts.” He also threatened that if “the encouragement of new desertions of soldiers of the Transcaspian army and their seduction by the Muslims” continued, the Russian authorities would introduce measures preventing pilgrims from going to Mashhad through Transcaspia.<sup>71</sup> After that, the Russian consul in Mashhad met with the Governor of Khorasan and repeated the same demands and threats. According to the consul, the governor claimed that he had brought all this to the attention of the ulama but they ignored it as always. In order to prove his support for what he claimed was a legitimate demand, the governor ordered the immediate return of two deserters who had been captured shortly beforehand. The consul in Mashhad further claimed that he had obtained information about two deserters who were in Tehran and that the prime minister was aware of that – therefore, the shah's government itself was involved.<sup>72</sup> Biutsov seems to disagree with the consul on that account. In his letter to A. K. Bazili, the head of the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Biutsov pointed out that Iranian authorities did not always ignore the Russians’ appeals and, interestingly, that the shah's government was uninvolved in accepting Russian deserters into service – it was local commanders who were recruiting fugitives as a result of a “peculiar structure of the Persian army that allow[ed] recruiting by local commanders for the units under their authority.”<sup>73</sup>

The Russian consul in Mashhad, Vlasov, emphasized that the conversion of deserters to Islam complicated capture and return because of “the weakness of the authority of the shah's government and the strong influence of the religious leaders ... involve[d] a great risk not just for the ... Russian Consulate and the Governor of Khorasan, but also for all the Europeans residing here.”<sup>74</sup> Conversion of Russians to Islam seemed to be especially offensive to the Russian authorities. Biutsov explained in his letter to General Aleksei Kuropatkin, commander-in-chief of the Transcaspian military district: “... once a deserter crossed the Persian border, conversion to Islam for him is a condition of his safety and a more or less comfortable life...” According to this letter, the impotent Iranian administration had no choice but to take into account “the fanatical religious authorities in such a center as Mashhad, where they... [were] capable to instigate a popular outrage in support of the newly converted Muslims.” Therefore, the only way to influence the “fanatics” was to threaten their material interests by creating obstacles for pilgrims – threats that were among the tactics used by the Russian administrators.<sup>75</sup> In Mashhad, according to the consul, it was easier for deserters to hide since they changed their clothing, shaved their heads and blended in with the pilgrims coming from different parts of the world and wearing their national costumes.<sup>76</sup> In 1896, General Kuropatkin in turn complained about desertions from the military units under his command that were stationed on the borders with Iran and accused Iranian officials of accepting them into service in the Iranian army. He also complained that Russian demands for their return were ignored and he demanded that the Iranian government stop accepting them and that they capture and surrender them in accordance with the Convention of 1844.<sup>77</sup>

Russian officials in Azerbaijan claimed to be having similar problems with the local authorities over the return of deserters. The general consul in Tabriz, in his letter to Biutsov and Kapnist, complained that Russian deserters were converted to Islam and subsequently were given refuge and protection by the local authorities. According to his letter of 1894, at that time they were hiding up to 11 deserters in Ardabil and Tabriz, and “the local authorities

did not consider it to be their duty to surrender them in spite of the Convention of 1844.”<sup>78</sup> Despite these complaints, several deserters were reportedly captured, mainly by Iranian authorities, and returned to the Russians, including Nikita Olad'ev in 1848,<sup>79</sup> Aleksei Noskov in 1870,<sup>80</sup> Aleksandr Verevkin in 1890,<sup>81</sup> Gavriil Karachentsev in 1890,<sup>82</sup> Gavriil Kostenko in 1893,<sup>83</sup> and Osip Trubinin in 1893.<sup>84</sup>

The story of deserter Aleksei Noskov demonstrates a “success” story for the Russian authorities. Noskov, from the 65th Battalion in Tiflis, deserted his unit in Lankoran in October of 1870 and went to Rasht by land where he went into *bast*. The Russian consul in Gilan demanded his return from the governor but the governor claimed that capturing a person from *bast* was beyond his authority. After Noskov left his asylum, the governor still refused to surrender him since, according to him, the deserter had converted to Islam and his capture would turn all the religious authorities against the governor. When Noskov started to walk in the streets, the consul ordered the foreman of the merchants, a Russian subject, to arrest him. In November, according to the foreman and the consul, the deserter was arrested in the street and put up no resistance. His arrest was based on the second Article of the Convention of 1844, providing for the arrest of those without passports. According to the Iranian governor, Noskov was arrested in a house of an Iranian citizen and was dragged out of it by force. After his capture, Noskov was sent to Lankoran and interrogated there. Aleksei Vasil'ev Noskov testified that he was 27 years old, from Samara province, illiterate, and that he had started his military service in 1866, in the 27th Battalion in Tiflis. He was “overwhelmed with work,” sober, and nobody had instigated him to desert. He told that he had converted to Islam and had been circumcised, and also that the foreman broke into the house where he was hiding, beat the people there and dragged him out.<sup>85</sup> It remains unknown what happened to him upon his return but he most certainly was severely punished for his desertion and especially for his conversion.

The story of Illarion Grekov is one of “failure” for the Russian authorities. In 1893, a former Cossack of the Kuban army, Illarion Grekov, residing in Urmiye, petitioned for amnesty. His petition was reviewed personally by the emperor and denied “because of the seriousness of the accusations against him.” Russian authorities, however, failed to announce this decision to him since he allegedly was sent to the United States by an American doctor. An investigation indicated that the doctor had employed a Russian Cossack in his service, whom he had shipped to the United States through Constantinople under a different name. Since it was not uncommon for the Russian deserters in the second half of the century to use false names, we can speculate that Grekov did the same.<sup>86</sup>

Some Russian fugitives in Iran preferred to conceal their real names and use false identities.<sup>87</sup> In 1848, a captured deserter called Nikita Olad'ev at first claimed to be a soldier of the 7th Georgian Battalion, but later during an interrogation he changed his story and declared that he had come with his mother to Iran in 1819 when he was only 13 to work in the Caspian fisheries. Russian consul in Gilan, Prince Dolgorukov, however, was unable to verify his story.<sup>88</sup>

At least some deserters disguising their identities probably had committed crimes. For

example, a fugitive Cossack of the Kuban army was, for some reason, trying to conceal his past and pretended to be a former officer; he used the name of Aleksandr Romanov and claimed that he had arrived in Tabriz from Baku, where he had converted to Islam. He was captured at the order of the foreman of the Armenian Russian citizens and transferred to Nakitchevan prison.<sup>89</sup>

The study of Russian deserters and their repatriations illustrates the growing power of Russia in Iran through the nineteenth century with its high point in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The dynamics of desertions from the Russian military to Iran demonstrates that their numbers were significant and measured in hundreds in the first half of the century, as a result of two wars between Iran and Russia, the patronage of `Abbas Mirza and the personal qualities of leadership of Samson Khan Makintsev. Most of the deserters at that time crossed the Caucasian border between Russia and Iran. During that time, the Russians were establishing their domination in Iran by military means and were learning to exercise pressure on Iranian monarchs. The Russians authorities deemed the issue of deserters and the Russian Battalion of such great importance that the emperor himself interfered, threatening to break off diplomatic relations with his Iranian counterpart if the deserters were not returned. The Iranians had no other choice than to allow the returns, and that, combined with the death of `Abbas Mirza and, later, that of Samson Khan, put an end to creating Russian military units in Iran and to mass desertions. Conversions to Islam were relatively rare in the first half of the century since it was unnecessary to convert in order to receive protection.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, in the absence of war between Iran and Russia, with Russia pursuing a more aggressive policy in Asia, including northern Iran, and after the military reform in Russia, the numbers of new deserters dropped significantly to tens instead of hundreds. Those were individual deserters who had to convert to Islam in order to receive protection from the ulama since the secular authorities were not strong enough to withstand the pressure from the Russian officials in Iran. The growing presence and influence of the Russians in the northern parts of Iran manifested itself in the fact that deserters were often captured and returned to the Russian authorities. Unlike in the first half of the nineteenth century, fugitives were hired by local rather than by central authorities – their presence in Iran became not only much more limited but also more decentralized. Local Iranian officials seem to have been caught between the Russian pressure and the threat of religious unrest if the newly converted fugitives were to be surrendered. For the Russians, the matter of returning deserters was mostly related to the prestige of the Russian Empire, its ability to exercise pressure and interact from a position of strength, since the numbers were too low to present any real threat to Russia's standing in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Iran. Russia perceived Iranian officials as weak, inefficient and inferior in every way and did not hesitate to threaten them. This attitude of exaggerated superiority over their Iranian counterparts serves as a marker of Russian Orientalism – the peculiar Russian variant of the theory and practice of dealing with the “Orient.” The coordinated activities of the Russian diplomatic and military authorities pursuing the deserters resulted in Russian Orientalism at the state level.

## Notes

1. This essay was first presented at the conference “Empires and Revolutions: Iranian–Russian Encounters since 1800,” organized by Stephanie Cronin at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, June 2009. I would like to thank Mark Woodcock for his insightful advice and kind help with this essay.
2. A paper “‘Bagaderan’ – Russian Deserters in the Persian Army, 1802–1839” by Aleksandr Kibovskii which deals with some aspects of the problem can be found at <http://marksrussianmilitaryhistory.info/Persdes2.html>. It quotes a publication, *Tseikhgauz* No. 5, 1996, as its source. The recent publications by Stephanie Cronin on Russians in Iranian military service in the nineteenth and early twentieth century also deal with some aspects of the issue of Russian deserters. See Stephanie Cronin, “Deserters, Converts, Cossacks and Revolutionaries: Russians in Iranian Military Service 1800–1920,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 48: 2 (2012): 147–82; same article in Stephanie Cronin ed., *Iranian–Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (London, 2013), 143–85. “Russkie dezertiry v iranskoii armii (1805–1829)” by A. I. Kruglov and M. V. Nechtailov addresses some features of the relationship between Iranian authorities and Russian fugitives, mainly under the command of Samson Khan, in the early twentieth century (see [http://www.reenactor.ru/ARH/PDF/Kryglov\\_Nechitailov.pdf](http://www.reenactor.ru/ARH/PDF/Kryglov_Nechitailov.pdf)).
3. Ad. P. Berzhe, “Samson-khan Makintsev i russkie begletsy v Persii,” *Russkaia starina* 4 (1876): 770–804; Aleksei Petrovich Ermolov, “Zhurnal posol'stva v Persiiu Generala Ermolova,” *Chteniia v Imperatorskom Obshchestve Istorii i Drevnostei Rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom Universitete* 2 (April–June 1863): 121–84; I. Noskov, “Posol'stvo poruchika Noskova v Persiiu s khrustal'noi krovat'iu,” *Istoricheskii vestnik* 30 (1887): 425–40; [Lev] Al'brant, “Komandirovka kapitana Al'branta v Persiiu v 1838 godu, raskazannaia im samim,” *Russkii vestnik* 68, no. 3 (1867): 304–40; A. O. Diugamel', “Avtobiografiia,” parts 1 and 2, *Russkii arkhiv* 5 (1885): 82–126, 6 (1885): 222–56, N. V. Khanykov, *Ocherk sluzhebnoi deiatel'nosti kapitana Al'branda* (Tiflis, 1850). See also L. Karskaia, “General Ermolov i prints Abbas-Mirza Kadzhar (sotsial'no-psikhologicheskii portret),” *Pis'mennye pamiatniki i problemy istorii kul'tury narodov Vostoka XVII*, part 1 (Moscow, 1985): 150–7.
4. Berzhe, “Samson-khan Makintsev,” 771.
5. John L. H. Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar: Army and Society in Russia, 1462–1874* (Oxford, 1985), 222.
6. Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar*, 224.
7. *Ibid.*, 115, 116, 147, 222–5.
8. Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran: 1780–1828* (Minneapolis, 1980), 106. On specific features of service and desertion in the Caucasus, see Vladimir Lapin, “Armiia Rossii na Kavkaze: privatizatsiia voiny,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 2008, #93 at <http://www.nlobooks.ru/sites/default/files/old/nlobooks.ru/rus/magazines/nlo/196/1142/1>
9. Berzhe, “Samson-khan Makintsev,” 772.
10. Al'brant, “Komandirovka kapitana Al'branta,” 305.

11. Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, 106. Interestingly, according to James Morier, Russian prisoners of war were pressed into the army of Yazid during a *ta'ziyeh* performance:

[Upon the death of Hoseyn,] the indignation of the populace wanted some object upon which to vent itself and it fell upon those of the actors who had performed the parts of Yezid's soldiers. No sooner was Hossein killed, than they were driven off the ground by a volley of stones, following by shouts of abuse. We were informed that it is so difficult to procure performers to fill these characters, that on the present occasion a party of Russian prisoners were pressed into the army of Yezid, and they made as speedy an exit after the catastrophe, as it was in their power.

In James Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor to Constantinople between the years 1810 and 1816* (London, 1818), 177. I am grateful to Mr David Blow for pointing this out to me.

12. Ermolov, "Zhurnal posol'stva," 176.
13. Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 773–4.
14. Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 316. According to Diugamel', however, who is quoting Nicholas I, he had served in the Chernigov Battalion. Diugamel' "Avtobiografiia," 85.
15. Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 772–4. According to Al'brant, among Russian deserters, more than 250 men were married to Armenian, Nestorian, Persian and Turcoman women. Al'brant, "Komandirovka kapitana Al'branta," 306.
16. Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVPRF), Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 2282, 126–32.
17. Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 803.
18. Ibid., 775–6.
19. Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, 106–7.
20. Karskaia, "General Ermolov i prints Abbas-Mirza," 156.
21. Al'brant, "Komandirovka kapitana Al'branta," 305.
22. Ibid., 306.
23. Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 783.
24. Diugamel', "Avtobiografiia," 85.
25. Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, 106.
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27. Ermolov, "Zhurnal posol'stva," 175–8.
28. Karskaia, "General Ermolov i prints Abbas-Mirza," 153.

29. Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 778.
30. Noskov, "Posol'stvo poruchika Noskova," 435.
31. Sazonov, *Pod stiagom Rossii*, 320–1.
32. Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 778–9.
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37. I. F. Blaramberg, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1978), 149.
38. Al'brant, "Komandirovka kapitana Al'branta," 317.
39. *Ibid.*, 322, Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 790.
40. Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 791.
41. Al'brant, "Komandirovka kapitana Al'branta," 321, 329–30.
42. Berzhe, "Samson-khan Makintsev," 791.
43. *Ibid.*, 791.
44. *Ibid.*, 793, 772, 799, 802.
45. *Ibid.*, 803–04.
46. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 2282, 21–5.
47. AVPRF, Fond General'nogo Konsul'stva v Tavrize, f. 289, op. 570/1, d. 1634, 21–3.
48. AVPRF, Fond General'nogo Konsul'stva v Tavrize, f. 289, op. 570/1, d. 1634, 38–53.
49. AVPRF, Fond General'nogo Konsul'stva v Tavrize, f. 289, op. 570/1, d. 1634, 61.
50. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 9.
51. AVPRF, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 451, 9–10.
52. AVPRF, Fond General'nogo Konsul'stva v Tavrize, f. 289, op. 570/1, d. 1634, 83.
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54. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 19.
55. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 2.
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58. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 6–7.
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68. Sanctuary or asylum – the designation of certain sanctuaries in Iran that are considered inviolable and were often used by people seeking refuge from prosecution. Jean Calmard, “Bast,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranica.com/newsite/>.
69. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 1–2.
70. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 2.
71. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 3.
72. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 5.
73. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 20.
74. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 6.
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76. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 16.
77. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 19.
78. AVPRF, Fond General'nogo Konsul'stva v Tavrize, f. 289, op. 570/1, d. 1634, 62.
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80. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 451, 6–8.
81. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 451, 12.
82. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 451, 19.
83. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 451, 26.
84. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 451, 35.
85. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 367, 2–15.
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87. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/3, d. 535, 15.
88. AVPRF, Missiia v Persii, f. 194, op. 528/1, d. 451, 2–6.
89. AVPRF, Fond General'nogo Konsul'stva v Tavrize, f. 289, op. 570/1, d. 1634, 54, 62.

## PART II

# INTELLIGENCE AND INTRUSION: THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

## CHAPTER 5

# NEST OF REVOLUTION: THE CAUCASUS, IRAN, AND ARMENIANS

*Houri Berberian*

On 17 November 1905, an activist with the pseudonym, “Japanese” (*Japonats`i*), writing in Armenian from St Petersburg to comrades in Geneva, remarked on the disruption of railway services from St Petersburg to the Caucasus because of strikes. He exclaimed, “Purportedly, the Caucasus is in the hands of revolutionaries ... The time of strikes has passed, armed uprising has emerged.”<sup>1</sup>

The Caucasus in the hands of revolutionaries is an image deeply bound with its rich and multifaceted history. The Caucasus's geographic in-betweenness as a land bridge between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean region is reflected in its history as a crossroads between empires and between East and West. The Caucasus has been incorporated into the Persian, Arab, Mongol, Ottoman, Russian, and Soviet empires at different points in its history, yet it has remained peripheral to these empires. A long history of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual existence has disposed the region both to peace and conflict, division and unity – seemingly paradoxical trends. The Caucasus has been referred to as a “hybrid society” and a “bi- even tri- cultural world” by scholars such as Nina Garsoian.<sup>2</sup> Garsoian, whose specialty lies in the ancient period, sees the ancient Caucasus as a “cultural unit that might be called anachronistically a ‘Third World’ between the Classical/Graeco-Roman and the Oriental/Iranian world powers,” this of course “despite unquestionable local variations of language and custom, as well as occasional internal dissensions over borderlands.”<sup>3</sup> More recently, Stephen Rapp has argued for a pre-national view of the region and “the cosmopolitan and multicultural condition which has characterized a shared Caucasian experience since antiquity.”<sup>4</sup> The idea of the Caucasus as representing “a shared civilizational structure of its own, one evolved from solidarities forged after years of conquest,” of a place of pluralities and mobilities, is perhaps as common as its representation as a focal point of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural conflicts, often sealed off from the rest of the world by its mountainous topography.<sup>5</sup> Charles King, for example, attributes the Caucasus's plurality to its varied topography and climate, contending,

The Caucasus has never been one place but many ... Moving through these varied

landscapes – crossing rivers or coming down out of the hills – literally meant exiting one world and entering another ... Roman writers claimed that scores of translators were required when traders sought to do business there while Arab geographers sometimes labeled the region the *djabal al-alsun*, the mountain of languages.<sup>6</sup>

The interplay of unity and plurality that equally reflects the reality of the Caucasus is perhaps best expressed by the unintentional use of the Caucasus as a term denoting both the singular and plural. Bruce Grant and Lale Yalçın-Heckmann, in their preface to *Caucasus Paradigms*, write

What does it mean to think ethnographically in a world region where peoples have for so long been so closely connected yet so consciously divided? ... For centuries, the Caucasus *have* been home to a dense conglomeration of religions, languages and communities imperfectly drawn together around changing allegiances of empire, Silk Road trade and state socialism. A long line of conquerors – Greek, Roman, Turk, Arab, Mongol, Persian, Ottoman, Russian and Soviet – changed the rules of Caucasus life in multiple ways. Yet despite such evident histories of diaspora, migration, conquest, and cohabitation, the Caucasus *is* renowned for images of closure.”<sup>7</sup> [emphases mine]

In this essay, I argue that as a center of both cultural reception and transmission, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Caucasus served as the playground and battleground of revolutionary ideas that permeated both Iran and Ottoman Anatolia. As such, the Caucasus served as the hinge that connected three revolutions (Russian: 1905, Iranian: 1905–11, Ottoman: 1908) and became the nursery of revolutionary ideas. Furthermore, I emphasize the important role of global developments in transportation and communication, particularly railways, telegraph, and the proliferation of the printed word, in hastening encounters between peoples and ideas as well as generating greater circulation and connections before and during revolutionary struggles. Relying primarily on archival documents from the almost untapped unpublished and published documentation of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (aka Dashnakts`ut`iwn, from hereon ARF), which was one of the first and leading Armenian nationalist and socialist organizations of the period, this essay focuses on the importance and contribution of the Caucasus to connected revolutions, especially the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–11). It does so by exploring the Caucasus in its global, regional, and local context and by centering on the circulation of Armenian revolutionaries as well as ideas, particularly but not exclusively between the Caucasus and Iran. Armenian revolutionaries flowing between the Caucasus, Iran, and the Ottoman Empire are ideal subjects for study: they prepared, collaborated, and participated in all three revolutions; they frequently crossed imperial borders; and, they adopted, adapted, and helped spread influential and global ideologies like socialism from the Caucasus to Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Armenian revolutionaries, as local and regional actors with global ties, as well as the ideas they carried, become a fitting means to study the South Caucasus as a nest of revolution, giving wings to revolutionary ideas, connections, and revolutionaries.<sup>8</sup>

The shifting climate of historical opinion and the rise of global, interactive history and its emphasis on networks – local, regional, and global – allow us to see the Caucasus as a place

of multiple circulations. As Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris, and Jacques Revel contend, “Just as there was a growing market for national histories in the nineteenth century and a mutual process of nation-building, the emergence of history as a discipline and a national (reading) market, something similar might be or is already happening in terms of demand and market for transnational histories.”<sup>9</sup> The global optic, alluded to by these scholars, helps us appreciate the remarkably “connected” nature of Caucasian history and explore the local and regional particularities of the Caucasus at the turn of the twentieth century in conjunction with globally experienced developments, which facilitated and accelerated the circulation of individuals, ideas, and materials. By focusing on one particular group, i.e., Armenians, active in differing degrees in all three revolutions with revolutionary and intellectual centers, this essay seeks to provide a clearer picture of how and why the South Caucasus was such a dynamic and important axis for ideas and the agents carrying them. To this end, the essay will begin with a brief discussion of the concept of time–space compression and its manifestation in South Caucasian urban centers, with a particular focus on the role of railways and telegraphy in facilitating revolutionary activity, including dissemination of literature and circulation of arms and men. This will then be followed by further exploration of the very tangible ways in which time–space compression made an impact on, and was employed by, activists and workers themselves who navigated the Caucasian–Iranian frontiers and brought with them ideologies and ideas, which had a profound impact on imperial subjects and revolutionary struggles.

The dynamic and interconnected nature of life in the South Caucasus at the turn of the twentieth century may best be understood by referring to the toolkit of concepts found in the recent work of a number of scholars. For example, in his influential book, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey notes that the period in which these revolutions took place witnessed significant shifts in technologies of global communication and transportation, resulting in an important new round of “time–space compression,” or the accelerated “shrinking” of the world.<sup>10</sup> By “time–space compression,” Harvey means “processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves.”<sup>11</sup> Processes refers to the shifts in technologies of global communications and transportation that began radically to transform people's lives beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century and accelerating thereafter. These shifts led to a shrinking or “compression” of both time and space, thus making the world smaller, time shorter, and life faster. Harvey explains:

The expansion of the railway network, accompanied by the advent of the telegraph, the growth of steam shipping, and the building of the Suez Canal, the beginnings of radio communication and bicycle and automobile travel at the end of the century, all changed the sense of time and space in radical ways. This period also saw the coming on stream of a whole series of technical innovations ... new technologies of printing and mechanical reproduction allowed a dissemination of news, information, and cultural artefacts throughout ever broader swathes of the population.<sup>12</sup>

In the context of the historically connected world of the South Caucasus, access to easier

and faster transportation technologies and to such global telecommunication technologies as the telegraph and steam-operated presses enabled and accelerated the movement and circulation of information and news from different parts of the world, as well as facilitating the movement of revolutionaries and literature, especially periodicals. It also gave rise to, as Chris Bayly demonstrates in reference to other parts of the world, increasing encounters and connections between societies, leading to both “hybrid politics” and “mixed ideologies” as well as its opposite, a “sense of *difference*, and even antagonism, between people in different societies, and especially between their elites.”<sup>13</sup> We see this phenomenon reflected in the collaboration among Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijani Turks, and Russians in revolutionary activity against tsarist autocracy (and later in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution), as well as fierce intolerance and violence, especially between Armenians and Azerbaijani Turks, from 1905 to 1906.

Time–space compression did not take place in a vacuum but was part and parcel of rapid urban growth, demographic mobility, and migration. The rapid growth of cities like Tiflis and Baku, which “expanded their populations more than ten times,” as well as industrialization and migration, all led to an environment in the South Caucasus that was particular to the area and yet very much part of global transformations.<sup>14</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, almost three-quarters of the population of these cities was migrant.<sup>15</sup> According to Daniel Brower, most migrants were “young, single, male peasants” without family ties in the urban centers, where they searched for work as unskilled or semi-skilled laborers.<sup>16</sup> Overcrowding due to migration led to “demands not only on the urban facilities” but also led to strains on already fragmented relationships among ethnically and linguistically diverse urban Caucasian communities, not only in Baku, Tiflis, as well as Odessa, verging at times on communal violence.<sup>17</sup> Both Baku and Tiflis were in a turbulent and transformative stage. Ronald Suny's assessment of Tiflis as “a city in turmoil, riven by the rivalries and conflicting interests of Armenians and Georgians, the Russian state and Caucasian society, workers and the propertied middle class” as well as a sizable immigrant population also applies to Baku. Baku was shattered by communal tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijani Turks, competing claims, and economic competition, all compounded by increasing numbers of immigrants from areas in the South Caucasus as well as Iran and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>18</sup> Brower paints a similar picture. In Baku and Tiflis, Brower writes, “ethnic and class divisions tended to reinforce one another ....” For Georgian and Azerbaijani workers, Armenian capitalists became both class and national foes.<sup>19</sup> Brower explains these social conflicts not only in terms of cultural and ethnic tensions but as a reflection, he attests, of a struggle “over labor conditions and inequalities of wealth.”<sup>20</sup> The same factors that led to the potential for development and improvement also led to antipathy as the revolution took its course.<sup>21</sup> Both Brower and Suny agree, however, that in the first few months of 1905 different ethnic groups came together at least temporarily as a result of their shared enmity toward the Russian state.<sup>22</sup> That kind of solidarity explains, for example, the crumbling of Russian power in Tiflis.<sup>23</sup>

The geography and position of the Caucasus as a crossroads have facilitated access to diverse knowledge and new ideas and ideologies. Particularly significant for the period under

examination here has been the “technological component” in the dissemination and circulation of ideas and individuals, i.e., advancements in communication and information – in the form of the telegraph as well as increased and easier access to revolutionary literature whether in the form of periodicals, pamphlets, or books – or transportation, i.e., a railway system that, by the early twentieth century, linked Poti, Batum, Vladikavkaz, Tiflis, and Baku.<sup>24</sup> According to J. N. Westwood's study, the first railway that went to the South Caucasus was that of Vladikavkaz, connecting Rostov and Vladikavkaz, just north of Tiflis, in 1875. In the 1880s and 1890s, railways connected Tiflis and Baku.<sup>25</sup> By 1890, railway lines linked Poti, Batum, Tiflis, and Baku.<sup>26</sup> Much more railway construction took place in the late nineteenth century than in the early twentieth century (a 75 percent increase in mileage in the first period compared with only 25 percent in the latter).<sup>27</sup> Westwood points out, “Russian engineers and capital also built lines in Turkey and Persia connecting with the Russian railways.”<sup>28</sup> The dramatic changes in technologies of transportation and communication (i.e., time–space compression) are crucial for understanding the Caucasus as a densely connected, compressed space where revolutionary ideas and elites would be expected to flow and circulate into neighboring regions.

The value of the railways in the Russian Empire, and certainly the Caucasus, is perhaps best expressed by Frithjof Benjamin Schenk's discussion of the way in which rail transport made an impact on the development of geographical mobility in nineteenth-century Russia. As the Russian state began to see the benefits of railways, i.e., as an “opportunity to ease the transport of goods, and as a strategic device that would enable the quick mobilization of troops in peace and war,” more energy was placed on railroad construction despite concerns about potential unwelcome consequences, mainly the mobility of people.<sup>29</sup> While some perceived the mobility resulting from railways as a positive and significant contributing factor to the Russian Empire's wealth, both Georg von Kankrin (finance minister) and Lev Alekseevich Perovskii (interior minister) also warned Nicholas I in the mid-nineteenth century that “the construction of railroads in Russia might cause a dangerous rise in geographical mobility.”<sup>30</sup> As Schenk explains, conservative authors cautioned: “passengers traveling the ‘iron horse’ (*chugunka*) in large numbers might devastate the country like ‘hordes of Arabs and Bashkirs’ had done previously.”<sup>31</sup> Von Kankrin expressed apprehension that the new system would “stimulate ‘communicability’ among the empire's population,” and thus “make ‘unstable people even more unstable’.”<sup>32</sup> While the railway system did not necessarily make people “more unstable,” it did increase their movement, their encounters with one another and with new ideas, and ultimately did help “stimulate ‘communicability,’” an environment more conducive to collaboration in resistance.

From 1894 to 1911, the number of railroad passengers in the Russian Empire increased 285.7 percent.<sup>33</sup> In 1903 alone, 93.5 million third-class and 7.8 million fourth-class tickets were sold.<sup>34</sup> Although there was a slowing down in 1904 and 1905 due to the Russo-Japanese War and the Russian Revolution, as articulated by the “Japanese” with whom I began this essay, numbers only increased thereafter.<sup>35</sup> As Schenk concludes, “the railroad contributed undoubtedly to an enlargement of the geographical radius of mobility of large parts of the society.”<sup>36</sup> It is no surprise, then, that in the late nineteenth century, finance minister Sergei

Witte, “stressed the urgent need for geographical mobility to enhance the economic and moral bonds [*npravstvenye sviazi*] between the various geographical regions of the country” – a far cry from Kankrin's and others' cautionary notices about the impending threat of unstable hordes on the empire.<sup>37</sup>

The significance of railways should not overshadow the important role of the telegraph. In fact, in the Russian and the Ottoman empires, telegraph systems preceded the construction of railways.<sup>38</sup> As Marsha Siefert explains, the telegraph along with telephony accelerated the global interconnectivity, as for the “first time ... symbols were able to move through space without requiring physical transportation of paper or people.”<sup>39</sup> According to Siefert, “By the end of 1864 there were five lines operating in the Caucasus,” including Poti and Yerevan, with Tiflis as a vital “node of the telegraph connection to Persia.”<sup>40</sup> The Russian empire's interest lay in not only securing communications and control over the Caucasus in the south but also rivaling the British in Iran further south.<sup>41</sup> Siefert concludes, “Overall, by the early twentieth century, all the provincial capitals, sea ports, industrial centres and most of the small towns of the Russian Empire were connected by the telegraph network,”<sup>42</sup> with the intention of more closely connecting the periphery to the center and thus establishing greater control over the vast expanse of the empire.

Although the telegraph, much like the railways, was established to assist imperial rule, these two technologies could and were in turn used to defy the states that initiated and carried out their construction, as the many telegrams between revolutionaries and the transport of arms and literature through the railways confirm.<sup>43</sup> The further away from the center, the more difficult it was to control telegraph communication.<sup>44</sup> The telegraph often became a target of strikers and revolutionaries, as telegraph workers went on strike in the Caucasus, Ottoman Empire, and Iran during revolutionary struggle.<sup>45</sup> After all, these “more politically minded strategists understood how to use the telegraph system to challenge the very empires that supported their construction,” as the many telegrams between Armenian activists in all three revolutions verify.<sup>46</sup> Revolutionaries exploited the telegraph the way they exploited other forms of the printed word. They used telegraphs to incite workers to action, to spread vital news and instructions, and to communicate with each other across great distances. Therefore, the telegraph – much like the railways – accelerated revolutionary communication and movement.

Workers, intellectuals, and revolutionary activists all took advantage of the more rapid and far-reaching methods of transportation and communication already radically transforming the social fabric of the region, and the latter two were remarkably adept at exploiting it and the steamship to disseminate a variety of revolutionary literature in the form of books, periodicals, pamphlets, and so forth.<sup>47</sup> The Armenian activists' experience and know-how even solicited help from the anti-Hamidian Prince Sabaheddin, who requested that the ARF see to the transfer of his society's (League for Private Initiative and Decentralization) organ (*Terakki/Progress*) from Europe through the South Caucasus and into the Ottoman Empire.<sup>48</sup>

The South Caucasus, Tiflis and especially Baku, became hubs of circulation along with

other centers like Odessa and Batumi.<sup>49</sup> Abraham Giwlkhandanian, an activist and member of the ARF, who wrote his impressions of his revolutionary days in Baku sometime before his death in the 1930s, remembers the many teachers working in the oil fields of Baku after losing their jobs due to tsarist closures of village schools. He writes that they set up reading rooms in the oil fields and received periodicals and books, which they then made available to workers.<sup>50</sup> In certain cases, they read revolutionary literature in groups, including Marx's *Das Kapital* in Russian translation until an unspecified dissension brought the reading to a halt after a few months.<sup>51</sup> Sometimes, workers like those of the oil fields of Arafelov formed “self-enlightenment and self-help” societies, contributing from 1 to 10 percent of their salaries to the purchase of newspapers and books, thus creating a sizeable library, which workers at Pitoev and Mantashev oil fields also utilized.<sup>52</sup>

The significance and impact of the printed word – a byproduct of another technology of time–space compression – on the development of both the literate and illiterate public are well established, but a few words are necessary as the seemingly “remarkable diffusion of the printed word” was certainly not unique to the Armenians but common among all city dwellers.<sup>53</sup> Brower remarks on the “explosion of popular culture through books, brochures, pamphlets, and papers ... [and] public readings and literacy schools, as well as through informal contacts (such as those facilitated by the ubiquitous tavern).”<sup>54</sup> Periodicals were often read aloud by the literate and discussed by both literate and illiterate audiences and for much of the time unhindered by tsarist censorship.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, while subscription numbers might be considered low, they do not provide the whole picture. For example, the literary and political monthly, *Murch* (Hammer), which competed with multiple newspapers (judging merely by the ads appearing in *Murch's* own pages), had 900 subscribers largely in the Russian Empire followed by Iran and beyond by October 1904.<sup>56</sup> What François Georgeon has shown in his discussion of the Ottoman case also resonates for the Caucasus and Iran:

The access to the written word is not exclusively reserved to those who know how to read and write. There exist, between the oral and written worlds, passages, mediations.... Very often reading is collective (in particular, reading of a newspaper, which is done aloud by somebody who knows how to read (the imam, the school teachers, the officer,...) in coffee houses, and especially in these kiraathane, which literally mean “reading houses”, which are half-way between European reading rooms and Eastern coffeehouses, and which began appearing in the 1860s.<sup>57</sup>

Newspapers, books, pamphlets, and brochures made their way to the Caucasus and the Ottoman Empire from Europe often through Iran or originated in the Caucasus and traveled west and south. For example, until the banning of the ARF's official party organ *Droshak* (Banner) into Iran in July 1906, 1500–1700 copies arrived from Geneva where it was published and passed on to the Caucasus along with other published material.<sup>58</sup> In 1905, the bulk of 7,000 copies of *Droshak* was carried into Ottoman Armenian provinces and a smaller number to the Caucasus.<sup>59</sup> Other regions in Iran, specifically Ardabil and Astara, reported transporting from 12,000 to 15,000 copies of *Droshak*, 500 of *Hayrenik* (Fatherland), a small

(unspecified) number of *Revolutsyonnaya Rossiya* (Revolutionary Russia, organ of the Socialist Revolutionary Party) and Armenian and Russian brochures, and Russian Social Democratic Labor Party newspapers (*Vpered* (Forward), *Iskra* (Spark), *Proletarii*) and bourgeois-liberal *Osvobozhdenie* (Liberation, 1902–05).<sup>60</sup> The Russian periodicals, *Vpered*, most likely travelled from the South Caucasus to Iran while *Droshak* (published in Geneva and Paris), *Iskra* (published in Stuttgart, Munich, Geneva, and London), *Osvobozhdenie* (published in Stuttgart and Paris), *Proletarii* (published in Vyborg, Geneva, and Paris), *Revolutsyonnaya Rossiya* (Geneva), and *Hayrenik* (Boston) most probably took the opposite route: once they reached Iran from Europe and the United States they moved up to the Caucasus.<sup>61</sup> The evidence also points to what one of the co-founders of the ARF, Simon Zavarian, writing from Istanbul refers to as a “book famine.”<sup>62</sup> He pleads for books and photos, citing “an inexhaustible demand.”<sup>63</sup> In many letters, Zavarian requests that books in general be sent to Istanbul, specifically mentioning the demand for works by Karl Marx and Pyotr Kropotkin (prominent Russian anarchist), with the intent of having them translated and published in Istanbul.<sup>64</sup>

The routes and modes of transportation by which these periodicals and other publications in the original language or in translation crossed borders, point to time–space compression, in particular the vital role of technological advances, whether railroads and steamships or even sailboats, and the expressed demand for such reading material. In addition to regular postal mail, all were used to transport periodicals, books, and pamphlets/brochures with relative regularity across the Caucasian and Iranian worlds, thus further fostering time–space compression.<sup>65</sup> In mainly Tiflis and Baku, between the years 1904 and 1912, 104 newspapers appeared (76 in Tiflis and 28 in Baku) of which at least 32 (possibly more) were revolutionary. Of these, the ARF published 14 newspapers (13 in Tiflis and one in Baku), the Hnchaks published four (three in Tiflis and one in Baku), and other Armenian socialists, mostly social democrats, published 14, the majority in Baku.<sup>66</sup> After 1908, the number of periodicals published in the Caucasus decreased substantially, as the focus of publications as well as the individuals behind them moved from the Caucasus to Istanbul (and Izmir) and, to a lesser degree, Iran due in large part to the Stolypin crackdown on revolutionaries and their activities in the South Caucasus, and the Ottoman revolution. The number of papers published exceeded that of the Caucasus.<sup>67</sup>

The impact of newspapers circulating by whatever means in many directions, originating in the Caucasus and Europe and traversing through Iran, should not be underestimated. They served to inform, enlighten, and propagate, and, as Ilham Khuri-Makdisi has pointed out in the case of the Eastern Mediterranean, “One of the main lessons radicals drew from world news was ‘how to “do” revolution.’”<sup>68</sup> Our Armenian revolutionaries were very much aware of the motivational and propagandistic effect of newspapers as well as circulars, brochures, and books, as they invested much energy and time in seeing to their publication, circulation, and dissemination. Furthermore, the spread of literacy and the printed word had the power to bring people together. Although differences and divisions among communities intensified and ethnic bonds deepened, Michael Hamm points in his study on Kiev to how “The printed word could break down class and national barriers, promote sensitivity and understanding, contribute to an

urban environment more tolerant of diversity and more amenable to change, and stimulate new ways of thinking about equity, justice, and authority,” and therefore, create some form of social solidarity.<sup>69</sup> The printed word, thus, had profound consequences and multiple functions and became part of a larger process that in the long nineteenth century led to the development, as Bayly argues, of “a kind of international class structure ... [that] At the very least... could perceive and articulate common interests which breached the boundaries of the nation-state....”<sup>70</sup> It is no wonder, then, that cities, including in the South Caucasus, where time–space compression was active and the printed word thrived and contributed further to the shrinking of the world, “were at the center of the revolutionary conflict of the early twentieth century. They became both the crucible in which these movements took on real life and the spark igniting opposition in other parts of the country.”<sup>71</sup>

Contemporary correspondence and newspapers as well as Giwlkhandanian speak to this revolutionary disposition of South Caucasian cities. Giwlkhandanian emphasizes the activist environment of the oil fields, even referring to the Tumayev oil fields as the place where “revolutionary activists were formed” and Baku as the city with the most *hayduks* (a term borrowed from the Bulgarian romanticized heroes to refer to revolutionaries) and the center through which all *hayduks* at one point or another passed.<sup>72</sup> Some of these men even came from the Ottoman Empire, passed through or stayed in Iran before stopping in the Caucasus.<sup>73</sup> With them (and students from Geneva,<sup>74</sup> too) passed arms and ammunition. For example, the “Khariskh” (Anchor) arms workshop in Tabriz, which was established in 1891 by ARF members, had as many as 36 workers in a 15-year period, many of whom came from the Tula arms factory in Russia. By 1896 alone, the workshop had produced 600 firearms. Military equipment like guns and munitions was transported to Tabriz after being bought from Russian armory workers in Tula and Tiflis and stored in different Caucasian cities. After assembly in Tabriz, they were delivered to various points near the Ottoman border and later across that border into Ottoman territory.<sup>75</sup> Materials for explosives were also transported across borders. For example, Rostom (Stepan Zorian, co-founder of the ARF) writing to Samson Tadeosian, an ARF activist in Salmas and participant in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, promises to bring with him samples of potassium chlorate in crystal and powder form, to use with other compounds to make explosives.<sup>76</sup> Rostom writes:

I want to write a few things about explosive elements, for which there will be great need soon. Your grounds are suitable for those kinds of experiments. We always place our hope on dynamite, but that is difficult to find. It is possible to use a few compounds, which although they do not have the force of dynamite, nevertheless are strong enough, which you will see from the experiments. Today, I write about two of them; henceforth, I will also communicate about others. The essential part of all these compounds is potassium chlorate [chlorate de potasse],<sup>77</sup> with which they [treat] the throat. It is necessary to get a hold of it in great quantity, in haste. If it cannot be found in Persia in great quantity, telegram or write, we will send it immediately; you may have it brought from Russia ... That salt combined with other elements, brings forth good explosives.<sup>78</sup>

He adds that that it is indeed easy to acquire and transport and he provides instructions on storage and use; he also asks that a young man from Baku be secured who knows how to make bombs.<sup>79</sup>

Giwlkhandanian attests to Baku's large role in transferring arms, ammunition, and explosive material for bombs.<sup>80</sup> Baku, however, was not alone. As the archival documents suggest, Tiflis, too, was such a site.<sup>81</sup> Giwlkhandanian asserts, “Baku was such a place that large numbers of workers and intellectuals were gathered from all corners of the Caucasus. True, at that time it was impossible to carry out any activity in a legal manner; however, that same living bond that existed between Baku and its environs markedly facilitated every kind of activity.”<sup>82</sup> Both the regime and the revolutionary parties were very conscious of Baku's significance to the Caucasus, which they considered “Russia's most vulnerable spot.”<sup>83</sup> All this demonstrates the significance of the revolutionary environment of the South Caucasus in circulation and in connecting a number of other regions from West to East.

The developments in the transportation and communication infrastructure that brought about time–space compression in the Caucasus radically transformed the lives and activities of revolutionary subjects residing in the region's central urban hubs. The impact of these changes becomes discernable upon further exploration of the ways in which Armenian activists exploited and were moved – literally and figuratively – by the turn-of-the-century's time–space compression, as they spread and disseminated revolutionary activity into the neighboring empires.

The historical impact of Caucasian Armenians on the Ottoman and especially Iranian communities is significant. Starting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, teachers and activists, who were often one and the same, moved from the South Caucasus into the Ottoman Empire and especially Iran. Their presence and activities vastly influenced, and at times transformed, Armenian intellectual and political life as well as political action in the Ottoman Empire and more so in Iran. Most Armenian teachers to Iran came from the Caucasus, especially Tiflis, and some from the Ottoman Empire. They included nationalist writers, academics, and revolutionary activists.<sup>84</sup> Armenian political parties began activities in the Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia, and soon after spread to northern Iran in the late nineteenth century.<sup>85</sup> Many sources, some of whose authors were political activists themselves, testify to the significance and number of Armenian revolutionaries who came down to Iran from Tiflis, Baku, and other cities and towns in the Caucasus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>86</sup>

The crisscrossing of intellectuals and revolutionaries within the Caucasus, Anatolia, and Iran was ubiquitous in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and made even easier and more frequent due to the increase in time–space compression and the proliferation of railroads in particular. A quick look at a few individuals will illustrate and reinforce the larger argument involving the impact of technologies of communication and transportation on the circulation of the Caucasian revolutionary elite made thus far. Several individuals stand out not only because of their travels to and from the South Caucasus but also because of their activism in at least two, if not three, of the regions and/or revolutions. Rostom, one of the founders of

the ARF, shows up in all three regions during revolution.<sup>87</sup> Rostom's case is particularly interesting, with his living and working in Bulgaria (especially Filibe (Plovdiv) and Sofia but also Varna on the Black Sea coast), Geneva, Tiflis, Baku, Tabriz, Tehran, Istanbul, Erzerum (Karin), Van, and so forth. Rostom's letters testify to his circulation. In 1898, Rostom lived in Geneva working on *Droshak*; from 1899 to 1902 he supervised ARF activities in Bulgaria; in 1903 he was in the Caucasus as a leading figure in the struggle against Russian confiscation of Armenian church properties; from 1904 to 1905, he traveled between the Caucasus (especially, Tiflis) and Geneva; and from 1905 to 1906, at the height of the Armeno-Azeri clashes and Russian Revolution, he was in the Caucasus, even meeting with Father Gapon, whose leadership of a peaceful protest in St Petersburg to present Tsar Nicholas II with a petition led to the infamous Bloody Sunday on 22 January 1905, one of the most significant events of the Russian Revolution of 1905. According to Rostom, Gapon proposed collaboration, in early 1905.<sup>88</sup> In 1907, Rostom was in Bulgaria; in 1908, in Tabriz and Tehran, entering collaboration with Iranian constitutionalists and revolutionaries; in 1909, in Tabriz, taking part in some military maneuvers against royalist forces, and in Istanbul strengthening bonds with Ottoman revolutionaries. In 1910, he lived in Istanbul and Karin, continuing his political and educational work. Rostom's comrades recognized that “he lived a wandering life, completely devoted to his ‘work.’” An anecdote narrated by a comrade is telling. Hovsep Tadeosian recounts, “one day in Tiflis, on the street, Rostom meets his wife.” His wife, surprised to run into him, asks, “When did you come?” Rostom responds, “It has been seven days... but I was very busy; I was not able to pass by the house.” His wife replies, “Fine... when you have time, drop by the house, too.”<sup>89</sup>

Rostom may have been an exception in the number of sites and the frequency of his visits yet his journeys across frontiers, during tumultuous political moments and struggles, were also much more widespread than one might assume. For example, Nikol Duman (Nikoghayos Ter Hovhannesian), who was educated in the Caucasus, traveled as a teacher and activist to northern Iran, returned to the Caucasus in 1905, escaped arrest in 1909, and took part in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution near its end, in 1911.<sup>90</sup> The trajectories of revolutionary leader and later chief of police Yeprem Khan, Keri (Arshak Gavafian), Martiros Charukhchian, and Dashnaktsakan Khecho (Khachatur Amirian) from activism and militancy in the Caucasus to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution are very similar.<sup>91</sup> Vaso Khachaturian, a member of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party in Baku and activist in the Russian Revolution also served with the *mujahedin* in Tabriz starting in 1908.<sup>92</sup> Others got their start in Ottoman Anatolia and in all cases ended up in Iran and the Caucasus.<sup>93</sup> Matsun Khecho (Grigor Mirzabegian) took a different route, starting in Iran, joining militants in the Caucasus in 1905, working in the Minerva oil fields (owned by Hambartsum Melikian) in Baku, organizing workers there, and returning to Iran in time to defend Tehran against royalist forces.<sup>94</sup> Many activists took advantage, of course, of the network of party members and allies within and across frontiers and were sometimes arrested or detained as they tried to make their way.

We have examined the technologies that facilitated the mobility and movement of the revolutionary elite and their ideas across the networks that stretched out from the South

Caucasus to Iran in the south and Russian and Ottoman Empires in the north and west respectively. The question then arises as to how the individuals in question were able to navigate and move across regional and state frontiers. Correspondence between revolutionaries indicates that, whenever possible, they made use of passports (*ants`agir*). Several letters mention such passports being offered and procured by activists. For example, Rostom writes about the availability of Dutch, Belgian, American, Cypriot, and Iranian passports for party members making their way across the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman frontiers.<sup>95</sup> In one letter, Rostom writes, “Enclosed I am sending a French passport that was with us; perhaps it will be necessary ...” He then lists several other passports. “Please be aware that we have ready: 1) one Persian passport ... 2) [one] American ... 3) [and one] Cypriote.”<sup>96</sup> In another letter, he maintains, “It is possible to find as many Belgian and Dutch passports as you want.”<sup>97</sup> Although imperial borders were much easier to cross in the early twentieth century than they later became as nation-states began to “monopol[ize]... legitimate means of movement,” passports – legally obtained or not – nevertheless assisted and expedited frontier crossings and circulation.<sup>98</sup>

Workers, too, became important conduits of ideas and experiences as they crossed the Caucasian and Iranian frontiers. While we have no exact figures for Armenian Iranian migrant workers crossing from Iran, especially from Azerbaijan province, to the South Caucasus, we may assume that they were part of the hundreds of thousands of Iranian migrant workers making their way to the Caucasus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some from heavily Armenian-populated regions.<sup>99</sup> Tsarist authorities began collecting information on Iranian migration to the Caucasus and Central Asia in the late nineteenth century, even issuing visas in Mashhad, Rasht, and Azerbaijan, although workers did not always possess official documentation.<sup>100</sup> Most were manual workers with some working in Baku's oil industry and comprising about 22 percent of the workforce in 1903 alone.<sup>101</sup> The numbers, which range from more than 67,000 in 1900 to more than 191,000 in 1911, reflect only legal migrants and, therefore, only a portion of the actual numbers, which may have reached as many as 300,000 by 1905.<sup>102</sup> What is equally interesting – and key to our discussion of circulation – is that a large number of these migrants returned to Iran. In 1900 more than 57,000 returned, while in 1911 more than 157,000 went back home.<sup>103</sup> This is a critical detail because it demonstrates that migrant workers returned to their communities influenced or affected by worker movements and strikes, socialist ideas, and revolutionary fervor in general.<sup>104</sup> As Iago Gocheleishvili demonstrates, these workers were a “live and mobile link that connected the Tbilisi, Baku, Tabriz, and Rasht revolutionary groups.”<sup>105</sup> Workers and revolutionaries themselves, therefore, helped create and contribute to deepening bonds between urban centers, diverse political and economic groups, and revolutionary movements.

Although Iranian workers proved difficult to organize in Baku, some did take part in strikes there in 1903, 1904, and 1906, and in Iran in 1906.<sup>106</sup> Cosroe Chaqueri emphasizes the influence of the Caucasian milieu on these workers and the development of social democratic organizations in Iran:

Their participation in industrial strikes and political events gave them the experience that they could never have acquired at home, where both the economic and political conditions for such actions were lacking. Yet their seasonal return to northern Iran was bound to spread the word that a different kind of life, one improved through political struggle, was possible. By the time the Constitutional Revolution took place, the notion of workers striking as a means of pressuring those who hired and pitilessly exploited wage earners had been implanted inside the country and acquired sufficient credibility to be acted upon. It was against this background that various Social-Democratic organizations were born and took an active part in the struggle for political change in Iran.<sup>107</sup>

The Caucasian Muslim social democratic Hemmat party, which collaborated closely with the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP) and the Armenian social democratic Hnchakian party, played an important part in galvanizing Iranian migrant workers and assisting in the formation of the Ferqeh-ye Ejtima`iyun `Amiyun (Social Democratic Party).<sup>108</sup> Chaqueri goes further by emphasizing the essential role of Armenian social democrats like Grigor Yeghikian, Tigran Ter-Hakobian, and Vram Pulosian in shaping and even initiating Iranian social democracy, including the Democrat Party and *Iran-e Now* (New Iran).<sup>109</sup> He concludes,

In short, Armenian Social Democrats and their Caucasian comrades, seeking a radical political change and all round development in Iran, introduced into Iran's political life new ideas, institutions, and political methods and procedures... They also demonstrated profound knowledge of socio-economic issues and dedication to, and love for, their country's future."<sup>110</sup>

Gocheleishvili, too, remarks on the significant role that South Caucasians played and the close collaboration of Georgians, Azerbaijani Turks, and Armenians in Iran.<sup>111</sup> He argues,

With years of experience in conducting revolutionary activities and with invaluable experience gained in the anti-Tsarist revolt in western Georgia and the 1905 Russian Revolution, the Transcaucasian revolutionary groups perhaps believed that they had a lot to share with the Iranian resisters. For this to be implanted, first, the Transcaucasians needed to have in Iran not simply experienced fighters, but politically and theoretically well-prepared leaders who would work in Iran in accordance with the party programme. Secondly, it required effective coordination among those Transcaucasian volunteers in Tabriz and Rasht who were affiliated with the Transcaucasian political organizations. It did not take the Transcaucasian revolutionary organizations long to take measures towards achieving the goal of establishing control over their corps in Iran, make sure that their activities in Iran were conducted according to the directives from the Caucasus.<sup>112</sup>

Equally important as men and arms were ideas – particularly socialism in its many variants – that filtered through the borders via revolutionaries, intellectuals, workers, as well as literature, including revolutionary pamphlets, circulars, newspapers (revolutionary party

organs), and so forth. The subject of socialist ideas and actions warrants further discussion and detail given its complexity and variations; however, because of the scope and limited space of this essay, I will only touch upon a few aspects to provide some insight into the circulation of ideas and will pursue a more thorough treatment in a larger study.

Ideas and ideologies, especially socialism, made their way from the South Caucasus to Iran, and earlier from Western Europe to the South Caucasus, and were adapted, adjusted, and altered according to political, social, and economic circumstances as well as cultural preferences.<sup>113</sup> Socialism in the early twentieth century not only came by various means, i.e., through roving revolutionaries as well as literature, all taking advantage of the technological component of time–space compression; it also came in many varieties (as did nationalism), was often vaguely expressed, and commonly intersected with nationalism and other ideologies despite attempts by some to view it merely in its strictly Marxist sense. In many places, such as Russia during the Russian Revolution of 1905, for example, the non-Marxist Socialist Revolutionaries garnered many more supporters than the Marxist Social Democrats.<sup>114</sup>

South Caucasian Armenian socialists ran the gamut from the minority social democratic Specifists to the socialist-nationalist Dashnaks and everything in between like the Hnchaks.<sup>115</sup> While the latter espoused a social democratic ideology, following Georgi Plekhanov and Karl Kautsky more closely, and suffered from multiple splits and secessions by party members to join other social democratic parties or form their own, they continued to exist as an Armenian social democratic party. The ARF, whose socialism frequently became the brunt of ridicule, hostility, and censure despite and sometimes because of its membership in the Second International in 1907, and which was much more closely aligned in thought and action with Russian and South Caucasian Socialist Revolutionaries, embraced and advocated aspects of the rather divergent socialisms of Karl Kautsky and Jean Jaurès. Armenian socialists frequently translated the works of Western European and Russian socialists. Based on my own perusal of press and archival documents as well as Ter Minassian's assessment, Kautsky seemed to be the most popular of the socialist thinkers among Armenians.<sup>116</sup> The Dashnaks' embrace of the French socialist Jaurès was in large part due to his views on the national question within socialism. Jaurès saw the nation “as the framework within which the struggle for socialism [could be] conducted” while the Social Democrat Kautsky believed that, because nations were products of modern economic development, they would also disappear with further economic change.<sup>117</sup> The ARF's affinity to seemingly divergent views on the national question may be a reflection of two key tendencies in the party. First, the ARF's history – whether in the South Caucasus, the Ottoman Empire, or Iran – demonstrates a party that for the most part evolved and adapted according to contemporary local, regional, and global circumstances and needs. Second and closely related, the ARF despite its highly organized structure remained fairly decentralized and consequently entertained a number of political and intellectual viewpoints within its ranks.

Socialism's appeal to European and Caucasian groups extended to Armenians as well, who were deeply inspired by their contact and exposure to Russian revolutionary populism and Marxist socialism.<sup>118</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the ideologies of the Armenian

political parties formed by Caucasian Armenian intellectuals mirrored many of the debates, disputes, and complexities of the Russian revolutionary movement at the same time that they reflected the general and particular Caucasian circumstances and context as well as Ottoman and Iranian realities.<sup>119</sup> Although very few Armenians were involved in the Russian populist movement (*Narodnichestvo*), which relied on the peasantry rather than an urban proletariat for social revolution, and very few adopted the aims of the populists, namely a form of agrarian socialism based on the village commune, most young Armenian intellectuals emulated the populist call to serve the “people” and they maintained populist leanings even as socialists. The tsarist secret police, Okhrana, also corroborate these connections in a report on the ARF. According to the report, the ARF was very much swayed by the Narodnaya Volya movement and had economic demands no different from other Russian revolutionary parties.<sup>120</sup> Okhrana maintained that the ARF came “under the influence of the Caucasus's socialist workers movement and as a consequence of the spread of Armenian intelligentsia's socialist ideas,” it quickly adopted the views of the Socialist Revolutionaries, moving increasingly closer to their party.<sup>121</sup> In some cases, however, Okhrana's estimation of the ARF was rather skewed, perhaps intentionally; for example, it calls the ARF a state within a state with an army of 100,000 and resembling “anarchist-communists.”<sup>122</sup> Influences on the ARF and other Armenian socialists came not only from Russian populists and Russian (and Caucasian) Socialist Revolutionaries but also from Russian (and Caucasian) Social Democrats and Western European socialists, like Jean Jaurès and others. Influence was not limited merely to reading, translation, and disseminating ideas and revolutionary literature; it involved face-to-face encounters, correspondence, and even collaboration between revolutionaries in the Caucasus and Iran on the one hand and European intellectuals and revolutionary thinkers on the other – all made feasible by the accelerated shrinking of the world.

Socialism in its many mutations appealed to Armenians for many reasons. For its Armenian followers, socialism promised political, cultural, and economic freedoms and harmonious existence.<sup>123</sup> This was especially meaningful for Caucasian Armenians facing growing ethnic conflict, especially the violence between Armenians and Azerbaijani Turks in the South Caucasus, as well as increasing Russian and Georgian anti-Armenian sentiment and prejudice. This on-the-ground practical experience may have been strengthened by continuing decreasing interest in the Armenian Question after the 1880s and the subsequent disenchantment to some degree with European moderate liberal nationalism and the realization of the need for a more radical socialist ideology that held the potential of deliverance from oppressive rule: (in order of importance, according to them) Ottoman, Russian, and Iranian.<sup>124</sup>

The Armeno-Azeri conflict and the Russian Revolution made a strong impact on the socialist leanings of both Hinchaks and Dashnaks as well as other Armenian socialists, many of whom were social democrats, leading to program changes that led to closer collaboration with other Caucasian revolutionaries and made the struggle in Caucasia against tsarist autocracy a principal focus of propaganda and action. The Dashnaks' 1905 Caucasian Project formally declared tsarism the enemy of the Armenian people, putting the Russian state on the same footing as the Ottoman state, and began collaboration with Russian revolutionary parties, especially Socialist Revolutionaries, and committed itself more openly to the socialist cause

and the working classes, which it reinforced in 1907 by linking socialism to collaboration with progressive forces.<sup>125</sup> Hnchaks collaborated closely with the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party in the worker strikes and uprisings of the Russian Revolution of 1905.<sup>126</sup> In 1905, the Hnchak Congress resolved, “To struggle and obtain political democracy based on Marxist principles” in the Ottoman Empire and “proletarian revolutionary activity in the Caucasus.”<sup>127</sup> Some Caucasian Hnchaks considered this move insufficient, committed themselves to a purely class struggle in the Caucasus, renounced the new program, and seceded from the party to join the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP).<sup>128</sup>

Arshavir Chilingirian, a Caucasian specifist along with two former Hnchaks, Vram Pilosian and Sedrak Banvorian, contributed intellectually to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution by helping to found the Tabriz Social Democratic party in 1905 and the Democrat Party in 1909, of which Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, Tabriz delegate to the *Majles* (assembly), was also a founding member and who along with Tigran Ter Hakobian became its intellectual leaders.<sup>129</sup> Ter Hakobian, like Pilosian, was forming democrat groups and in addition organizing workers in Tabriz.<sup>130</sup> When he moved to Tehran in 1910, he became a regular contributor to the Democrat Party organ, *Iran-e Now*, writing on such issues as the destructive nature of political terrorism.<sup>131</sup> According to Janet Afary, Ter Hakobian wrote many of the “more substantial” theoretical essays in the journal, which he submitted in French for translation to Persian before publication.<sup>132</sup> In January 1910, Hnchaks and Iranian social democrats created an Iranian branch of the Hnchakian party.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, close relations between Hnchak Simon Simonian and his student in Russian, Key Ostovan (Hoseyn Mo`tamed) – subsequently *Majles* delegate – led to the translation of the Hnchak program into Persian with the collaborative efforts of Key Ostovan and leading Hnchak theoretician Grigor Yeghikian. Yeghikian was yet another roving activist who started out in the Ottoman Empire, went to the Caucasus, and ended up in Iran in 1902, long before the Russian and Iranian revolutions. Arguably, the most significant ideological influence on Iranian constitutionalists came from Armenian social democrats, many of whom were from the Caucasus.

While scholarship on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution as well as the Ottoman and Russian revolutions has touched upon and in some cases even more closely explored connections between the revolutions largely in a comparative context, it has neglected to situate clearly and deeply these revolutions within early twentieth-century global transformations. Furthermore, it has failed to examine, in a systematic way, the circulation of individuals, literature, material, and ideas that helps not only connect those revolutions but situate them in their world historical context. The meaningful and profound impact of the Caucasus on its surroundings, especially Iran, as a nest of revolution connecting revolutionaries and revolutionary struggles is deeply intertwined with wider global transformations. The extent of circulation of men, arms, and ideas that we witness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries only becomes possible when we consider the role of new technologies like the railways and the telegraph and the proliferation of periodicals and books, all of which had a powerful effect on revolutionary activists taking part in multiple struggles against autocracy. Therefore, *fin de siècle* time-space compression resulting from

global developments and revolutions in transportation, communication, and economy taking place and accelerating in the early twentieth century together with the increasing connections between and entanglements of regions, near and far, had profound consequences for the way groups began to think of their place in the world and their social, political, and economic interests. The South Caucasus with its roving revolutionaries and itinerant ideas is an ideal site to observe and explore time–space compression, circulation, and connections both within its borders and beyond, especially with its geographically and historically bound neighbor, Iran.

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## Notes

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  21. *Ibid.*
  22. *Ibid.*, 329–30, 346; Suny, “Tiflis,” 275.
  23. Brower, “Urban Revolution,” 349.
  24. Frederik Coene, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (London, 2010), 21–2; for the technological component, see also Struck, Ferris and Revel, “Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History.” For telegraph advances and history, see Peter J. Hugill, *Global Communications since 1844: Geopolitics and Technology* (Baltimore, 1999). See also, J. N. Westwood, *A History of Russian Railways* (London, 1964), 45, 60, 61, 100, 140, 144, 168, 245.
  25. See the maps in Westwood, *A History of Russian Railways*, 60, 61.
  26. *Ibid.*, 100.
  27. *Ibid.*, 104.
  28. *Ibid.*, 140.
  29. Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, “‘This New Means of Transportation Will Make Unstable People More Unstable’: Railways and Geographical Mobility in Tsarist Russia,” in John Randolph and Eugene M. Avrutin, eds, *Russia in Motion: Cultures of Human Mobility*

since 1850 (Chicago, 2012), 3.

30. Ibid., 4 and 8.
31. Ibid., 4.
32. Ibid., 3 and 4.
33. Ibid., 10.
34. Ibid., 5 and 9.
35. Ibid., 10.
36. Ibid., 9.
37. Ibid.
38. Marsha Siefert, “‘Chingis-Khan with the Telegraph’: Communications in the Russian and Ottoman Empires,” in Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen, eds, *Comparing Empires: Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oakville, CT, 2011), 82.
39. Ibid., 81–2, 99. Although Siefert focuses on Harold Adams Innis's argument that the “‘bias of communication” in empire shifted from time to space,” thus “reducing signalling time” and “controlling space,” one could also point to the impact of the telegraph in compressing both time and space. (82) See also, Harold A. Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto, 1951) and *Empire and Communications* (Toronto, 1972).
40. Siefert, “‘Chingis-Khan with the Telegraph,’” 93.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 101
43. Ibid., 104.
44. Ibid., 102.
45. Ibid., 103. Siefert only mentions Russian and Ottoman telegraph strikes, but the same applied to Iran as well. See Cosroe Chaqueri, *Origins of Social Democracy in Modern Iran* (Seattle, 2001), 93.
46. Ibid., 82, 103–4.
47. For Varna sailboat, see ARF Archives, B 377-4; for Romanian steamships, B 377-1, B 377-5. Regarding the transport of books and newspapers via sailboat and steamship, see B B 377-31, B 377-32, B 377-34, 445-4. Folder B 580 is full of references to newspapers, arms, being received in Iran but does not specify coming from Caucasus. An abundance of information and detail regarding transportation of arms and literature and the traffic of activists may be found in the correspondence, reports, and minutes of Dashnak bodies and members in the ARF Archives. See also Andre Amurian, *H. H. Dashnaks ‘ut ‘iwně Parskastanum, 1890–1918* [The A. R. Federation in Persia, 1890–1918] (Tehran, 1950), 12–13.
48. ARF archives, B 328-8, B 328-17.
49. ARF archives, B 377-10.

50. A[braham] Giwlkhandanian, *Bagui derĕ mer azatagrakan sharzhman mĕj* [Baku's role in our liberation movement] (Tehran, 1981), 23, 25.
51. The Marx reading group had 8–10 workers. See *ibid.*, 27.
52. *Ibid.*, 24. Workers at the Caspian Co. read mostly Russian literature. See *ibid.*, 25.
53. Brower, “Urban Revolution,” 342.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*; Altstadt-Mirhadi “Baku”, 303.
56. For subscription numbers, see *Murch Monthly* (Tiflis), 10 October 1904, 158. Specificists, a “political minority in a national minority” as Ter Minassian calls them, had seven newspapers in Baku and Tiflis between the years 1904 and 1912 and more than a dozen brochures and publications, including translations of Kautsky, Plekhanov, in 1906 alone, interested mostly in the national question and syndicalism, “confirm[ing] the prestige of German social democracy and the triad of Bebel-Liebkecht-Kautsky” (96). Anaide Ter Minassian, “Aux origines du marxisme arménien: Les spécifistes,” *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 19/1–2 (Jan.–June 1978): 67–117, 94–6. See also Anaide Ter Minassian, “The Role of the Armenian Community in the Foundation and Development of the Socialist Movement in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1876–1923,” in Mete Tunçay and Erik J. Zürcher, eds, *Socialism and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (London, 1994), 133, 134.
57. François Georgeon, “Lire et écrire à la fin de l'Empire ottoman: quelques remarques introductives,” *Revue du monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 75–76 (1995): 169–79 (178), translated by Ilham Khuri-Makdisi. Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley, 2010), 36–7.
58. Report of A.R.F. Vrezh Committee, 25 November 1906 in Hrach Dasnabedian, ed., *Niwter H. H. Dashnaks`ut`ean patmut`ean hamar* (Beirut, 1984), 4: 282. Both the Azerbaijan Central Committee report and an article appearing in *Droshak* blamed the Russian state for exerting pressure on the Iranian government. See Rostom to Azerbaijan Central Committee, 17 February 1905, document 46-1, in *Rostom Namakani* [Rostom Letters] (Beirut, 1999), 379, and Western Bureau to Vrezh Central Committee, date unspecified, document 46-7, in *Rostom Namakani*, 385–6.
59. Minutes of Azerbaijan Regional Congress, Session 3, 3 February 1906, in *Niwter*, 4: 240–58.
60. Report of Shahsevan [Ardabil] and Andar [Astara] Regions, 1 February 1906, in *Niwter*, 4: 295–8.
61. The Social-Democratic paper *Murch* (Hammer) certainly had subscribers in Iran, as confirmed by special subscription fees. For mention of publications and periodicals crossing the border from the South Caucasus to Iran, see Ali Miransari, “The Constitutional Revolution and Persian Dramatic Works: An Observation on Social Relations Criticism in the Plays of the Constitutional Era,” in H. E. Chehabi and Vanessa

Martin, eds, *Iran's Constitutional Revolution: Popular Politics, Cultural Transformations and Transnational Connections* (New York, 2010), 242; Touraj Atabaki, "Constitutionalists *Sans Frontières*: Iranian Constitutionalism and its Asian Connections," in *ibid.*, 345.

62. Letter 5, in *Simon Zavarian*, vol. 3 (Antilias, 1997), 16.
63. Letter 2, in *ibid.*, 12.
64. See, for example, letters 2, 5, 8, and 22 in *Simon Zavarian*, 12, 16, 21, 42–4. ARF Archives contains lists of books (B 580-26) and lists of ARF publications (C 96).
65. See fn. 47.
66. Kirakosian provides the most comprehensive list of periodicals. A. Kirakosian, *Hay parberakan mamuli matenagitut'yun, 1794–1967: hamahavak' ts'ank* [Bibliography of Armenian periodical press, 1794–1967: compiled catalog (Yerevan, 1970), 530–1, 544. Levonian's numbers are lower, totaling 57, but, unlike Kirakosian, Levonian's information indicates which periodicals may have been revolutionary or political. See Garegin Levonian, *Hayots` parberakan mamulě, 1794–1934* [The Armenian periodical press, 1794–1934] (Yerevan, 1934). See also Ter Minassian, "Role of the Armenian Community," 121–34. See also *ibid.*, fn. 23, p. 190, fn. 31, pp. 191–4, fn. 33, pp. 194–7; for Social Democratic publications, see fn. 47, pp. 200–1.
67. Kirakosian, *Hay parberakan mamuli matenagitut'yun*, 546, 548–9.
68. Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean*, 32.
69. Michael F. Hamm, "Continuity and Change in Late Imperial Kiev," in Michael F. Hamm, ed., *The City in Late Imperial Russia* (Bloomington, 1986), 109.
70. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 21.
71. Brower, "Urban Revolution," 344.
72. Giwlkhandanian, *Bagui derě*, 27–9, 64. Examples include Kristapor Mikayelian, Matsun Khecho, and Nikol Duman. See *Ibid.*, 27–9, 64.
73. See, for example, Report of Avarayr [Khoy] Region, 1 February 1906, in *Niwt`er*, 4: 270–5 (274).
74. *Ibid.*, 53 and 56.
75. Report on central arms factory of Vrezh [Tabriz] presented to Fourth General Congress. This piece is undated, unsigned, and unsealed, but was most probably prepared in 1906 by the Azerbaijan Central Committee as it was found among the committee's papers. It is a brief history of the factory from 1891 to 1906, and includes a list of gunsmiths, their apprentices, and the years they worked. It also mentions that by 1896 the factory had produced 600 firearms. "A.R. Federation Vrezh 'Khariskh' workshop," in *Niwt`er*, 4: 284–7; for the arms "factory," see Malkhas [Artashes Hovsepian], *Aprumner* [Life experiences] (Boston, 1931), 141, 331. Rostom writes from the Caucasus about being in negotiations with someone specializing in purchasing arms and transferring them to Iran (1 Oct 1904). See Western Bureau to Vrezh Central Committee, Document 43–60, dated 1

October 1904, in *Rostom Namakani*, 339.

76. For a comprehensive study of Armenian participation in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, see Hourri Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911: “The Love for Freedom Has No Fatherland”* (Boulder, 2001).
77. Rostom, although writing in Armenian, uses the French *chlorate de potasse*.
78. Rostom to Samson Tadeosian, undated, document 15–6, in *Rostom Namakani*, 363. The letter is undated and, therefore, it is unclear whether Rostom was in Tiflis or Geneva at the time.
79. *Ibid.*, 363, 364.
80. Giwlkhandanian, *Bagui derĕ*, 141; ARF archives B, 15-6; B 377-30, B 377-31, B 377-32, B 377-34.
81. ARF Archives, B 445-6, 580-15. Georgians played a similar role in circulating arms and ammunition. See, for example, Gocheleishvili, “Introducing Georgian Sources,” 65.
82. Giwlkhandanian, *Bagui derĕ*, 148.
83. *Ibid.*, 153.
84. See, H. G. Injikyan, H. G., ed., *Merdzavor yev Mijin Arevelk’i yerkrner yev zhoghovurdner* [Countries and peoples of the Near and Middle East], vol. 8: *Iran* (Yerevan, 1975), 244. See also Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule, 1908–1914* (NJ, 2011), revised edition, 130.
85. Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1963), 173.
86. See, for example, Malkhas, *Aprunner*. Malkhas, a member of the ARF, participated in the traffic of arms and men through Iran. See also Arsen Kitur, *Patmut’iwn S. D. Hnch’akian Kusakts’ut’ean* [History of the S. D. Hnchakian Party] (Beirut, 1962), 1: 203, 208, 209.
87. For Rostom's collaborative activities, see for example, Hovsep Hovhannisian, *Husher* [Memoirs] (Yerevan, 1995), 176, 196–7. Kitur, *Patmut’iwn*, 1: 399–400. For a French translation of Kitur, see Chaqueri, *La social-démocratie en Iran: articles et documents annotés et présentés* (Florence, 1979), 238. See also Sokrat Khan Gelofiants, *Kayts: S. D. Hnch. Kusakts’ut’ean gortsunĕut’iwnits’ togh p’asterĕ khosin* [Spark: let the evidence from the S. D. Hnch. Party activity speak] (Providence, 1915), 13–15, 24–7; Hrand Gangruni, *Hay heghap’okhut’iwnĕ Osmanean bṛnatirut’ean dĕm (1890–1910)* [The Armenian revolution against Ottoman despotism (1890–1910)] (Beirut, 1973), 195–6. See also Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York, 1996), 239.
88. Rostom to Kristapor [Mikayelian], 24 February 1905, document 213-54a, in *Rostom Namakani*, 379.
89. Hovsep Tadeosian, “Tapaṛunner ants’iali husheri mĕj” [Strolls into the Memories of the Past], in *Rostom: Mahvan Vatsunamiakin Artiv* [Rostom: On the Sixtieth Anniversary of his Death] (Beirut, 1979), 251. Reprinted from *Amsagir* [Fatherland monthly], 24, 6

- (November–December 1946): 83–88. See Rostom to Azerbaijan Central Committee, 17 February 1905, document 46-1, in *Rostom Namakani*, 379) and letters in *Rostom Namakani*.
90. See Hovak Stepanian, “Nikol Duman (mahvan 15-amiaki artiv)” [Nikol Duman (on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of his death)], *Hayrenik` Amsagir* 8, 12 (October 1930): 158. For Duman's limited role during Mohammad `Ali Shah's assault in 1911, see Amurian, *Dashnakts`ut`iwně Parskastanum*, 81–5. See also G. Lazian, *Hegha`p`okhakan Dēm`er* (Aleppo, 1990), 323; *Hushamatean Hay Heghap`okhakan Dashnakts`ut`ean Albom-Atlas, Volume 1: Diwts`aznamart* [Commemorative album-atlas of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, vol. 1: heroic combat] (Glendale, CA, 1992), 22.
  91. *Hushamatean*, 27, 56; Amurian, *Dashnakts`ut`iwně Parskastanum*, 57–9, 60–3, 66–73; Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e mashruteh-ye Iran* (Tehran, 1984), vol. 2, 838, 842. See also “Parskastan: mi ēj parsakan heghap`[okhakan] patmut`iwnits” [Persia: a page from Persia's revolutionary history], *Droshak*, no. 1, January 1911. Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e hejdah saleh-ye Azerbaijan* (Tehran, 1978), vol. 1, 115–17; Farro [Hovsep Hovhannisian], “Grishayi husherě” [Grisha's memoirs] 3, 4 (February 1925): 90–2; H. Elmar [Hovsep Hovhannisian], *Yeprem* (Tehran, 1964), 140–4, 151–64, 338–46, 483, 489–93, which includes extracts from Grisha's memoirs; Esma`il Ra'in, *Yeprem Khan Sardar* (Tehran, 1971), 321–5; “Yepremi arshavě Atrpatakan” [Yeprem's march to Azerbaijan], in A. Amurian [Andre Ter Ohanian], *Dashnakts`ut`iwn, Yeprem, parsakan sahmanadrut`iwn, H. H. D. kendronakan arkhiv* [A. R. Federation, Yeprem, Persian constitution, A. R. F. central archives] (Tehran, 1976–9), vol. 1, 43–4; “Yeprem yev ir gortsě,” in Amurian, *Arkhiv*, 1: 97–102, 105–10. Ibrahim Fakhra'i, *Gilan dar jonbesh-e mashrutiyat* [Gilan in the constitutional movement] (Tehran, 1974), 216–18.
  92. Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 244; see also, Afary, “Armenian Social democrats and *Iran-i Naw*: A Secret Camaraderie,” in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left* (London, 2004), 67–84. See also Chaqueri, ed., *La Social-démocratie en Iran: articles et documents* (Florence, 1979); Iraj Afshar, ed., *Asnad-e tazeh-yab-e mashrutiyat va naqsh-e Taqizadeh* (Tehran, 1980).
  93. *Hushamatean*, 1: 38, 144, 146, 176.
  94. *Hushamatean*, 56. According to Giwlkhandanian, *Bagui derě*, 27–8, Matsun Khecho also co-organized arms transfers from Julfa to Salmas.
  95. See, for example, Rostom to Kristapor [Mikayelian], doc. 212-114, undated (possibly end of 1904) and Rostom to Kristapor [Mikayelian], 4 February 1905, docs 213-53, in *Rostom Namakani*, 354–5 and 373–4. Money also circulated as indicated by the correspondence in the ARF archives and by Rostom's letters in *Rostom Namakani*.
  96. Rostom to Kristapor [Mikayelian], 4 February 1905, docs 213-53, in *Rostom Namakani*, 354-5.
  97. Rostom to Kristapor [Mikayelian], doc. 212-114, undated (possibly end of 1904), 373–4.
  98. See John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State*

(Cambridge, 2000), 1.

99. Hassan Hakimian, "Wage Labor and Migration: Persian Workers in Southern Russia, 1880–1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17/4 (Nov 1985): 444, 454, 456–7.
100. Chaqueri, *Social Democracy in Iran*, 80.
101. Ibid., 84.
102. Ibid., 81, 82; Hakimian, "Wage Labor and Migration," Table 2, 447.
103. Chaqueri, *Social Democracy in Iran*, 81, 82.
104. See, for example, Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford, 1992), 32, 37; Hakimian, "Wage Labor and Migration," 445–7, 449. See also Bagratuni, "Namak Bagvits`" [Letter from Baku], 16 July 1908, *Hnchak*, no. 6–7, June–July 1908.
105. Iago Gocheleishvili, "Georgian Sources on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1905–1911: Sergo Gamdlisvili's memoirs of the Gilan Resistance," in Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Iranian–Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (London, 2013), 208.
106. Cosroe Chaqueri, *Social Democracy in Iran*, 87, 90. Gocheleishvili, "Georgian Sources," 208. See also, Iago Gocheleishvili, "Introducing Georgian Sources for the Historiography of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911)" in H. E. Chehabi and Vanessa Martin, eds, *Iran's Constitutional Revolution: Popular Politics, Cultural Transformations and Transnational Connections* (New York, 2010), 45–66.
107. Chaqueri, *Social Democracy in Iran*, 95–6.
108. Chaqueri, *Social Democracy in Iran*, 117, 119. See also Sohrab Yazdani, "The Question of the Iranian *Ijtima`iyun-i Amiyun* Party," in Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (London, 2013), 189–206. Unlike Chaqueri, Yazdani concludes that although the *Ejtima'iyun-e `Amiyun* leaders "in the Caucasus and/or in Iran, studied different types of Russian party organization and adopted those forms which they considered most suitable for Iranian conditions," the party was "an Iranian organization with its own internal dynamism. As such, it would be preferable to study this first Iranian political party, with its leftist tendencies, in accord with Iranian socio-political and cultural conditions, and not merely as a by-product of struggles taking place beyond the country's borders," *ibid.*, 200, 203.
109. Chaqueri, *Social Democracy in Iran*, 148, 154, 173, 181, 188.
110. Ibid., 192.
111. Gocheleishvili, "Introducing Georgian Sources," 211.
112. Gocheleishvili, "Georgian Sources," 58.
113. See, for example, Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 284.
114. Ibid., 311.
115. Specifists are members of the Armenian Social Democratic Workers' Organization, much

like the Bund, founded in 1903, in Baku. See TerMinassian, “Aux origines du marxisme arménien.”

16. Ter Minassian, “The Role of the Armenian Community,” 122, 128, 134.
17. John Schwarzmantel, *Socialism and the Idea of the Nation* (New York, 1991), 75, 80, 104, 105. See also, Madeleine Rebérioux, “Jean Jaurès and the Armenians.” *The Armenian Review* 44, no. 2/174 (1991): 1–11. See also, Ephraim Nimni, *Marxism and Nationalism: Theoretical Origins of a Political Crisis* (London, 1991). According to Schwarzmantel, both Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxembourg “argued that ‘less developed’ nations should relinquish their right to self-determination and be assimilated into more ‘civilised’ nations so that the cause of progress could be advanced.” (65)
18. See Nader Sohrabi's discussion about the influence of the French Revolution on the Young Turk movement. See Nader Sohrabi, “Global Waves, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew about Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered,” *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* 44 (2002): 45–79.
19. Ronald Grigor Suny, “Populism, Nationalism, and Marxism among Russia's Armenians,” in Suny, ed., *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington, 1993), 64.
20. Tsarist Spy Service “Okhrana's” Report about the A.R. Federation, *Niwt`er*, 2: 326, 328.
21. “Okhrana's” Report, 329.
22. “Okhrana's” Report, 325, 331, 333.
23. See, for example, the introductory pages to the ARF Program of 1892, S[imon] Vratsian, ed., *Divan H. H. Dashnaks`ut`ean* [Records of the A. R. Federation], (Boston, 1934), 1: 96–100. See also A. Giwlkhandanian, *H. H. Dashnaks`ut`ean arajin tsragirě yev nra heghinaknerě* [The first program of the A. R. Federation and its authors] (Athens, 1987).
24. See Hovsep Hovhannisian, *Husher* [Memoirs] (Yerevan, 1995), 176, 196–7. Kitur, *Patmut`iwn*, 1: 399–400. For a French translation, see Chaqueri, *La social-démocratie en Iran*, 238. See also Gelofiants, *Kayts*, 13–15, 24–7; Gangruni, *Hay heghap`okhut`iwně*, 195–6. See also Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 239.
25. Fourth Regional Congress of Caucasus, 1904, Session 2, in *Niwt`er*, 2: 213; “Nakhagits kovkasean gortsunēutean” [Plan for Caucasian activity], June 1905, in *Niwt`er*, 2: 232–4. For a text of the decisions, see for example, “Heghapokhakan dashn ts`arizmi dēm” [Revolutionary pact against tsarism], *Droshak*, no. 12, December 1904; *Heghap`okhakan dashn: mijkusaks`aakan khorhrdazhoghovneri voroshumnerě* [Revolutionary pact: decisions of the interparty conferences] (Geneva, 1905). See also a circular sent out by the ARF's Western Bureau, 10 January 1905, in *Niwt`er*, 2: 225–6. The new struggle on the Caucasian front was also helped by attempts at Armenian inter-party solidarity. “Miutiwn kam hamerashkhutiwn hay heghap`okhakani yev otar tarreru het” [Unity or solidarity with Armenian revolutionary and foreign elements], Third General Congress (February–March 1904, Sofia), in *Niwt`er*, 2: 118–19. See also Circular by the Western Bureau of the Dashnaksutiun, 30 November 1904, in *Niwt`er*, 2: 202–3. See also,

“Heghap`okhakan kusakts`ut`iwnneri dashn ts`arizmi dēm” [Pact of revolutionary parties against tsarism], *Droshak*, no. 5, May 1905.

26. See “XVIII Tari” [18th Year], *Hnchak*, no. 1, January 1905; “Bagui gortsadulē” [The Baku strike], *Hnchak*, no. 1, January 1905; “Heghap`okhut`iwn Rusastanum” [Revolution in Russia], *Hnchak*, no. 2, February 1905; “Kazmakerpvats kṛiv” [Organized battle], *Hnchak*, no. 3, 20 February 1905. For Armenian worker and peasant participation in the Russian Revolution, see, for example, Ts. P. Aghayan, *Revoluts`ion sharzhunnerē Hayastanum, 1905–1907 t.t.* [Revolutionary movements in Armenia, 1905–1907] (Yerevan, 1955); V[artan] A[ram] Parsamyan, *Revoluts`ion sharzhunnerē Hayastanum, 1905–1907 t.t.* [Revolutionary movements in Armenia, 1905–1907] (Yerevan, 1955).
27. Kitur, *Patmut`iwn*, 1: 293. For similar perceptions, see also “Hnch`akian Kusakts`ut`iwnē” [The Hnchakian party], *Hnchak*, no. 1–2, January–February 1906.
28. For further elaboration, see “Mi kani akamay khōsk`er” [A few obligatory words], *Hnchak*, no. 3, March 1906.
29. Kitur lists the names of those who seceded from the Hnchakian party and settled in Tabriz. See Kitur, *Patmut`iwn*, 1: 294. Pilosian's letter to Taqizadeh, dated 19 August 1909, confirms that plans to form the Democrat party had already taken shape on Taqizadeh's return in November 1908 from London to Tabriz and before his departure to Tehran in July or August 1909. Ettehadieh Nezam Mafi gives the date of Taqizadeh's return to Tabriz as Rajab 1327 (qamari) which may be July or August 1909. See Mansureh Ettehadieh Nezam Mafi, *Peydayesh va tahavvol-e ahzab-e siyasi-ye mashrutiyat: dowreh-ye avval va dovvom-e majles-e showra-ye melli* (Tehran, 1982), 199. This is further supported by a letter from Dashnakist Vahan Zakarian to Yeprem Khan, wherein Zakarian stated that the foundations of the party were put into place on Taqizadeh's return to Tabriz. For Zakarian's letter, see Amurian, *Arkhir*, 1: 254–62. For Pilosian's letter, see Iraj Afshar, ed., *Owraq-e tazehyab-e mashrutiyat va naqsh-e Taqizadeh* (Tehran, 1980), 238–40. See also Astghuni [Yeghikian], “Chshmartutiunner,” 9/46 (August 12, 1913). Pilosian to Taqizadeh, 19 August 1909, in Afshar, *Owraq*, 238–40. For program and regulations of the Democrat party, see Mansureh Ettehadieh Nezam Mafi, ed., *Majmu`eh-ye motun va asnad-e tarikhi* (Tehran, 1982), 4: 3–19.
30. Ter Hacobian [Hakobian] to Taqizadeh, 1 November 1910, in Afshar, *Owraq*, 315.
31. Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 269. For a discussion of Ter Hakobian's series of articles entitled “Terror,” which appeared in *Iran-e Now* from 18 December 1910 to 4 January 1911, see 293–8.
32. *Ibid.*, 275, 388 n. 81. See also Afary, “Armenian Social Democrats.” Interestingly, under attack from the *London Times*, which accused *Iran-e Now* of being run by Armenians and Russians, the newspaper denied that it had any Armenians on its staff. See Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution, 1905–1909* (1910; new edition, Washington, D.C., 1995), 443.
33. Astghuni [Yeghikian], “Inch`pes kazmvets` Parskastani S. D. Kusakts`ut`iwnē” [How

Persia's S. D. Party was organized], in *Hushardzan nvirvats Sots'ial Demokrat Hnch'akean Kusakts'ut'ean k'arasunamiakin* [Commemorative volume dedicated to the fortieth anniversary of the Hnchakian Party], ed., S. D. Hnch'akean Kusakts'ut'ean Fransayi Shrjan (Paris, 1930), 192–3; Aram Arkun, “Ełikean (Yaqikiyan), Grigor E,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica* (Costa Mesa, 1998), 3: 364–5.” Astghuni [Yeghikian], “Inch`pes kazmvets`,” 193. A meeting between Naser al-Molk and Yeghikian may have taken place in January or February 1911 when the regent was in Anzali. See Cosroe Chaqueri, “The Role and Impact of Armenian Intellectuals in Iranian Politics, 1905–1911,” *Armenian Review* 41/ 2 (Summer 1988): 1–51 (23). The Socialist International Bureau received information about the organization on 29 October 1910. See “Bulletin Périodique du B[ureau] S[ocialiste] I[nternationale],” no. 7, 1911, p. 37 in Chaqueri, *La social-démocratie en Iran*, 229.

## CHAPTER 6

# THE LOAN AND DISCOUNT BANK AS AN AGENT OF RUSSIAN INTERESTS IN IRAN

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This essay analyzes new Russian archival materials related to the activities of the Discount and Lending Bank in Iran from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The discussion illustrates how during that period the bank, through its various activities, turned into one of the main agents of Russian state interests in Iran. Russian and foreign researchers have examined various aspects of the bank's activities and performance.<sup>1</sup> This essay, based on previously unused material from the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA, St Petersburg) and the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI, Moscow), aims to expand our knowledge of the bank's role in Iranian society. It discusses a number of new financial documents, as well as bank materials concerning its relationships with members of the shah's family and Iranian merchants. The essay also sheds new light on the creation of a bank network of agencies across Iran. Among the new materials introduced and employed in this essay, two documents are of exceptional importance: “Case of rewarding Iranian subjects with Russian orders and medals” and “Case of purchasing a movie theatre.”<sup>2</sup>

The development of capitalism in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century resulted in the emergence of new forms of relations between the tsarist government and neighboring Middle Eastern countries, including Iran. Russia's influence from this period until 1917 penetrated all spheres of life of the Iranian state, including politics, economy, and the public activities of the Iranians. Soviet scholars even refer to this period as the “Golden Age” of Russian rule in Iran. The increase in Russian activities in Iran was to a great degree due to the rivalry between Russia and Great Britain in this region. As far back as 1895, during his visit to Tehran, A. N. Kropotkin (1848–1925), the commander of the Russian troops in the Trans-Caspian region and the head of the extraordinary embassy to Iran, stated officially that the rivalry with Great Britain “should lie primarily in the sphere of economic interests.”<sup>3</sup> Soon, in 1907, tsarist Russia and Great Britain managed to divide Iran into spheres of influence: the northern part of the country became the Russian sphere, while the southeastern sphere fell to the British.

It is well known that, already in 1889, Baron Julius Reuter opened the Shahinshah (or Imperial) Bank in Iran, representing the interests of Great Britain.<sup>4</sup> In response, the tsarist

government urgently promoted concessions from the shah for Russian entrepreneurs, in order to advance Russia's financial activity. As a result, a number of Russian private joint stock companies appeared in Iran, investing their capital in various activities, including finance, road construction, the development of the Anzali port, telegraph networks, and fisheries. However, already in the 1890s, those private companies gradually passed into the control of the state capital, which meant that the Russian state held more than 50 per cent of their shares and could therefore control and direct their activities according to its own interest. At the same time, those companies were officially registered as private, so that representatives of the tsarist power and the state would not formally be interfering in the internal affairs of Iran.

One obvious example of these tactics was the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran, built upon the private Loan Society of Iran, owned by Iakov Poliakov (1832–1909).<sup>5</sup> Early in 1890, Iakov Poliakov acquired a 75-year concession from the shah's government to lend money against stocks and to hold auction sales. In 1891 he organized the Brothers Loan Society with capital fixed at 1,250,000 rubles. The concession stipulated 10 per cent of the funds for the shah's treasury, 25 per cent for the founders, and 65 per cent for the shareholders. For auction sales in Tehran, Iakov Poliakov was to pay 1,000 tumans to the shah's government at the end of the year. This society functioned for only three years, from 1891 until 1894, with rather limited time to expand its business. At about the same time, significant changes in Imperial foreign policy were taking place. S. Iu. Witte (1849–1915), appointed Russian finance minister in 1892, paid special attention to Russian trade with the neighboring Asian states. In the following year, he initiated a special Senate meeting on Asian trade with members of the finance ministry and foreign affairs participating. At the meeting, Witte emphasized that progress in Russian trade in Iran would depend on a large credit agency. Since for political reasons the Imperial Bank of Russia could not establish a branch in Tehran, Witte suggested turning the unprofitable Poliakov Brothers Loan Society into a state enterprise with the attributes of a private bank. This project was considered by the finance ministry on 4 May 1894 and approved by Tsar Alexander III (r. 1881–94) several days later.

The Poliakov Brothers Loan Society was thus procured by the finance ministry and then reorganized as the Loan Bank of Iran. Note that the previous owner, Iakov Poliakov, who relinquished most of his shares to civil servants, was granted recompense of a mere 225,000 rubles but was able to secure the office of head of the bank for his brother Lazarus (1849–1914), at least temporarily. In reality, however, the bank functioned as a Russian State Bank branch. Following multiple inspections by the finance ministry, the brothers had to resign a decade later. Reorganized again in 1902, the new Loan and Discount Bank of Iran continued operations until the October Revolution in Russia in 1917. Its board was formed of members of the tsar's government, including Witte himself, and representatives of the Romanov dynasty. The board held 77 per cent of total shares.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the tsarist government founded a financial institution accountable to it: its activities would be terminated only after establishment of Soviet power in Russia. The foundation of the Loan and Discount Bank effectively met the geopolitical and financial interests of Russia. Let us recall that in the late 1880s, Russia had become a major trading partner of Iran, leading to active financial operations and investment of Russian capital in its economy. Consequently, the

newly reorganized bank had the following functions: to promote the development of Russian trade in Iran, the sale of Russian goods, and the distribution of Russian banknotes among the local population, as well as the displacement of British goods from Iran. At the same time, the ruling Qajar monarch, Mozaffar al-Din Shah (r. 1896–1907), who urgently needed cash loans and credits, was also interested in a rapprochement with Russia. Cash was necessary to implement reforms, improve living standards in the country, and to overcome stagnation in the economy and trade. Therefore, starting in the 1890s, Russian state capital started to flow into Iran through this bank and was invested in loans, minting coins and other financial operations. Soon, the Loan Bank, having inherited a pawn office from Iakov Poliakov, started giving out small loans mostly secured by real estate to the local population.<sup>7</sup>

In 1898 Petr L'vovich Bark (1869–1937) became the board chairman of the bank.<sup>8</sup> The other members of the board, as mentioned earlier, included government officials and Romanov grand dukes (Vladimir Aleksandrovich, Andrei Vladimirovich, and Kirill Vladimirovich). After the reorganization, the bank business grew quickly. While the balance statement for the original Loan Bank for 1 December 1901 showed 4.8 million rubles, the total stock of the new Loan and Discount Bank of Iran already amounted to 6.7 million rubles by the end of 1902. The 77 per cent held by management was therefore equal to 5.2 million rubles, demonstrating that the bank, as mentioned earlier, had become a state-controlled business.<sup>9</sup>

Russian influence, supported by the bank activity, was increasing every year, so that soon Russia was able to overtake Britain in terms of trade, particularly in Iran's northern provinces. It achieved a dominant market position there and also acquired the right of exclusive financing of the Iranian government, which resulted in de facto control over the country's national finances. The following numbers illustrate the flow of funds to the shah's circle. In May and June 1895, the bank lent 100,000 tumans to the royal treasury. Only twelve months later, in 1896, the bank lent 156,390 tumans for six months at the shah's request, supported by Russian diplomats. Also worth mentioning is another large loan to the shah in January 1900: 22.5 million rubles in gold at 5 per cent repayable within 75 years. Payment on the loan was secured with revenues from all the Persian Gulf customs. Among the main conditions of these loans was the obligation on the Iranian government to pay off all their debts to Britain and not to seek any long-term loans from any third party without Russia's consent.

The bank gave the credits and loans to Iranian citizens as well: for example, the Bandar Gaz agency alone from the second half of 1912 to November 1913 considered 176 loan requests by numerous Iranian clients.<sup>10</sup> This information is indicative of a considerable circle of local merchants collaborating with the Discount and Lending Bank of Iran.

The loans of money readily accepted by the shah's government from the new bank served to consolidate the dominant Russian position year by year. In addition to the above-mentioned operations, the Loan and Discount Bank was commissioned to buy up land from the local population, particularly in the north and along the Caspian shore (for example, near Anzali, Rasht, Tabriz, Qazvin, and some other locations), where it organized various enterprises. For its compatriots, the bank dealt with the export and distribution of Russian goods in Iran, acting as a go-between for Russian manufacturers and their Iranian commercial clients.<sup>11</sup> From the

end of the 1890s, Russian industrialists had to deal with the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran if they wanted to be successful in their enterprises. The Russian State History Archive contains records of such industrialists and their companies, including A. Khoshtaria & E. Vatatsi, the Ivan Stakheev Business Association, the St Petersburg Sewing Mill Partnership, the Okhta Cotton Mill, and the Caucasian Cotton Corporation. It was also the Loan and Discount Bank that mediated all sorts of concessions sought by Russian industrialists from the shah's government, such as highway construction, fishing, and the building of the port of Anzali. Loan and Discount Bank directors held shares in various major projects. For example, the above mentioned Petr L'vovich Bark became the director of the Anzali–Tehran road construction project.

During its existence, the Loan and Discount Bank progressively established five large branches, operating in major Iranian cities: Tehran, Mashhad, Rasht, Tabriz, and Kermanshah. Additionally, nine smaller bank agencies (representations) were founded in Barforush, Bandar Gaz, Isfahan, Qazvin, Kushan, Sabzavar, Ormiyeh, Hamadan, and Anzali.<sup>12</sup> The bank also opened six small agencies in Russia: in Ashkabad (Ashqabad), Baku, Yerevan, Jolfa, Merv, and Moscow. New Loan and Discount Bank branches would often open in a location where a new Russian corporation was founded or a new road section was to be built. Thus *Novoe vremia* journal's correspondent, V. A. Shuf, described the Loan and Discount Bank branch in Tabriz as follows:

This is an excellent bank instituted by Count Witte as Tabriz Road Company ... its building is the best in Tabriz. The two houses for the bank clerks and the splendid villa of the manager, A. L. Anastasinskii, are buried in verdure of almond and peach trees. The garden is really marvelous. The villa is guarded by Persian Cossacks. The bank building in the center of Tabriz reminds one of a sturdy manor house.<sup>13</sup>

The author also reports that banking operations were performed in both Russian and Iranian currencies.

This statement by Shuf allows us to conclude that the monetary operations of the bank were aimed at attracting not only Russian but also Iranian entrepreneurs. Dealing in Iranian currency enabled the bank to increase the volume of its trading operations with the Iranian clients by granting them commodity loans and cheap credit. The trading operations of the Loan and Discount Bank assumed such a large scale that it caused dissatisfaction among a large number of Russian companies that suffered from unexpected competition with the bank. Immediately after the bank's reorganization, the board was granted the right to receive concessions from the shah for creating Russian enterprises. For example, the Qajar government granted the bank an exclusive right to build and exploit the dirt road from Russian Julfa crossing through Tabriz to Qazvin. The construction of this major road consisted of two sections: the first one from the Russian border (Julfa) to Tabriz and the second from Tabriz to Qazvin. Such a road was of great importance to the board since at that time Tabriz was one of the main trading centers of northern and central Iran. Both Russian and Iranian merchants, including those dealing with foreign trade and small local tradesmen, were mostly supportive of such construction. This

concession gave the opportunity to the Discount and Lending Bank to further strengthen its influence. Having received this concession, the bank board invited Russian businessmen and their private building companies to take part in this enterprise according to the conditions defined by the bank.

Managers of the branches and agencies of the Loan and Discount Bank also served as informants about events occurring in their cities. They provided information on all sorts of incidents they had witnessed, in their messages to E. K. Grube (1866–?), the business manager of the Central Office of the bank in Tehran and the representative of the Finance Ministry. The latter, in turn, passed on that information to St Petersburg, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For example, Grube, drawing upon reports from the bank representative in Tabriz, V. Budilovich, reported in his telegram of 22 May 1903 on a major turmoil in Tabriz:.

... Tabriz. Unrest, bazaars are closed, the bank also. The riots are directed against the new tariff on the new road, against the Europeans in Iranian service, against the sale of hard liquor, schools ... Absolute chaos in the customs control.<sup>14</sup>

Such messages speak of the growing mass protests in Iran that would lead to the revolution of 1905–11.

As indicated above, the bank's activities reflected imperial interests and its policies were defined by special conferences of several Russian ministries – finance, foreign affairs, and military – in St Petersburg. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that following the Agreement of 1907, the Loan and Discount Bank discontinued its operations and closed down its branch in Sistan province, located in the British sphere of influence. Business proposals by private entrepreneurs that did not meet the interests of the state elite failed to get the bank's support. Thus, in 1901, the board of the Loan and Discount Bank rejected a project suggesting construction of a kerosene pipeline through Iran from the coast of the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf. Anan'ich suggests that this project was put forward by the Russian engineer and businessman, S. E. Palashkovskii.<sup>15</sup> Officially this refusal was motivated by the large financial expenditure and the questionable profitability of the project. It is more likely, however, that it was the political implications of the project for the relationship between Russia and Great Britain that influenced the decision of the board members: the pipeline was to go through the British-controlled southern parts of Iran.

At the same time, the management of the Loan and Discount Bank readily rewarded those agents and assistants among Iranian, Azerbaijani and Central Asian merchants who conducted their operations through the bank and provided “different services” to it.<sup>16</sup> Archival materials reveal what Russian orders and medals were awarded to the partners of the bank. They included the Gold Medal of the Imperial Order of St Anna with ribbon, the Order of St Anna first class and third class, and the Imperial Order of St Stanislaus second class and third class.<sup>17</sup> The board would scrutinize the nominations, reserving the right to strike undesirable candidates from the list. Thus, bank records from March 1905 indicate that the board turned down two nominees: Joseph Flebus, a Belgian national who served as Post Director of Azerbaijan, and Amir Mirza Habib, the Crown Prince's Master of Ceremonies, both “having

no direct relation to the bank and thus to be merited by the Foreign Office.”<sup>18</sup>

The above-mentioned “case of rewarding Iranian subjects with Russian orders and medals” contains a special chart with the name, nationality, related bank branch, type of activities and grounds for the award for each nominee. Among individuals who received awards we can identify two main categories: Iranian customers and bank employees who were closely connected with the bank. According to our document, in 1905 the bank rewarded 20 people: 12 from the Tehran branch, seven from the Tabriz branch, and one from the Mashhad branch. Of these, 18 were customers and two were translators working for the bank. The document begins with a Mashhad merchant, Mouvin Toujar (Movin Tojjar). A Loan and Discount Bank manager in Mashhad nominating the merchant wrote in his petition of 23 February 1905: “I humbly request your intercession for [Haji Mouvin] concerning a gold medal for him to wear over his neck / since a silver one/ would not be as appropriate.” His nomination was supported by no less a person than the head of the board, Petr L'vovich Bark, who mostly resided in Tehran and personally controlled all activities of the bank. As recorded, the generous reward included a letter of commendation, a portrait of Petr L'vovich Bark, a valuable snuffbox, a gold medal, and an honorary diploma.<sup>19</sup> Another bank customer deemed as deserving an award was a certain Hajji Sa`id Hoseyn Lajevardi, “an important broker in sugar and tea business, most helpful both to the bank and Russian trade in Iran at large.”<sup>20</sup>

Another person rewarded was Mirza Seyyed `Abdollah Khan, a bank employee. He had worked as senior interpreter at the Loan and Discount Bank branch in Tehran for fourteen years. The knowledge of the bazaar constituency he accumulated in the process proved useful in obtaining information about client solvency. He was awarded the Order of St Anna third class. The Tehran branch granted him the Gold Medal with the ribbon to wear over his neck. Another individual, named Mirza `Azizollah Khan, had worked for the bank for five years as a translator and had also performed financial services for which he was rewarded the Order of St Stanislaus third class.<sup>21</sup> Thus, as we observe, the board presented expensive gifts to the bank employees for their long and irreproachable service.

At the same time, the board at times rejected applications of chiefs of branches or agencies for rewarding office workers. For example, a manager of Bandar Gaz Agency appealed to the board, requesting Ericsson & Bure gold watches as New Year 1914 presents for his employees. The watches were to be engraved with the bank monogram and appropriate encomia. In a special memorandum, the board turned down the request, because, as the board pointed out, the Bandar Gaz Agency had only provided services for a short period of time. The cost of all the watches was estimated at between 400 and 600 rubles – such a substantial sum of money would most likely be intended for a more seasoned branch or agency.<sup>22</sup>

As archival documents indicate, the activities of the Loan and Discount Bank, were not limited to financial and commercial operations in Iran. The above-mentioned Petr L'vovich Bark observed a certain political politesse in respect to the shah and his entourage. On behalf of the board and the Russian government, he and some bank officials presented expensive gifts not only to the reigning shah and his dignitaries but also to the heir apparent, in an attempt to promote a friendly relationship with the ruling elite on a personal level. The manager of the

Tabriz branch, V. Budilovich, wrote in his letter to the board, dated 17 March, 1905:

... The bank has become well acquainted with the Valiahd's Court, but during my visits to his palace I have to tip everybody there. Additionally, both my wife, who pays visits to the Princess, and I are expected to present gifts from time to time.<sup>23</sup>

Among those gifts was a cinematograph with motion pictures, presented to the heir apparent, Mohammad `Ali, at the initiative of the main bank officials, P. L. Bark and E. K. Grube. The document mentioned earlier and entitled "Case of purchasing a movie theatre" sheds new light on the relationships between the bank's management and members of the royal family.<sup>24</sup> The main motive for such offerings was apparently to strengthen the bank's own position and influence at the court.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, cinematography and watching films were a novelty for the Iranian nobility and, increasingly, the general public in Iran. Mozaffar al-Din Shah was introduced to European films in Paris in 1900, during his European tour. He was deeply impressed by this innovation but probably did not have an opportunity to purchase it. Although four years later, in 1904, the first public "moving pictures" (slides) show took place in Tehran, real cinematography would become widespread in Iran only after 1912.<sup>25</sup> For this reason, at the end of 1904, the bank board decided to present the crown prince, Mohammad `Ali, with a cinematograph with a hand electric motor, a dynamo (*dinamo*) machine, a petrol engine, a screen, a lens and a set of movies.<sup>26</sup> In order to demonstrate movies in Iran, the bank had to invite a Russian engineer to Iran as the shah did not have such a specialist in his service in Tehran. In a telegram sent from Tabriz to St Petersburg on 2 November 1904, E. K. Grube requests:

Please dispatch as soon as possible the proposed present for the Heir Apparent with a set of film bands. In addition to the usual amusing pieces, get some movies of the Royal family life, parades, railway, military action [the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–5], everything packed in boxes with utmost care and dispatched as distinguished parcels.<sup>27</sup>

The bank's appeal was answered promptly. The film selection seems to follow a special scheme: the Russians offered Iranian nobility an official view of the Russian imperial court and some recent domestic events. Cinematography and films were readily available as there was a Joachim's photographic shop, "F. Joachim & Co.," and a court photographer's studio, "K. E. Hahn & C.," in St Petersburg.<sup>28</sup> Initially, two lists of motion films were sent from St Petersburg to the Loan and Discount Bank: one containing 37 items from the Joachim's photographic shop and another one, containing 40 items from Hahn; altogether 1,080 meters with the price totaling 864 rubles 80 kopecks.<sup>29</sup>

Of the 37 pictures from Joachim's shop, 28 were bought, as reported by Petr L'vovich Bark. The following feature films among them deserve special notice: "*Boating*," "*Ambush*," and "*Raid on Train*." From the Hahn's list of court chronicles, Petr L'vovich Bark selected only eight films: "*Arrival of the Imperial yacht 'Alexandria'*"; "*Livadia, Grand Princesses*

*dancing at the palace*"; *"Livadia, His Majesty's departure"*; *"Sankt-Petersburg Jubilee Celebration [200 years of its foundation]"*; *"Inauguration of the Troitskii bridge"*; *"Nevskii Avenue at Politseiskii bridge"*; *"May Parade in St. Petersburg"*; and finally *"Shah of Iran [Mozaffar al-Din] at the Botanical gardens [in St Petersburg]"*. The films (475 meters) were evaluated at 712 rubles 50 kopeks.<sup>30</sup>

On the whole, purchasing and shipping of the films and relevant equipment was fairly expensive. The board of the Loan and Discount Bank assigned 4,113 rubles 65 kopeks for this purpose. Shipping was entrusted to A. N. Nikolaev, maintenance assistant of Mikhailovskaia Artillery Academy. He was given 500 rubles for travel expenses and 460 rubles in remuneration. Nikolaev was to "deliver the articles safe and sound, set them up, show the films several times and train an authorized person in handling the cinematograph and the dynamo."<sup>31</sup> The articles in question arrived safely, with the exception of minor damage to the petrol engine, despite the fact that the mission was perilous. Difficulties emerged with purchasing a 20-pud (327.6 kg) dynamo machine and delivering the bulky gifts. Shipping was hampered by extremely cold winter weather, with air temperature falling to  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ , a lack of adequate roads and overall poor communications in Iran. For these reasons, carburetor parts for the petrol engine failed. To avoid delays, Nikolaev was assigned an assistant, a young Tatar boy called Bagirov, trained at an industrial school in Tiflis and working "for power plants" in Tabriz. In five days, they repaired the engine, working with exceptional vigor and diligence.<sup>32</sup> Nikolaev also instructed Bagirov in the system of the petrol engine and cinematograph, in order to put him in charge of maintenance after Nikolaev's departure from Iran.

Both Iranians and resident Russians anticipated a film show in Tehran, the former as a novelty, and the latter as a memory of their native St Petersburg. However, since the films were primarily meant as a gift to the Valiahd, the heir apparent, whose residence was in Tabriz, the Loan and Discount Bank manager in Tabriz, V. Budilovich, received the following message from Petr L'vovich Bark: "The cinematograph is intended, as you may know, as a gift to the shah's heir, and you should present it to His Highness with A. N. Nikolaev installing it in the Valiahd's Palace, a show in a bank or to any third person is by no means advisable."<sup>33</sup> The first showing of Russian films took place on 16 January 1905 and reportedly turned out to be "absolutely successful and astounding" for His Highness.<sup>34</sup>

An important piece of evidence of close contacts between the bank management and the Valiahd is found in a letter from the above-mentioned Loan and Discount Bank manager, V. Budilovich, to Petr L'vovich Bark, explaining that:

Sunday, 16 January, the cinematograph produced a most favorable impression on His Highness. During the show I [V. Budilovich] was sitting next to His Highness with other invited persons standing. I explained each subject to the Valiahd. His Highness talked to me in Russian, which he speaks pretty well, when not too timid. His Highness was impressed by the parade inspections and the streets in St. Petersburg. The Valiahd dreams of traveling to St Petersburg which the Government invariably denies him. Watching the moving pictures the Valiahd kept wondering: "Will I ever see it?" With

regard to the war pictures (the Japanese regretfully taking up a great deal), I described them as sham pictures taken near St Petersburg rather than actual military action. The Valiahd went into the particulars of war, declaring his strong faith in Russian superiority and Japanese defeat.<sup>35</sup>

In this passage, we can see one interesting detail: Crown Prince Mohammad `Ali's knowledge of Russian military actions in the Russian–Japan war of 1904–5.

The heir informed Budilovich that “He had seen something similar at the shah's in Tehran, probably a magic lantern, that is, a still projector. However, the shah had no such cinematograph.” In addition, the Valiahd mentioned that he had been able to take photographs and asked to send him a little modern photo camera. Therefore, as Budilovich reports, he had no other choice than to ask His Highness to take a photo camera as a present – fortunately, he had one with him. Most likely, it was his own camera, which he had not intended to give away but was forced to offer in such a situation; therefore, in addition to the cinematograph and the films, the heir also obtained a camera. As a result, the Valiahd wanted to send his photograph to Petr Bark in recognition of this present, adding that “I will try to find my picture taken in Tehran, it seems better than all others or else I will have another [photo] taken for this purpose.”<sup>36</sup> Apparently, the Valiahd had not been introduced to the board chairman of the bank and wanted to make a good impression upon such an important person.

These were the effects of the first film show about Russia. The heir intended to continue with the entertainment, and the Russians were willing to oblige. Another show was planned in March, and so, on 10 March, more Hahn's films were brought to Tabriz and presented to Mohammad `Ali the following day. The series pleased the heir to such an extent that he had “His autographed photo” sent to Petr Bark. However, as Budilovich proceeds: “on Tuesday, March, 15, the Valiahd quickly left for Tehran in response to the shah's telegram, although on Sunday, 13 [March] He had considered staying here for three weeks at least.”<sup>37</sup> Here, we seem to know the real cause of the Valiahd's departure. According to the official version, the heir was to hold regency during the shah's proposed European visit. However, Budilovich specified another reason:

They say that the shah's health is so poor that the Valiahd will most likely replace him. The shah's brainpower is said to have declined altogether. He has nervous fits resembling epilepsy with foamy mouth and mumbling. In any case, the Valiahd is gone for a long time, perhaps, for eight months as he believes, having taken almost everybody and everything with him.<sup>38</sup>

There could have been grave circumstances at the court as the heir departed in a hurry. Budilovich reports that “the Valiahd departed urgently, without even waiting for his successor, the new heir, Nezam Sultan, [who was] due [to arrive] by the weekend.”<sup>39</sup> As we can see, the bank's management was able to please the future shah by introducing him to a new European technical innovation and strengthening personal bonds between him and the bank officials. However, further developments at the court, the shah's infirmity and the revolutionary situation

in the country in 1905, mainly in the provinces of Azerbaijan and Tabriz, overshadowed the heir's desire for entertainment.

The archival accounts used in this essay demonstrate how the efforts of the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran concentrated on furthering Russian Imperial domination in the political, economic and cultural spheres of life in Iran. Operated by the Russian state, the bank protected and promoted the interests of Russian official power. The bank began to operate as a result of the rivalry between Russia and Great Britain for influence in Iran and, in its turn, contributed to the conclusion of the treaty of 1907.

At the same time, the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran was given broad authority over Russian financial and social activities in Iran and therefore was able to concentrate control over all Russian enterprises under its control from the end of the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. The bank's activities in the country were multifaceted. Archival documents confirm that many Iranian merchants were involved in commercial relations with the bank. At the same time, some of them were informants of the bank and helped the Russians to monitor the situation in Iran and, probably, apply this knowledge to a more efficient utilization of local conditions and resources. One avenue used by the board in order to maintain an amiable relationship with the shah and his immediate entourage was to bestow novelty gifts upon them. At the same time, their choice of films apparently demonstrates an aspiration to impress the Iranian rulers with the great authority and advanced development of the Russian Empire. Thus, the new material from Russian Archives presented in this essay provide an important supplement to what is already known about the activities of the Loan and Discount Bank of Iran.

## Notes

1. Various aspects of the bank activities have been covered in the works of Russian and foreign scholars: B.V. Anan'ich, *Rossiiskoe samoderzhavie i vyvoz kapitalov 1885–1914. Po materialam Uchetno-ssudnogo Banka Persii* (Leningrad, 1975); B.V. Anan'ich, *Bankirskie doma v Rossii 1860–1914* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1991); S. G. Beliaev, "Uchetno-ssudnyi bank Persii v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny," in *Rossia v XIX–XX vv.* (St Petersburg, 1998), 276–85; Mehran Kamrava, *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*, 3rd edn (Berkeley, 2013); Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Iran: Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran* (London and New York, 2013); Firuz Kazemzadeh, "Bor'ba za vliianie v Persii: diplomaticheskoe protivostoianie Rossii i Anglii," see <http://www.historylib.org>; Hooshang Amirahmadi, *The Political Economy of Iran under the Qajars: Society, Politics and Foreign Relations, 1796–1926* (London, 2012); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy 1900–1930* (Durham and London, 2003); Katherine A. Watson, "Banks and Industrial Finance. The Experience of Brewers 1880–1913," *Economic History Review. New Series* 49/1 (February 1966): 58–81.
2. See: RGIA, f. 600, op. 2, d. 1460, 1905; f. 600, op. 4, d. 33, 1904. In addition we have to

point out that the above-mentioned Russian Historical Archive contains many potentially valuable documents. For example, fund N 600 RGIA consists of 10,352 documents (1894–1917), which remain mostly unknown to scholars.

3. RGIA, f. 563, op. 2, d. 231, 4–12. This extraordinary embassy informed the shah and his court about ascent to the throne of the new Russian Tsar Nicholas II (1894–1917). A. N. Kuropatkin was a well-known person in Iran who had been awarded the Order of Lion and Sun of the second degree by the Iranian government (1882). Later A.N. Kuropatkin became a Russian military minister (1898–1904). N. V. Kolomytseva, “A. N. Kuropatkin – voennachl'nik, prosvetitel’,” see: <http://www.pskoviana.ru/index.php>, 2011; A. Mitiashkin, “Kuropatkin A.N. Russkaia armia” Series 49/1, (February, 1996): 58–81.
4. On the activities of the Imperial Bank see the following: Charles Ph. Issawi, *Economy of Iran under the Qajars* (London, 2012); F. H. Hinsley, ed., *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge, 1977); Geoffrey Jones, *Banking and Empire in Iran: The History of the British Bank of the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 1986–7); Muriel Atkin, “Russia and Iran in the Great Game,” *Iranian Studies* 45/2 (March, 2012): 306–8.
5. RGIA, f. 20, op. 4, d. 3709, 1–17; f. 600, op. 10, d. 168, 10. For more detail on the Poliakov dynasty see: A. A. Fursenko, *Iz istorii rossiiskogo predprinimatel'stva* (Moscow, 1996), 25–30; I. Zaslavskaiia, “Brat'ia Poliakovy – kommertsanty, dvoriane, evrei,” *Zametki po evreiskoi istorii* 10 (145) (October, 2011), see: <http://www.berkovich-zametki.com/November>, 2011.
6. RGIA, f. 563, op. 2, d. 231, 4–12. From 1917 to 1921 the bank continued to perform insignificant financial operations. The Loan and Discount Bank ceased to exist in 1921, when according to the Soviet–Iranian treaty, the government of the Russian Federation handed it over to the shah for free. See: The State Archive of Russian Federation, f. P-4720, op. 1, d. 1; f. P-4738, op. 2, 1901–1902; f. P-4738, op. 1, 1917–1921; f. P-4350, op. 1, 1911–1921. See also: *Sovetsko-Iranskie otnosheniia v dogovorakh, konventsiiakh i soglasheniakh MID SSSR* (Moscow: Ministerstvo inostrannykh del, 1946), 74–82.
7. RGIA, f. 20, op. 4, d. 3709, 1–17.
8. Petr L'vovich Bark was a big wheel in the Russian banking business; later he became the last Minister of Finance of the tsar's Russia (from 6 May 1914 to 28 February 1917). After the revolution of 1917 he lived in Great Britain and then in France. Bark is buried at the Russian cemetery Caucade in Nice. See: S. G. Beliaev, *P. L. Bark i finansovaia politika Rossii* (St Petersburg, 2002); D. N. Shilov, *Gosudarstvennye deiateli Rossiiskoi Imperii 1802–1917. Bibliographicheskii spravochnik* (St Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulavin, 2001), 61; N. I. Smirnova and T. M. Obraztsova, *Petr L'vovich Bark (06.01.1869–16.01.1937) – chinovnik, bankir i poslednii ministr finansov Rossiskoi imperii*, see: <http://www.nwab.ru/editions/publics/751/3256>. Associaciia Bankov Severo-Zapada, 30 May 2008.
9. RGIA, f. 563, op. 2, d. 231, 22–30.

10. Ibid., f. 600, op. 2, d. 1460, 44.
11. Ibid., f. 268, op. 3, d. 875, 17,136,170. About Russian land purchases in Iran see also: Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism* (London, 2007): 72–4; Elena Andreeva and Morteza Nouraei, “First Phase of Colonization. Russian Villages in Iran in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Iranian Studies* 46/3 (May, 2013): 415–42; Vanessa Martin, *Anglo-Iranian Relations since 1800* (London, 2005); Vanessa Martin and Morteza Nouraei, “The Role of the Karguzar in the Foreign Relations of State and Society of Iran from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1921. Part 1: Diplomatic Relations,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 25/3 (November, 2005): 261–77.
12. AVPRI, f. Sredneaziatskii stol, op. 485, d. 278, 137–8; f. Persidskii stol, op. 400, d. 916, 84–90; d. 917,140–5.
13. V A. Shuf (Borei), “Korrespondentsiia ob ekspeditsii v Persiiu. Russkii bank i torgovlia v Tabriz,” *Novoe vremia* 12897 (February, 1912): 5. Vladimir Shuf (01.01.1865–02.11.1913) was a poet, journalist and reporter of the “Silver Age,” better known in the literary circles under his pen-name, “Borei.” At the end of 1911, he departed from St Petersburg to Iran as a *Novoe vremia* journal correspondent and member of a field motor company, dispatched there to perform mechanical tests in army units, see: <http://www.v-shuf.narod.ru/public3htm>.
14. RGIA, f. 286, op. 3, d. 385, 77.
15. Ibid., f. 560, op. 28, d. 247, 15; see also: Anan'ich, *Rossiiskoe samoderzhavie*, 34.
16. Ibid., f. 600. op. 2, d. 1460, 1905.
17. The Order of St Anna was established as an honorary award of the Romanov dynasty in 1735. In the reign Tsar Paul I (r. 1796–1801) it became an imperial and state award (since 1797) for civil servants and military men. It is a silver gilded medal with insignia. The size depends on the grade: first class – 52x52 mm; second class – 44x44 mm; third class – 35x35 mm. The Order of St Stanislav was a Royal and Imperial Order of the Russian Empire. The lowest in the hierarchy of state honors, it was awarded to civil servants and adherents of different faiths. See: S. R. Serkov, “Orden Sviatoi Anny,” “Orden Sviatogo Stanislava,” *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal* 5, 6 (Moscow, 1990): 93, 95; see also: [http://www.soldat.ru/spravka/issue\\_vij/vij-1990.html](http://www.soldat.ru/spravka/issue_vij/vij-1990.html); A.A.Simonov and A.N.Zakatov, *Imperatorskie ordena Rossii 1698–1997* (Moscow, 1997).
18. RGIA, f. 600, op. 2, d. 1460, 10–18.
19. Ibid., 10.
20. Ibid., 14.
21. Ibid., 14–22.
22. Ibid., 43–4.
23. Ibid., f. 600, op. 4, d. 33, 143.
24. Cinematograph was an early term for moving camera cum film projector. Notice that

cinematograph became popular in Russia starting in May 1896, half a year later than in France (1895).

25. Page “Iranian Cinema,” see: [http://www.Iran.ru/upload/block\\_39a-istoriya-iranskogo-kinematographa](http://www.Iran.ru/upload/block_39a-istoriya-iranskogo-kinematographa). The first works on Iranian cinema appeared in Iran only at the end of the 1980s. On the Iranian Cinema see the following works: Jose de Esteban, Louise Johnson, and Anastasiia Kerameos, *Iranian Cinema* (London: National library) see: <http://www.bfi.org.uk>; Parviz Jahed, *Directory of World Cinema: Iran* (London, 2011), see: <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk>, November, 2011); Hamid Reza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema: A Political History* (London, 2006); Sheibari Khatereh, *The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetics, Modernity and Film after the Revolution* (London, 2011); Mohammad Ali Issari, *Cinema in Iran 1800–1979* (New York, 1989); Nasir al-Din Shah, *Aktur -i sinema: Once upon a Time* (Cinema DVD Video-Iranian Movies: Ferdosi Multimedia, 2002); Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (London and New York, 2001); Hamid Dabashi, *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema* (Washington, DC, 2007); Roza Holman, *The Real Persian Allegory: Contemporary Iranian Cinema and the Politics of the Poetic* (PhD diss. (Melbourne: M.A. University of Melbourne, Department of English Literary Studies, School of Culture and Communication, 2008); Agnes Devictor, “Iranian Cinema: A Political History of Iran Cinema and the Islamic Revolution,” *Iranian Studies* 43/3 (2010): 432–6; N.G. Loskutova, *Kino Irana: vedushchie tendentsii 1950–2000*, Thesis diss. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi Institut Kinematografii. Avtoreferat na soiskanie uchenoi steperni kandidata iskusstvovedeniia, 17.00.03, 2006); N. V. Kazurova, *Etnokulturnye traditsii Irana v otrazhenii natsional'nogo kinematografa*, Thesis diss. (St Petersburg: Muzei antropologi i etnographii Petra Velikogo. Avtoreferat na souskanie uchenoi steperni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk, 07.00.07), 2012.
26. Dynamo (dinamo) machine – obsolete term for a modern electrical generator of direct current.  
Petrol engine – a moveable apparatus of electrical energy with engine, working with petrol, see: <https://ru.wikiptediia.org>.
27. RGIA, f. 600, op. 4, d. 33, 14–15.
28. “Joachim & Co” was founded in 1869 and operated two offices by 1902: one at 3 Nevskii Avenue in St Petersburg and the other at 36 Miasnitskaia in Moscow. Joachim's was a famous company awarded Golden and Silver Medals at Russian and European exhibitions. “Court Society of Hahn &Co” began its work in 1891. It was located in Tsarskoe Selo (the imperial summer residence 27 km from St Petersburg) at Shirokaia street (in the House of Beraskoni), near the railway station, see: [http://www.Tsarselo.ru/yenciklopedija\\_tsarskogo\\_sela/nauka-i-tehnika\\_v\\_tsarskom\\_sele/totatele](http://www.Tsarselo.ru/yenciklopedija_tsarskogo_sela/nauka-i-tehnika_v_tsarskom_sele/totatele), 2015.
29. RGIA, f. 600, op. 4, d. 33, 10–12.
30. Ibid., 23–5
31. Ibid., 26.

32. Ibid., 32
33. Ibid., 34–5.
34. Ibid., 35.
35. Ibid., 40.
36. Ibid., 40–1.
37. Ibid., 142
38. Ibid., 143.
39. Ibid., 144.

# CHAPTER 7

## INFIDEL AGGRESSION: THE RUSSIAN ASSAULT ON THE HOLY SHRINE OF IMAM REZA, MASHHAD, 1912

*Rudi Matthee*

### **Introduction**

On 30 March 1912, Russian troops assaulted and shelled Astan-e Qods-e Razavi, the holy shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth Shi`i Imam, in Mashhad, while pursuing Iranian royalists who had taken refuge (*bast*) in the sanctuary. The incident left at least 39 people dead and a great many wounded, and caused significant damage to the shrine complex.

The Russian bombing of the Mashhad shrine was one among several striking events occurring in the aftermath of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1906–11), which saw a new level of foreign intervention and occupation as well as a heightened role for local and provincial forces in the ongoing struggle for the political future of the country.

At the time, this incident received little international media coverage, and the calamitous sinking of the RMS *Titanic* on 14–15 April soon overshadowed it. Nor has it figured prominently in modern historiography.<sup>1</sup> The Iranian Constitutional Revolution is, after the Islamic Revolution of 1978–9, the most intensely researched episode in modern Iranian history. The Constitutional Revolution as commonly covered does not extend to 1912, though. Rather, it unfolds between 1905, when the initial protests erupted with the famous *bast*, and 1911, the year in which Constitutionalists regained the upper hand against the counterrevolution of 1909. Beginning with E. G. Browne's *The Persian Revolution*, studies typically do not go beyond 1909, or at most late 1911, when a conflict between the cabinet and the Majles led to the dissolution of the latter.<sup>2</sup> The next period of interest to historians is World War I and Iran's role in it. The years 1912–13 thus tend to “fall between the cracks.”

Yet the assault on the shrine was of great significance, for the loss of life it caused and the damage it did to the shrine and, symbolically, for the sacrilege it was seen to have perpetrated against a sanctuary held to be inviolable and certainly off-limits to “infidels.” On the national Iranian stage, the incident represented humiliation inflicted by an imperialist power seemingly able to act with impunity in its self-proclaimed sphere of influence. The act of aggression

provoked deep outrage, in Iran as well as in the wider Muslim world, deepening the existing resentment of Russia among Iranians, who expressed this sentiment in an outpouring of poetry and folk tales.

It is tempting to see the incident as simply the violent culmination of Russian aggression and occupation of large parts of northern Iran, the outcome of a series of provocations on the part of the tsarist regime seeking an excuse to intervene and take control of a major city. This is certainly the way the events in question have been portrayed in the English-language literature, beginning with the eyewitness reports of Percy Molesworth Sykes, the British consul general in Mashhad at the time. Britain in this scenario figures as the prudent and decent power protecting a hapless Iran threatened by an aggressive Russia. The one Russian scholar who has examined the case unsurprisingly casts doubt on this reading and attributes the violence in part to the inability of Iran's authorities to curb their own hooligans, in part to British provocation and scheming.<sup>3</sup> The Iranians, in turn, tend to view their role as that of victims of imperialist bullying. In a recently published well-documented book on the incident, the antecedents, and the aftermath, Iranian victimhood indeed is the main theme. *Enqelab-e Tus* reproduces the narrative of events originally published in a lithograph version by Mohammad Hasan Adib Haravi in 1299hq/1920, collated with other writings by the same author, information from Iranian and foreign sources, woven together in an analysis copiously supported by explanatory footnotes, documents, and appendices. The editor, Setar Shahvazi, mentions that domestic Iranian elements played a role in the events, and the documentation shows how pervasive and decisive that role really was, but it is hardly part of the overall analysis in the editor's extensive introduction. The focus of the book is on the foreign interference in Iran's national affairs and the brutality of the assault on the country's sovereignty and national pride.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, the interpretations vary according to “national” viewpoints. Yet one of the most interesting aspects of the events of 1912 is precisely that the notion of “national” representatives and their interests intersects with the part played by individuals who were clearly non-state actors and manifestly did not serve the national interest. This is the point of departure of this study, which on the basis of an array of archival and secondary sources, English, Russian, and Persian-language ones, will look at the sequence of events culminating in the Russian assault on the shrine through multiple lenses. One is that of relations between Iran and Russia as complex, driven by a cast of characters far more diverse than just state actors. Another is that of the emerging realization that the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and its aftermath was not a straightforward march toward freedom thwarted by the forces of reaction, but an intricate phenomenon in which an authentic call for royal accountability and popular representation resisting the forces of reaction was mixed with personal rivalries and opportunism representing an often sordid quest for personal gain – all of it entangled with the position and role of the two main outside powers, Russia and Britain, as personified by their representatives in Mashhad.<sup>5</sup> A third is that of culpability. Rather than assuming that Russia's involvement was driven by sinister objectives and that the violence its troops applied in the end was inevitable and predictable, it seeks to uncover motives that fit the circumstances while acknowledging the limitations the Russians were faced with in their ability to control a highly volatile situation and recognizing their documented reluctance to perpetrate violence against a

target of such obvious religious and cultural sensitivity.

## **Political Background and Context**

To put the events of 1912 in their proper context, it is necessary to go back to the well-known Russo-British agreement of 1907, which divided Iran into two spheres of influence. The Russian sphere, which covered the country's northern part, included Khorasan. The British, mostly concerned about Iran as a buffer zone protecting India, reserved the barren lands of Sistan and Baluchistan for themselves. Russia's free hand in the north was reinforced by two circumstances. One was the discovery of oil in southwestern Iran – the “neutral” zone – a year or so after the conclusion of the agreement. Careful not to offend its main rival, and effectively short on leverage, “Britain refrained from intervening against the Russian violence, atrocities and domination in its sphere.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, St Petersburg and London effectively came to cooperate in the Afghan–Iranian border area, in part to prevent German penetration.<sup>7</sup>

The other consequential accord from this period is the so-called Potsdam Agreement – so named after the meeting between the tsar and the kaiser in the fall of 1910. Signed in August 1911, it made the up-and-coming power Germany recognize Russia's “special interests” in Iran, while insisting that she only had the commercial interests in mind that she had been pursuing for quite some time.<sup>8</sup> This left the British, whose Iran policy had since 1907 been informed by a desire to maintain good relations with Russia in order to keep the Germans at bay, with little room for maneuver, which essentially meant that they had little choice but to acquiesce in Russian behavior.<sup>9</sup>

The Constitutional Revolution, having succeeded in 1906, took a dramatic turn after the death of Mozaffar al-Din Shah in January 1907 and the subsequent enthronement of his son, Mohammad `Ali. The new shah forged a coalition with those clerical forces who had never accepted the idea of popular representation and man-made laws, as well as with the Russians, at least with the ones who represented Russian power in Iran. The result was the Russian shelling of the Majles building in June 1908, and the suspension of the national assembly as well as the constitution. Nevertheless, the revolutionary forces of Tabriz and the Bakhtiyari tribal leaders caused the tables to turn, so that in August 1909, following negotiations between the Russians and the British, Mohammad `Ali Shah was forced to resign. Offered a stipend in return for a pledge to abstain from politics, he went into exile to Odessa. This did not weaken the Russian position in the north, however.

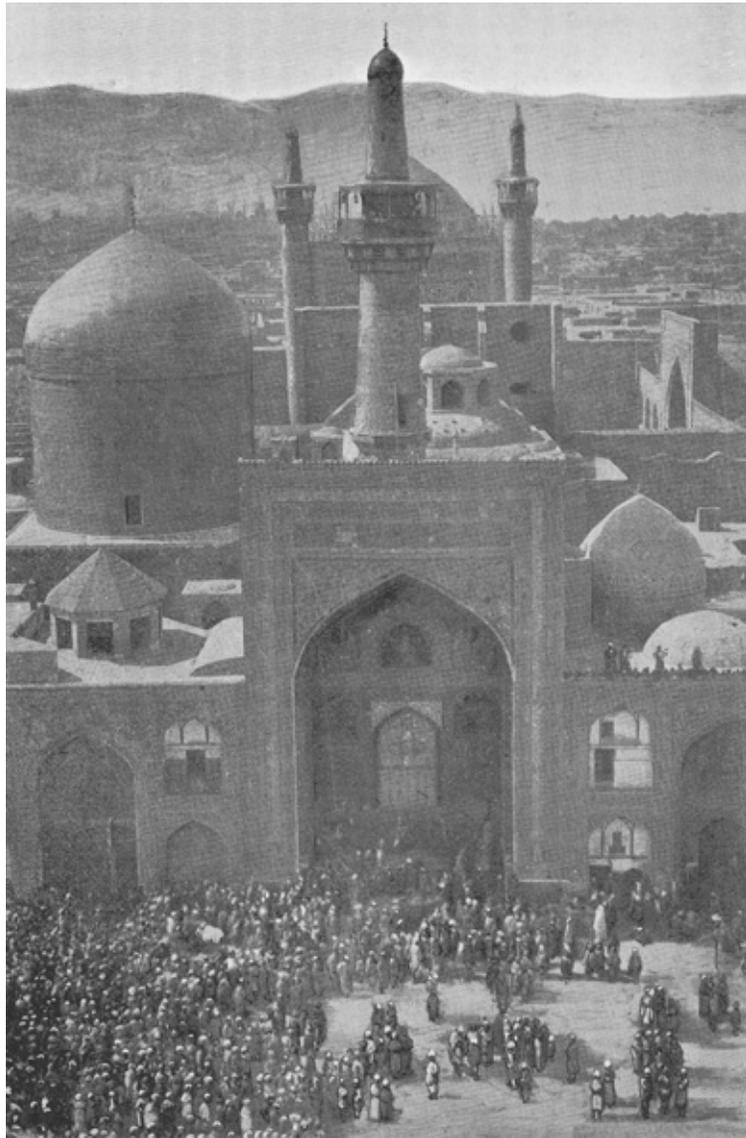
Indeed, the chaos and lawlessness that came to prevail throughout the country gave the Russians an excuse to tighten their grip on the part they controlled. While in the south the British, faced with similar chaos, set up the South Persian Rifles, the Russians, using the Cossack brigade, increased their control and engaged in a creeping occupation marked by the collection of taxes and the transfer of land to Russian immigrants, which they justified with reference to the order they helped restore.

## The Local Setting: Mashhad and the Shrine

At this time Mashhad was a town of some 60,000 inhabitants – but in effect many more given the huge numbers of pilgrims thronging the city at any given time of the year.<sup>10</sup> A bustling city inhabited and visited by a cosmopolitan crowd – Iranians, Arabs from Mesopotamia, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Bukharans, and Indians – it served as a major commercial center connecting Iran with Afghanistan and Central Asia. For the British, the town was the listening post for developments in western Afghanistan as well as the activities of their main rivals, the Russians. For the latter, Mashhad, in the words of Percy Sykes, the local British consul as of 1905, was of even greater importance for being the capital of Khorasan, “on which the province of Askabad depends for its daily bread.” Russia was also by far the city and region's most important commercial partner. The bazaars of Mashhad in the early twentieth century were filled with Russian goods.<sup>11</sup> Russians also made up most of the town's large foreign community.<sup>12</sup>

The city's primary significance lay in the shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth spiritual leader of Twelver Shi`ism, a sanctuary with an annual revenue of some 100,000 tumans or £20,000 in the late nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The Hungarian Ármin (Hermann) Vambery, who visited Mashhad in Muslim disguise in the 1860s, called the complex, covered with gold on the inside as well as on the outside, the richest in all the Islamic world.<sup>14</sup> The shrine was (and, at least officially, still is) off-limits to all but Shi`is. Vambery insists that Hindus, Armenians and Jews were not even allowed to behold the sanctuary from afar, since their eyes had a desacralizing effect even from a distance of 500 paces.<sup>15</sup> The German Graf von Schweinitz, who visited Mashhad in 1909, speaks of the hostility shown to non-Shi`is, local Jews and foreigners alike, by common people and especially the seyyeds attached to the sanctuary, who would take great affront at being touched by ritually unclean non-Shi`is.<sup>16</sup>

On the way leading to the sanctuary, the so-called Bala Khiyaban, a chain at the entrance of the actual tomb marked the limits of access to “infidels.” Going beyond the chain, the visitor would first enter the *sahneh-ye kohneh*, the old court, which measured some 200×290 feet. This court was lined on either side by two-storey buildings. The lower parts were composed of shops occupied by doctors, watchmakers, bookbinders, and seal-engravers. The upper rows housed offices belonging to the officials attached to the shrine. At the center of the court was the famous *saqa-khaneh-ye Naderi*, an octagonal marble structure.<sup>17</sup> From the old court the pilgrim would pass via a second *saqa-khaneh* to the most magnificent hall, the *dar al-siyadeh*. The *sahneh-ye now*, the new court, was distinctly less impressive. Built by Fath `Ali Shah, it had been further extended and embellished by Mohammad Shah and Naser al-Din Shah. The Gowhar Shad was the third of the courts surrounding the golden dome.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 7.1** Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad at the turn of the twentieth century, from Major Percy Molesworth. Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia or Eight Years in Iran* (London, 1902).

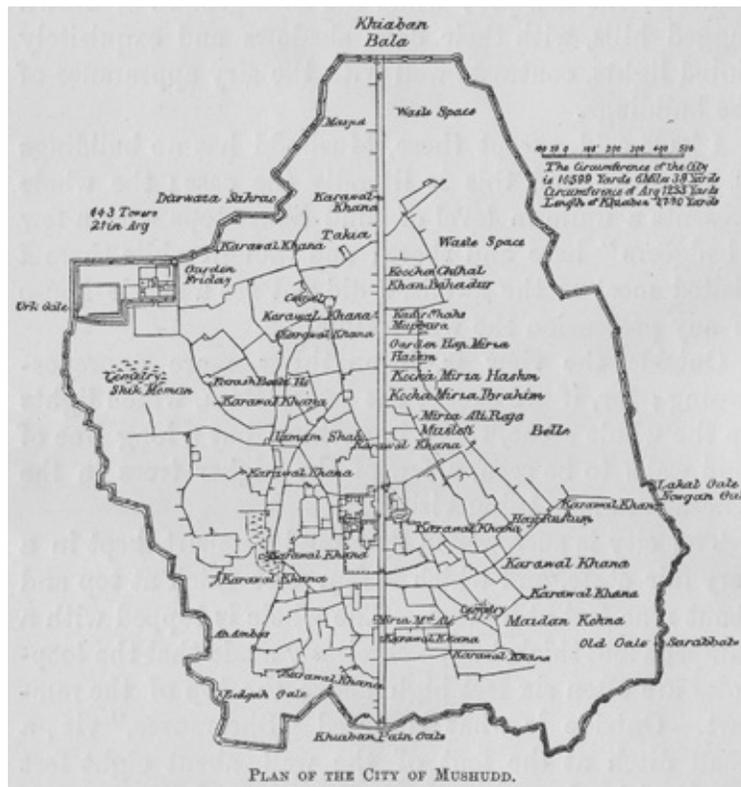
Charles Edward Yate called the religious students, *tollab*, attached to the shrine, “a most unruly and troublesome lot,” adding that many of them were not students at all but hangers-on, men who, unable to get into one of the local colleges, had joined the staff of some priest on the chance of getting fed, helping to magnify his importance.<sup>19</sup> Weak government meant great power for the *mojtaheds* overseeing the shrine. These often worked together but, whenever they quarreled, their followers would gather all the ruffians, *lutis*, in town, and the result would be subdued disturbance, resulting in shops being closed and commerce coming to a standstill.<sup>20</sup> Von Schweinitz notes how the city's European residents had welcomed the arrival of the Russians for bringing order and protection, adding that the secular Iranian authorities had treated Europeans with a great deal of courtesy and kindness as well.

The totality of the buildings, including a major bazaar, constituted a *bast*, a sanctuary, within which the chief of police possessed no jurisdiction and where the custodian of the shrine, the

*motavalli-bashi*, held sway by way of part-time doorkeepers, *darban*, who numbered some 1,000. Mashhad was only one of three such sanctuaries left in Iran.<sup>21</sup> In normal times, the shrine was home to a variety of criminals who found refuge from the law as long as they stayed inside the precinct. During the Constitutional Revolution, the shrine also became home to a variety of anti-constitutional elements, many of them agitators.<sup>22</sup>

Among the British, the main player was Percy Molesworth Sykes, an officer of long experience and great familiarity with Iran and its ways – one of the few British civil servants who did not consider being stationed in Iran a form of punishment and hardship. His assistant was Captain Redl, a fluent speaker of Persian as well as a Russian, who served as the British military attaché. The Russian presence in town, by contrast, was more than a matter of a consulate and its small staff. The Russians were heavily invested in Mashhad, having bought parcels of land just outside the city in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> Sykes's Russian counterpart, Prince Aristid Mikhailovich Dabizha, was a colorful, erratic man of Moldovan ancestry who was in the habit of wrapping his enormous grey beard in a silk bag to keep the dust out of it. An “official of the old school,” he had been in Iran since 1908, earlier having served in Bushehr, Mohammareh and Isfahan, where he had suffered under British high-handedness.<sup>24</sup> The Russian military commander in town was General Red'ko, condescendingly described by Sykes as a “man of about forty-five ... of an active abstemious habit and ... mentally on a somewhat higher plane than the usual Russian officer.”<sup>25</sup> The relationship between British and Russians was one of rivalry and mutual suspicion, but also marked by mutual recognition of the treaty that bound both, at least outwardly, as well as by diplomatic cordiality, which even took the form of occasional socializing.

These consular officers reported to – although did not necessary inform – their superiors: George Barclay, British Minister in Tehran; Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary in London, and their Russian counterparts, ambassador Nicholas Hartwig in Tehran, and Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov, Russia's minister of foreign affairs at the time, in St Petersburg.<sup>26</sup> And beyond those was public opinion in Russia and England as expressed in parliamentary debates and the press – in both cases very much directed against the other power.



**Figure 7.2** Mashhad street plan in the late nineteenth century, from C. M. MacGregor, *Narrative of a Journey through the Province of Khorassan and on the N. W. Frontier of Afghanistan in 1875*, 2 vols. (London, 1879).

The most prominent among the local authorities was Rokn al-Dowleh, the *kargozar*, or “foreign office agent,” who acted as liaison between the Iranian government in Tehran and the foreign consuls. Rokn al-Dowleh seems to have been a weak man; clearly undecided in loyalty to either the royalists – followers of the anti-constitutionalist Mohammad `Ali Shah – or the revolutionaries – who were themselves divided between Democrats, who favored radical reform, and Moderates, who stood for gradual change. This indeterminacy seems to have been a general feature of local leadership and included the *mojtaheds* of the shrine, who went back and forth between support for the Constitutional Movement and abhorrence of it.<sup>27</sup> The deposition and exile of Mohammad `Ali Shah in 1909 brought the Young Persians to power, but in Mashhad this mainly led to new taxes on landlords and merchants, which the new authorities pocketed themselves. This, combined with the breakdown of order, caused many to show support for the exiled shah and his return to Iran. The same divisions, exacerbating the feebleness of executive power in a country wracked by lawlessness, allowed the Russians and the British to play a disproportionately large role in the affairs of the city. Sykes himself admitted that the state of unrest and anarchy prompted many well-to-do Iranians to resign themselves to the idea of ultimately accepting Russian rule.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 7.3** Sir Percy Molesworth Sykes, British Consul in Mashhad in 1912. © Sykes House, London.

The main local non-state actor was Yusof Herati, agitator and agent provocateur, a supporter of the ex-shah, fiercely anti-constitutionalist and, according to Sykes, beholden to the Russians, who used him for their own purposes. Born in Herat, he had been taken by his father on a pilgrimage to the Iraqi *atabat* in 1884. In later years, he had moved back and forth between Herat and Mashhad. The Russians described him as a “cunning and unprincipled fellow” who had served them for some fifteen years, during which time he had visited Central Asia and St Petersburg, only to be dismissed in c. 1906–7 for being a British agent (as well). His attempts to re-ingratiate himself with the Russians by denouncing the English, and to curry favor with the latter by discrediting the Russians, had remained unsuccessful, as a result of which he had chosen to declare himself a fervent supporter of Mohammad `Ali. This does not seem to have prevented him from doing the bidding of the Russians, though.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 7.4** Prince Aristid Mikhailovich Dabizha, Russian Consul in Mashhad in 1912, from Mohammad Hasan Adib Haravi and Setar Shahvazi, *Enqelab-e Tus*.

The other local actor of note was Seyyed Mohammad Yazdi, a.k.a. Taleb al-Haqq, an ambitious cleric, aged about seventy, with family roots in Yazd, who had grown up in Tabriz. His intimate connection to the court of Mohammad `Ali Shah as a preacher had made him a fierce opponent of the Constitutional Movement. Forced to leave Tabriz, he had gone to Tehran, where he had agitated against the constitutionalists, distributing pamphlets at the shrine of Shah `Abd al-`Azim. He had next been sent into internal exile to Mashhad.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 7.5** Yusof Herati (left) and Mohammad Qoreysh Abadi (right), from Mohammad Hasan Adib Haravi and Setar Shahvazi, *Enqelab-e Tus*.

### **The Geopolitical Setting in 1911**

The Russians at the time outdid the British in economic and political power and influence in Iran, more particularly so in the country's northern half, its economic center and the location of the capital, Tehran, as well as the country's second city, Tabriz. Russia was, by far, Iran's most important trading partner in the years leading up to World War I, with 70 percent of Iran's exports going north, five times the value of goods destined for Britain and British India.<sup>31</sup> Its sheer proximity, moreover, gave Russia the power to threaten Iran with direct military occupation – something she had already achieved in part by way of a significant military presence in Azerbaijan and Khorasan.



**Figure 7.6** Mortaza Qoli Khan, *motavalli* of the Shrine, from Mohammad Hasan Adib Haravi and Setar Shahvazi, *Enqelab-e Tus*.

The Russians used this power effectively in their opposition to the employment of the efficient and headstrong American official, Morgan Shuster, who in 1911 had been enlisted by the Iranians to reorganize their country's fiscal system. In late 1911, unhappy about Shuster having hired Major Stokes and M. Lecoffre, two British nationals known for their liberal and anti-Russian feelings, they sent an ultimatum to the Iranian government demanding his dismissal. The British, keen to maintain good relations with Russia – and just as annoyed with Shuster's openly anti-imperialist stance – conceded and in November let it be known that “any demand for Shuster's dismissal will be met with no objection by His Majesty's Government.”<sup>32</sup> In November 1911 tensions mounted to the point where the Russians issued several ultimatums, the second of which included the demand that Shuster be dismissed, that the Iranian government would not employ any more foreigners without Russian sanction and, the height of chutzpah, that the Iranians should defray the cost of Russia's military presence on its soil – which she increased as the situation was evolving, threatening to dispatch troops to Qazvin and all the way to Tehran if demands were not met within forty-eight hours.<sup>33</sup> By mid-December, as

thousands of Russian troops were moving toward Tehran, the Iranian cabinet decided to give in to the Russian demands, but the parliament voted to reject the ultimatum. On 24 December, the cabinet of Samsam al-Saltaneh, which had been deposed when the Majles refused its request to be allowed to comply with the Russian ultimatum, executed a coup d'état against the parliament.<sup>34</sup> This was the beginning of the so-called Bakhtiyari regency as well as the end of the Shuster era and the Constitutional Revolution as such.

A few days earlier, on 20 and 21 December, fighting had broken out almost simultaneously in Tabriz, Rasht and Anzali, provoked, at least in Tabriz, by the Russians, though elsewhere perhaps by the Fedayin, their main opponents.<sup>35</sup> With 4,000 troops present in Tabriz, the Russians embarked on a reign of terror in this constitutional stronghold, bombarding the citadel, where hundreds of Mojahedin had taken refuge. The low point came on New Year's Day 1912, when they hanged Seqqat al-Eslam, the city's most prominent cleric, with five other high officials, an event equivalent, in Shuster's words, to "that which would be produced on the English people by the hanging of the Archbishop of Canterbury."<sup>36</sup> Simultaneously, they acted with violence against the inhabitants of Anzali and Rasht, notwithstanding the fact that, by this time, the Iranian government had accepted all the demands included in Russia's ultimatum. It is important to note that the Russian representative in Tehran, and certainly the authorities in St Petersburg, did not approve of the behavior of local Russian consuls, calling the events an "orgy of indiscipline."<sup>37</sup>

The other main issue in 1911 played itself out in Transcaspia and involved Mohammad `Ali Shah and his attempts to claw his way back to the throne with Russian assistance. The Russians, who seem to have supported him, considering him a useful tool, pledged that they would not prevent him from returning, yet also made it clear to him that he would have to return to Iran at his own risk.<sup>38</sup> Mohammad `Ali forged a particularly strong connection with the tribes of Gorgan (Astarabad) via his main supporter and ex-commander-in-chief, Arshad al-Dowleh. The deposed shah's propaganda, lubricated with large sums of money, attracted regional tribes as well as bandit leaders in the Mashhad area, such as Rahim Khan, resulting in a great deal of unrest and lawlessness, in the form of rural brigandage and periodic Turkoman raiding.

Despite the agreement that they had made with the new Iranian authorities with regard to Mohammad `Ali Shah, the Russians did little to prevent the ex-ruler from engaging in political activity. In mid-1911, having moved from Odessa to Vienna, he made his case among arms dealers in various European countries. Traveling in disguise from the Black Sea, he arrived at Gumush Tepe, on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, on 16 July, accompanied by boxes of arms labeled "mineral water," which had obviously been seen through by the Russian authorities.<sup>39</sup> Since the British did not intervene, Mohammad `Ali's foray created great alarm among the Constitutionals, and for good reason, for what ensued was a multi-pronged attack on the capital, with Arshad al-Dowleh moving in with Turkoman tribal recruits from Khorasan. Arshad al-Dowleh's march, however, ended with his defeat and execution, putting an end to the ex-shah's campaign. Mohammad `Ali next fled to a ship and escaped across the Caspian Sea. This effectively put an end to his ambitions, although not to the activities of his followers in

Mashhad.

## The Run-up to the Assault

By all accounts, Russian pressure on northern Iran mounted in the last weeks of 1911. On 14 December, a regiment of Cossacks from Merv consisting of 1,300 men left Ashkhabad (Ashgabat), to arrive in Mashhad on the 22nd. With more infantry troops arriving a few days later, before the end of the month the number of Russian soldiers in Mashhad had risen to 2,000. At the same time, fighting broke out between Russian troops and the Iranian *mojahedin*, with the confrontation in Tabriz being the most violent.<sup>40</sup> `Ashura, the commemoration of Imam Hoseyn's martyrdom, which occurred a week later, coinciding with New Year's Day, thus came at a sensitive time, prompting Sykes to express the hope that news about the recent fighting at Tabriz might not reach the population of Mashhad until after the mourning ceremonies.<sup>41</sup> As it happened, the `Ashura processions passed without incident in Mashhad, aside from a scuffle at the Russian Bank in town. Yet a few days later, as a force of 800 Russian troops was about to enter Quchan, 130 km northwest of Mashhad, Iran's clerical establishment responded to the events of Tabriz by calling for a jihad against the Russians.<sup>42</sup>

In the 20 January entry of his diary, Sykes reports that 800 more Russian troops had arrived and that the people of Mashhad were behaving "very well, being thoroughly cowed by what had happened at Tabriz." However, he warned, a single shot fired by a fanatic, a lunatic or drunk might start a conflagration, adding that this was perhaps what the Russians were waiting for.<sup>43</sup> On Thursday, 18 January, the Russian military attaché, Red'ko, had assembled his troops in the Meydan-e Arg and given a speech in which he assured his audience that the Russians had not come to wage war on Iran but to restore order by putting an end to the lawlessness and banditry to which Russian subjects in Khorasan had fallen victim. He thanked the local Iranian authorities for assisting him in his efforts by preventing the outbreak of disturbances.<sup>44</sup> Six days later Sykes reported that the people of Mashhad were becoming accustomed to the Russian troops; and he noted that General Red'ko was careful to maintain discipline. A heavy snowfall followed by a cold snap had also kept the people of the city indoors.<sup>45</sup>

Soon thereafter Sykes began to refer to a rebel movement and the demonstrations it organized in town in support of Mohammad `Ali Shah. Its leaders were Taleb al-Haqq, the elderly cleric who proclaimed his allegiance to Mohammad `Ali Shah while decrying constitutionalism and democracy as Babi and infidel inventions, and above all, Mohammad Yusof Khan Herati, a "noted scoundrel," in Sykes's words. Herati, who apparently had been promised a large sum of money by the ex-shah, had been demonstrating for months in favor of the return of the latter to power, first from the confines of the Russian consulate, and then, when the Russians withdrew their official support for him, in early February, from the security of the shrine. The local Iranian authorities for some time had wanted to expel him. Handed 100 tumans by the governor-general of Khorasan, he was supposed to leave Mashhad. Yet the Russians, considering him a useful tool, arranged for him to stay. Together with a retainer of the Russian Legation named Akbar Boland Tehrani, Herati had been allowed, under Russian

protection, to take *bast* in the shrine. There, he took signatures for a petition on behalf of the deposed ruler, while staging demonstrations with a flag on which was written: "Let us pray to the Russian Governor-General to restore to us our shah." A tent had been pitched and tea and sugar were distributed, at Russian expense, attracting a crowd of "loafers," as Sykes put it.<sup>46</sup>

On 14 February, Sykes wrote that more Russian soldiers had reached Mashhad but that, thanks to the efforts of the *kargozar* and the local police forces, the population showed no hostility toward them. Even drunken Russian officers and soldiers were "treated with the utmost consideration and politeness, the policemen telephoning for a party of their countrymen to take them home." Russian marches through the city, which, Sykes alleged, were calculated to excite the populace, passed off without incident, and after a "few days of curiosity," Mashhad "ceased to think about the new arrivals." Sykes surmised that this "tranquil state of affairs" was to the liking of his Russian colleague, who kept spreading the news that the ex-shah would regain the throne, even adopting the prediction by a local astrologer that Mohammad `Ali would first be defeated and then, after reaching Mashhad, would march on Tehran.<sup>47</sup>

The author of *Enqelab-e Tus*, an eyewitness to the events, confirms this narrative, reporting that the following words appeared on the door of the old court, with Herati's signature underneath: "I have sound information that His Highness Mohammad `Ali Shah will come to kiss the threshold of the holy shrine of the Eighth Imam; and we are presently in the process of making preparations for the ceremonies related to the arrival of his Highness."<sup>48</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Russian interpretation of this episode is different. Historian A. M. Matveyev, using unpublished documents from the archives of the Uzbek SSR, also, portrays the sympathizers of Mohammad `Ali as initially quite well-behaved folks who refrained from harassing ordinary citizens. But where Sykes saw an attempt by the Russians to foment unrest via their local agents, which, once it erupted, would then give the former an excuse to assume control of the city administration, Matveyev depicts a band of rebels, supporters of the ex-shah, who in early February 1912 had taken possession of the shrine and had begun to terrorize the local population, doing great harm to Russian trade and property.<sup>49</sup>

It is clear that the British and the Russians maintained contact about the evolving events, both in Mashhad and at the Foreign Ministry level. Meeting Sykes on 6 February, for instance, Dabizha assured his colleague that he would do everything possible to "calm the mob" and that he had ceased to protect Herati. The city in the next few days indeed regained some calm.<sup>50</sup> In reality, the Russian government, having decided to start cooperating with its British counterpart, in mid-January had begun advocating direct negotiations between Mohammad `Ali Shah and the Naser al-Molk government. The Russian Foreign Ministry accordingly began to "put pressure on its consuls to refrain from aiding Mohammad `Ali Shah and his supporters."<sup>51</sup> Foreign Minister Sazonov showed himself willing to let the former shah go, provided the Qajar dynasty was to remain in place and that Russia would be offered additional concessions in its zone, including the acceptance of land ownership by foreigners. Ivanov, the Russian consul in Astarabad, was instructed to offer Mohammad `Ali Shah an annual stipend of 50,000 tumans as well as full amnesty for his supporters.<sup>52</sup>

On 13 February, matters suddenly turned critical. Together with Sheykh `Ali Akbar, Taleb al-Haqq and Seyyed Mohammad `Ali, Yusof Herati organized a fresh demonstration, threatening Sykes and his servants as well as the members of the Constitutional Party. The latter, Sykes insisted, had to be restrained from overreacting. They had subscribed 900 tumans and engaged some Russian Circassians to murder Herati. The British managed to calm tempers by way of the Iranian liaison attached to the consulate, Khan Mobarak `Ali Shah, who managed to forestall the crime by threatening to withdraw the support of the consulate and by pointing out that killing Yusof Herati might actually justify a Russian intervention.

Later that same day the news came that Mohammad `Ali Shah had agreed to leave the country – in return for amnesty for his supporters and a pension for him. It took until 20 February for the Russian consul to receive instructions about this from St Petersburg, preventing any coordinated action between the British and the Russians to defuse the tensions in town.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, another brigand, Mohammad Nishapuri, was spotted roaming around Mashhad with his gang of some twenty men. Having shot four of the men sent against him by the authorities, they joined Herati and his band of brigands, who were now shooting “freely at night to keep up their courage.” The Iranian authorities were afraid to take any action in response, both on account of the sanctity of the shrine and, as Sykes claimed, because they realized that the Russians were only waiting for a chance to take over the administration of the city.<sup>54</sup>

It is at this point that a divergence between official Russian views, on the one hand, and orders and actions by the Russian representatives in Mashhad, on the other, becomes visible. Having received a telegram from the Russian Legation informing him that the ex-shah would conditionally leave Iran, Sykes suggested to his Russian colleague that they draft a letter together to the *kargozar*. Yet Dabizha responded by saying that he had received no information or instructions from his superiors in St Petersburg. Sykes, pondering this response, wondered if this was a ploy or whether Dabizha was merely “determined to plough a lonely and crooked furrow.”<sup>55</sup>

On 18 February Sykes received another telegram from the Russian Legation, stating that by now his colleague had been instructed to change his attitude toward the ex-shah. Yet Dabizha told him once again that he had received no instructions from St Petersburg. This pattern of denial and what Sykes called feint ignorance continued even as Dabizha received instructions from Sazonov to cooperate with Sykes and stop supporting those who favored a return of the ex-shah.<sup>56</sup>

Later that same month, Sykes claimed that the Russians, having failed to create anarchy in Mashhad on a scale sufficient to justify their intervention, were now trying another method.<sup>57</sup> This, too, involved Mohammad `Ali who, enjoying a Russian stipend, had taken refuge on the island of Ashurada in the southeastern corner of the Caspian Sea. On 20 February, the Russian consul notified Mohammad Taleb al-Haqq that the ex-shah was scheduled to leave Iranian soil, urging him to instruct his men to leave the shrine, as refusing to do so would only create chaos.

Three days later Dabizha wrote to Rokn al-Dowleh, the *kargozar*, with the news that the Russian consul in Astarabad had met with the ex-shah and had conveyed to him the news that the two powers had decided that he should leave Iranian soil, with a pension of 50,000 tumans a year, to be paid by the Iranian government, and amnesty for his followers.<sup>58</sup>

On 28 February, as nightly disturbances and shootings proliferated, more and more merchants kept their shops shuttered and no one dared go out later than half an hour after dusk. In a letter to Rokn al-Dowleh, Dabizha stated that the rabble assembled in the mosque, numbering about 100, were only intent on creating chaos, adding that these troublemakers prevented ordinary Muslims from visiting the shrine in an orderly fashion, and that Russian subjects had been complaining about the unrest and the ruinous effect it had on their business. The letter contained an ultimatum to the authorities of Mashhad, to the effect that they should disperse the mob at once, vacate the shrine, or confess to their inability to do so.”<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, the Russians, according to Sykes, continued, by way of agents provocateurs, to spread the word that the ex-shah would return within forty days, thus causing the number of agitators in the shrine to increase in number and activity.<sup>60</sup>

In early March, Sykes described the situation as getting out of hand. A Russian officer was shot at, and Yusof Khan Herati and his men attacked a police post, seizing four policemen, one of whom was killed. The Russians thereupon sent troops, with the nominal aim of protecting their nationals but also, in the opinion of the British consul, to strengthen Herati's hand. Yet it rather seems that, at this point, the Russians were losing control over their proxies and thus over the situation in Mashhad. A telegraph message of 8 March in which Dabizha called military action against the supporters of the ex-shah “unthinkable” since it would entail the occupation of the mosque and thus incite Muslim sentiment against the Russians, suggests a realization that his options were limited.<sup>61</sup>

On 8 March, Herati and his men “sallied out again.”<sup>62</sup> According to Adib Haravi, twenty-three people were killed in the clashes that ensued between Constitutionalists and rebels.<sup>63</sup> On 12 March, Herati was said to have seized some Babis, threatening to hang them. He had, however, released these after “receiving some money.” Meanwhile he kept increasing his forces, boasting that he was imitating Nader Shah.<sup>64</sup>

In response, the Russian consul on 11 March turned to Rokn al-Dowleh, requesting the suppression of this revolt. The latter declared himself powerless to act, however. Fearing a repeat of the story of Tabriz, the Russians thereupon set out to restore order in Mashhad. All “peace-loving” citizens gave up the *bast*, leaving only some 600–700 armed insurgents inside the shrine. These had been joined by some 200 robbers, also armed and disguised as pilgrims, who used the fact that the shrine was not accessible to non-Muslims to their advantage.<sup>65</sup>

Two days later, on 13 March, the news broke that Mohammad `Ali had left Iranian soil, rendering the cause of the rebels hopeless. Yet their resolve only hardened in response. They stepped up their agitation and vandalism, targeting shops, including Russian ones. The Russians in response posted artillery on rooftops and had soldiers patrol the bazaar and the area surrounding the shrine.<sup>66</sup>

Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, fell on 20 March. A few days earlier some people approached Herati to seek a reprieve in the prevailing turmoil so that people would be able to enjoy a calm and joyful holiday. He agreed and an announcement appeared on the door of the shrine to the effect that no one would be molested during the days of the holiday.

At this point, various attempts were made to find a solution to the problems.<sup>67</sup> A meeting designed to ease tensions brought high-ranking `olama such as Hajj Mirza Ja`far and Mirza Sayyed Ebrahim Razavi together with several officials of the shrine. It was suggested that Herati be offered the government of Torbat-e Heydariyeh, some 150 km south of Mashhad, and that `Ali Akbar be granted a function commensurate with his dignity. But such a move required the approval of Rokn al-Dowleh and, since this was not forthcoming, the meeting remained fruitless.<sup>68</sup>

Reconciliation through mediation by Sykes through Mobarek `Ali Shah failed as well. As the various parties seemed to come together, the Russians announced that the talks had broken down because the Iranians were not interested in a deal. Undisclosed sources informed Sykes that the Russians secretly informed the supporters of the ex-shah that the latter had already landed at Bandar Gaz and was on his way to Mashhad.<sup>69</sup>

More violence followed. On 24 March the Shir-e Shur Police Station, located near the consulate quarter, was attacked. By tapping the phone of his Russian colleague, Sykes found out that Herati, working in collusion with the Russians, had been responsible for this attack. Herati had informed Dabizha that he was waiting for an order to take on the telegraph office next, and had been told to wait a little.<sup>70</sup> Russian sources report the same attack but insist that, in response, Dabizha had called a meeting with Rokn al-Dowleh, who declared that he was unable to restore order, whereupon the Russian consul had told him that, in that case, he had no choice but to declare a state of emergency.<sup>71</sup>

Martial law was indeed declared later that same day. Two days later the members of the city's armed police were summoned to the *qazaq-khaneh* to receive their wages. When they showed up with their weapons, they were surrounded by Russian soldiers and disarmed. A further notice was proclaimed, ordering anyone in the possession of a weapon to surrender it for a receipt. The Russians thus curtailed the firepower of the city's inhabitants, and only the rebels in the shrine were left with their arms.<sup>72</sup>

On 26 March matters took an even more ominous turn as a body of 150 men declared jihad and symbolically donned white shrouds. Between 2,000 and 3,000 villagers joined them, making an uncontrollable outburst of fanaticism probable, as Sykes put it. A number of Russian soldiers who were posting notices around the shrine were charged out and ran away. However, efforts by the Russian attaché to convince the rebel leaders to withdraw proved successful, for on March 29 a *fatwa* was issued to the effect that to carry arms in the shrine was a sign of disrespect and thus inadvisable, and that the city's shops should be reopened. A few shops did reopen and only the men of Herati and Taleb al-Haqq remained in the shrine.<sup>73</sup>

New hopes were raised when, upon the proclamation of martial law, a new governor-general, Naser al-Dowleh, was appointed, replacing what Sykes called the weak and "useless"

Rokn al-Dowleh.<sup>74</sup> Through his agent, Naser al-Dowleh offered Yusof Herati 60 tumans per month as well as a sum down if he left the shrine. He did not, even though General Red'ko at this point, probably on Wednesday 27 March, made it clear to him and his men that there was no more hope of Mohammad `Ali returning to Iran. They were also told that, if they had any other demands and objectives, they should emerge from the shrine and notify the authorities of these, after which they would be granted protection, except for Herati and Mohammad Qoresh Abadi. If they did not comply with these orders, the Russians would remove them forcibly from the precinct within forty-eight hours.<sup>75</sup>

## The Assault

Herati at this point showed himself to be cocky and independent: not only did he spurn the Russian ultimatum but he reacted by inciting more resistance, holding speeches in which he bragged that the Russians would never dare violate the sacred site and that he and his men would be ready to resist them if they did.<sup>76</sup> In the same period, Dabizha, clearly keen to avoid a violent outcome, contacted various behind-the-scenes advisers of the insurgents, the *mojtaheds* Mirza Ebrahim, Taleb al-Haqq, Qa'em Maqam al-Towliyah, and various merchants, to persuade them to put down their arms, threatening action if they did not.<sup>77</sup> When the forty-eight hours had passed and nothing had happened, Dabizha spoke by telephone to the supervisor, *motavalli-basi*, of the shrine, Mortaza Qoli Khan Tabataba'i, asking him why the rebels had not been expelled yet. The deadline was subsequently extended by one day, allowing some more time for negotiations between the authorities and the rebels.<sup>78</sup> That same Friday 29 March, the `olama spent the entire day meeting at the residence of Mirza `Abd al-Rahman Modarres, after which they all put their seal on a *hokm*, decree, ordering those occupying the shrine to give up their arms and surrender, and merchants to open their shops, in order to preserve the sanctity of the shrine and avoid the shedding of Muslim blood. The rebels in response agreed to surrender their weapons on condition that these be stored, sealed and secured, for one or two months, until the city was safe and they could be returned to them.<sup>79</sup>

The morning of the following day, Saturday 30 March, things initially looked up; the shops in town were open and there was generally a "hopeful feeling."<sup>80</sup> Yet the rebels remained holed up in the shrine. Matters soon deteriorated. One of the Russian agents provocateurs, Nayeb `Ali Akbar Hasani, collected a band of 200 women at two *krans* a head, and had them rush to the bazaar shouting that they wanted their shah. The shops closed as a result. Sykes dismissed this development as being of "slight importance." The Russian account contradicts this. According to Dabizha, the agents of the rebels next became overbearing in their demand that the Russians guarantee the abolition of all constitutional reforms. Dabizha, utterly fed up with the insurgents, the terror in which they held the people of Mashhad and their assumptions about never-ending Russian forbearance, at this point cancelled all discussions and announced that if by 3:00 pm the rebels had not disarmed and dispersed, he would hand all authority to the commander-in-chief of his armed forces. This decision was apparently taken without consultation of, or approval by, St Petersburg.<sup>81</sup>

At 2:30 pm that same afternoon Dabizha called Sykes to tell him his troops would start shelling the shrine at 3:00 pm unless Herati and his men had vacated the sanctuary by that time. In the Russian reading of developments, Dabizha made one last futile effort to persuade the insurgents to comply. These responded at 4:30 by opening fire on the Russian troops. The latter replied but soon ceased firing. After a final attempt to convince the insurgents of the futility of their stubbornness failed, the Russians stormed the courtyard. The actual bombardment started at 4:45 pm.<sup>82</sup> With the four large guns that they had installed about half a mile outside the city, and one machine gun in the main thoroughfare leading to the mosque, the Bala Khiyaban, and the Maxim guns they had placed around the premises, the Russians fired some 200 shells, damaging both the gold dome and the blue-tiled dome. The shelling lasted two hours, following which Cossack forces entered the shrine, “shooting and bayonetting all those who could not find cover.” Yusof Herati, Mohammad Qoresh Abadi, and a number of their riflemen had disappeared soon after the first shells had been fired. The troops who did not disappear sent for him for instructions but, when he did not show up, left their positions so as to blend in with the crowd of pilgrims. By 6:30 pm the Russian detachments had reached the chain separating the outer precinct from the *bast* area. Desperate pilgrims were heard calling “*aman, aman,*” whereupon Russian troops were ordered to hold their fire. A total of 1,400 persons were found in the shrine. Of these, 37 had been detained, among them Taleb al-Haqq.<sup>83</sup>

The following morning Sykes telephoned the Russian consulate offering the use of the British hospital for the wounded, to be informed that there were no wounded. Later, however, nineteen injured men and women were brought in. Sykes also asked Dabizha for permission to visit the shrine. Having received an affirmative response, he did so in the company of the *motavalli-bashi*. This enabled him to offer an eyewitness description of the state of affairs. The old court, he said, which showed a “general air of neglect,” bore some marks of the bombardment. The new court, which had served as Herati's headquarters, was not much affected either. The party finally reached the Gowhar Shad, which had been repeatedly struck, resulting in (minor) damage to the tiles. The golden dome had been hit in four places and the gold tiles were twisted and much more badly damaged. The British party was not allowed to enter the shrine's inner chamber. Sykes suspected that this was because everything it contained had been carted off the night before. At the same time a committee of Iranian architects examined the shrine for damage and estimated the cost of repairs at 46,000 tumans or £9,000. They calculated that 19 shells had struck the gold dome and that 11 had hit the blue dome, damaging its irreplaceable tiles.<sup>84</sup> As for casualties, rumor had it that 100 people or even hundreds had died. The official death toll was 39, however. Sykes gives a total number of 74 casualties, 71 men and three women. Of the 31 wounded, three had been Russian. He concluded his report by stating that the effect on Mashhad was one of “stupefaction and bitter repentance” at having believed the Russians in their promise that they would back the ex-shah.<sup>85</sup>

A much more dramatic (and exaggerated) version of the incident was relayed to England – a move that the Russians interpreted as being part of well-planned British propaganda designed to discredit them.<sup>86</sup> The report of the incident that appeared in *The Near East* spoke of “some two hundred” killed and stated that the shrine had been “looted of most of its valuables,

carpets and manuscripts ....”<sup>87</sup> A telegram from Tabriz sent to E. G. Browne, shortly after the events claimed that, “all the holy courts and buildings, the sacred dome and the cloisters have been destroyed by cannon-balls.”<sup>88</sup> In a subsequent letter to the *Manchester Guardian* Browne spoke in equally dramatic terms, comparing the events with the “savage Mongol invasion of Persia” in terms of vandalism and violence.<sup>89</sup> The Qajar statesman, `Eyn al-Saltaneh, in his diary notes how the Russians allegedly had also robbed the shrine of its treasure.<sup>90</sup> In reality, however, the damage was far less severe and not much property had been taken. The Russian soldiers had clear instructions not to loot. Sykes himself stated that the top of the grating of the actual shrine, which was a “gold knob studded with valuable jewels,” had been hit by a bullet and the jewels had disappeared. The safe in the treasury had not been forced, but a chest containing such precious objects as the bow of the Safavid ruler Shah `Abbas I and the shield of Mohammad Shah, the Mughal ruler defeated by Nader Shah, had been broken open. These objects had, however, been returned. Sykes concluded that, “altogether the losses in the shrine were not serious.” The fifty-two shops in the covered bazaar, on the other hand, operated by precious-stone cutters and seal-engravers, had been ransacked. A statement by Kerbala'i `Ali, the caretaker of that part of the bazaar, confirmed losses of between 10,000 and 12,000 tumans.<sup>91</sup>

Following Sykes's visit, a document was drawn up under Russian auspices. It returned the shrine to the *motavalli-bashi* while it made the Russian action seem justified and legitimate. Mortaza Qoli Khan at first refused to take responsibility for this whitewash but relented when he realized that this was the only way to regain possession of the sanctuary. He did, however, not seal the document but signed it with half his usual signature, “this being the usual method of protest in Persia” in Sykes' words.<sup>92</sup> For some two weeks following the assault, the Russians continued to enter the shrine on horseback, until on 15 April they received strong orders from Tehran as well as St Petersburg that *bast* should be restored.<sup>93</sup> A sum of 80,000 tumans was made available for the restoration of the shrine.<sup>94</sup> Several months after the events, a beginning was made with the repairs.

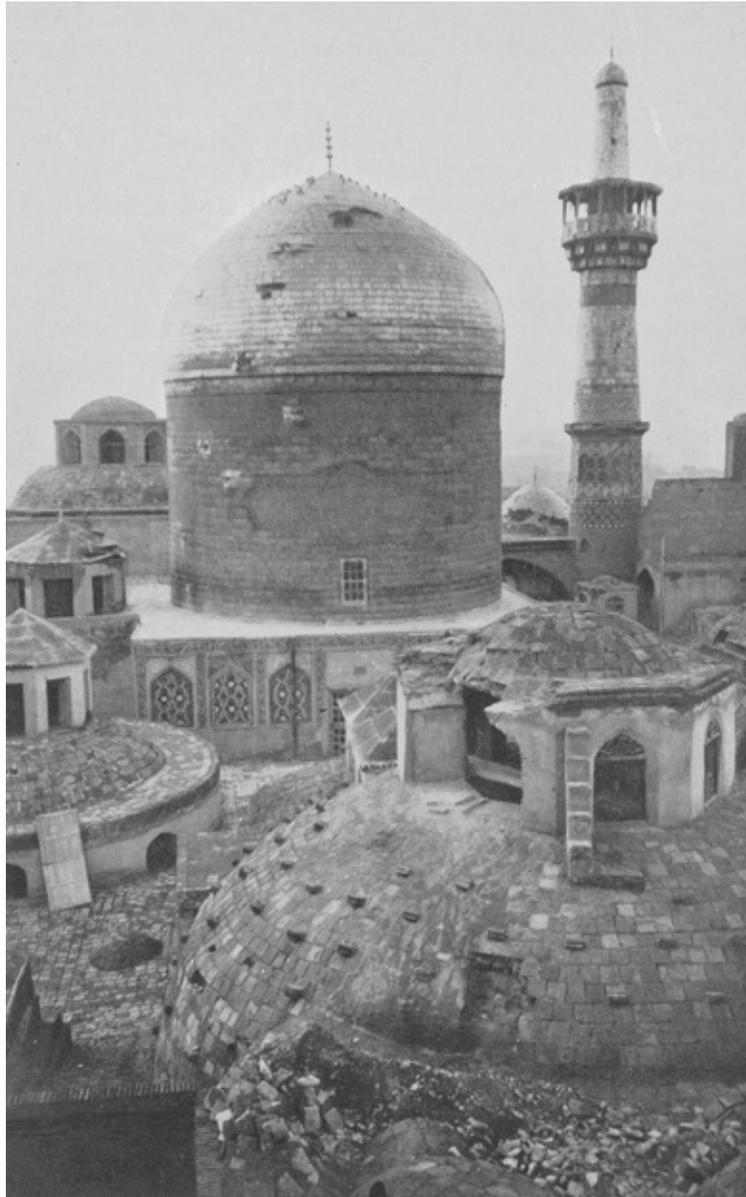
## **The Aftermath: Revelations**

The Russian version of the events, found in an official report written on 31 March by Red'ko, upheld the line that Herati and his “robber band” had taken *bast* in the shrine as of February, terrorizing the hapless population and causing a complete cessation of trade, including trade conducted by Russian merchants. He states how he had first exhausted all peaceful means of influencing the Iranian authorities, the clergy and the agitators themselves. Yet, since the robbers “carried their acts to the extreme of insolence, robbing and even murdering, and even threatening that they would cut the throats of and hang all Russian and other Europeans,” on 30 March, at 3:00 pm Red'ko had sent an ultimatum to the rebels demanding their immediate surrender, and when none was forthcoming and the rebels opened fire even before the expiration of the hour's grace, he had no choice but to act.<sup>95</sup>

The British reading of these same events was rather different, and it was soon backed up by

documents and confessions. Sykes, having consulted various Iranians, on 13 April remarked that there was a universal feeling among them that “the Russians wish to strike a blow which would echo like a thunder-clap all over Persia and strike fear into all hearts.”<sup>96</sup> As for Yusof Herati, Sykes reported that he and his fellow agents provocateurs had been led out of the shrine under Russian escort half an hour after the cessation of the bombardment. Herati had first been taken to the Russian consulate and, allowed to leave Mashhad, was now in the hills near Shandis. He had escaped and remained on the run for some seven weeks. On 23 May he was captured by the authorities of Mashhad and, at the orders of the Russians, who did not want him to make public statements, promptly shot. The following day his corpse was first paraded through the city fastened on a catafalque covered with red cloth that was placed in a carriage filled with roses, and then strung up in the main square of Mashhad.<sup>97</sup>

Before long, further evidence of a premeditated Russian scheme surfaced. Shortly after the assault, Captain Redl laid his hands on a copy of the Russian order issued on the day before the assault that contained detailed instructions about the projected action, suggesting that the entire incident had been planned beforehand. On 13 April Sykes furnished additional proof of collusion between the Russians and Yusof Herati and his agents by clarifying how they had escaped from the shrine with Russian assistance. He invoked several witnesses who had seen how Herati and his men had been escorted out of the shrine shortly after the shelling ended, to end up in a village named Qal`eh Emami, some twelve miles from Mashhad. Sykes also reports how, meanwhile, Herati had written him three petitions asking the British for assistance and declaring that the Russians had deceived him. Sykes saw this as more proof that the Russians had been in “criminal collusion” to bombard the shrine.<sup>98</sup>



**Figure 7.7** The Dome of the Shrine after the Russian shelling, from Dwight M. Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion. A History of Islam in Persia and Irak* (London, 1933).

In a later report, Sykes furnished a letter written by Herati to Red'ko on 30 March, the day of the assault, in which Herati reminded his protectors that he had served them for twenty-two years, how he had served the Russian government in Bokhara and Khiva, and how he had taken sanctuary in the shrine for one year and eleven days for fear of the constitutional government. In light of these antecedents he now felt betrayed.<sup>99</sup>

On 10 or 11 April, moreover, Sykes had a conversation with Mortaza Qoli Khan, upon the latter's request. The keeper of the shrine told the British diplomat that, a day before the shelling, the Russian consul had called on him to assure him that "in no case would the shrine be attacked." On the day of the assault, however, he had received a letter from Red'ko stating that, "the shrine would be bombarded in an hour's time unless Yusof and the other agitators quitted it." Treating him rudely, Red'ko had told Mortaza Qoli Khan that the Russians would level the sanctuary if their demands were not met. Forced to go to the shrine, Mortaza Qoli

Khan had been taken to Yusof Herati who, told to leave, had responded that he would not, lest people would think he was a coward. Proceeding to the Gowhar Shad Mosque, the *motavalli* had barely had time to meet Nayeb `Ali Akbar Hasani and Taleb al-Haqq when the Russians opened fire from the roof of the mosque, forcing him to go inside the haram, where a large panic-stricken crowd of unarmed men and women was assembled. Some two hours after nightfall the firing had stopped. The Russians then entered the tomb chamber, ordering those present to leave, striking them with the butts of their rifles. Having reached the old court, they were put under guard. Colonel "Scourrat" appeared on the scene in a semi-drunken condition, having been given wine by Red'ko to celebrate their "victory." He had been kept in custody until the next day, forced to show the Russians around every corner of the shrine.<sup>100</sup>

Sykes revised his earlier report about the absence of Russian looting as well. In mid-April he reported that "there was no doubt whatever that the Russian officers and men looted shops and houses extensively."<sup>101</sup> Later that month he spoke of rumors according to which some of the fine carpets had not been returned, and implicated his "colleague," Dabizha, a "keen collector of carpets."<sup>102</sup> Two months later Sykes insisted that Dabizha had been bribing St Petersburg, securing an extension of his stay by "sending the emeralds and rubies which he received as part of his share of the loot."<sup>103</sup> And in July the British consul claimed that the "egregious colonel Scourrat" had "obtained a sword studded with jewels and much other loot," some of which he had to give up.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, Sykes, who all along had surmised that his Russian colleague had either disobeyed instructions from his superiors in Tehran and St Petersburg or had not received any, in June got hold of two letters that confirmed his suspicion that the Russians were simply double-dealing. One had been written on 14 February by Mohammad Vali, the *sepahdar*, the representative of Mohammad `Ali, and had been copied from the original by Khan Mobarak `Ali Shah. That letter confirmed that the ex-shah had received Herati's previous letters and that a reply had been given. It further instructed Herati to leave the shrine immediately and take sanctuary with the Russian legation to take necessary action from there, in consultation with the Russians. The other letter thanked him for acting in accordance with the previous instructions and admonished him to take no action without the permission of the consulate.<sup>105</sup>

Sykes conveyed all this information in a series of frantic dispatches to the newly appointed British Minister at Tehran, Sir Walter Townley. The latter, keen to maintain a good rapport with the Russians, was little impressed with what he thought was overblown rhetoric, until he grudgingly had to accept the veracity of Sykes' allegations.<sup>106</sup>

## Reactions

Since the suppression of the parliament in December 1911 had been accompanied by a ban on the press, we unfortunately have no domestic Iranian newspaper reports, either from Mashhad or from Tehran, with immediate reactions to the assault.<sup>107</sup> Yet it is clear that the incident caused great anger and hatred among the people of Mashhad, prompting an outpouring of poems lamenting the assault. Sykes reported in June that the "guides of the shrine who recite

the various wonders in a fixed poem,” had “added many details about the outrages inflicted by the Russians, tales of whose misdeeds will be carried far and wide.”<sup>108</sup> According to the German embassy in London, pictures of the atrocities, including images of mutilated bodies, went from hand to hand in Iran. Together with Morgan Shuster's book, *The Strangling of Persia*, which indicted both the Russians and the British as oppressive forces in Iran, these had done much to tilt public opinion against the Russians.<sup>109</sup>

The events resonated outside Iran as well. As said, E. G. Browne publicized the Russian aggression in Britain. A few years later, during World War I, German propaganda decried the Russian aggression by way of pamphlets.<sup>110</sup>

The reaction from the wider Muslim world and especially from India, where anxieties about Russia's occupation of northern Iran had been voiced earlier, was as swift as it was fierce. Sykes, who predicted that the effects of the outrage would be felt in India, contributed to exactly such emotions by commissioning a local artist to create a rendering of the assault. The result was a graphic cartoon that vividly depicts the Russians with their weaponry, their horses, and even dogs, amid the carnage. After it appeared in early June, Sykes sent the cartoon to Tehran and the Subcontinent, where it was publicized to show the Muslims of British India what they could expect if they would ever fall for Russia's blandishments.<sup>111</sup> Sykes saw this as the one satisfactory outcome of the events, since it would spread the word about Russia's brutality.<sup>112</sup>

The Persian-language *Habl al-Matin*, published in Calcutta, wrote about the events in bitterly accusatory tones, first implicating the British and then exonerating them.<sup>113</sup> Numerous telegrams from incensed Muslims in India poured in as well. On 4 April 1912, a resolution of Muslims in Calcutta was passed, protesting against the outrage. The Muslims of Allahabad followed suit. On 6 April, a telegram arrived from S. Wazeer Hasan, Honorary Secretary of the All India Muslim League, located in Lucknow, expressing regret mixed with sorrow about the bombardment and urging the Government of India and the Home Government to dissociate themselves from the action, to take steps to have the Russian troops removed from the shrine, and to persuade the Russians to evacuate northern Iran. The Foreign Office indeed took up the matter with the Russians yet failed to influence their behavior.<sup>114</sup>

### **Marginal Text of the Cartoon**

Oh Lord of the Time, Regard Tus.  
The harshness and the oppression of the son of  
Harun al-Rashid is increased  
Release us from the tyranny and oppression of the Russians  
Oh King, the honor of thy ancestor is gone to the wind  
From the crooked ebony revolution of the heaven  
This dome became the target of Russian guns

Oh Lord of the Time!

Regard this race of tyrants  
They entered the shrine of the saint  
They land guns on the tomb of the Imam Reza  
This tyranny was enough that they all wore long boots  
The building of Islam cracked in A.H. 1330 (1912)  
The place was a refuge of the weak  
On that night it became the battle place of the black-hearted  
Round the grating of the sacred tomb  
There were many killed, lying in blood  
Like fish in a pool  
How can I complain of this to thee  
O Secret of God  
Thou knowest the action of the doers of the bad deed

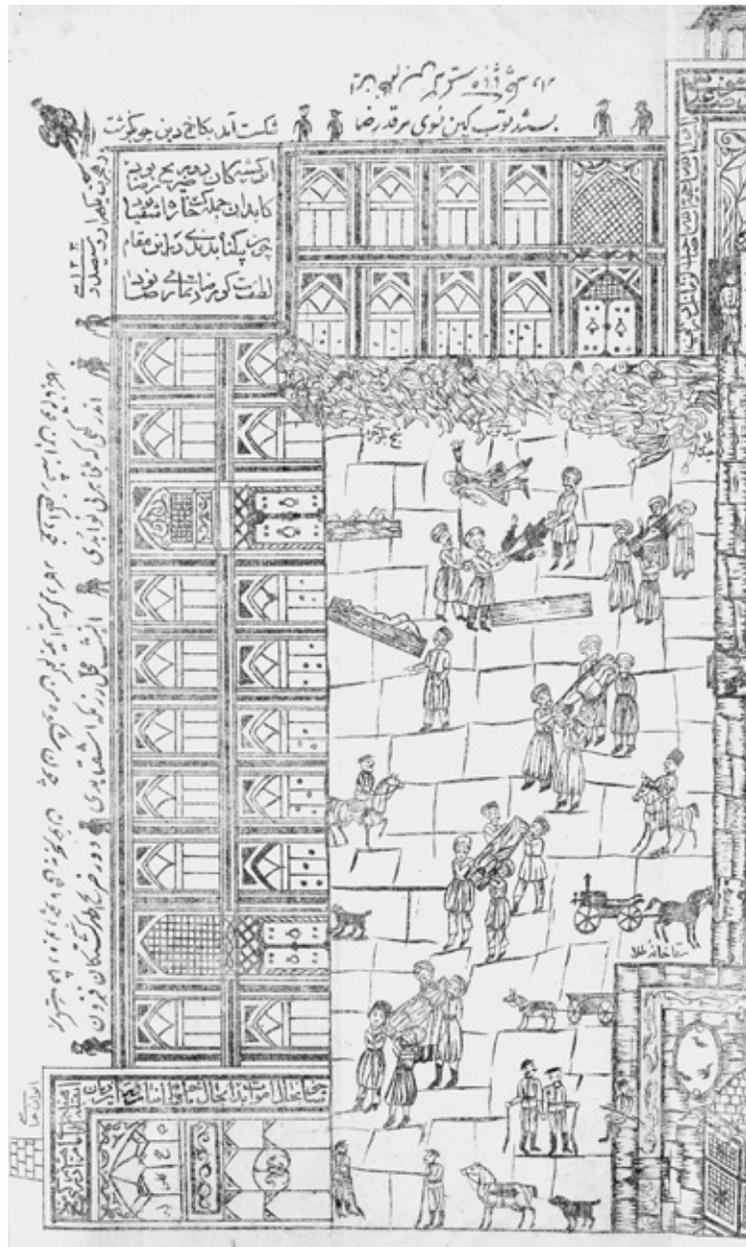
Nor was the incident quickly forgotten. Iran's foremost poet of the period, Malek al-Sho`ara Bahar, wrote at least two poems, "Masa'eb al-Razaviyeh," ("Calamities of the Shrine of Reza"), and "Tup-e Rus" ("Russian Cannons"), in commemoration of the outrage.<sup>115</sup> Benjamin Burges Moore, who visited Mashhad less than two years after the incident, claimed that the "bombardment of the shrine [had] caused the Russians to be cordially hated," adding that, "neither it nor the hanging of the mollahs at Tabriz, will ever be forgiven by Persians."<sup>116</sup> In 1927, a full fifteen years afterwards, a *Mosibat-nameh* "Book of Disaster," was published containing more poems in which the events were recounted.<sup>117</sup> And according to the Orientalist, Dwight Donaldson, writing in the early 1930s,

Devotees of the Shrine throughout Persia have bitterly resented this desecration and they observe the annual anniversary of its occurrence with a spirit of depreciation in which they are not slow to point out that the afflictions that have come upon Russia since 1911 must be a Divine punishment for their having violated the sanctity of the tomb of the Imam Reza.<sup>118</sup>

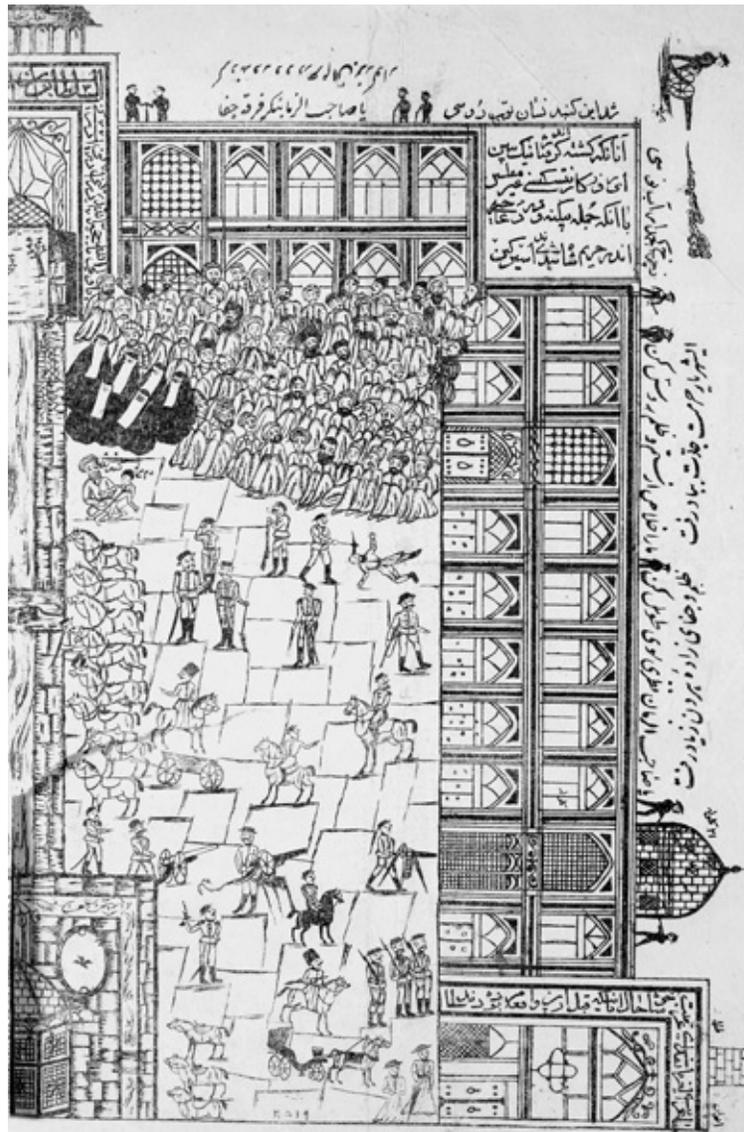
## Conclusion

The Russian assault on the Astan-e Qods-e Razavi in Mashhad in early 1912 was a shocking violation of the sanctity of a Muslim shrine, even if it was not on a par with Napoleon's decision to sack the al-Azhar mosque and its surrounding quarter in Cairo following a popular uprising against the French in October 1798, let alone with the British desecration of multiple mosques, including the Jama Masjid, in Delhi in the aftermath of the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion – or, for that matter, the assault on the Astan-e Qods-e Razavi by the forces of Reza Shah in the summer of 1935. More than just naked aggression on the part of an overbearing outside power acting with impunity in a weak, subordinate country, it was also a complicated event filled with ambiguity, in which official Russian and British interests and objectives were partly aligned partly in conflict with the motives and urges of actors "on the ground," their local representatives as well as various Iranian individuals.

The ambiguity begins with the party whose interests and objectives seem the most clear-cut: Russia. Contrary to common perceptions, the Russians were ambivalent about Iran. Their instincts were with the conservative forces against the constitutionalists, and Russia's envoy to Tehran, Nicholas Hartwig, is known to have been deeply skeptical about the prospects for parliamentary rule in Iran. But they were also impatient with Qajar inefficiency, and they worried that the fall of the dynasty might come at the expense of their influence in the country. Most of all, in keeping with their longstanding concerns about anarchy in Iran, the Russians were fearful of the chaos unleashed by the revolutionary ferment.<sup>119</sup> Instinctively grasping the difficulty of imposing their authority on an unruly country, the Russians arguably never intended outright and permanent occupation in Iran – as they did not in Afghanistan in the 1980s.<sup>120</sup>



**Figure 7.8** Cartoon of the Russian assault on the Shrine. © British Museum.



This forces us to look critically at the argument that the Russian shelling of the shrine was pre-planned and deliberate, as advanced by Sykes in his reports, by Sir George Buchanan, Britain's ambassador to St Petersburg at the time, in his memoirs, and by Jennifer Siegel in her fine study of Britain's duel with Russia over Central Asia.<sup>121</sup> For the argument that the aggression served Russian purposes inasmuch as it broke the back of the Constitutionalist Movement to be valid it has to be clear that the Russian consul in Mashhad acted according to orders emanating from St Petersburg. Yet there is no evidence that Foreign Minister Sazonov was directly involved in the decision to attack the shrine. Indeed, just as the Russian central government did not approve of the actions undertaken by its soldiers in Tabriz, so it does not seem to have authorized the violence perpetrated in Mashhad. Even after St Petersburg had agreed to give up supporting Mohammad `Ali Shah, Dabizha acted in blatant collusion with the followers of the ex-shah, using local *lutis* and regional rebels as agents provocateurs. Sykes was right to call his Russian colleague a maverick, went to plow his own furrow. The assault may have been preceded by a conspiracy, though not necessarily one orchestrated from St Petersburg, and violence was not its unavoidable outcome. There is enough evidence to suggest that Dabizha was fully aware of the popular hatred that entering the sanctuary by force might unleash, and did everything he could to avoid such drastic action.

As for the British, their policy objective in Iran, in the words of Benjamin Burgess Moore, a contemporary observer, was two-fold: “to maintain [their] friendship with Russia, and to maintain the independence of Persia.” Moore called the first the more imperative one, though, adding that, “in so far as conflict has, at any time arisen between the two objects, the former has always dominated the issue.”<sup>122</sup> This priority is certainly borne out by the attitude of Sir Walter Townley, the British representative in Tehran, for whom Sykes's insistently negative views of the Russians and their motives were awkward and unwelcome – and who only grudgingly accepted the evidence about Russia's machinations that transpired after the facts. Sykes, in other words, was no less of a maverick than his Russian colleague.

The Iranians, finally, were manifestly weak, in part because they were internally divided, both at the national level and in Mashhad. If they were victims of the events, they were by no means passive victims. The “rebels” among them, the anti-Constitutionalist ones who supported Mohammad `Ali, may have looked like Russia's tools but they used the Russians as much as the Russians used them, until they overplayed their hand, thinking that the inviolable shrine that served as their refuge would shield them from infidel attack. They professed to support the ex-shah, yet this agenda was trumped by self-preservation. Yusof Herati, for one, clearly played his own opportunistic games, seeking British assistance when he felt treated poorly by the Russians. Like many Iranians at the time, he “looked to Britain as a protector against Russia.”<sup>123</sup> Yet in 1912, with the Russians in control of much of northern Iran, playing off the British against the Russians was no longer as easy as it had been before.

### Author's note

Thanks to Antony Wynn for finding and procuring the image of Sykes, no. 7.3, for me.

### Notes

1. An exception is the extensive coverage of the incident in Antony Wynn, *Persia and the Great Game. Sir Percy Sykes. Explorer, Consul, Soldier, Spy* (London, 2003), 204–35.
2. Actually, most studies of the Constitutional Revolution do not go beyond 1909. See, for instance, Vanessa Martin, *The Iranian Revolution of 1906* (Syracuse, 1989); and Eadem, *Iran between Islamic Nationalism and Secularism: The Constitutional Revolution of 1906* (London and New York, 2013). Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911* (New York, 1996) ends in the early days of 1912, with the events in Tabriz, and does not mention Mashhad and the Russian presence and activities there.
3. A. M. Matveyev, “Rol' angliiskoi provokatsii v meshedskikh sobytiakh kontsa 1911 i nachala 1912 goda,” *Trudy sredneaziatskogo universiteta*, new ser., 57 istoricheskie nauki, kniga 7 (Tashkent, 1954), 133–61. The article is reviewed in Anon., “Mashhad 1911–1912,” *Central Asian Review* 6/3 (1958): 324–46.
4. Setar Shahvazi (Bakhtiyari), ed., *Enqelab-e Tus. Vakavi-y jasarat-e artesh-e Tzar beh Haram-e Motahhar-e Razavi* (Tehran, 1388/2009), 16. For a different, more even-

handed interpretation of the events, see `Ali Najaf-Zadeh, *Konsulgari-ha, mostakhdeman va mostasharan-e khareji dar Mashhad* (Mashhad, 1394/2015), 54–77.

5. See, for instance, Abolhassan Hadjiheidari, *Nayeb Hoseyn Kaši – Strassenräuber oder Revolutionär? Eine Untersuchung zur neueren iranischen Geschichte (1850–1920)* (Berlin, 2011).
6. Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (London, 1965), 135, 158.
7. Evgeny Sergeev, *The Great Game 1856–1907. Russo-British Relations in Central and East Asia* (Washington D.C. and Baltimore, 2013), 339–40; and Serge Sazonov, *Fateful Years 1909–1916. The Reminiscences of Serge Sazonov* (New York, 1928), 33, 60.
8. Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia. Imperial Ambitions in Qajar Iran* (New Haven, 1968; repr. London, 2013), 596.
9. Avery, *Modern Iran*, 134, 141–2.
10. C. E. Yate, *Khurasan and Sistan* (Edinburgh, 1900), 330; A. V. Williams Jackson, *From Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam. Travels in Transcaucasia and Northern Persia for Historic and Literary Research* (New York, 1911), 265.
11. Percy Molesworth Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia or Eight Years in Iran* (London, 1902), 25.
12. Lieut.-Colonel Sir Frederick O'Connor, *On the Frontier and Beyond. A Record of Thirty Years' Service* (London, 1931), 162.
13. Yate, *Khurasan and Sistan*, 344.
14. Ármin Vámbéry, *Meine Wanderungen und Erlebnisse in Persien* (Pest, 1867), 320.
15. *Ibid.*, 324.
16. Hans-Hermann Graf von Schweinitz, *Orientalische Wanderungen in Turkestan und im nordöstlichen Persien* (Berlin, 1910), 26–7.
17. P. M. Sykes, “Historical Notes on Meshed,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and England* (1910): 1132–3.
18. *Ibid.*, 1145–6.
19. Yate, *Khurasan and Sistan*, 332.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Naser al-Din Shah's first grand vizier, Mirza Taqi Khan Farahani, better known as Amir Kabir, in c. 1850 had sought to abolish the right of seeking refuge in the thousands of sites – mosques, shrines, the kitchens and the stables of the royal palace, and foreign legations – that served as a safe haven for criminals and political dissidents in Iran. After his second trip to Europe in 1878, Naser al-Din Shah issued a decree that limited the number to only three: Mashhad, Qom and Shah `Abd al-`Azim near Tehran. See Jakob Eduard Polak, *Persien. Das Land und seine Bewohner*, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1865), 2: 83–5; and James Greenfield, *Die Verfassung des persischen Staates* (Berlin, 1904), 83.
22. NA (National Archives, Kew Gardens), FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes,

- “Restrictions of the sanctuary area,” 4 May 1912.
23. Morteza Nouraei and Vanessa Martin, “Russian Land Acquisition in Iran from 1828 to 1911,” in Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Iranian-Russian Encounters. Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (London and New York, 2013), 104; and Elena Andreeva and Morteza Nouraei, “Russian Settlements in Iran in the Early Twentieth Century: Initial Phase of Colonization,” *Iranian Studies* 46/3 (2013): 415–42.
  24. O'Connor, *On the Frontier*, 162; Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, 434–6.
  25. Anon., “Mashhad 1911–1912,” 327.
  26. For Sazonov, see Alastair Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900–39* (New York, 2012), 18–19; as well as his own memoirs, Sazonov, *Fateful Years*.
  27. Wynn, *Persia in the Great Game*, 167, 184.
  28. *Ibid.*, 205.
  29. Matveyev, “Rol' angliiskoi provokatsii,” 140. In the period preceding the events of 1912 Herati had spent time in Tehran, where he edited two newspapers, *Fava'ed-e `ammeh* and *Kelid-e siyasi*, neither of which seems to have survived the year of their founding, 1325/1907. See Edward G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia* (Cambridge, 1913; repr. Los Angeles, 1983), 124, 127.
  30. Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Mashrutiyat-e Iran*, 2 vols (Tehran, 2537/1978), 148–9, 182, 210; Sheykh Hoseyn Owliya Bafqi, “Ashub-e akhar al-zaman,” in Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 320–1; and Mehdi Bamdad, *Sharh-e hal-e rejal-e Iran dar qarn-e 12 va 13 va 14 hejri*, 6 vols (Tehran, 4th edn, 1371/1992), 5: 122–3.
  31. Dietrich Geyer, *Der russische Imperialismus. Studien über den Zusammenhang von innerer und auswärtiger Politik 1860–1914* (Göttingen, 1977), 252.
  32. Arthur Moore, *The Orient Express* (London, 1914), 165.
  33. The text appears in W. Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia* (New York, 1912; repr. 1968), 166–8.
  34. Avery, *Modern Iran*, 162–3.
  35. Edward G. Browne, *Letters from Tabriz. The Russian Suppression of the Iranian Constitutional Movement* (Washington, D.C., 2008), 31.
  36. Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia*, 220.
  37. Jennifer Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia* (London, 2002), 120.
  38. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, 597–600.
  39. Moore, *Orient Express*, 34.
  40. Edward G. Browne, *Letters from Tabriz*, 30ff.
  41. British Library, India Office Records (IOR), L/PS/10/209, Diary military attaché, Mashhad, no. 51, week ending 23 Dec.; and no. 52, week ending 30 Dec. 1911; and Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 141,

42. IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed diary week ending 6 Jan. 1912. `Eyn al-Saltaneh, *Ruznameh-ye khaterat-e `Eyn al-Saltaneh*, ed. Mahmud Salar and Iraj Afshar (Tehran, 1377/1998), 5: 3591–2; German Foreign Office Archives, Berlin, Auswärtiges Amt (AA), R19136, Tehran to Berlin, 12 Jan. 1912.
43. IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 20 Jan. 1912.
44. Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 143–4; Najaf-Zadeh, *Konsulgari-ha*, 69–70.
45. IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 27 Jan. 1912
46. Report by Molla Mohammad Hashem Khorasani, in Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 310; and IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 3 Feb. 1912. See also NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, telegram Sykes to India, 3 Feb. 1912; and IOR, L/PS/10/122/1710, Sykes, Mashhad, 14 Feb. 1912.
47. FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, “Ex-Shah disturbances,” 14 Feb. 1912; also in IOR, L/PS/10/122/1710, Sykes, Mashhad, 14 Feb. 1912.
48. Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 112.
49. Matveyev, “Rol' angliiskoi provokatsii,” 139–41.
50. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, telegrams to India, 7 and 10 Feb. 1912.
51. D. W. Spring, “Anglo-Russian Relations in Persia 1909–1915” (PhD dissertation, University of London, 1968), 266.
52. Siegel, *Endgame*, 124.
53. IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 17 Feb. 1912; and NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, “Second phase of the disturbances in Meshed,” 28 March 1912.
54. IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 29 Feb. 1912.
55. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, “Second phase of the disturbances in Meshed,” 28 March 1912.
56. Ibid.
57. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, 27 Feb. 1912.
58. Translations in NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912.
59. IOR, L/PS/10/270, Barclay to Grey, Tehran, 27 Feb. 1912; and NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes to London, “Second phase of the disturbances in Meshed,” 28 March 1912. The letter to Taleb al-Haqq and the other two notes appear in English translation in appendices A–C. See also Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 104–07.
60. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes to London, “Second phase of the disturbances in Meshed,” 28 March 1912.
61. Matveyev, “Rol' angliiskoi provokatsii,” 141.
62. NA, FO 248/1054, Sykes, summary of Meshed diary, no. 16.
63. Shahvazi, eds., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 110.
64. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 16 March 1912.

65. RGVIA (Russian Military Archive, Moscow), f[ond] 400, op[is] 15, d[elo] 3929, l. 58–9: Kopia vsepoddaneishago raporta nachal'nika Khorasanskikh otriadov, 18 March 1912. Thanks to Moritz Deutschmann for transcribing this for me.
66. Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 111–12.
67. Ibid., 113.
68. Ibid., 109.
69. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshhed 1912, Sykes, “Declaration of martial law at Mashhad,” 30 March 1912; Matveyev, “Rol’ angliiskoi provokatsii,” 141.
70. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, “Declaration of martial law at Mashhad,” 30 March 1912.
71. Matveyev, “Rol’ angliiskoi provokatsii,” 141.
72. Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 115.
73. IOR, L/PS/10/122/2141, Sykes, Mashhad, 30 March 1912.
74. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, Summary of Meshad diary, 9 April 1912.
75. Shahvazi, eds., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 116.
76. Ibid., 116–17; and Mohammad Ravesh, ed., *Mashruteh-ye Gilan az yaddashtha-ye Rabinu beh enzemam-e vaqa`eh-ye Mashhad dar 1912* (Rasht, 1352/1973), 135.
77. Matveyev, “Rol’ angliiskoi provokatsii,” 144.
78. Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 226, fn. 89, based on Mashhad al-Reza.
79. Ibid.
80. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, “The bombardment of the Meshed shrine,” 6 April 1912.
81. Matveyev, “Rol’ angliiskoi provokatsii,” 144.
82. Ibid. Sykes, who apparently was unaware of Dabizha's last-ditch efforts, wondered why the assault had started as late in the afternoon as it did – originally planned for 3:00 but effectively only begun at 3:45 – in light of the short window for operations in the face of possible resistance. He suspected that the late hour was chosen to facilitate the escape of the main agitators.
83. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshhed 1912, note of Sykes to Tehran, 5 April 1912.
84. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshhed 1912, Sykes, Summary of Meshed diary, no. 16.
85. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshhed 1912, Sykes, “Military dispositions & orders,” 5 April; and Owliya Bafqi, in Shahvazi, ed., *Enqelab-e Tus*, 328, an eyewitness to the events who mentions the reports of 100 and even 400 killed but states that, in reality, 40 people had lost their lives.
86. Matveyev, “Rol’ angliiskoi provokatsii,” 147.
87. In Wynn, *Persia in the Great Game*, 224.
88. Browne, *Letters from Tabriz*, 166.

89. Anon., "Mashhad 1911–1912," 341.
90. `Eyn al-Saltaneh, *Ruznameh-ye khaterat*, 5:3683.
91. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, "The bombardment of the Meshed shrine," 6 April 1912; Statement of Kerbela'i `Ali, encl. of Sykes, 16 April 1912.
92. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, "Account of the bombardment as given by the Mutawalibashi," 12 April, 1912.
93. Ibid., Sykes, "Restrictions to the sanctuary area," 4 May 1912.
94. `Eyn al-Saltaneh, *Ruznameh-ye khaterat*, 5: 3761.
95. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Order No 138 of May 1st 1912, to the troops of the Turkistan military district by General Jasonof.
96. Ibid., Sykes, "The relations of Yusuf with the Russians after the bombardment," 13 April 1912.
97. IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed consular diary ending 25 May 1912. Taleb al-Haqq managed to escape to Russia and ended up in Kerbala in Iraq. In 1914 he was arrested by the Ottoman authorities who accused him of espionage, put him on trial and had him executed. See Bamdad, *Sharh-e hal-e rejal*, 5: 123.
98. Ibid.; and NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, note of Sykes to Tehran, 5 April 1912.
99. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912.
100. Ibid., Sykes, "The account of the bombardment as given by the Mutawalibashi," 12 April 1912.
101. Ibid., Sykes, Mashhad to Townley, Tehran, 16 April 1912.
102. IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 27 April 1912.
103. NA, FO 248/1054, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 29 June 1912.
104. IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 27 July 1912.
105. In NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912
106. Wynn, *Persia in the Great Game*, 226–7.
107. The local Mashhad paper *Ettela`at-e Yowmiyeh* only started publishing in 1292–3/1913–14.
108. IOR, L/PS/10/209, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 15 June 1912.
109. AA, R19030, German Embassy London, 4 Sept. 1912, "Russisch–Englische Beziehungen."
110. Gottfried Hagen, *Die Türkei im Ersten Weltkrieg. Flugblätter and Flugschriften in arabischer, persischer und osmanisch-türkischer Sprache als einer Sammlung der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg eingeleitet, übersetzt und kommentiert* (Frankfurt a/M, 1990), 147.
111. NA, FO 248/1054, Sykes, Meshed diary ending 8 June 1912; and Wynn, *Persia in the Great Game*, 224.

12. NA, FO 248/1054, Meshed 1912, Sykes, 13 April 1912.
13. *Habl al-Matin*, 8 April and 13 May 1912.
14. No. 1776, 2395 Also see Matiur Rahman, *From Consultation to Confrontation: A Study of the Muslim League in British Indian Politics* (London, 1970), 260–1; and M. Rafique Afzal, *A History of the All-India Muslim League 1906–1947* (Karachi, 2013), 118.
15. See Haravi and Shahvazi, *Enqelab-e Tus*, 342–8.
16. Benjamin Burges Moore, *From Moscow to the Persian Gulf* (New York and London, 1915), 106.
17. See Rasul Ja`fariyan, “Mosibatnameh. Yek sanad-e adabi az vaqi`eh-e hamleh-ye Rusha beh haram-e Imam Reza `aleyho al-salam,” in Idem, *Maqalat-e Tarikhi* 6 (Qom, 1379/2000), 105–16.
18. Dwight M. Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion. A History of Islam in Persia and Irak* (London, 1933), 177.
19. Moris Deutschmann, *Iran and Russian Imperialism. The Ideal Anarchists, 1800–1914* (Abingdon, UK, and New York, 2016), 1, 3, 5, 155–6.
20. See Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy. The Russians in Afghanistan 1979–89* (Oxford, 2013), 73–81.
21. Sir. G. Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories* (London, 1923); Siegel, *Endgame*, 127.
22. Moore, *Orient Express*, 164, 167.
23. Wm. J. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations during World War I* (London, 1984), 18.

## PART III

# OFFICERS AND ORIENTALISTS: THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

## CHAPTER 8

# A RUSSIAN OFFICER'S LETTERS ON RUSSIAN AND BRITISH ACTIVITIES IN IRAN DURING WORLD WAR I

*Nugzar K. Ter-Oganov*

World War I was, at its time, the most global, sanguinary, and destructive military conflict in the history of mankind. While the main military events occurred in Europe, Qajar Iran was also drawn into the orbit of the military–political confrontation. Although an outpost of the Russian Empire, the Caucasus, bordering Iran and Turkey, became a place in which the conflicting interests of the Central Powers and the Entente nations in the Middle East were played out.<sup>1</sup> The Caucasus front, which encompassed the eastern *vilayets* of Ottoman Turkey and the northwestern provinces of Iran, had serious strategic importance not only for Russia but also for Great Britain, its ally in the Entente.

It is well known that some active participants of the battles in the Iranian sector of the Caucasus front, which was sometimes referred to as the “Persian front,” left memoirs and personal correspondence. These reveal not only the human qualities and worldviews of their authors, but also their perspectives of the situation at the front. Unfortunately, they are not considerable in number.<sup>2</sup>

On the whole, there are not many Russian historiographical works describing the wartime situation in Iran as a part of the military operations of the Caucasus front. Soviet historiography, heavily loaded with ideology, significantly ignored that period of Russian history. One exception is that of the most outstanding Soviet researcher of the Caucasus front, N. G. Korsun.<sup>3</sup>

Among other publications related to the subject is A.M. Baskhanov's scholarly contribution, *A Biographical–Bibliographical Dictionary of Russian Military Orientalists*,<sup>4</sup> where researchers can find the names of many outstanding military orientalist who served at the Caucasus front during World War I. D. Volkov's works, too, deserve interest, as they provide insight into Russian Imperial policy's influence on the development of Persian military studies in Russia.<sup>5</sup>

Although the Caucasus front occupied an important place in the plans of the Entente, there

are nevertheless few published primary sources, particularly in English, describing the situation in the Iranian sector of the Caucasus front during World War I, with the exception of the highly valuable diaries of C. J. Edmonds, the Assistant to Political Officer to Shushtar, and the diaries of F. Hale.<sup>6</sup> It is for this reason that any additional primary sources referencing the military and political situation of Iran on the Caucasus front enrich our knowledge on the subject disproportionately. In that sense, Russian staff-captain Konstantin Nikolaevich Smirnov's manuscripts, kept in the Archives of the National Center of Manuscripts in Georgia, contain valuable information on Iran, including the period of World War I. Smirnov discusses many details and events that took place in that country, some of which were previously unknown or shrouded in mystery.<sup>7</sup>

It is worth highlighting that, unlike the above-mentioned authors, Smirnov was not an ordinary witness: not only was he a participant in the military operations on the Caucasus front but he was also a military orientalist by profession and closely familiar with Iran. That is why his perspective on the events in Iran is of particular interest.

K. N. Smirnov, born in Temirkhanshura in the Northern Caucasus in 1878, graduated from the Tiflis Cadet Corps and the Mikhailovskoe Artillery College. In 1903 he completed the Officer's Course of Oriental Languages at the Asian Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in St Petersburg. Given the rank of second lieutenant, he was attached to the staff of the Caucasus Military District. In 1904, together with Colonel V. P. Liakhov, a well-known figure who would become the Commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade, Smirnov was sent to south-east Turkey on an intelligence mission.<sup>8</sup> In 1906, Smirnov became deputy head of a newly formed irregular Intelligence Department at the staff of the Caucasus Military District, which reported directly to the Main Directorate of the General Staff (GUGSh). But he did not serve there long. For seven years (1907–14), he was on an official mission in Iran as a tutor to the heir to the throne, the young Sultan Ahmad Shah (r. 1909–25). Smirnov stayed at the shah's palace till 1914, carrying out his official, as well as covert, duties in Tehran. Notably, while serving in Tehran, Smirnov regularly sent his reports on the situation in Iran to the Caucasus Military District's headquarters.<sup>9</sup>



The Staff-Captain K.N.Smirnov, 1914.

**Figure 8.1** Konstantin Nikolaevich Smirnov.

Soon after finishing his mission in Iran in September 1914, Smirnov was ordered to return to the headquarters of the Caucasus army. After the onset of World War I, in the winter of the same year he found himself in the Turkish sector of the Caucasus front, from where, in November 1915, he was appointed to the staff of the Expeditionary Cavalry Corps in Iran, which was commanded by General N. N. Baratov. According to his service record, while serving in the Expeditionary Corps, on 30 July 1916 Smirnov was honored with the rank of colonel.<sup>10</sup> He stayed in Iran until October 1916. That winter, he returned to the Turkish sector of the Caucasus front, where he remained until the beginning of 1918.

K. N. Smirnov belongs to the category of authors who are interesting not only as scholars but also as chroniclers of the events they witnessed, or in which they participated. During his first mission to Iran in 1907–14, Smirnov wrote his diaries, which are an extremely valuable Russian source on Qajar Iran and Russian–Iranian relations.<sup>11</sup> In addition to these diaries, Smirnov published many orientalist works in the pre-revolutionary Russian military press, going back to the very beginning of his service at the staff of the Caucasus Military District. Under the Soviet regime, he also continued his fruitful research but he was not destined to fully implement his vast knowledge of Iranian and Turkish history: in 1938, he became a victim of the Stalinist purges.<sup>12</sup> In 1959, according to a military tribunal decision, K. N. Smirnov was rehabilitated.<sup>13</sup>

Of Smirnov's manuscript legacy, his private letters are of greatest interest. They were addressed to his wife, Xenia Karlovna (Kester) Smirnova, whom he married during his first mission to Iran. Xenia Smirnova accompanied her husband to Iran. There is circumstantial evidence that she was somehow linked to the headquarters of the Caucasus Military District (HCMD) in the years of World War I.

To our great regret – despite the fact that Smirnov regularly wrote letters to his spouse from

the front – only a small number survived. Many of the letters that did survive have not survived in full; the vast majority of Smirnov's personal archives and rich library was destroyed under the Soviet regime. Although Smirnov sent twenty-five letters from the Caucasus front to his wife between 19 December 1914 and 1 August 1917, only thirteen related to Iran survive, dated from November 1915 to August 1916.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the surviving letters and fragments give us an idea of Russian and British activities in Iran.

Of greatest interest are those letters Smirnov sent from the Iranian sector of the Caucasus front, where he headed the Intelligence Department and ran the diplomatic affairs of the staff of the Expeditionary Cavalry Corps. His official status was that of captain: “Captain Smirnov, listed in the light guards cavalry, at command of the Supreme Commander of the Caucasus Army.”<sup>15</sup>

Depending on the deployment of Russian military units acting against the Turkish army and supporters of the Turko-German alliance (both in north-eastern Turkey and north-west Iran), Smirnov regularly sent these letters to his wife from Qazvin, Kermanshah, Kerind or Qasr-e Shirin, to wherever his spouse resided at any given moment – Tiflis, Sevastopol, Hamadan or Qazvin. The letters show that during World War I, Xenia was for the most part in Iran and was aware of the dramatic events happening there.

According to Smirnov, from November 1915 to March 1916 the headquarters of the Expeditionary Corps were located at Qazvin,<sup>16</sup> but due to an offensive on Khanaqin conducted by Russian forces, and the need for better control of the operations of the Corps through Kerind and Qasr-e Shirin, the headquarters were transferred closer to the frontline, to Kermanshah. In August 1916, after the retreat of the Russian forces from Hamadan, the headquarters of the Corps (renamed the First Caucasus Cavalry Corps) moved to Aveh, where they stayed for some time.<sup>17</sup>

According to the letters, in September 1916, having finished his spell of service at the Corps, Smirnov left Aveh and never returned there. From the end of 1916 to the beginning of 1918, he was on a mission in Trabzon as the head of intelligence at the staff of the Caucasus Army and the Black Sea Fleet.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the private nature of Smirnov's letters, they contain previously unknown factual material concerning, for instance, the activity of General N. N. Baratov's Expeditionary Corps in Iran and at the Turkish–Iranian border, as well as the episode of Anglo-Russian military cooperation against the Turko-German Alliance in the territory of Iran and Turkey. In contrast to official reports and memos, his private letters from the front line sometimes contain new information and unconventional commentary on various sides of historical events. A further value of Smirnov's letters consists in the fact that unlike many similar letters, diaries, and memoirs about the front, which as a rule were censored, his letters managed to avoid censorship.

## **Smirnov's Duties as a “Political Officer” in the Expeditionary Corps**

Judging by the letter sent on 22 November 1915 from Qazvin, by that time Smirnov was already at the headquarters of General Baratov's Expeditionary Corps.<sup>19</sup> He often contacted Baratov regarding service matters. Immediately after having been assigned to Baratov's staff, Smirnov complains that he became overloaded with affairs. “Our way of life is the ugliest one, like it was in Poklevskii's times,<sup>20</sup> to whom Baratov could be compared with his well-mannered behavior. We never go to sleep before midnight, dine and drink tea at any given time ....”<sup>21</sup>

Notably, while staying in Iran, Smirnov was occupied with “social, political, intelligence and police affairs.”<sup>22</sup> In the letter dated 11 August 1916, Smirnov details his service responsibilities and calls himself a “political officer,” using the English term for an army institution.<sup>23</sup> Smirnov wrote to his wife,

Today, your political officer had a hard day. A mass of work has accumulated – to write to Amir Afkham and Amir Afshar an appeal for calm to the inhabitants of Qazvin, telegrams to the envoy, to Bolkhovitinov and Prozorkevich concerning the political situation, etc.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, his responsibilities included diplomatic and social visits to prominent Iranians. In the same letter, he writes: “I visited eight Persians in order to make them *ehvalpurea* [this invented word no doubt refers to the well-known form of Persian politeness, known as “*ahvalporsi*”] in the name of Baratov.” In one day, Smirnov managed to visit “four mojtaheds, two princes and two rich men.”<sup>25</sup> Smirnov gave all of them Baratov's card as an invitation to a party celebrating the latter's being awarded the Order of St George. As Smirnov admits, “Among these Persians, some are our sworn enemies.” Apparently, in order to warn those “enemies” to behave, Smirnov published in the press “Baratov's threatening announcement of death penalty for various deeds.”

From one of the letters we learn that following his visits to Iranian persons of interest, Smirnov also visited Britons (though he did not disclose the details of his visits to the latter). On the same day, he was ordered to resolve the situation of a prisoner sent to him by an officer of the Persian Cossack Brigade from Zanzan; he then gave an order on political issues to the translator, and also ordered a stay of execution of a death sentence. Finally, he typed up all the information gathered during the day. Smirnov complained to his wife of being busy: “All day I ran like a hamster in a wheel!” The most interesting conclusion Smirnov makes comes at the end of the letter, when he compares his duties during his first mission to Tehran with those at the Expeditionary Corps: They were nothing new. That is, Smirnov acknowledged that during his two missions to Iran, he acted as an intelligence officer. At the same time, he thought that the last mission was far more important than the previous one: “Here you feel your importance, although based on my former service in Tehran,” Smirnov admitted.<sup>26</sup>

## **Ahmad Shah Remembers Smirnov and Wants to Meet Him**

According to one letter, Smirnov's return to Iran in 1915 did not go unnoticed by his former pupil, the ruler of Iran, Ahmad Shah Qajar. The latter inquired about his whereabouts with the Russian envoy, N. S. von Etter, expressing a wish to meet Smirnov. As the letter relates, Smirnov's colleagues saw something important in this interest from the shah. We see that it was apparently the reason that Smirnov decided to go to Tehran together with the Chief of Staff, N. F. Ern, and General Baratov himself. The letters do not indicate whether Smirnov managed to meet the shah. Nevertheless, a small photograph kept in his personal archives, dated 1916, has been preserved, which shows General Baratov and Captain Smirnov in Tehran.

## **General N. N. Baratov and the Russian Officers Serving in Iran**

Smirnov's letters shed light on some Russian military, diplomatic and political figures. One figure of particular interest is General N. N. Baratov, the commander of the Expeditionary Cavalry Corps in Iran. According to Smirnov, from the moment of his arrival to the corps, his relationship with both Baratov and his Chief of Staff, Ern, was very good: "Both of them are good to me, nice people, and especially good are my relations with Ern."<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, he criticizes Baratov for his soft character: "I cannot stand people with such a boneless character like Baratov, and hate to see that," wrote Smirnov in his letter from Kermanshah in May 1916.<sup>28</sup> Even so, judging by his letter of 1 January 1916, General Baratov seems to have been rather a noble military man. For instance, on the first day of the New Year, Smirnov accompanied General Baratov on a visit to prisoners of war. The visit was organized as a response to the rumors about the prisoners' poor conditions. During their visit, "the corps commander paid attention to many irregularities and promised to satisfy many prisoners' complaints and gave them 5 rubles for cigarettes." One prisoner was released. Smirnov suggests that the Persians had "won the lottery" in Baratov and him, and he maintains that the Persians themselves often made similar statements. He concludes that, "Baratov treats the Persians in a very humane manner."<sup>29</sup>

Smirnov's estimate of General Baratov's activity changed depending on the latter's treatment of him. Smirnov admits, "After all, when he needs me, he always treats me better, and now there are no diplomatic officials, nor officers who know Persia."<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Smirnov is critical of General Baratov's military merits as demonstrated in his evaluation of Baratov's victory at Rabat Kerim.<sup>31</sup> He ascribes Baratov's important victory at Rabat Kerim more to chance and luck than to the general's military abilities.

According to Smirnov, the Iranian Prime Minister, Farman Farma, received information that Amir Heshmet, a former head of the Persian army in Azerbaijan province and a nationalist, wished to make an incursion into the rear of the Russian forces.<sup>32</sup> Fearing that Heshmet's maneuver would end in failure, the Iranian prime minister informed General Baratov of the imminent attack by means of the commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade, Colonel Prozorkevich. In order to prevent the dangerous maneuver, Russia's Tehran detachment was sent to attack Amir Heshmet, who was defeated and forced to flee. As it turned out, Heshmet did not pose a threat to the Russians' rear forces, since he intended to raid Tehran himself with

the aim of seizing cash from banks, arresting foreign envoys, staging a big heist and abducting the shah to Isfahan. But, as Smirnov explains, he was somehow delayed at Rabat Kerim, possibly worried by the movement of another Russian unit to Qom, and was unprepared for the attack by the raiding Russian cavalry unit. Smirnov writes, “Thus, B[aratov] saved Tehran from a great catastrophe, which could be of great importance.” Despite the fact that Smirnov considered Baratov's success a stroke of luck, he nevertheless was happy for such fortunate men: “Let God give us more lucky people as leaders.” But to modify his cynicism, Smirnov added: “In essence, military successes and failures always occur due to unexpected trifles.”<sup>33</sup> In the same letter, Smirnov shares a secret with his wife concerning Baratov's health: the general suffers from fever.



**Figure 8.2** General Baratov and Captain Smirnov in Tehran, 1916.

In his letters about Baratov, Smirnov often mentions, in a negative manner, Baratov's favorite, V. D. Kargaleteli, an officer of the General Staff who had a great influence on the corps commander.<sup>34</sup> So, for instance, in a letter of May 1916, Smirnov wrote clearly that “Kargaleteli openly mistreats him [Baratov], calls [him] spineless, while Baratov, having packed their belongings and ready to continue their trek, shyly asks Kargaleteli, who likes to sleep in the mornings: ‘Well, Vasilek, can we go, are you ready?’ One just wants to spit!”<sup>35</sup>

According to Smirnov, Kargaleteli also said many bad things about Ern, the head of the corps' staff – for example, accusing him of sheer incompetency. As it appears, from the very beginning of his service at the corps, Smirnov failed to establish normal relations with Kargaleteli. Already, in one of his first letters he characterizes him as follows: “not a bad fellow, clever (a university graduate), but very ill-bred in conduct, although he served at the Lithuanian Guard Regiment. He snubs me, and apparently in vain, since I pay no attention.” Smirnov felt relieved when they got a telegram about Kargaleteli's transfer to the Northern front. “It has become far more pleasant without him,” Smirnov concludes. After Kargaleteli left, Baratov began to treat Smirnov better: “Now we converse freely at the table, and the General is somehow treating all better, without fear how that individual would like it.”<sup>36</sup> Even

so, in his letter of 28 August 1916, Smirnov continues to complain about Baratov: “Unfortunately, I see that he does not like me very much. And you and I in general were not liked by the hearty people in Tehran.” He adds: “I don't like first, that having made mistakes, he put the blame on me (although for small things), and second, his inattentive attitude towards me.”<sup>37</sup>

In Smirnov's letters, among the Russians who served then in Iran, we find mention of the vice-consul (and secret military agent) in Mosul, V. F. Kirsanov,<sup>38</sup> of whom he writes:

I like Kirsanov very much, he is a classy diplomat and slightly reminds me of Sablin [the Russian chargé d'affaires in Tehran, who replaced N. G. Gartvig as the head of the diplomatic mission]. He does not intend to return to military service and wishes to be transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>39</sup> Kirsanov is a good fellow, but lazy and a great gossipmonger.

The letter also mentions Kirsanov's local agents, the dragoman Madik, and a Russian intelligence agent, a defrocked Chaldean priest, called Makdo.<sup>40</sup>

Besides the abovementioned Russian military and diplomatic dignitaries, the letters also mention Prince Beloselsky-Belozersky, the head of the Caucasus Cavalry Division; and Baron Medem, the commander of the Caucasus Border Guard Regiment, whose staff was located not far from Hamadan.<sup>41</sup> One can find some characteristic traits of the portrait of General Yudenich, the commander of the Caucasus Army. The letters also mention the commander of the Second Caucasus Border Guard Regiment Prozorkevich, Colonel Liakhov, Count Nirod, the head of the Cossack division at Qazvin; Chernozubov, the commander of the Second Caucasus Cavalry Corps that operated in Azerbaijan; Major General Melik Shakhnazarov, Chief of Logistics; officers and orientalists Malinovsky and Nagaibakov; and other officers of the Caucasus Army. The last letters sent from Iran testify to the changes in the Caucasus Army, when soldier committees began to run army affairs and to decide the matters of peace and war.

## **Smirnov's Letters on the Dynamics of Anglo–Russian Relations**

In Smirnov's letters, we also find information on the dynamics of Anglo-Russian relations in Iran. The letter of 22 November 1915 shows that while staying at Qazvin, Smirnov often contacted the British in the line of service.

How all is changing in this world. Never was I acquainted with any Englishman, and I had only strictly official relations with them, and now every moment English women [say] Captain Smirnov, Captain Smirnov, seeing me on the street from afar, English children nod, and the misters shake hands with a pleasant smile.<sup>42</sup>

At an evening party arranged on the occasion of General Baratov's being awarded the Order of St George, Smirnov socialized mostly with English women. One of the English women even recalled his wife, Xenia Smirnova: “She was so interesting at the British mission in Tehran –

*La Dame en Noir.*"<sup>43</sup>

Smirnov's letters give us reason to assume that, in that period of time, relations between the British and the Russians in Iran were improving. The relations were so cordial that, for instance, some British even invited Smirnov to their homes. "I drank tea today ten times, the last time with a cake on the occasion of the birth of a little Carlene," Smirnov wrote in his letter of 25 November 1915, noting that the hostess "expressed hope that sometime I would also eat [Carlene's] wedding cake."<sup>44</sup> Smirnov also visited British diplomatic representatives. For instance, in December 1915, in Qazvin, he visited the British consul in Hamadan, with whom he had to settle a misunderstanding between the consul and General Baratov concerning the untimely raising of *only* the Russian flag at Hamadan (as opposed to both the Russian and British flags). As directed by Baratov, Smirnov had to assure the British consul that "when they will raise the British flag, Baratov will again travel to Hamadan," thus paying tribute to the Union Jack.<sup>45</sup>

But, judging by Smirnov's later letters, sent at the end of April 1916, these relations considerably cooled due to the well-known events at Kut-el-Amara, where British general Charles Townsend's detachment became completely surrounded by the superior Turkish forces. So, Smirnov's letter of 25 April 1916 reports that the sad news of General Townsend's capitulation at Kut-el-Amara was received the previous day by the staff of the Expeditionary Corps at Kermanshah. Not without reason, Smirnov speculated that the British might accuse General Baratov of delaying his offensive against the Turkish forces, thus making it possible for the Turks to keep the British garrison surrounded and to force it to lay down its arms.<sup>46</sup>

Smirnov's conjecture, which proved correct, was that General Townsend's capitulation changed the situation in the Turks' favor, and as a result both Kermanshah and Hamadan would come under Ottoman pressure. Soon after, in the summer 1916, this became the case, and the Russian forces were forced to leave Hamadan and Kermanshah. In his letter, Smirnov warns his wife about the Turkish forces' offensive, which threatened Kermanshah, Senneh and Hamadan.<sup>47</sup>

Smirnov's fear that the British would accuse Baratov of deliberate delay was confirmed in his letter sent from Kermanshah in May 1916. Townsend's capitulation did directly influence the British stance towards the Russians. Relations between Smirnov and Williams, the British military agent at Kermanshah, serve as a vivid illustration of that.<sup>48</sup>

According to Smirnov, Williams usually coded his telegrams, which he also received from the staff of Baratov's Expeditionary Corps. After Townsend's wretched capitulation, Williams's attitude towards his Russian counterparts changed for the worse. He once even refused Smirnov's request to encode Baratov's telegram. Moreover, as described in Smirnov's letter, two days before the letter's composition, Williams sued the Russian forces for damaging premises in Hamadan. According to Smirnov, Williams was charged by the British envoy, C. Marling, with finding a solution to damaged property and with transferring the goods of a carpet factory to Resht. Smirnov then remarked to Williams that Marling's order was inappropriate, since these tasks were not among the responsibilities of a military agent.

Williams recalled it and called “these things – stupidities,” to which Smirnov reacted indignantly, advising Williams to choose his words carefully. The incident with Williams, Smirnov believed, offered a demonstration of the deteriorating state of relations between the British and the Russians:

After that history I felt sad about humanity. If such a cultured nation as the British are incorrect, what could be demanded of us? Having been convinced that now we would not attempt to take Baghdad, and that we failed to save Townsend at the cost of our own head, the local Englishmen ceased to be courteous, threw us out of the house, and wish to oust Baratov's convoy from the stables of the British consulate. Williams refused to encode our telegrams.<sup>49</sup>

In his letter of 1 May 1916, sent from Qasr-e Shirin, Smirnov writes that despite the fact that Baratov refrained from rendering aid to the besieged British garrison, nevertheless the Russians considered the possibility of capturing Baghdad on their own in the future. Smirnov, probably not without reason, assuming that he could be appointed to Baghdad, addressed these lines to his wife: “No, Xenia dear, no way that I would go to Baghdad, even if appointed, and in general, I am rather an urban dweller and don't like the camp life.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Letters on the Deteriorating Situation in Tehran in August 1916**

In his letter of 5 August 1916, Smirnov describes how ominous the situation in Tehran was becoming, even under the stabilized conditions of the Turkish–Iranian front. He laconically describes the situation at the front: “The Turks do not move, and Etter [the Russian envoy to Tehran] already wishes to flee. Let us see how matters will be in a month!”<sup>51</sup> However, as is seen in his next letter of August 10, the Russian envoy was forced to stay after having received a telegram from the Grand Duke, although the Russian General Consul, Shritter, had left Tehran by that time.<sup>52</sup>

In actual fact, according to the available archive materials, many in Iran took seriously a possible Turkish offensive on Tehran. So, for instance, in his telegram of 2 August 1916, Colonel Prozorkevich, the commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade, reported: “An offensive by the Turks on Tehran creates a possibility of an urgent evacuation from Tehran of the Russian institutions and all the subjects in the near future.”<sup>53</sup> Moreover, according to an encoded telegram from Prozorkevich sent on 9 August of the same year to the Department of the General Quartermaster of the Main Directorate of the General Staff, a partial evacuation of Tehran had already begun; Prozorkevich noted that the arms of the Persian Cossack Brigade and the brigade's quick-fire cannons (at the disposal of General Baratov's Expeditionary Corps) were being transferred to Rasht, and there was even an intent to transfer the staff of the brigade to that city.<sup>54</sup>

Judging by the letter, there was fear of a dangerous deterioration of the military–political situation in Tehran itself. Due to this, people in Tehran turned to General Baratov and requested that he save the situation. It can be assumed that the inadequate conduct of Russia's

envoy and its general consul, as related by Smirnov, caused admonitions in Russian military–political circles. Because of that, at Baratov's behest, the Russian authorities prepared a proposal to appoint to Tehran a military envoy in the person of General Vadbolsky, the former commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade.<sup>55</sup>

## The Letters on Smirnov's Controversial Treatment of the Iranians

Judging by his letters, Smirnov treated Persians with disdain, often calling them “*Persiuks*” (Persikins).<sup>56</sup> Smirnov's letters offer a glimpse of his worldview: he was neither an extreme nationalist nor a cosmopolitan, but a representative of that category of the Russian officer corps who looked down on both their people and on some national minorities of the Russian Empire, at times with undisguised dislike. His letters are permeated with xenophobia, which is clearly seen in his referring to Persians in a derogatory manner. Smirnov justifies his dislike of the Persians with the fact that they had held his grandfather captive during the second Russo–Iranian war (1826–8), causing his vengeful feelings. He also recalls (without details) the “unpleasant tricks” which the “*Persiuks*” sometimes played against him.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, in one of his later letters, he expresses his gratification with the Persians’ treatment of him:

A great satisfaction to me is how the Persians treat me. A lot of people come to me, displaying the greatest respect; I hear a lot of flattering things, like that they thank the fate that I am here, [as someone] who knows the people, and with whom one can directly converse, etc.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, he expresses genuine surprise at the Persians’ attentiveness towards him: “But I don't know how to explain the Persians’ attentiveness – imagine, no one offered me a bribe, as is usual in Tehran. Do they know that I will not take [one], or did the Russians here not take them at all, I don't understand.”<sup>59</sup>

In conclusion, Smirnov's private letters, despite the sometimes fragmentary nature of the information contained within, deserve the attention of researchers dealing with Iran and Russian–Iranian and Anglo–Russian relations in that country during World War I. The letters reveal many previously unknown facts related to General Baratov's Expeditionary Cavalry Corps and K.N. Smirnov's various activities in Iran.

## Notes

1. The Central Powers consisted of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. The Entente or Triple Entente was formed after the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention of August 1907, and consisted of the Russian Empire, France and the United Kingdom.
2. Among these recollections, which were later published, are those of F. I. Eliseev, *Kazaki na Kavkazskom fronte, 1914–1917. Zapiski polkovnika Kubanskogo kazach'ego voiska*

- v trinadtsati broshiurakh-tetradiakh. (Moscow, 2001); A. G. Emelyanov, *Persidskii front (1915–1918)* (Berlin, 1923); P. N. Strel'ianov (Kalabukhov), *Kazaki v Persii. 1909–1918 gg.* (Moscow, 2007); Strel'ianov (Kalabukhov), *Odisseia kazach'ego ofitsera: Polkovnik F. I. Eliseev* (Moscow, 2001); E. V. Maslovskii, *Mirovaia voina na Kavkazskom fronte 1914–1917 gg. Strategicheskii ocherk* (Paris, 1933); S. Chernomordik (Larionov), "Pered Oktiabrem na dalekom fronte," *Proletarskaia revoliutsia. Istoricheskii zhurnal*, no. 10. (1922); A. G. Shkuro, *Grazhdanskaia voina v Rossii: Zapiski belogo partizana* (Moscow, 2004); Kh. D. Siomina, *Tragedia Russkoi armii Pervoi mirovoi voiny 1914–1918 gg. Zapiski sestry miloserdia Kavkazskogo fronta*, 2 vols (New-Mexico, 1963–4); M. M. Isaev, "Zakhlostnyi front." *Sbornik pisem, sostavila E. G. Boldina i M. M. Gorinov – Moskovskii arkhiv. II polovina XIX – nachalo XX vv. Istoriko-kraevedcheskii almanakh*, vypusk 2 (2000).
3. N. G. Korsun, *Pervaia mirovaia voina na Kavkazskom fronte. Operativno-strategicheskii ocherk* (Moscow, 1946). Also, see Korsun, *Alashkertskaia i Khamadanskaia operatsii na Kavkazskom fronte mirovoi voiny v 1915 godu* (Moscow, 1940); Among other Soviet researchers should be mentioned A. P. Steklov, *Revoliutsionnaia deiatel'nost' bol'shevistskikh organizatsii na Kavkazskom fronte, 1914–1917 gg.* (Tbilisi, 1969); A. O. Arutiunian, *Kavkazskii front, 1914–1917 gg.* (Yerevan, 1971). Among post-Soviet researchers: A. Pronin, "Pokhod na Khamadan. Expeditsionnyi korpus generala Baratova na Persidskom fronte," *Rodina*, no. 5 (2002); A. V. Shishov, *Persidskii front (1909–1918). Nezasluzhenno zabytye pobedy* (Moscow, 2010); Shishov, *Kavkazskii front – Pervaia mirovaia voina. Prolog XX veka*, ed. by V. L. Malkov (Moscow, 1998); R. N. Evdokimov, *Kazachii voiska v usloviakh Pervoi mirovoi voiny: Kavkazskii front* (thesis, 2005).
  4. M. K. Baskhanov, *Russkie voennye vostokovedy do 1917 goda. Biobibliograficheskii slovar'* (Moscow, 2005).
  5. D. Volkov, "Persian Studies and the Military in Late Imperial Russia (1863–1917): State Power in the Service of Knowledge," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 47, issue 6 (2014): 915–32; Volkov, "Moscow, St Petersburg, Tiflis: Researching Russia's Relations with Iran During the Late Imperial and the Early Soviet Periods in Russian and Georgian Archives," *BIP Annual Workshop*, University of Edinburgh, 9.02.2013.
  6. C. J. Edmonds, *East and West of Zagros. Travel, War and Politics in Persia and Iraq, 1913–1921*, ed. and intro by Yann Richard (Leiden-Boston, 2010); F. Hale, *From Persian Uplands* (New York, 1920).
  7. Archives of the National Center of Manuscripts of Georgia. Fond 39 (hereafter: ANCMG).
  8. Ter-Oganov, "Rapport du Capitaine en Second Constantin Smirnov sur Son Voyage en Turquie en 1904," 209–29.
  9. Central Historical Archive of Georgia, f. 521. op. 2, d. 423.
  10. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 3, l. 4.
  11. K. N. Smirnov, *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shakha. 1907–1914 gg.* (s

*prilozeniiami*), arranged and edited by N. K. Ter-Oganov (Tel-Aviv, 2002).

12. For Smirnov's biography and works, see Ter-Oganov, "Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Konstantina Nikolaevicha Smirnova, in Smirnov, *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shakha*, 1–14.
13. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 8, l.1
14. See ANCMG, f. 39, d. 52–76.
15. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 67, l.40.
16. However, judging by the date of the telegram from the commander of the Persian Cossack Division Baron Maidel from 12 February 1917, in the winter of 1916–17 General Baratov was still at Qazvin. See Russian State Military-Historical Archive, f. 13185, op. 3, d. 48, l.17, 57 (hereafter RSMHA).
17. By request of the British government, the Kerind-Qasr-e Shirin operation was conducted in order to capture Khanaqin. Its aim was to relieve the situation of General Charles Townsend's British detachment, which was completely surrounded by the Turks in Kut-el-Amara. On 5 (18) April 1916, General Baratov's Expeditionary Corps, which operated in Iran, struck at a flank of the 6th Turkish Army, which opposed the British Expeditionary Army. On 8 (21) April, General Baratov's forces took Kerind and Qasr-e Shirin and, developing their offensive on the Baghdad direction, ousted the Turks from Khanaqin and entered Mesopotamia. See Wikipedia, <http://www.ru.wikipedia.org>. But as is revealed in Smirnov's letter, General Baratov's corps did not continue its offensive, since, having not noticed an advance movement by the British, the commander of the corps received an order to stop the offensive and to take positions to the west of Qasr-e Shirin. In the summer of 1916, the Expeditionary Corps was completely withdrawn from Mesopotamia.
18. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 77, l. 7.
19. It should be noted that General Baratov and the headquarters of the Expeditionary Corps were located in Qazvin by 1 November 1915, and by 20 November of the same year the Russian forces took all the starting points to begin an advance operation on the enemy's positions. See: Emelyanov, *Persidskii front*, 22.
20. Smirnov means the Russian Envoy to Tehran, S. A. Poklevskii-Kozell, with whose work style he had become acquainted during his first mission to Iran in 1907–14. In his *Diaries of the Persian Shah's Tutor*, Smirnov wrote of him: "Those who earlier knew him said that before Persia he never worked and that he does not know how to work, but in any case in Persia he had to work much and he managed well. His collaborators were in a very difficult situation, since things were run in an impossible way. There was no fixed time for dinner (sometimes, we went to dinner at 11 o'clock in the night, instead of 8), and having returned late from a party, he started to work at three in the morning ...." See Smirnov, *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shakha*, 40.
21. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 62, l. 22v.
22. *Ibid.*, l. 26.
23. According to Arnold Wilson, the so-called "political officers" were recognized everywhere as the "direct middlemen between the army and the population." See Sir

Arnold Talbot Wilson, *Loyalties. Mesopotamia. 1914–1917. A Personal and Historical Record* (New York, [1969]), 143. To be more concrete, the direct responsibility of the British “political officers” was conducting human intelligence. See also: Eliseev, *Reid sotnika Gamaleia v Mesopotamiiu v mae 1916 goda* (New York, 1957), 16.

24. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 62, l. 26. Amir Afham was the Hamadan governor and landowner. Amir Afshar was the head of the Afshar tribe in the Zanjan region. Bolkhovitinov was the acting head of staff of the Caucasus Military District. Prozorkevich was the commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade.
25. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 70, l. 51.
26. *Ibid.*, l. 28.
27. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 62, l. 25v.
28. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 67, l. 41.
29. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 63, l. 30.
30. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 68, l. 49v–50.
31. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 63, l. 30–1.
32. According to a well-known participant in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911 in Iran, Hasan Taqizadeh, Amir Heshmet was, for a period of time, the head of the army in the province of Azerbaijan and the leader of *mojahedin* who fought against the supporters of the deposed Mohammad `Ali Shah, Samad Khan Shoja` od-Dowleh and the Russian forces. In the beginning of 1912, after a defeat, Amir Heshmet, accompanied by a group of *mojahedin*, fled to Salmas, and from there to Ormiyeh, after which he hid at a Turkish border guard barracks. But Hoseyn Kazemzadeh maintained that he found asylum at Salmas with the Turkish border guard commissar. See E. Browne, *Nameh'ha'i Tabriz* (Tehran, 1351/1972), 121, 167.
33. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 63, l. 30v–31v.
34. Captain of the General Staff V. D. Kargaleteli (or Kargareteli) was the senior aide at the staff of the First Caucasus Cossack Division, and apparently also fulfilled similar functions in General Baratov's Expeditionary Corps. See Eliseev, *Reid sotnika Gamaleia v Mesopotamiiu*, 9. According to Emelyanov, during the offensive on Khanaqin in April 1916, Kargaleteli – who was called “Baratov's evil genius” – for some time served as the head of staff of the Expeditionary Corps. Emelyanov also thinks that the blame for the failure of the offensive in the direction of Baghdad was unjustly ascribed to Kargaleteli. See Emelyanov, *Persidskii front*, 87. Notably, he was the same Karagaleteli who, after finishing his service at the Northern front, returned to the Caucasus, from where he, together with the notorious Budu Mdivani, unexpectedly appeared at Kucheik-Khan Jangali's camp at a Resht. They are mentioned as “two aggressive Communists” in the memoirs of the British political officer Edmonds. See Edmonds, *East and West of Zagros*, 304.
35. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 67, l. 41.
36. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 68, l. 49v.

37. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 72, l. 34–34v.
38. It should be noted that Kirsanov served no less than five years as the vice-consul at Mosul. See RSMHA, f. 1300, Department OGENKVAR 1864–1918, op. 1, d. 1307, 1503.
39. At the time, former officers of the General Staff were often appointed to the offices of consuls, vice-consuls and sometimes secretaries of the General Consulates in Turkey and Iran. These former officers, having attained civilian ranks, were in fact secret military agents. After their spell of service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a rule, they resumed their military careers. See Ter-Oganov, *Iz istorii razvedki SHKVO v Turtsii i Irane, (1870–1918 gg.)* (Saarbrücken, Germany, 2015), 9–11.
40. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 62, l.23.
41. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 72, l.33.
42. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 64, l.39v.
43. The dame in black (French) – ANCMG, f. 39, d. 62, l. 24.
44. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 62, l. 27v.
45. Ibid., l. 26v.
46. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 64, l. 38v. In actual fact, Baratov's Expeditionary Corps' slow response to the Turkish blockade was not due to a “delay” of the Russian offensive but to the absence of a deep rear and the remoteness of the Russian main supply base, Enzeli.
47. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 64, l. 39v.
48. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 67, l. 40–40v.
49. Ibid., l. 40v.
50. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 66, l. 45v.
51. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 68, l. 48v.
52. Ibid., l. 23.
53. RSMHA, f. 2000, op. 1, d. 7749, l. 21.
54. Ibid., l. 23.
55. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 70, l. 51v.
56. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 62, l. 27v.
57. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 63, l. 30v.
58. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 72, l. 35v–36.
59. ANCMG, f. 39, d. 62, l. 28.

## CHAPTER 9

# VLADIMIR MINORSKY (1877–1966) AND THE IRAN–IRAQ WAR (1980–8): THE CENTENARY OF “MINORSKY'S FRONTIER”

*Denis V. Volkov*

As archival research supports,<sup>1</sup> Russia's “Iranists” quite often had a crucial impact on the course of international affairs, securing and extending the sphere of Russian imperial influence not only into the broader Persianate World<sup>2</sup> but also directly affecting the vicissitudes of European politics. Thus this essay explores Vladimir Minorsky's early scholarly and professional career as a budding diplomat of Imperial Russia in Iran and focuses on his participation in the activities of the Russo-British-Turkish-Iranian Quadripartite Boundary Commission, which a century ago drew almost 1,200 miles of Iran's present-day western frontier. The essay also reveals some of the implications these activities (which were mainly inspired by Minorsky<sup>3</sup>) had for Iran in the context of the perennial frontier issue that culminated in the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war in 1980.

On 19 April 1888 the rector of St Petersburg University, Mikhail Vladislavlev, wrote a letter to the Russian Minister of Education that maintained:

Our enlightenment mission in the Orient, political consolidation of Russian might and influence in all parts of Asia cannot be put into effect unless we actively prepare for it, unless along with military measures we train people, possessing both the knowledge of regions, of the way of life and spirituality of their inhabitants as well as of the language of the latter. Only by means of possessing a cohort of Asian languages experts will we be in position to study and assess Asian affairs with our own eyes, not with those of others, and we will have our own pioneers of the Russian influence in the Orient who, collecting a variety of firsthand intelligence, will provide a solid base for state considerations on where and how to act in future.<sup>4</sup>

These words reflect the two main components of the discourse known as *Russkoe delo* (the Russian Cause) that existed also in late Imperial Russian Oriental studies – a belief in Russia's

superior right to civilize non-European people and an awareness that the country was in ongoing competition with Western European powers in this process.<sup>5</sup> More interestingly, these words also highlight the embedded attempts of Russian scholars to promote their own scholarly institutions and activities while using current discursive developments within the context of their interaction with state power – the most characteristic feature of a late Imperial Russia's and, subsequently, a Soviet power/knowledge nexus.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of the interaction of scholars with state power is not new. The study of the power/knowledge nexus in Western scholarship was initiated in the 1970s–80s by various Russia scholars, pioneers such as Loren Graham, Alexander Vucinich and Peter Kneen.<sup>7</sup> Later, the engagement with the Foucauldian notion of power relations, which took place against the backdrop of the 1990s' debate on the applicability of this notion to Russia, led to much more nuanced research on the troubled relationships of Russian intellectuals with the state.<sup>8</sup> The works of Nikolay Kremontsov, Stephen Kotkin, Jeffrey Roberg, Peter Holquist, Francine Hirsch and Daniel Beer on Russian identity and Russian self-perception are particularly worth mentioning in this regard.<sup>9</sup> This scholarship has been significantly enriched by recent contributions of scholars such as Alex Marshall, David Schimmelpenninck and Vera Tolz. They have engaged with the study of the impact of the interaction of power/knowledge relations and discourses on national identity in the process of the production of scholarly knowledge on Russia's inner and outer Orient within the four main domains of Russian Oriental studies, namely academic, military, diplomatic and missionary.<sup>10</sup> This four-fold organizational set-up, and the productive interplay of these domains at institutional and individual levels, have been researched in more detail – specifically within Russia's Iranian studies of different periods – in other works by me.<sup>11</sup>

These four domains were particularly active during the complex interaction of *fin-de-siècle* Russia with Iran. The general political, economic and military aspects of these developments were fairly extensively studied in the second half of the last century by Soviet scholars such as Nina Kuznetsova, Liudmila Kulagina, Nina Mamedova and others; as well as, to a lesser extent, in Western scholarship, mainly by Firuz Kazemzadeh, Richard Frye and Muriel Atkin.<sup>12</sup> Soviet scholarship, of course, while lacking in analysis and suffering severely from prevailing “governmentality,”<sup>13</sup> nevertheless provides abundant source material, particularly in terms of the Russian archival documents it uses – material to which Western researchers have had only limited access.<sup>14</sup> It is rather peculiar that, in addition to lacking in theoretical methodology, much of recent Russian scholarship continues to adhere to Soviet-style approaches crossbred with a new emphatically patriotic bias. While these works tend to be sharply critical of the detrimental role of the European imperialist powers, especially of Britain in Iran, they generally depict late Imperial Russia's impact on its “minor Southern neighbor” in positive terms. The works of Kulagina, Mamedova, Elena Dunaeva and, particularly, Sergey Sukhorukov, are illustrative of this tendency.<sup>15</sup>

Next to all this scholarship on nineteenth and early twentieth-century political and economic developments, the history of Russo–Iranian relations as reflected in the careers of individuals who actively participated in these developments remains understudied. The first significant

steps in this direction have been taken by scholars such as Elena Andreeva, Nugzar Ter-Oganov, Stephanie Cronin and Vladimir Genis.<sup>16</sup> Their works analyze various aspects of the mutual influence of the two cultures, particularly at the individual level, and engage with the destinies of the Russian intellectuals who, while carrying out their professional assignments in the context of the different discourses and institutional practices of current Russia, made serious efforts to understand Iranian culture in a broader sense. It is to this field that this essay aims to contribute.

The methodology used here draws on the theories of Michel Foucault (1926–84), and more particularly his ideas on power relations within the power/knowledge nexus, the notion of how discourses influence the process of scholarly knowledge production within a particular society, and the role of intellectuals and their privileged position in the power relations grid.<sup>17</sup> The essay focuses on this interplay of power and knowledge as illustrated by the professional and scholarly activities of Vladimir Minorsky, a late Imperial Russian diplomat, in the context of the Russo-British geopolitical struggle of the time. It first contextualizes the character of the Russian presence in Iran at the turn of the twentieth century and the involvement of Russia's Iranian studies therein. This is followed by a brief look into the academic background of Minorsky and the origins of the Russo-British-Turkish-Iranian Quadripartite Boundary Commission. The essay then analyzes Minorsky's multifaceted productive role in the activities of the commission. The concluding part presents the result of these activities and of Minorsky's contribution to the outcome. In addition, the essay is the first to highlight some aspects situated beyond the conventional historiographic wisdom accumulated by the available international scholarship on Minorsky, including his secret collaboration with the Bolsheviks.

The study is based on documents from the Russian and Georgian archives, the written testimonies of the British members of the commission, as well as on unpublished materials derived from Minorsky's private archive. Minorsky's diaries, composed in the period of the commission activities, are of particular value. They include his private notes in combination with the drafts of reports to his superiors, which allows us to verify the extent of the integrity of his relationships with the state on different matters. All these – mostly unpublished – primary sources also are of particular value for shedding new light on the activities of the main participants of a boundary commission whose decisions became an integral part of a set of multilateral agreements spanning almost three centuries. The concluding decisions of the commission secured the very regional arrangement that had long-term economic, political and military implications.

Although, according to the Constantinople Protocol of 1913, the commissioners of all four parties – Britain, Russia, Iran and Turkey – “should enjoy exactly the same rights and the same prerogatives,”<sup>18</sup> the two colonial powers – Britain and Russia – played decisive roles as the two parties with the greatest interests in the region. In the second half of the nineteenth century the face-off between the European powers and Russia for influence in the Middle East escalated radically. The relative progress achieved by Russia in its turf war with Britain by the early twentieth century was secured through a steadily increasing military presence underpinned by growing economic and financial influence. Russian economic penetration

gained particular significance in the framework of General Kuropatkin's policy, proclaimed by him after his trip to Tehran in 1895 and aimed at “inconspicuous elimination of the British influence in Persia,” as he put it in his report to Nicholas II.<sup>19</sup>

Later, this became part of a broader strategy of the so-called “Russia's comprehensive penetration into Persia,” designed and realized by Kuropatkin during the period of his tenure as War Minister (1898–1904) together with the then Finance Minister (1892–1903), Count Sergei Vitte.<sup>20</sup> Between 1895 and 1910 Russia invested almost 21 million roubles in the construction of strategic roads in northern Iran, and this happened exactly when there was a lack of funding in this field in Russia itself.<sup>21</sup> By 1907, Russian companies were also implementing various projects in the south of Iran – the traditional zone of British influence. One example is the establishment of the regular cargo-and-passenger sea line “Odessa-the ports of the Persian Gulf.” Only Russian steamers operated on this route. In 1900–5, Russia would also quite often and successfully stage so-called “flag shows” in the Persian Gulf, by the most up-to-date military four- and five-pipe heavy cruisers, previously unseen in the region under the British flag, which impressed the local sheikhs as much as it infuriated the British.<sup>22</sup>

The infamous Anglo-Russian convention of 1907 put an end to “free trade competition” between the two powers. The agreement arguably benefitted both sides. Nevertheless, in the short term, it turned out more advantageous for Russia, given her geographical proximity.<sup>23</sup> Russia gained a dominant military position in Iran, and the Russian zone of influence had become a virtual Russian colony by 1914.<sup>24</sup> Russia was now both Iran's most important creditor and its largest trade partner. The Russian Discount and Lending Bank would finance not only large-scale local projects but also allocate funds to the shah's court without any specific assignment, provided they were spent on his private needs, which, in actual fact, was a way of bribing the shah.<sup>25</sup>

An especially damaging effect of Russia's presence in Iran was that, unable to compete with Britain, Russia tried to secure its economic interests through rather blunt measures, including bans against Iran's trade activities with third countries, the deliberate hampering of the development of local industries, of the construction of railways (from 1870 to 1913), and of Iran's trade fleet. Russo–Iranian relations in this period were marked by massive Russian penetration into Iran carried out by various means: economic, political and military, where Russia's political influence and overwhelming military presence made up for its lack of competitiveness relative to other European powers.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, “the main strength of the Czarist position in the northern parts of Iran was obviously based upon its political and military establishment,”<sup>27</sup> with a marked increase of the latter by the outbreak of World War I. Some 13,000 Russian officers and soldiers controlled most of the western areas and the entire north of Iran – the status quo relished by Britain, since Russian troops were an effective barrier on the route of a possible German and Turkish advance toward British India.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, it should be noted that Russia's military presence in Iran went hand in hand with the activities of the Russian late Imperial diplomatic corps. In fact, the activities of the Russian military in the field (except for those aimed at gathering strictly

military data) were, first of all, subordinated to the head of Russia's Legation in Tehran and to consuls stationed in other cities and towns. The diplomats were thus bound to further Russian influence in Iran.<sup>29</sup> They therefore possessed much more operative autonomy and capabilities, even compared with the military, to influence the events and the outcome of Russia's policy towards the country. Endowed as they were with state power, they were in the most advantageous position to make the best use of those capacities and to exploit their official postings in the pursuit of their own interests – very often including scholarly ones. In this sense, the power/knowledge nexus in “late Tsarist diplomacy is best exemplified by individual diplomats during the period 1900–17.”<sup>30</sup>

One of the most representative examples of such diplomats was Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky (1877–1966) who, during his sixteen years of service as an employee of the Persian Desk of the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, rose from the lowly post of a *student*,<sup>31</sup> or trainee, of the Russian Legation, to its Acting Head. By the time he left Iran for Paris in 1919, he had also become an internationally acknowledged scholar. He subsequently continued his scholarly career as a lecturer in Persian and Turkish studies at l'École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes – the famous *Langues O*.<sup>32</sup>

Trained in law at Moscow University, Minorsky in 1900 switched to Oriental studies at the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages, with the aim of embarking on a career of a *diplomato-vostochnik*.<sup>33</sup> As a senior colleague of his, Andrew Kalmykow, put it in his memoirs, learning Oriental languages could somehow guarantee employability in the most privileged workplace in the Russian Empire – the Ministry for Foreign Affairs – since its European sections were impregnable for students from relatively modest families. This was also indicative of the discursive manifestations of higher Russian society: the opportunity to be permanently engaged in interaction with Western culture was the most desired option for well-educated Russian nobility.<sup>34</sup>

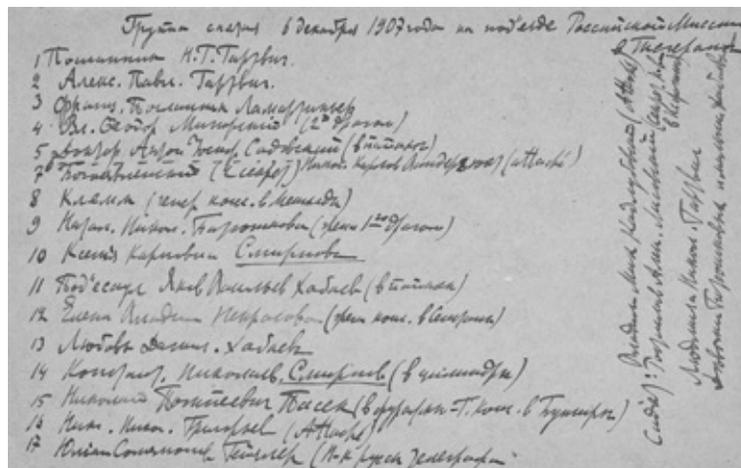


**Figure 9.1** The Russian Legation in Tehran on 6 December 1907. Photograph from the private

collection of a close friend of Minorsky, Colonel Konstantin Smirnov, who served at the Qajar Court from 1907 to 1914. © Georgian National Center of Manuscripts.

Since Minorsky was descended from a very modest family living in the small town of Korcheva on the Upper Volga, any prospect of securing a good position was ruled out. That his father was also a Jew further diminished his chances, given the pronounced anti-Semitism within Russia's state structures at the time. That is why, having succeeded in entering Moscow University by way of receiving the Gold Medal in secondary school, four years later he decided to convert his law course to Persian studies, an area of little prestige within the Russian Imperial Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This choice not only allowed Minorsky to penetrate Russia's most hard-to-get-into entity: it eventually proved to be an asset for his future professional and scholarly career.<sup>35</sup>

In general, in the context of Russia's “civilizing mission,” a discourse adopted from the West, Russians, particularly diplomats and military officers, tended to perceive themselves as fully fledged Europeans in the Orient (as opposed to strong doubts about their identity vis-à-vis especially Western Europe). This comes out in their diaries and other writings, which depict “Oriental realities” on behalf of a “civilized European”, using the same term for their own identification.<sup>36</sup> The private notes of Andrei Kalmykow, Nikolai Bravin and of Minorsky himself demonstrate that the preferred secondment destination among Russian diplomats-*vostochniki* was Turkey, because of its proximity to Europe and its relatively tolerable living conditions, and definitely not Iran, which in all respects was farther from Europe and considerably less tolerable in terms of quality of life for a “civilized European.”<sup>37</sup> Still, by the end of the nineteenth century, Iran had turned into a front line in the diplomatic fight between Russia and Great Britain, and most diplomats who worked on Iran would find themselves more and more involved in Russia's broader foreign policy activities, including those in Europe.



**Figure 9.2** “Smirnov's explanations to the photo.” (1) The Russian Minister, Nikolai Gartvig. (3) The French Minister, Maximilien de la Martinière. (4) Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky (2nd dragoman). (8) Fon Klemm (General Consul in Mashhad). (10) Kseniia Karlovna Smirnova. (14) Konstantin Nikolaevich Smirnov (in a top hat). © Georgian National Center of Manuscripts.

It was exactly at this time that Russia started to second its military representatives and diplomats with “Iranian” experience to Britain, where, due to their greater “field” experience and the scholarly approach adopted in Russian military Oriental studies, they often had the upper hand over their British counterparts during negotiations concerning Iranian affairs.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, by then Persian studies had become the driving force of Russia's Oriental studies. Almost all the main scholars dealing with the Islamic Orient were in one way or another involved in the study of Iran. In addition, at this relatively early stage of the development of Russia's Oriental studies, priority was given to the accumulation of primary sources – manuscripts, artefacts and other first-hand materials gathered by the representatives of all four orientological domains present in Iran.<sup>39</sup> Benefiting from Russia's massive presence in Iran, Russian military officers, diplomats, Orthodox missionaries and scholars had the opportunity to travel around the country and gather all kinds of area-study information, which eventually made an enormous contribution to Persian studies in Russia.<sup>40</sup> The same factors significantly helped Minorsky advance his professional and scholarly career; in addition, of course, to his own perseverance and curiosity, which his teachers Korsh and Krymsky at the Lazarev Institute had already noted and commented on. As Professor Krymsky, with evident frustration would later recollect in his memoirs, in spite of their energetic efforts to keep him at the institute, Minorsky “preferred diplomatic service in the Orient because of the sprightliness of his temperament, all the while carrying on his scholarly work.”<sup>41</sup>

Having entered the Imperial Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1903, Minorsky spent four years – from 1904 to 1908 – in Russia's General Consulate in Tabriz and the Russian Legation in Tehran. Alongside his professional duties, he dedicated this time to the study of the western and northwestern parts of Iran.<sup>42</sup> Precisely during this period he became profoundly interested in the history and culture of the Kurds as part of Iranian culture.<sup>43</sup> Inspired by the writings of Edward G. Browne, and the Russian scholars Viktor Rozen and Colonel Alexander Tumanskii, he also used his sojourn in Iran to gather a great deal of first-hand material on the Iranian Baha'is and the mystical Ahl-e haqq sect.<sup>44</sup> As early as 1902, while still a student at the Moscow Lazarev Institute, he began to correspond with the Professor of Persian studies at the Faculty of Oriental Languages in St Petersburg, Valentin Zhukovskii (1858–1918), who by that time had authored a number of publications in this field. It was then that they established the close teacher–disciple relationship that lasted until Zhukovskii's death. Zhukovskii provided his new disciple with ad-hoc guidance and later supervised his scholarly work on “The People of Truth” and the gathering of relevant manuscripts,<sup>45</sup> after Minorsky had embarked on a career as an imperial diplomat at the Persian Desk on 3 September 1903.<sup>46</sup> This subsequently enabled Minorsky to present successful reports to Russia's orientological societies and to publish his first monograph on the sect in 1911. The work won the Gold Medal of the Ethnography Section of the Moscow Imperial Society of Natural Sciences. It also received positive feedback from the demanding Vasilii Bartol'd, marking the beginning of their close and long scholarly cooperation, which lasted until Bartol'd's death in 1930.<sup>47</sup>

It is worth noting that Minorsky's scholarly writings, and the reports presented to the Russian Imperial Geographical, Archaeological and other scholarly societies, resulted in him

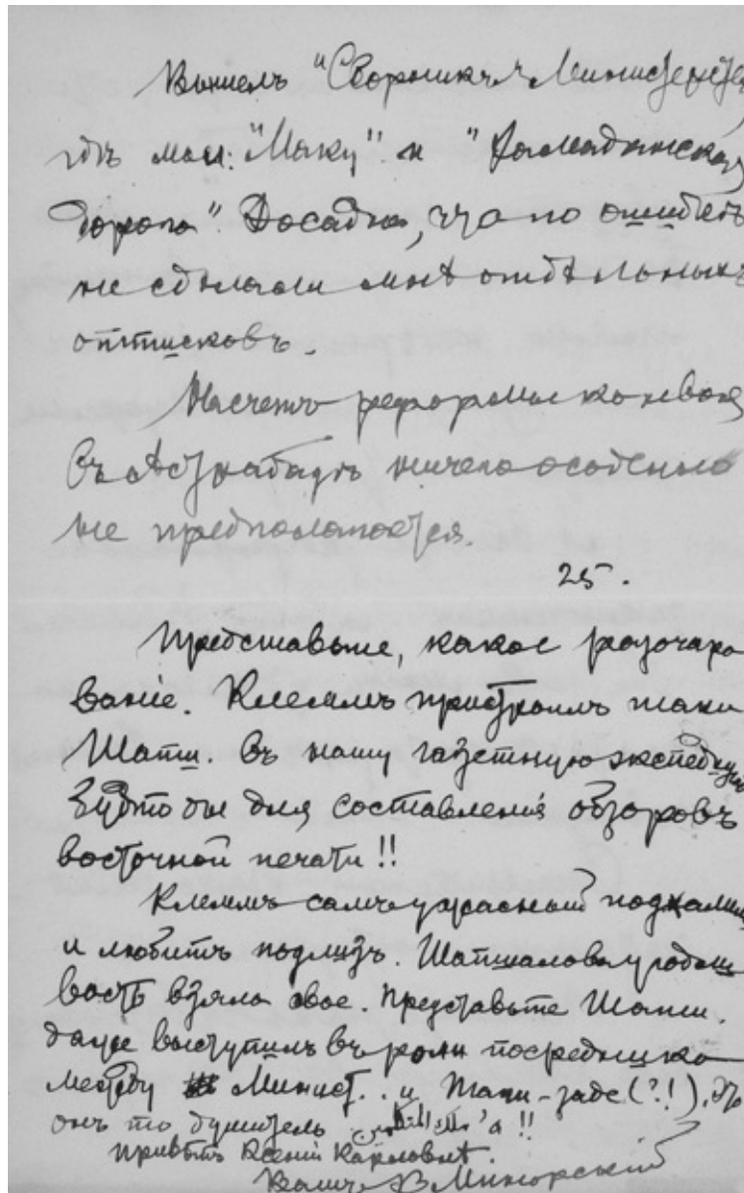
being perceived by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as something more than a conventional diplomat. In late 1911, he was thus assigned to supervise the topographical surveillance of parts of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan – exactly the areas of his scholarly interest.<sup>48</sup> Minorsky's diaries indicate that this is exactly the assignment he was hoping for; so here we have a clear manifestation of power/knowledge relations, whereby state power and academic knowledge intersect with personal interest and expertise. The successful fulfilment of such an assignment promised accelerated promotion, which was also coveted by Minorsky, as evidenced by his diaries.<sup>49</sup>

Minorsky's cooperation with the British Consul in Tabriz, Mr Shipley, and their joint tour of the Iranian border areas occupied by Turks, in the summer of 1911, was to be spadework for the future activities of the quadripartite boundary delimitation commission tasked to settle the long-disputed frontier between Iran and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>50</sup> There had never been a mutually agreed fixed frontier between these two countries along the imaginary sinuous line from Mount Ararat to the Persian Gulf and, whenever one of the neighboring states was stronger, it would encroach upon the other's territory. Besides, there were independent sheikhdoms, controlling vast areas and changing their allegiances at any given time as they saw fit.<sup>51</sup> In actual fact, as perceived by Britain and Russia, this area was a rather wide strip, almost 1,200 miles in length, of scarcely populated mountainous or desert no-man's land, making it of little strategic and economic interest to them. However, this tended to create unnecessary permanent tension between the two states in which Britain and Russia had underlying interests. Therefore, throughout the nineteenth century considerable efforts had been undertaken to demarcate the border, but the process had been interrupted whenever relations between Britain and Russia turned bad.

The first multilateral attempts to demarcate the frontier between the former Iranian and Ottoman Empires date back to the first half of the nineteenth century. The treaties of Erzerum of 1823 and 1847 represented the joint efforts of Iranians, Turks, Russians and British to clear up the vagueness that existed around boundaries, generating constant border conflicts between the two neighbors.<sup>52</sup> The demarcation commission established by the second treaty of Erzerum turned out to be the most efficient and fruitful in terms of the scope of work done and the topographical information it yielded. The commission's painstaking activities on site, mainly led by Russia and Britain, took place between 1848 and 1852, and the subsequent settlements were interrupted by the Crimean war, in the aftermath of which the border question failed to be finalized.<sup>53</sup> However, all those vigorous efforts did not remain in vain.

Notwithstanding all the changes in the political relations of the states involved, the previous commissions succeeded in producing a significant amount of valuable scholarly material later to be codified and supplemented by Minorsky and Shipley's activities. They used the *Carte Identique*, elaborated in 1869, as the basis for their continuing topographical studies. But they identified more than 4,000 discrepancies, mainly due to Minorsky's expertise.<sup>54</sup> As Professor David Marshall Lang of SOAS, who in World War II served in Tabriz as a British military officer, put it: “Minorsky's expert knowledge of the territory and of the peoples and tribes involved fitted him ideally to represent Russia in this new attempt to fix the boundary.”<sup>55</sup>

British officers also acknowledged that, owing to his profound expertise on the region, Minorsky remained a leading figure during the preparatory work and for the duration of the commission's activities – a fact that made Minorsky, whose diaries show an awareness of his contributions, demand appropriate recognition and career promotion from the Russian Minister in Iran and his superiors in the Imperial Ministry.<sup>56</sup>



Вышла "Восточная Минералогия"  
и мои: "Маки" и "Хамаданская  
дорога". Фосадна, что по существу  
не столько мои труды, сколько  
опытнее.

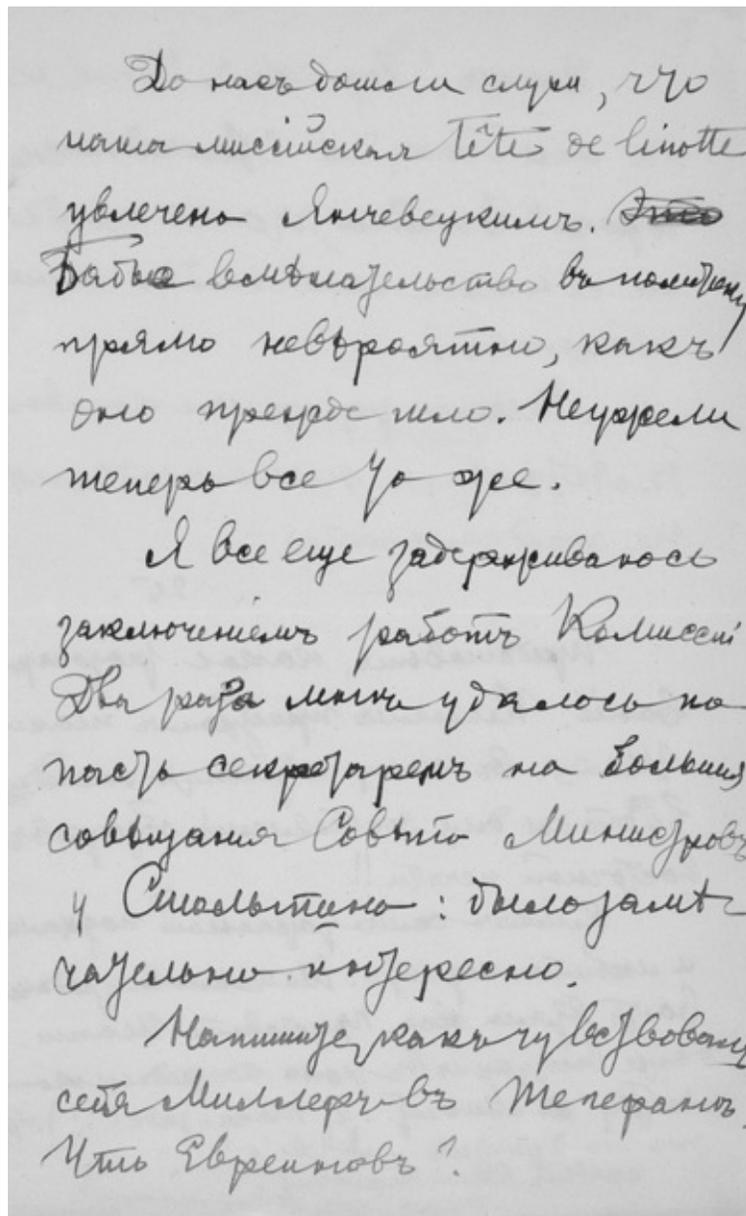
Мне очень приятно, что мои  
работы вышло опубликовать  
не предполагая.

25.

Представьте, какое разочарование  
было. Рассказываю приятельнице моей  
Маше. В нашу газетку следуют  
еще один раз составлены обзоры  
восточной печати!!

Кем они составлены? Поджались  
и любил почитать. Шайшапову родили  
вотъ взяли свое. Представьте Маше.  
Даже все упили в роли посредника  
между ~~и~~ Минист. и Маки-заде(?!), но  
они по дружбе с ~~Кавири~~ а!!  
привет от Рами Каримовича.  
Кавири В. Минорский

**Figure 9.3** Page 4 of Minorsky's letter (St Petersburg) to Smirnov (Tehran), where he mentions that his works “Maku” and “The Hamadan Road” have been published by the Ministry. © Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts.



До насъ дошло и слыши, что  
наша индийская tête de linotte  
убиена индусскими. ~~Тито~~  
Баба вольнолюбиво в посылку  
прямо невзрачно, какъ  
это предъшло. Неуряди  
теперь все по делу.

А все еще задракивается  
заключенная работа Комиссии  
Эта работа наша удалось по  
порядку секретарю на Бюро  
связи Свѣтло Министровъ  
у Смольникова: делозапит  
кажется интересно.

Министре какъ удовлетованы  
сей Министровъ Мережановъ.  
Что Евреиновъ?

**Figure 9.4** Page 3 of Minorsky's letter (St Petersburg) to Smirnov (Tehran), where he mentions that he has taken part in the meetings of the Russian Government regarding the activities of the Commission. © Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts.

After finishing all preparations and signing the quadripartite protocol in late December 1913, Minorsky set off from Istanbul to Mohammarah.<sup>57</sup> At that point he sent a letter to his senior friend, Vasilii fon-Klemm, who by then had become the ministry's Official for Special Assignments. The letter was supposed to follow up his promotion nomination addressed to the Head of the Asian Department of the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Kimon Argiropulo, on behalf of the Russian Minister in Iran, Stanislav Poklevskii-Kozel. Minorsky wrote:

I am emphatically asking you to let me know whether the Minister's nomination of my promotion has been crowned with success (no. 984 addressed to K. M. Argiropulo). C'est le moment on jamais receives anything from the Ministry. Well, in any way, the deal was struck. My role will become clear if we compare what had been done during my

absence from Constantinople to what was done in the period from October 19 to November 9 [...] I hope I won't be forgotten. The promotion is also essential for my status on the Commission.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, after the final preparations for the establishment of the commission were transferred to Constantinople on 16 February 1912, Minorsky was seconded to Turkey with the new rank of Second Secretary of the Russian Embassy. Joint Russo-British cartographical activities were an integral part of the quadrilateral intense negotiations, which were held between 1912 and 1913. Minorsky's contribution to every single part of this process was so crucial that the Monarch's Grace was bestowed on him on behalf of Nicholas II well before the signing of the agreement.<sup>59</sup> In the spring of 1913 he had to leave for St Petersburg in order to arrange his private affairs. During his several months' absence, nothing had been done, as he wrote in his diaries.<sup>60</sup> On Minorsky's return to work in October 1913, the job was finalized within a month. According to the testimony of the British officers, even they seemed to fully trust and rely on Minorsky, as they had been instructed by the Foreign Office that Minorsky was the only man competent in the question.<sup>61</sup> Their joint efforts were finally crowned by the signing of the Constantinople Protocol of 1913, marking the beginning of the functioning of the Quadripartite Commission on the Demarcation of the Turco-Persian Boundary. When already on board the ship heading to the Persian Gulf, Minorsky would write in his private notes that it had only been due to his own efforts that the preparatory tasks had been finalized and the protocol signed. He continued:

It was only after my return from Russia that we finally managed to push things on. First, I with my colleagues worked out the draft of the agreement. Then the agreement was signed by the grand vizier and the ambassadors: ours, the English and the Persian one. It was for the first time in my entire life that I was present at such an act, which, on top of everything, was, to a great extent, my own doing. I was the one who in 1911 took up the border question and theoretically finalized it, and now I am travelling in order to demarcate Persia from Turkey in practice, and God willing, to complete what has not been completed since 1843.<sup>62</sup>

Thereby, the stipulated task read that the commission was to demarcate three-quarters of the border, according to the available *Carte Identique*, inherited from the previous commissions, and corrected based on the Minorsky-Shipley elaborations. The final quarter was to be defined on site.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the political controversies surrounding the issue of border demarcation throughout the nineteenth century, the whole process was aggravated by the geographical nuances confronting the multiple commissions. The most evocative description of the borderlands straddling the frontier between the Persian Gulf to Mount Ararat is that given by McLachlan:

The topography of the Iran/Iraq borderlands is extremely varied. In the south it takes the approximate course of the Shatt al-Arab waterway and its adjacent marshes across the Mesopotamian plain before striking into the foothills of the Zagros and the high basins

such as Mehran. The heights of the Zagros-Tauris ranges increase in altitude and topographic complexity with travel northwards to high mountains in the Tauris proper, where narrow intermontane basins and confined river valleys form the only access in difficult terrain. Despite this physical diversity, there is a remarkable singleness of aspect to the border zone – marshland, high hills and mountain have all acted over long periods as negative areas for human settlement.<sup>64</sup>

Given the geographical difficulties of the terrain in question, and the fact that *Carte Identique* proved “insufficiently accurate,”<sup>65</sup> a great deal remained to be decided on site, along the whole length of the border. According to the Constantinople Protocol, all decisions were to be agreed on a quadrilateral basis; however, all the spadework had been carried out by the British and the Russians, and their vision of the issue was crucial during the commission's field activities.

A few noteworthy differences distinguished Minorsky's approach towards the tasks of the commission from that of the British officers. Judging by the writings of Colonel Charles Ryder and Captain Arnold Wilson, once in the field their approach to the mission was neutral or even somewhat aloof, intent on carrying out the stipulated task as closely to the maps they had as possible, and, in so doing, to try to cause as little argument between Iranians and Turks as possible. They would quite often express their sincere surprise with the unwillingness of either side to move the border dozens of kilometres in this or that direction. Those areas were mainly underpopulated, desert-like or rugged mountainous, and hence “valueless” terrain, in their opinion.<sup>66</sup> Another British commissioner wrote: “The character of much of the territory was so vile that it was a matter of wonder that either Power should think it worthwhile to quarrel about it, while the inhabitants were hardly such as a self-respecting power would care to have as subjects.”<sup>67</sup>

Minorsky's notes suggest, though, that, in contrast to his counterparts, he constantly thought that his country was losing something:

Not without regret I have to think that we too easily gave up our grounds in Mesopotamia to England, and everything in southwestern Persia is also now falling into the hands of the English. They have already taken the neutral zone and before they creep farther into the North, we had better bargain for concessions in the South, for example, near the Karun [River], or a railway to Mashhad.<sup>68</sup>

On the basis of the accordance between his thoughts as recorded in his diaries and the drafts of his reports to the Russian Minister in Iran, one can see which thoughts led Minorsky to writing this or that report or analytical proposal. It is interesting to follow how Minorsky used both his official position in the Commission as Head of the Russian section and his unofficial, though generally acknowledged, status as the main expert on the region to conduct his own fight in the Great Game – a conflict that, as he and his fully fledged analogue from the Russian military, the later Lieutenant-General Andrei Snesev (1865–1937), believed, did not end in 1907 but only became more urgent.<sup>69</sup> The farther the commission moved to the north, the more

often Minorsky noted with obvious pride in his diary that he had managed to retain this or that area within Iranian territory. This bias is particularly noticeable in the areas populated by Kurds.<sup>70</sup>

Minorsky's efforts to bring as much contested territory as possible under Iranian jurisdiction can be explained as follows. First of all, as appears from his notes, he personally sympathized with the Kurds.<sup>71</sup> This sympathy also comes out in his work *Kurdy. Zametki i vpechatleniia* (The Kurds: Travel Notes and Impressions), published in 1915 based on the material he collected between 1911 and 1914, as well as in his documented impressions from his interaction with Kurds during the activities of the commission.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, in his scholarly opinion, which he inherited from his teachers Zhukovskii and Bartol'd, the Kurds were an integral part of the Iranian cultural and historical community.<sup>73</sup> Hence, the greatest possible extent of their lands should be included in Iran's territory.

However, the main stimulus for his Kurdish sympathies seems to have sprung from his allegiance to *Russkoe delo*, involving the promotion of Russian interests in remote regions deemed crucial for the viability of Russia's sphere of influence in the East.<sup>74</sup> Given the speed and extent of Russia's recent imperialistic expansion, in the perception of the time, "today's inner Orient" was "yesterday's outer Orient" and "today's outer Orient" could potentially become "Russia's inner Orient of tomorrow." The same perceptions were applicable to Iran. As Paul Luft maintains in his "The End of Czarist Rule in Iran," "[...] by the outbreak of the war, relations between Czarist Russia and Iran had reached a new stage in which the grip of Russian rule on the northern provinces of Iran was strengthened to such a degree that Iran's sovereignty became seriously undermined and it was expected that the economy of the northern provinces would become integrated with that of Russia."<sup>75</sup>

During the first years of World War I, Russian roubles, called *baratovki* after General Baratov, the Russian Commander-in-Chief at the Persian front, were in wide circulation among Iranians and were more welcomed than local currency for settling transactions.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, taking into consideration the political situation in and around Iran, in the early twentieth century the Russian foreign affairs establishment and the military saw the country as potentially part of Russia.<sup>77</sup> At least, the western and northern parts of Iran, being under *de facto* Russian occupation with all conventional colonial institutions from 1909 to 1917, had already become a virtual Russian territory by the early 1910s.<sup>78</sup> Russian troops, for instance, provided public order and security in this part of the country; executive and judicial powers were carried out by multiple Russian consuls stationed in all significant population centers.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, for Minorsky, who would remain a staunch apologist of *Russkoe delo* throughout his whole political career, it made sense to move the border westward under various pretexts, including the necessity to preserve the geographical cohesion of specific local tribes.

Simultaneously, having analyzed the documents and reports of the commission, it would be unfair to conclude that the representatives of the two Great Powers imposed their will on the Iranian and Turkish sides. According to the provisions of the Constantinople Protocol, the British and Russian representatives were vested with the power of arbitration in case of

unsolvable disagreement between the Iranian and Turkish sides. As another British commissioner wrote,

[I]t had one rather curious result [...] Persians and Turks almost invariably tried to avoid making mutual concessions that might not be approved by their governments and might get them into trouble [...] The result was that any decision of any importance was left to the arbitrators [...].<sup>80</sup>

All this was aggravated by the lack of relevant knowledge of the region and it appears that, in actual fact, the representatives of imperialist powers cared much more about the well being of local tribes than the representatives of central governments of the two neighboring countries did.

This leads us to another peculiar observation. The commission was supposed to delimit the boundary in a region where there had never been boundaries in the modern geographical and political sense of the word. In fact, the commission was tasked to establish spatial limits for nomadic peoples and particularly for the rather militant Kurds, traditionally heedless of spatial boundaries. During the fieldwork, the commissioners quite often asked locals to which country the ground they stood on belonged, and always received the answer that it belonged to God.<sup>81</sup> So wherever in that region the border was laid, it was destined to be laid in the wrong place. The members of the commission realized that it had to be done with minimal negative consequences. "The fixing of a frontier was repugnant to the finer feelings of the Kurds, and [...] most of the pillars survived their erection not more than twenty-four hours."<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that eventually all pillars were completely destroyed and restored every two to three years during the following fifteen years.<sup>83</sup> In 1925 this led the members of the commission to some important epistemological conclusions, expressed by Minorsky's brother-in-Orientalism Captain Wilson:

The Kurds have a conception of frontiers which is different from ours, but is quite reasonable. According to them, sovereignty is not vested in land, but in human beings. Freedom of movement is essential to nomads.<sup>84</sup>

This was supplemented by Colonel Ryder's words when he said:

It is so easy to lay down a frontier in the chancelleries of Europe and to agree if Turkey makes a concession in the south, Persia shall respond in the north; but this is no consolation to the inhabitants concerned: they will not stand it at any price, when they live in inaccessible country remote from central governments. Full consideration must always be given to local opinions.<sup>85</sup>

Quite satisfied with the successful counteraction rendered by Russian troops to Ottoman encroachments on Iranian territory during the pre-war years, Britain did not lay a claim to the western and northern provinces that were essential for Russian economic and military influence in Iran.<sup>86</sup> Although Minorsky's British colleagues on the commission were little

inclined to confronting his patriotic zeal, such an obsession with state interests naturally did not go unnoticed. Eleven years later, during the meeting of the Royal Geographical Society dedicated to the activities of the commission, Colonel Ryder would recall with reserve and fine English humor that Minorsky's "stout upholding of Russian interests was only mellowed by the presence of his charming wife [...]."87

It should be noted in this context that Minorsky married shortly before the journey in 1913 and that the couple's trek through deserts, marshes, and mountains whilst braving the bullets of Kurdish attackers counts as their almost year-long honeymoon. His wife, Tatiana Shchebunina, began learning Persian as soon as she boarded the ship to Muhammara and she endured the whole adventure from start to finish, continuing to assist her husband in his scholarly activities throughout his life. Minorsky had met his future wife and assistant precisely during his several months' absence from Istanbul in 1913. During his stay in St Petersburg he managed to arrange his marriage and to coordinate with the Ministry the possibility of his wife accompanying him during the commission's field activities.<sup>88</sup> This fact is also indicative of his privileged position within the highly bureaucratized diplomatic apparatus of late Imperial Russia.<sup>89</sup> Minorsky did not miscalculate on this account either. Instead of a potential burden, being the only woman among almost 200 males, Tatiana turned out to be a great scholarly asset. Continuing to master Persian, she was able to establish contacts in the places traditionally off-limits to males in Muslim societies. Almost every time the party made a stop in a village or a nomad winter settlement Tatiana, properly instructed by Minorsky, would go to *andaruns*, communicating with local women and jotting down ethnographic or linguistic data. Her husband so much appreciated her contribution that he dedicated the main work that resulted from this extensive trip, to her, and separately mentioned her productive role in his notes and published writings.<sup>90</sup>

It is worth noting that, by drawing on his wife's collaboration, Minorsky followed a Russian orientological guild tradition, initially introduced by Zhukovskii in the 1880s. Later on this phenomenon became so widespread among Russian orientologists that it can be categorized as an institutional practice adopted by late Imperial Russia's orientology. This was rooted in the emancipation discourse of the 1860s–70s and the reforms that occurred in Russia during that period, including the Russian military. In order to secure the success of Russia's further advancement to the south and east, the current war minister, Dmitry Miliutin (1861–81), who himself possessed a strong scholarly background, decided, among other measures, to tackle the problem of the lack of information regarding Russia's Asian neighbors. He introduced courses of statistics and other subjects in the Military Academy by way of encouraging closer study of Oriental states and cultures. In pursuit of this, he propagated gathering all the available information by Russian officers, even of a character far from military needs.<sup>91</sup> During the period in question, Russia's nascent Oriental studies suffered from a dearth of primary sources. So this discursive method – the attempt to collect all the available information concerning all the aspects of life in the areas of their scholarly interest – passed over from military Oriental studies to the academic, diplomatic and missionary domains.<sup>92</sup>

Such practices implied improvization, including the use of means such as the wives of scholars who, because of their high educational background, might be of great scholarly

assistance to their husbands, particularly in areas to which the latter had no access because of strong gender taboos in Muslim societies. In 1883–6, during Zhukovskii's academic fieldwork in Iran, his wife Varvara Karlosheva mastered Persian to the extent that she was able to collect and process linguistic data on Iranian folklore collected during her communication with women. In the letters to his teacher, Viktor Rozen, Zhukovskii acknowledged her help in his ethnographic studies, including family relationships and women's everyday life in Iran.<sup>93</sup> Varvara made friends in the shah's *andarun* in Tehran and subsequently in the *andaruns* of the governors of Isfahan and Shiraz – the three cities where her husband did his fieldwork – and became a valuable source of ethnographical and political information for Zhukovskii. Later, she even published an independent scholarly work, *Persidskii enderun*.<sup>94</sup> Likewise, Captain Konstantin Nikolaevich Smirnov (1877–1938), a private tutor from 1907 to 1914 of the heir to the Iranian throne, Ahmad-Mirza (the later Shah of Iran), entrusted his wife Kseniia with a similar assignment. In addition to nuanced political intelligence, Smirnov's wife provided him with extensive information on customs and everyday life in the shah's *andarun*, which Smirnov used in his scholarly writings.<sup>95</sup>

Returning to Minorsky's participation in *Russkoe delo*, it should be mentioned that at the time of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, Edward G. Browne published his emotional protest in the British press against Russia's policy in Iran, condemning several Russian diplomats, among them Minorsky. However, later, in the 1920s, when Browne got to know Minorsky closely, he apologized for his earlier criticism, and Minorsky even stayed a while at his home.<sup>96</sup> In his 1966 obituary for Minorsky, Professor Lang also wrote that,

Russia's attempts to suppress the Persian Constitutional Movement and turn much of the country into a province of Tsarist empire were uncongenial to Minorsky, who did all that he properly could to dissociate himself from them.<sup>97</sup>

However, Minorsky's private notes, written during the Iranian Constitutional Movement of 1905–11, urging tsarist Russia to take more decisive measures and proposing a project to sever Azerbaijan from Iran on the basis of their profound cultural differences, prove the contrary. On this issue he had been in full agreement with his closest friend, another scholar of Iranian studies, the later Colonel Konstantin Smirnov, who advocated drastic Russian measures in Iranian Azerbaijan, including its annexation.<sup>98</sup> Given the strong discourse of *Russkoe delo* permeating all the four domains of late Imperial Russia's Oriental studies, views such as these espoused by Minorsky and Smirnov were quite natural and understandable. It was only much later that Minorsky changed his views and became more “liberal.”<sup>99</sup> In 1917, his reports to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Provisional Government, Pavel Miliukov, maintained:

The main question boils down to whether we acknowledge Persia as an equal-in-rights member of international communication, whether we consent to give her such independence which not only we – but also England – have, in fact, virtually been denying to her. [...] we should support liberals, a rapprochement with middle classes is

necessary, we need to minimize the interference with Persian affairs.<sup>100</sup>

Without any doubt, Minorsky was not a conformist, but rather one of the most remarkable examples of an intellectual who skilfully and productively used the capacities handed to him by power/knowledge relations. His archive contains documents indicating that during the 1920s he was one of the most valuable and reliable sources of political intelligence for the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of Soviet Russia.<sup>101</sup> Being handled personally by Georgy Chicherin,<sup>102</sup> he would send reports on the domestic and foreign policies of European countries, particularly France, where he lived and worked during the period. According to Chicherin's instructions, Minorsky was supposed to use his personal contacts in the upper echelons of the French and British political establishments for his own systematic analysis of events and relevant materials attainable to him due to his special position. In so doing, Minorsky was expected to cover, “from the Soviet standpoint,” a variety of issues, including France and Britain's policies in the Middle East, Iran and Afghanistan, and the French and British policies vis-à-vis the USSR. The assignment included even topics such as domestic politics and the issues related to conditions in the Russian immigrant colony.<sup>103</sup>

Bartol'd was aware of Minorsky's “special position” and was going to use it for the publication of his new scholarly works in 1930, something that was impossible in the USSR with regard to the scholarly works of ordinary Russian emigrants.<sup>104</sup> This topic, of course, needs additional research, to be done in other security services archives of Russia, France and Great Britain, since the documents available in Minorsky's private collection do not clarify whether this cooperation was voluntary or forced, or whether Minorsky played a double game on behalf of the Russian Government in Emigration, the French DST and/or the British SIS, and/or, by doing so, intended to secure a place at the Bolshevik Commissariat for Foreign Affairs as Chicherin's deputy, whom he had known since before 1917. Minorsky's notes only mention that NKID severed this relationship on its own initiative in late 1927 (notwithstanding Minorsky's later efforts to restore it), which allows us – provided the notes convey the facts – to suggest that the Bolsheviks suspected disinformation.<sup>105</sup> All the above-mentioned episodes of Minorsky's interaction with the state demonstrate the justification of the historically and socially contextualized approach informed by the concepts of “archaeology of knowledge” and the interplay of power/knowledge relations, where individual and institutional interests and public discourses play equipotent productive roles based on a nexus of state power and knowledge.

As was rather conventional for late Imperial Russia's orientology, activities for the sake of Russia's state interests abroad – in this particular case, Minorsky's participation in the work of the commission – proved to be a significant contribution to orientological scholarship. The pursuit of individual and institutional interests by means of making use of the capabilities vested in Minorsky by state power and public discourse eventually resulted in the enhanced reproduction of knowledge itself, which thus seems in full conformity with Foucault's postulation about the main feature of the interplay of power relations, namely its productivity. The ethnographical and linguistic material gathered by Minorsky made a valuable contribution to Iranian studies and enabled him to publish multiple scholarly works on the history and

culture of the Kurds and the other peoples of the region, up to the Cambridge period of his life (1941–66).<sup>106</sup> This discursive component, which can be formulated as an intense exploitation of official postings for scholarly activities, was indeed widespread among Russian “practical” orientologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Zhukovskii's and Rozen's correspondence with their disciples indicates that it was the university teachers, inspired by their own interpretation of the discourse of *Russkoe delo* – the development of Russia's domestic scholarly knowledge about the Orient for the sake of greater understanding toward the promotion of their state's interests – who inculcated in their students, would-be diplomats and military officers, the necessity of gathering artefacts and primary materials as a virtue, with the argument that it would foster national scholarship.<sup>107</sup> In a 1925 article analyzing Russian scholarship on Iran, Bartol'd separately mentioned Minorsky for his “productive abuse” of official postings with scholarly aims, and, in this sense, put him in one row with the other Iranists such as Nikolai Khanykov, Matvei Gamazov, and Tumanskii.<sup>108</sup>

Minorsky's endeavors to invest his scholarly expertise in spadework, the office and the field activities of the commission were, as illustrated above, appreciated by his British colleagues from the outset. The same crucial contribution to the eventual outcome of the commission's activities was also acknowledged in the course of time. In 1967, Lang wrote in praise of the scholar: “Minorsky's frontier, which now separates Persia from both Iraq and Turkey, has stood the test of time for over 50 years.”<sup>109</sup> This, one should admit, was not exactly the case. In 1994, the Director of the Geopolitics and International Boundaries Research Centre, Professor Keith McLachlan, while pointing to the Iran–Iraq border litigation in the twentieth century, argued that, “Iran's border with Iraq [had] remained profoundly unstable in the modern period. [...] The transition was difficult, painful and incomplete by the 1990s.”<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, as early as March 1917 in his analytical reports to the Russian Provisional Government, Minorsky wrote that the British and Turks had been trying to revise the border between Iran and Turkey and that it was only due to Russia's firmness that the border remained intact. He reiterated that the 1914 version of that part of the western Iranian border was the most expedient since it took into consideration both the geographical specificities of the region in question and the ethnographic issues of the local tribes' settlements.<sup>111</sup> The period that followed the 1920s and 1930s also witnessed some political friction over the Iranian–Turkish frontier; however, this was mostly caused by the relevant central governments and maintained in an unsolved condition by third powers. For example, in the late 1920s the USSR Deputy Foreign Commissar, Lev Karakhan, instructed the then Soviet Ambassador to Iran, Iakov Davtian, that:

The USSR is interested in continuing the state of conflict between Persia and Turkey over border sections, including the “Maku Triangle.” We are not interested in the situation being resolved to the benefit of either side. However, we also should prevent these conflicts from becoming worse since that could create the conditions for the penetration of the Western powers to the region.<sup>112</sup>

Therefore the smouldering border friction continued into the 1950s–1970s. However, the essential point is that the disagreement over the southern section of the frontier – the part running along the Shatt-al-Arab River – became the “touchstone of the hostility between the two states”<sup>113</sup> only since the processes of centralized nation-state building began in Iraq in the late 1950s.

The British members of the 1913 commission testified that the southern part of the boundary had been determined in full conformity with the *Carte Identique*; though in practise it was laid mainly according to the unilateral decision of the British on site.<sup>114</sup> Minorsky mentions in his private notes that “the British demarcation on Shatt-al-Arab was without any idea about moral rectitude”.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, as the inner documents of Britain's Foreign Office confirm, significant deviations from the initial plan were allowed on site: “Large oil-bearing areas were transferred from Persian territory to Turkish jurisdiction under the British protectorate, and the Sheykh of Muhammara, Great Britain's close ally, received considerable concessions.”<sup>116</sup>

Such biased activities have to be understood in the context of the ever-increasing military Russian presence in Iran at the time. Minorsky, though fully aware of these transgressions, neither protested nor appealed for strict observance of the initial agreements of the Protocol. Knowing the priorities of his head-office, which was reluctant to struggle with Britain in the south-west of Iran, he preferred – within his own operational field – not to counteract the semi-legitimate British gains in that frontier section. Instead, intending to benefit more from his expertise further to the north along the border, Minorsky decided implicitly to exchange his leniency for the compliance of his counterparts to Russian demands in the central and northern sections of the frontier. In addition to that, and as compensation for the British gains, in his reports to St Petersburg he proposed to demand new and greater concessions in Iran that were not directly related to the boundary question, such as the construction of a railway connecting Mashhad to the Russian system and other concessions in Iranian Azerbaijan.<sup>117</sup>

The Iran–Iraq war of 1980–8 broke out over a disagreement over the demarcation of the border along the Shatt-al-Arab, i.e. precisely the section of the Iran–Iraq border accepted on site by the commission, where Minorsky had been occupying the leading expert position. However, the conclusion of the war in 1988 restored the status quo. Rather than being an argument between locals, the Shatt-al-Arab dispute repeatedly served as a pretext for the escalation of the antagonism between the Iranian and the Iraqi regimes.<sup>118</sup> Although ultimately the commission failed to solve the perennial frontier issue and, in some areas, particularly in the south, even complicated it, in actual fact it cannot be argued that the commission laid the foundations of the future war.<sup>119</sup> An underlying mistake of a broader nature was committed by the common expert decision to base the general outline of the frontier on the *Carte Identique*. This map had already inherited all the ambiguities of more than three centuries of previous Iranian–Ottoman imperial strife. In addition, the British left a small stretch of a few dozen kilometres as the only access to the Persian Gulf for a far vaster territory, which in 1932 turned into independent Iraq. This had also promised to create serious border tensions for future generations.<sup>120</sup> All this was done with the tacit consent of Minorsky who, in exchange, hoped to receive British concessions during the demarcation in the western and northern areas of the

frontier, which were of significantly greater interest to the Russians.

However, what is illustrative for Minorsky's personal efforts as a scholar is that he succeeded in avoiding splitting the homogenous local Kurdish tribes and also managed to discern the dual identity of the Iranian Kurds. Since then, no significant border adjustments have been made within the zone for which the Russian part of the commission was responsible, and, even at a time when Iran's central authority was at its weakest, no claims with regard to the reassessment of Iran's external boundaries have been made on behalf of the Iranian Kurds.<sup>121</sup> In this sense, Minorsky's frontier did withstand the test of time. Paraphrasing the words of the French orientologist and geographer Jacques Ancel, one should mention that, ultimately, there are no problems of boundaries – there are only problems of political regimes of neighboring countries.<sup>122</sup> This observation is clearly supported by the bitter experience of Russia and Ukraine in 2014, when one power suddenly recalled historical border “ambiguities” and made use of them for the sake of its current foreign policy expediency vis-à-vis third powers and without any fear of spilling fraternal blood. In this sense, the testimonial point of the present-day Iran–Iraq border status quo is that this boundary is no longer demarcated by iron, wooden, stone or muddy pillars, erected by imperialist powers, but by minefields laid by the very governments of neighboring nations that are relatively close in culture and that profess the same religion, similar to the current situation on the Russian–Ukrainian border.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank Rudi Mathee, Elena Andreeva, Oliver Bast and Vera Tolz for their invaluable critical comments during various stages of the preparation of this article. My profound thanks also go to the employees of the archives mentioned here for their sincere cooperation, especially the Head of the St Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Irina Fedorovna Popova.
2. The concept of the broader Persianate World was first emphasized by Vasilii V. Bartol'd (1860–1930) in 1901 as a thesis regarding the role of Iranian culture as a binding agent for a region spreading “far beyond the linguistic Iran – from Constantinople to Calcutta and the towns of Chinese Turkestan.” Vasilii V. Bartol'd, “Iran. Istoricheskii Obzor. Russkie issledovaniia,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 7 (Moscow, 1977), 232, 237; “Istoriko-geograficheskii obzor Irana,” in *Collection of Works*, vol. 7 (Moscow, 1977): 34–5. However, the usage of the relevant term gained momentum after the publication of Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols (Chicago, 1974). Also, see the proceedings of an insightful workshop on this topic, *The Persianate World: A Conceptual Enquiry*, held 9–11 May 2014 at the University of Yale by Professors Abbas Amanat and Said Arjomand.
3. The spelling of the names of Russians is given according to the Library of Congress transliteration, notwithstanding their foreign origins (e.g. Bartol'd – not Barthold; Vitte – not Witte), except for those individuals who emigrated and whose work was extensively published in English. Their names are given according to the spelling adopted in their

English-language works (e.g. Minorsky – not Minorskii; Kalmykow – not Kalmykov).

4. *Materialy dlia istorii Fakul'teta Vostochnykh Iazykov*, vol. 2 (St Petersburg, 1905), 185.
5. The upholding of Russian state interests and the promotion of Russian culture and “way of life,” *obraz zhizni*. For a detailed deconstruction of the *Russkoe delo* discourse in late Imperial Russia's society and of Russian orientologists' perceptions of it, see Denis V. Volkov, “Persian Studies and the Military in Late Imperial Russia (1863–1917): State Power in the Service of Knowledge?,” *Iranian Studies* 47/6 (2014): 915–32.
6. The Foucauldian capability of “civilian” scholars, using the capacities emanating from the state, to benefit from state interests by means of creating discourses, necessary for pursuing their own interests often aimed at the institutional advancement of their scholarly field, was also studied in Krementsov's work, though mostly for the early Soviet period. See Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (London, 2005), 33, 58; Nikolai Krementsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, 1997), 4–5, 29–30.
7. See Loren R. Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, 1993); Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture 1861–1917* (Stanford, 1970); Alexander Vucinich, *Empire of Knowledge: The Academy of Science of the USSR (1917–1970)* (London, 1984); Peter Kneen, *Soviet Scientists and the State* (London, 1984).
8. See Denis V. Volkov, “Individuals, Institutions, Discourses: Knowledge and Power in Russia's Iranian Studies of the Late Imperial, Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods,” *Middle East – Topics & Arguments* 4 (2015), 61–4.
9. See Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (New York, 2005); Jeffrey L. Roberg, *Soviet Science Under Control: The Struggle for Influence* (London, 1998); Peter Holquist, “Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work: Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context,” *Journal of Modern History* 69/3 (1997): 415–50; and “Rossiiskaia katastrofa (1914–1921) v evropeiskom kontekste: total'naia mobilizatsiia i ‘politika naseleniia’,” in *Rossia i pervaiia mirovaia voina*, ed. N. N. Smirnov (St Petersburg, 1999), 83–102; Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880–1930* (London, 2008).
10. See Alex Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800–1917* (London, 2006); David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (London, 2010); Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford, 2011).
11. See Denis V. Volkov, “Rupture or Continuity? The Organizational Set-up of Russian and Soviet Oriental Studies before and after 1917,” a special themed issue of the journal *Iranian Studies*, eds Stephanie Cronin and Edmund Herzig, 48/5 (2015), 695–712; and Volkov, “Persian studies and the Military.” On Soviet and post-Soviet Russia's Iranology, see also Volkov, “Individuals, Institutions, Discourses.”
12. See Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864–1914: A Study in*

- Imperialism* (London, 1968); Richard N. Frye, "Oriental Studies in Russia," in *Russia and Asia. Essays on the Influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples* (Stanford, 1972), 30–52; Muriel Atkin, "Soviet and Russian Scholarship on Iran," *Iranian Studies* 2/4 (1987), 223–71.
13. See Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political* (London, 1995), 36–41; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 21–3.
  14. On the situation in Russian archives and the issue of traditional overemphasized secrecy, see Denis V. Volkov, "Fearing the Ghosts of State Officialdom Past? Russia's Archives as a Tool for Constructing Historical Memories of its Persia Policy Practices," *Middle Eastern Studies* 51/6 (2015): 901–21.
  15. See Sergey Sukhorukov, *Iran mezhdu Britaniie i Rossiei. Ot politiki do ekonomiki* (St Petersburg, 2009); Liudmila Kulagina, *Rossii i Iran (XIX – nachalo XX veka)* (Moscow, 2010); Liudmila Kulagina, ed., *Iranistika v Rossii i iranisty* (Moscow, 2001). See also Nina Mamedova, "Istoriia Sovetsko-Iranskikh otnoshenii (1917–1991)," in *Iran. Istoriia, ekonomika, kul'tura*, ed. Nina Mamedova and Liudmila Kulagina (Moscow, 2009); Liudmila Kulagina and Elena Dunaeva, *Granitsa Rossii s Iranom. Istoriia formirovaniia* (Moscow, 1998).
  16. See Elena Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game. Travelogues and Orientalism* (New York, 2007); Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Iranian–Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800* (London, 2013); Nugzar Ter-Oganov, ed., *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shaha, 1907–1914* (Tel-Aviv, 2002); Nugzar Ter-Oganov, *Persidskaia kazach'ia brigada, 1879–1921* (Moscow, 2012); Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii: Sluzhba v Persii i Bukharskom Khanstve, 1906–1920* (Moscow, 2003); Vladimir Genis, *Nevernye sluzhi rezhima: Pervye sovetskie nevozvrashchentsy, 1920–1933* (Moscow, 2009).
  17. See such works by Foucault as: *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, 1989); *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York, 1972); *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (London, 1980).
  18. Rules of procedure of the Delimitation Commission, The Constantinople Protocol of 1913 ([http://www.parstimes.com/history/iran\\_iraq\\_1913.html](http://www.parstimes.com/history/iran_iraq_1913.html); accessed 1 June 2015).
  19. The Archive of Orientologists of the St Petersburg branch of the Institute of Orientalology of the Academy of Sciences (henceforth – AV), f. 115 (Snesarev), op. 1, d. 152 (*The Humble Report of Lieutenant-General Kuropatkin on his trip to Persia in 1895*), l. 35–6, 64. The Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (henceforth AVPRI), f. 144 'Persian Desk', d. 2308, l. 116.
  20. See Vitte S. Iu., *Vospominaniia*, vols 1–3 (Moscow, 1960).
  21. AVPRI, f. 144, d. 4021, l. 230.
  22. See Aleksandr Shirokorad, *Persii i Iran: Imperiia na Vostoke* (Moscow, 2010), 103–5.
  23. See Evgenii Sergeev, *Bol'shaia igra, 1856–1907: mify i realii rossiisko-britanskikh*

*otnoshenii v Tsentral'noi i Vostochnoi Azii* (Moscow, 2012), 276, 289. The book was translated into English and published as: Evgeny Segeev, *The Great Game, 1856–1907: Russo-British Relations in Central and Eastern Asia* (Baltimore, 2013).

24. See Dietrich Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860–1914* (Hamburg, 1987), 333–5.
25. See *ibid.*, 336.
26. See Nugzar Ter-Oganov, “Zhizn’ i deiatel’nost’ Konstantina Nikolaevicha Smirnova,” in *Zapiski vospitatelia persidskogo shaha*, 6; Kulagina, *Rossia i Iran*, 157.
27. Paul Luft, “The End of Czarist Rule in Iran,” in Charles Melville, ed., *History and Literature in Iran* (Cambridge, 1990), 100.
28. *Ibid.*, 100–1, 111.
29. See Marshall, *The Russian General Staff*, 16, 26–7.
30. Alastair Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900–1939* (Basingstoke, 2012), 12.
31. The lowest rank in Russian diplomatic legations abroad, which was officially titled in Russian “*student missii*.”
32. See Louis Robert and Henri Massé, “Éloge funèbre de M. Vladimir Minorsky, associé étranger de l’Académie; la séance du 13 mai 1966,” *Compte rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 2 (1966): 227–8.
33. The term *vostochniki* derives from *Vostok* (“the East” or “the Orient” in Russian) and officially was used in late Imperial Russia to differentiate the military officers and the employees of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs from their colleagues who had not received the appropriate Oriental studies training. It can be translated as “Orientalist.” Since the early 1920s a term *vostokoved* (“orientologist”) has officially been used for everyone professionally trained in Oriental studies. The latter sounds more scholarly in Russian. In order to avoid the unnecessary Saidian connotation of “Orientalist” and to preserve the neutral epistemological denotation of the professional term, I henceforth use the nouns orientologist and orientology as well as the adjective orientological throughout the piece where pertinent, similarly to Tolz and Schimmelpenninck (see, for example, Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient*, 1, 3).
34. See Andrew D. Kalmykov, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat: Outposts of the Empire, 1893–1917* (London, 1971), 12–18. See also Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy*, 11.
35. See Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii*, 254–5. See also “Bibliography of the Publications of Professor V. Minorsky. Studies presented to Vladimir Minorsky,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 14/3 (1952), 7. See also John Andrew Boyle, “Obituary: Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966),” *Journal of Asian History* 1/1 (1967): 227.
36. Andreeva, *Russia and Iran*, 5–7, 14, 25, 82–3. See also Völkov, “Persian Studies,” 15–16.

37. AV, f. 17 (Valentin Zhukovskii), op. 2, d. 9 (correspondence with Bravin), l. 1, 54ob. Kalmykow, *Memoirs of a Russian Diplomat*, 12–14.
38. See Marshall, *The Russian General Staff*, 43–4.
39. For the legitimation of this term, rather unconventional for the English language, see endnote 33.
40. See Volkov, “Persian Studies,” 10–12.
41. Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii*, 255.
42. See D. M. Lang, “Obituary: Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 29/3 (1966): 693.
43. Minorsky, Vladimir Fedorovich (1877–1966): outstanding Russian scholar of Persian history, historical geography, literature and culture (See Clifford E. Bosworth, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/minorsky-vladimir>. Last visited 17 April 2014).
44. On Tumanskii's scholarly activities see Bartol'd, “Iran. Istoricheskii Obzor,” 332; Volkov, “Persian Studies,” 9–10. On Viktor Rozen see Vasilii V. Bartol'd, “Baron Rozen i russkii provintsial'nyi orientalism,” in *Collection of works*, vol. 9 (Moscow, 1977), 589–95.
45. In 1903, in one of his letters Minorsky writes that he managed to find and obtain one of those manuscripts related to the *ahl-e haqq* which Zhukovskii had pointed him to. Minorsky then keeps saying that it contains 70 pages and he has already translated it (AV, f. 17, op. 2, d. 37, ll. 2).
46. AV, f. 17 (Valentin Zhukovskii), op. 2, d. 37 (Correspondence with Minorsky), l. 1–2ob, 6. See also Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii*, 255.
47. AV, f. 134 (Vladimir Minorsky), op. 3, d. 12, d. 478 and d. 479 (Correspondence with Bartol'd). See also Bartol'd, “Iran. Istoricheskii Obzor,” 329–30, 332. Ilya Gershevitch, “Professor Vladimir Minorsky,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (1967): 53.
48. See Lang, “Obituary,” 695.
49. AV, f. 134 (Vladimir Minorsky), op. 1, d. 803 (Travel letters; Notebook no. 1), 1–1ob; d. 52 (notes on the article *Kaliashin*), l. 1–2.
50. See Genis, “*Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii*,” 255.
51. See Lang, “Obituary,” 695.
52. See Keith McLachlan, “Territoriality and the Iran-Iraq war,” *The Boundaries of Modern Iran* (London, 1994), 57; and Sabri Ateç, *The Ottoman–Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843–1914* (Cambridge, 2013), 54–7, 129–38.
53. See Colonel H. D. Ryder, “The Demarcation of the Turco-Persian Boundary in 1913–1914,” *The Geographical Journal* 66/3 (1925): 227–8.
54. *Ibid.*, 228.
55. Lang, “Obituary,” 695.

56. See AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 803 (Travel letters; Notebook no. 1), 5–5ob.
57. Present-day Khorramshahr, the Iranian *Stalingrad* of the Iran–Iraq 1980–8 War.
58. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 803 (Travel letters; Notebook no. 1), l. 5.
59. See Genis, *Vitse-Konsul Vvedenskii*, 255. An award (first used by Catherine the Great in 1774) that was solemnly invested along with, subsequently, a medal (established in 1826 by Nicholas I) to civil servants and military officers by Russian monarchs as a sign of supreme gratitude for services rendered.
60. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 803 (Notebook no. 2), l. 7.
61. Ibid. On the role of Minorsky in the activities of the commission see also Arnold Wilson, A. C. Wratislaw and Percy Sykes, “The Demarcation of the Turco-Persian Boundary in 1913–1914: Discussion,” *The Geographical Journal* 66/3 (1925): 238, 241.
62. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 803, l. 1.
63. See Ryder, “The Demarcation,” 228.
64. McLachlan, “Territoriality,” 58–9.
65. Ryder, “The Demarcation,” 237.
66. See Ryder, “The Demarcation,” 230, 234.
67. Wilson et al., “Discussion,” 240.
68. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 803 (Notebook no. 2), 8–9ob.
69. See Andrei Snesev, “Anglo-Russkoe soglasenie 1907 goda,” *Obshchestvo revnitatelei voennykh znaniy* 1 (1908), 1–44. See also Sergeev, “Bol'shaia igra,” 293.
70. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 803 (Notebook no. 2), l. 12.
71. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 758 (Private notes), l. 3–4; op. 2, d. 514 (Minorsky's correspondence), l. 1.
72. See Vladimir Minorsky, *Kurdy. Zametki i vpechatleniia* (Petrograd, 1915). See also Natalia Safonova, “V. F. Minorsky (1877–1966) i ego vklad v kurdovedenie,” *Pis'mennye pamiatniki vostoka* 1/8, (2008), 225–6.
73. See, for example, Bartol'd's works, such as “Istoriko-geograficheskii obzor Irana,” as well as Zhukovskii's works, such as “Sekta “Liudei Istiny” – Ahl-i Hakk – v Persii,” *ZVORAO* 2 (1887): 1–24; *Materialy dlia izucheniia persidskikh narechii* (Petrograd, 1922).
74. See Volkov, “Persian Studies,” 14, 17.
75. Luft, “The End of Czarist Rule in Iran,” 99.
76. See Father Superior Aleksandr (Zarkeshev), *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v Persii-Irane (1597–2001)* (St Petersburg, 2002), 111–13.
77. See Lamzdorf's letter to Nicholas II in Ter-Oganov, “Zhizn',” 6.
78. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 502, l. 1 (Minorsky's depiction of the situation in Northern Iran). See also Rose Louise Greaves, “Some Aspects of the Anglo-Russian Convention and its

Working in Iran, 1907–1914,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 31/2 (1968): 304–5.

79. AV, f. 134, op. 2, d. 197, l. 21 (Minorsky's depiction of the omnipotent role of Russian consuls in northern Iran). In his *Notes*, dated by 1908, Smirnov mentioned a certain “top-secret message,” sent through him from Mohammad-Ali Shah to Nicholas II and the latter's response. However, because of the secrecy of the matter he did not reveal the content. Only in 1933 did Smirnov add a comment on his manuscript that it had been a request to accept Iran as Russia's protectorate, similar to the Bukhara Khanate, and Nicholas II's polite refusal (The Georgian National Center of Manuscripts (henceforth – GNCM), f. 39, d. 13, l. 39–39ob; d. 19, l. 13–17).
80. Wilson et al., “Discussion,” 239–40.
81. *Ibid.*, 240.
82. Ryder, “The Demarcation,” 234–5.
83. See Wilson et al., “Discussion,” 238.
84. *Ibid.*, 238.
85. Ryder, “The Demarcation,” 235.
86. See Ter-Oganov, “Zhizn’,” 7.
87. Ryder, “The Demarcation,” 234.
88. See Ilya Gershevytch, “Professor Vladimir Minorsky,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1/2 (1967): 53–7, 56. Lang, “Obituary,” 695.
89. See Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy*, 16–18.
90. See Minorsky, *Kurdy*.
91. See Holquist, “Rossiiskaia katastrofa,” 85–86. On Miliutin's activities see his memoirs: D.A. Miliutin, *Dnevnik general-fel'dmarshala grafa Dmitriia Alekseevicha Miliutina. 1876–1878. 1879–1881* (Moscow, 2010).
92. See Volkov, “Persian Studies,” 7–10, 16.
93. The Archive of Russia's Academy of Sciences (henceforth AN), f. 777, op. 2, d. 165 (Rozen's correspondence), l. 14. See also Valentin Zhukovskii, *Obraztsy persidskogo narodnogo tvorchestva* (St Petersburg, 1902), 4. See also Petr Bushev, “Zhizn’ i deiatel'nost’ V.A. Zhukovskogo,” in *Ocherki po istorii russkogo vostokovedeniia*, ed. V. Avdiev (Moscow: 1959), 119, 123–4.
94. See Varvara Zhukovskaia, “Persidsky enderun,” *Vestnik Evropy* (October, 1886), 501–49.
95. GNCM, f. 39 (Konstantin Smirnov), d. 12, l. 50ob.-51ob; d. 13, l. 75–75ob, 77. See also Ter-Oganov, “Zhizn’,” 17.
96. See Lang, “Obituary,” 694–5.
97. *Ibid.*, 693.
98. GNCM, f. 39, d. 12, 73ob-75; d. 11, l. 3, 16ob. On Minorsky's *Azerbaijan Project of*

1909 and his efforts to revive it in 1917 see also Saleh Aliev, *Istoriia Irana. XX vek* (Moscow, 2004), 90–1.

99. AV, f. 134, op. 2, d. 197 (Reports to Foreign Affairs Minister Miliukov), l. 1–3, 23, 24ob, 42.
100. Ibid., l. 24ob., 42.
101. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 396 (Chicherin's assignment), l. 1–3. It is worth noting that the Russian archive authorities at their own discretion banned the photocopying of the materials of this and other files (*delo*) related to Minorsky's cooperation with NKID. On the activities of the so-called special departments (*osobyi otdel*) in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia's archives see Volkov, “Fearing the Ghosts.”
102. The Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs (1918–30).
103. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 396, l. 8. See also d. 433 (Reports on the situation in the Russian Embassy in London).
104. AV, f. 134, op. 3, d. 479 (Correspondence with Bartol'd), l. 25.
105. AV, f. 134, op. 1, d. 396, l. 1. This could have also been influenced by Chicherin's loss of actual power in the *NKID* by that time because of his sharply deteriorated health problems and his ongoing feud with the factual head of the then *NKID*, Maksim Litvinov (Vallakh), to whom he just might not have passed his personal contact over (RGASPI, f. 159, op. 2, d. 2, ll. 102–3, 173; d. 69, ll. 25, 34). The initial draft of this paper was composed in 2014. Recent research carried out by the author in several French archives in 2016 and 2017 has yielded further information on Minorsky's voluntary cooperation with Bolsheviks in the 1920s. Minorsky's personal dossier held by the French Ministry of the Interior was later stolen by Russian security services. For further details, see Volkov, *Between Powers, Knowledge and Identities: Vladimir Minorsky as a Diplomat, Scholar and Spy* (in preparation).
106. See Minorsky, Kurdy. Lang, “Obituary,” 696.
107. AV, f. 17 (Valentin Zhukovskii), op. 2, d. 37 (Correspondence with Minorsky, 1904), l. 6, 8. See also d. 9 (Correspondence with Bravin), l. 1ob.-2, 7ob., 14. See also Viktor Rozen, “Babidskii antikholernyi talisman, 1892,” *ZVORAO* 7 (1893), 317. Zhukovskii would openly state the necessity of collecting all available area-study information for scholarly purposes as the direct duty of those Russians with orientological training who were serving in Iran (Valentin Zhukovskii, “Cherty sovremennogo polozheniia Persii v ee literaturnykh proizvedeniakh, 1903,” *ZVORAO* 16 (1904–1905), xvi). See also Valentin Zhukovskii, “Rossiiskii imperatorskii konsul F. A. Bakulin v istorii izucheniia babizma,” *ZVORAO* 24 (1917): 35.
108. See Bartol'd, “Iran. Istoricheskii Obzor,” 329.
109. Lang, “Obituary,” 696.
110. See McLachlan, “Territoriality,” 6, 59.
111. AV, f. 134 (Reports to the Minister for Foreign Affairs Miliukov, 1917), op. 2, d. 197, l. 26–7.

12. The Archive of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (henceforth – AVPRF), f. 08 (Karakhan), op. 10, papka 33, d. 190 (Correspondence with the Soviet Ambassador in Iran, Davtian), l. 11.
13. McLachlan, “Territoriality,” 60.
14. Wilson et al., “Discussion,” 237, 239.
15. AV, op. 1, d. 803 (Notebook 2), l. 8ob.
16. Marian Kent, “Constantinople and Asiatic Turkey, 1905–1914,” in *British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey*, ed. F. H. Hinsley (London, 1977), 153–4. See also Marian Kent, *Oil and Empire: British Policy and Mesopotamian Oil, 1900–1920* (London, 1976).
17. AV, op. 1, d. 803 (Notebook 2), l. 8–12.
18. See Keith McLachlan, “Introduction,” in *The Boundaries of Modern Iran* (London, 1994), 8.
19. See Richard N. Schofield, *The Evolution of the Shatt al-Arab Boundary Dispute* (Cambridgeshire, 1986).
20. Ibid.
21. See Maria T. O’Shea, “The Question of Kurdistan and Iran’s International Borders,” in McLachlan, *The Boundaries of Modern Iran*, 54–5.
22. The original citation is: “There are no problems of boundaries. There are only problems of nations.” See McLachlan, “Introduction,” 8.

## CHAPTER 10

# RECONSTRUCTIONS OF A NATIVE IN EXILE: COSSACK BRIGADE FIGHTER AND ARCHITECT OF TEHRAN – NIKOLAI L'VOVICH MARKOV (1882–1957)

*Lana Ravandi-Fadai*

The road to the Russian Orthodox Cemetery where Nikolai Markov lies buried is long and tiring. One passes through Tehran's raucous and vast main bazaar and the neighborhood of Dowlab on the eastern outskirts of the city, which not so many years ago was still rural. Despite today's ever-expanding ranks of urban apartment buildings, a sense of peacefulness and isolation remains here. The cemetery has reconciled former conflicts: believers lie side by side with atheists; Cossack Brigade and White Guard fighters share earth with revolutionaries and communists, many of whom fought one another on Iranian soil in the early twentieth century.

One of those Cossack Brigade fighters was Nikolai Markov, who made Iran his home when he found himself without a country after the Bolsheviks took power. Though an outsider by birth, he helped to shape the cityscape of the Iranian capital with dozens of buildings: the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Justice, the main post office, the façade of the Italian Embassy, a representative office for the Singer sewing machine company, and others, including a number of residential buildings. He built several churches in the Iranian capital: the Russian Orthodox Church of Saint Nicholas, the Assyrian Church on Forsat Street, and the Armenian Church near the Russian Embassy. Despite being a practising Orthodox Christian, Markov was entrusted with the design and construction of several large mosques in Tehran, including Fahr al-Dowleh, aka Amin al-Dowleh. The blending of ancient and modern, striking a balance between the influx of Western modernity – part of the new, forward-looking Iranian identity that Reza Shah was promoting – and reverence for Iran's past – also an important element in the ideology of the Pahlavi state – was perhaps Markov's calling card as a professional architect. But there were other foreign and native architects working in Iran at the time who combined past and present styles and techniques – the French architect André Godard, for one. The Russian's buildings have a uniqueness that is not only the product of a high degree of architectural craft but arguably an expression of his status as an exile: a way of

carving out a distinct identity between his native and his adopted self. The Frenchman could return home; but the state Markov was born into, the Russian Empire, no longer existed. Having fought against the Bolsheviks on Iranian soil,<sup>1</sup> it was unthinkable for him to return to what had become the Soviet Union. This could not but inform the work of a sensitive designer, even within the constraints of contracts that were often state-sponsored. As an outsider who nonetheless attained a fluency in his second culture, Markov subsumed his background, his training in Byzantine and European architecture, under a neo-traditional Iranian style – but not completely: like a mask that vaunts a new identity but, being translucent, simultaneously betrays an earlier one.

Nikolai Markov was born on 27 or 28 December 1882 in Tiflis, in the southern Caucasus governorate of the Russian Empire, now Georgia.<sup>2</sup> His family had noble roots in European Russia, near Kursk. According to family tradition, one of their ancestors – Mark Voloshenin or Mark Rossa-Tolmach – served as envoy from Tsar Ivan the Third at the court of the sixteenth-century Iranian ruler Uzun Hasan. Nikolai's son has written that, from an early age, his father was fascinated by the art and architecture of the peoples of Transcaucasia and Iran.<sup>3</sup> Tiflis was the intellectual and cultural center of the Caucasus at the time, a focal point in the broader region's cultural mosaic that could hardly have failed to fire the imagination of an artistically inclined youngster, just as it inspired many of his countrymen to travel deeper into the East.

Nikolai's father, Lev L'vovich Markov, had been sent to Tiflis as a Privy Counselor, a post that counted among the higher ranks in Tsarist Russian bureaucracy. The elder Markov was also the rector of the Tiflis Gymnasium, where son Nikolai proved to be a good student. The curriculum was rigorous, classical, and religious in orientation: Greek and Latin, French and German; math, science and geography; and the precepts of the Russian Orthodox Church – “God's Law.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1901, Nikolai Markov enrolled in the architecture department of the Imperial Academy of Arts in St Petersburg, where he studied under Leon Benois of the renowned Benois family of architects and artists.<sup>5</sup> Three times between 1903 and 1905 he was granted leave to travel around Russia to make renderings *sur le motif* and, it would seem, to take photographs of “local views.”<sup>6</sup> Then, in 1905, Nikolai abruptly requested a leave of absence from the academy.<sup>7</sup> He wished to travel to Iran, where his older brother Boris was working as an engineer on the railway being built between Julfa and Tabriz. Boris also helped to build an administrative building in Tabriz. It was on this journey that Nikolai fell in love with Iran and decided he would study its language and culture some day.<sup>8</sup> The following year, Nikolai was back in the imperial capital finishing his architectural studies. Requirements for graduation included drawing up plans for ventilation and heating of buildings and calculating the dimensions of a structure with a large dome, knowledge that Markov would later put to use in ways his professors – and maybe Markov himself – might scarcely have imagined.<sup>9</sup> Markov graduated in 1910, officially receiving the title of Artist-Architect.<sup>10</sup> While studying, he had also married, and would soon have two children.



**Figure 10.1** Markov in Tbilisi, Georgia, where he was born and raised. © Russian State Historical Archive.

His military service obligation still had to be fulfilled, which included some architectural work in St Petersburg, where in 1913 he was a consulting engineer for the construction of a Military Automobile School, a facility dedicated to the newly developing technology of armored vehicles.<sup>11</sup> As soon as his military service ended, Markov made good on the wish born of his 1905 trip to Iran: he enrolled in a Persian-language course at the Academy of Eastern Languages, graduating in 1914, just as World War I began – “destroying all of his plans,” his son Alexei would later write.<sup>12</sup>

Markov volunteered and in 1914 was serving in the Caucasian Army under General Baratov as a captain in the engineering corps.<sup>13</sup> Thanks to his knowledge of Persian, soon Markov was in Iran serving under General Lazar Bicherakov, “famous for his daring raids behind the lines of the Turkish–German forces,” and Lieutenant General Baratov, an Old Testament-brand of warrior who “never missed church services”<sup>14</sup> and whose zeal brought successes against German–Turkish forces.

Although in August of 1916, the Russian expeditionary corps under Baratov was forced to

relinquish Hamadan to advancing Turkish forces, by the beginning of March 1917 Hamadan had been retaken from the Turks thanks to significant reinforcements arriving from Russia. But, hard on the heels of this victory, news reached Tehran of the February Revolution and the tsar's abdication. In the words of historian Salekh Aliev, “The political transformations in Petrograd reverberated with a loud echo in Iranian political circles,”<sup>15</sup> where an opportunity was seen to restore the country's autonomy and rid it of both Russian and British interference. The situation for the Russian soldiers in Iran deteriorated as quickly as the ruble exchange rate. Unable to buy necessities, soldiers began to commandeer them. There were riots, fires, and violence in places. Support promised by the British, who were eager to co-opt the Russian forces, was sporadic. In August 1917, General Baratov sent an urgent telegram to the supreme commander of the Caucasus Front:

The only way out of the situation at hand is to leave Persia. We simply cannot close our eyes to the unfolding situation, which threatens to disorganize our troops as a result of the pillaging that is inevitable given the circumstances ....

The locals, Baratov noted, were no longer accepting Russian money: “Without Persian money here, it is impossible to exist.”<sup>16</sup>

It was around this tense time, after the expulsion of Turkish forces from Hamadan, that Markov found himself embroiled in an incident in the nearby city of Borujerd. Markov had lost a sum of 12,000 tumans due to the closure of the Russian bank there. He approached a certain Shahzada Jadid-e Islam<sup>17</sup> for help, promising him 5 percent of whatever sum he could recover. According to official complaints filed by Shahzada, he did indeed recover part of the money but Markov did not pay the promised 5 percent. Shahzada then requested that the local authorities prevent Markov from leaving the city until he paid. The unscrupulous General Baratov became involved – taking the Iranian's side and ordering Markov to stand trial in Hamadan. But here the story takes an unexpected turn: Markov returns the money and explains that an agent of the Russian consul, apparently an Iranian, had provoked his actions. Not only does Shahzada then drop all complaints against Markov but he requests that the consular agent be removed from office. The governor of the region also files a document stating that the government has no complaints against the Russian officer.<sup>18</sup>

As the October Revolution took root, the Russian army in Iran dissolved. Leon Trotsky, in his capacity as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, repeatedly ordered all Russian units out of Iran, but Baratov and the “fanatically anti-Bolshevik”<sup>19</sup> Bicherakhov refused, joining forces with the White Guard as fighting spilled into the Caucasus and Iran, and later joining up with the British “Dunsterforce.”

In 1919, several letters were sent to Iran by the Iranian Consulate in Tiflis, now the capital of the newly declared and short-lived Democratic Republic of Georgia, requesting that a certain Monsieur Markov living there be invited to Iran to assist in completing the Anzali–Tehran road project, a Russian–Iranian joint venture now experiencing difficulties due to the chaos in Russia. These requests likely refer to Boris Markov, Nikolai's older brother who had worked as an engineer in Iran and whom Nikolai visited on his student trip, although it should

be noted that Nikolai himself is reported to have been in Tiflis briefly at some point after the Russian Revolution.<sup>20</sup> After first appealing to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Welfare, the consulate sent this letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

27th of Rajab 1337 [29 of April, 1919]

To the Honorable office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

As I brought to the attention of your Honor previously, regarding the Anzali–Tehran road, since at this time the government of Russia is under the communists, with former officials no longer in office or power, the Iranian government should oversee and administer [this project] itself and directly. There is no doubt that [the] above-mentioned [project] could be overseen by a European engineer with a sound knowledge of the project; and your humble servant thinks, as someone who knows Monsieur Markov, that he is among the most capable and experienced Russian engineers, having in years past been engaged with work in Tabriz and Teheran. He is very familiar with all aspects of Iranian reality and well disposed toward Iran. Presently, he resides in Tiflis, and has volunteered to put himself at the service of Iran. Thus we propose to appoint him as head of the road-building project. His presence would be very useful and appropriate. But I leave the decision up to your Honor. I took it upon myself to bring this to your attention and make this proposal purely out of my best wishes for the state.

The Russia Department of the Iranian Consulate for the Caucasus<sup>21</sup>

Clearly Monsieur Markov was held in high regard, and his connection with Iran was not merely a business relationship – the attachment to the country was apparently something of a family affair among the Markovs. Unfortunately, it is not known whether Boris Markov ever returned to Iran.

Nikolai's activities in Iran remained military rather than architectural for the time being. In 1919, he became an instructor in the Iranian Cossack Brigade and, by the end of the year, he was a division commander fighting Bolshevik forces.<sup>22</sup> In 1920, he was appointed director of the Cossack Brigade expeditionary headquarters in Gilan,<sup>23</sup> where the Soviets and Jangalis were fighting to establish an Iranian Socialist Republic. Markov may also have participated in other notorious exploits of the Iranian Cossack Brigade, such as the capture and execution of the Soviet emissary Kolomiitsev in 1919 or assisting in the overthrow of the Qajar government in 1921. Some sources claim that Markov even attained the rank of general in the Iranian Army.<sup>24</sup>

In 1921, with the tsarist cause lost and support from Britain withdrawn, the Cossack Brigade was dissolved and Markov settled in Tehran. He remarried, this time to a Russian girl from Baku, who would give him three more children.<sup>25</sup> His second wife, who worked as a doctor in a Tehran hospital, was to die young, around the age of 27.<sup>26</sup> Markov now actively returned to architecture. Fighting in the Cossack Brigade had, perhaps paradoxically, opened the door for Markov to realize himself as an architect, for it was there that he became friends with another member of the brigade, Reza Khan. According to Markov's son, the two men shared a “deep respect” for one another.<sup>27</sup> Reza Khan who, in 1921, overthrew the Qajar regime and four years later had himself declared shah, provided patronage for many of Markov's large projects. The shah's favor must have been beneficial in other ways, considering

the Soviet government's sustained efforts to apprehend former White Guard fighters and other antagonists. While no records of attempts to recover Markov have been found, in the early 1920s Soviet Plenipotentiary Fyodor Rotshtein asked Reza Khan to hand over a Chechen who had served in the Cossack Brigade with the future shah. "It's not worth our while," said Rotshtein, "as two great powers, to quarrel over some White Guard colonel ...." To which Reza Khan replied, "I ask you not to bring that up again."<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 10.2** The Cossack Brigade circa 1921: Reza Khan and Markov are sitting side by side in the center of the second row. © Institute for Iranian Contemporary Studies.

Architecture as an immediate and visual embodiment of new ideology was of primary importance to Reza Shah, especially in the context of his drive to modernize the country. As Professor Talinn Grigor argues, "Cultural patronage under Reza Shah was predominately architectural, and architects played a decisive role in setting aesthetic trends and contemporary modernist agendas."<sup>29</sup> A telling example of the architectural dimension of the new regime is Markov's Amjadiyeh Sports Complex, built in 1934, which combines reverence for the past with the strivings of a modernizing society. Massive towers at the entrance resemble the "badgir" wind-catching towers and majestic structures of ancient Iran; while the complex itself, with its large swimming pool, high dive, and modern facilities, belongs to the trends and innovations of the twentieth century.

But Markov was not crudely fulfilling state contracts for nationalist symbols. He deeply revered and understood not only the forms of classical Iranian architecture but also the traditional building methods, closely studying the latest discoveries of archeologists, who were increasingly active in Iran during this time. He preferred local materials – brick, stone, tile and plaster – whereas many architects in Iran who had studied in Europe or the Soviet Union were turning to metal, glass and cement. Markov's name even entered the Iranian architectural lexicon: the 20x20 cm bricks that he used came to be known among Iranian builders as "ajor-e markovi" or "Markov's brick."<sup>30</sup> Some striking examples of Markov's Iranian revival style are the former municipality building, the French Jeanne d'Arc school, the American Alborz College, and the Varamin Sugar Factory. Many of these buildings were

realized under Iranian oversight according to Markov's designs.

At times, however, he worked in the language of European architecture. The Italian Embassy, for example, represents a classic Palladian style much like that of Imperial St Petersburg, the result of an “architectural intervention” by Markov in 1925 on the façade of a nineteenth-century Qajar mansion.<sup>31</sup> Other examples are the Music Chapel on Sa'di Street, Tehran's first exhibition hall – with its large, mirrored windows, and certain residential homes.<sup>32</sup>

In the dignified façades and traditional materials of Markov's buildings, one can discern the conservative cultural and aesthetic allegiances of their author; and in the subtle blend of Iranian and non-Iranian elements, one can see the exile, who blends in and yet retains – perhaps intentionally as a mark of pride – his foreign accent. In the absence of written sources, it is in the aesthetic characteristics and histories of the buildings themselves that we can detect clues to his experience in exile and his attitude toward Iran, alongside glimpses into Iranian society and the state of the Russian émigré community there at the time.

Presented here are brief histories of four of the Russian architect's higher profile projects in Iran, with the caveat that his output was too prolific to analyze in the space of one article.

## **Alborz College**

This is Markov's first large-scale Iranian project, built in 1924. The American College of Iran, which later became Alborz College, was founded in 1873 by Presbyterian missionaries. By the early twentieth century it had grown and was in need of a new campus. Markov was asked to draw up the plans,<sup>33</sup> and he opened his composition with a majestic chord: a grand entrance recalling the architecture of the Safavid period – including tiles with inscriptions and decorative brickwork. The symmetrical composition and the faux towers hark back to pre-Islamic Iranian architecture, while the arched window frames with pointed tips are a familiar Markov feature, perhaps taking their cue from Gothic architecture.

A reminiscence by a graduate of Alborz College highlights how details of the complex were intended to evoke the Iranian past:

First, a large swimming pool was built in front of the building and two rows of cypress trees were planted on either side of the entrance. Doctor Jordan [the college president] would often say that the cypresses had been planted in honor of the cypresses that your Zoroastrian fathers planted on either side of the doorways of their holy buildings ... In imitation of a golden tablet that had recently been uncovered at Takht-e Jamshid, a metal plaque inscribed with the dates of construction was placed in the foundation alongside ancient Iranian coins.<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 10.3** Alborz College. © *Ettela`at* Newspaper Archive.

But the building also represented a modern outlook. As Iranian writer Shadmehr Rastin points out, it was as if the enclosed form of the old houses of learning, which looked inward around a courtyard, had now been opened to face outward:

Markov responded to two needs in society at the time: artistic form and rationality. People wanted to become modernized quickly and knew that one path to progress lay in exchanging the old educational system for a new one ... the *maktab khana* [old school house] must be replaced by an academy with classrooms, teachers of a variety of disciplines, blackboards, benches and textbooks. Thus, instead of using the layout of the old Ilkhanid or Safavid madrassas and looking for a solution in a central courtyard with an Iranian garden as a focal point, he arranged the square classrooms of Alborz in a long, straight line .... And yet in fact, this line – or spinal cord – was still a borrowing from the Iranian garden .... In other words, the structure met the modern needs of the people of Tehran in 1924, yet its inner world was guided by the measured and symmetrical mindset of traditional Iranian architecture.<sup>35</sup>

Like many other Markov buildings that played a role in the public life of the capital, Alborz has become a part of Tehran's collective historical memory.

## Qasr Prison

In the early 1920s, the new autocratically minded regime of Reza Shah began considering the construction of a large prison. Qasr was to be Iran's first modern prison, or rather “penitentiary,” since it would incorporate the more humanistic approach to incarceration that had been evolving in the Europe and America, and reflect the latest trends in prison architecture. A neologism was even coined in Persian to reflect the new attitude – “*nadamatgah*,” a place for penance – which can be seen on period architectural plans now displayed in the museum complex dedicated to the building.

A contemporary Iranian periodical described the preparations for the high-profile project,

and how Monsieur Markov carefully studied the strengths and weaknesses of existing prisons:

The new prison could not be built without studying the past, and in 1923 all existing documents and files [related to prison construction] were gathered. What's more, in 1925, [a representative] from the government of Iran was invited to participate for the first time in the International Prison Congress. Monsieur Markov the engineer then drew up plans for the prison based on designs that had been well received at the international conference, adding alterations of his own.<sup>36</sup>

Records from the congress, which was held in London in 1925, show delegates grappling with a world that was changing rapidly – even more so for Iran. They discussed such issues as the dangerous influence the new art form of cinema might have on crime levels, especially among youth. Another topic was whether prisons should have in-house laboratories or clinics for “physical and mental” examinations.<sup>37</sup> The congress resolved that they should, and Markov's prison was duly equipped with a large clinic of six 6-person rooms and sixteen single rooms. Markov – or his client – did not follow all of the international congress recommendations, however: Qasr prison had an overall capacity of 800 prisoners, a mixture of 5-person and solitary cells,<sup>38</sup> despite the recommendation of the congress that no prison should have more than 500. A *zur-khaneh*, or traditional gymnasium, greenhouse and mosque were also included, consistent with the idea of reform.

The project entered the national political discourse. In the Sixth Majles, sometime shortly after the London prison conference, future Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh condemned the enormous expense of the prison as a waste of money:

Today we say that we want to build everything in this country similar to other countries. Anywhere, anything that is good must be copied by us, in such a way that we have to spend two hundred thousand tumans so that the place for our robbers is similar to the place for theirs. This work will need two hundred thousand tumans. Now I want to ask you gentlemen, and especially the Minister of the Interior, is it possible that we make a similar expenditure, so that the good people of this country, the righteous people of this country, as well as the nationalists of this country can become like those in other countries?<sup>39</sup>

Construction began, nonetheless, in 1928, and the next year the prison was already receiving its first inmates, even though work continued until 1931.

The form of the prison is strikingly geometric and came to be called “haft-o hasht” (“seven and eight”) because those numerals are written √ and ∧ in Persian and the layout resembles one numeral overlaid onto the other. According to a guide at the museum, this symmetry was intended to disorient a potential escapee.<sup>40</sup> But there was also an aesthetic motivation for the “haft-o hasht” layout, although it is difficult to see today, except from the air. The site chosen for the prison was a wide stretch of land on which stood a Qajar hunting lodge and gardens, built in 1790 during the reign of Fath `Ali Shah (1797–1834). Markov, ever attentive to

surroundings, would certainly have studied and taken into account the layout of the garden on which the hunting lodge stood.<sup>41</sup> The Qajar garden formed a grid, into the horizontal center of which Markov inserted his own geometric design – a tilted parallelogram:

Not only was he sensitive to the layout of the gardens, but the façade of his prison resembles that of the Qajar-era mansion, and, as will be seen below, internal details were appropriated from Qajar architecture. Signature Markov stylistic elements include the pointed arches for window frames, and the long stately façade with crenellated battlements between imposing towers – as in the Amjadiyeh Sports Complex.

This distinctive “haft-o hasht” shape, with its hub-and-spoke design – four hubs serving as guard houses, from which corridors of cells radiate outward, the doors of which are all visible from the hubs – traces its pedigree back to a revolutionary prison building called Eastern State Penitentiary, built 1829–36 in Philadelphia, that Quaker-dominated city “infatuated to the last degree with the penitentiary system.”<sup>42</sup> The iconic structure of Eastern State Penitentiary consisted of a single hub at the center of seven spokes, each with a double row of cells. The “hub-and-spoke” layout, sometimes loosely called “panopticon,” which allowed for partial observation from a single, central point, would go on to influence prisons across the world.

The design was also the product of an evolving religious approach to incarceration, guided by the Quaker-sponsored “Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Misery of Public Prisons,”<sup>43</sup> which sought ways not merely to incarcerate but to reform criminals.<sup>44</sup> Separate cells preventing communication between inmates and encouraging reflection, work and exercise areas, and other innovations embodied in Eastern State Penitentiary would become international standards for prisons – or “penitentiaries” and “reformatories,” as they were preferably called – and can be seen in the Qasr design.



**Figure 10.4** Markov took the layout of the Qajar garden into account when planning the shape and location of his penitentiary. © Google Maps.

One of the many descendants of Eastern State Penitentiary is a detention facility in St Petersburg, Russia, then and now the largest in Europe. As with the Eastern State Penitentiary, it was not officially called a prison. In this case, the name is “Sledstvennyi izolyator no. 1,” or “Investigative Isolation Ward No. 1.” As an architecture student in St Petersburg, Markov

would have been familiar with Kresty, completed in 1890 and a cutting-edge facility for its time. Moreover, that prison's architect, Antonii Tomishko, studied and taught at the Imperial Academy of the Arts, where Markov later studied, and was an exponent of the neo-Byzantine architecture Markov himself so admired. Instead of Eastern State's single hub-and-spoke wheel, Tomishko gave Kresty two separate hubs with four spokes – two Xs, or crosses – hence the prison's popular name: “The Crosses,” or in Russian, “Kresty.”

The cross shape was not coincidental but part of the same religious reformist legacy as Eastern State. Indeed, a large neo-Byzantine/Russian revival cathedral stands between the two crosses, just as Qasr has its own mosque. For the Qasr penitentiary, Markov would seem to have merged the two Christian crosses of Kresty, creating the interlocking “haft-o hasht” design. If there is indeed such a design genealogy behind Qasr, then it is one of several examples of Markov referencing, in a partially masked fashion, a Russian building and the neo-Byzantine style popular in pre-revolutionary Russia.



**Figure 10.5** Reinventions of the penitentiary form over the course of a century. © Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania; Qasr Garden-Museum.

Many of Reza Shah's former confederates would end up in Qasr, followed in the late 1920s by the first Iranian communists, who had organized strikes, and in the late 1930s by left-leaning workers and intellectuals who would, after the World War II, form the core of the Tudeh Party.<sup>45</sup> In fact, so many prisoners passed through Qasr that the prison has become a cultural icon. And just as Markov's preferred cut of brick introduced into Persian the term “Markov's brick,” so the architecture of Qasr prison led to several new expressions, albeit mostly in circulation among the criminal world. Two of these are related to Markov's appropriation of the vaulted Qajar lobby for the hubs connecting cellblocks. In addition to being a guardhouse and observation point, the hub was also the first space new inmates entered. As the ceilings of these hubs had eight ribbed vaults, the expression “zir-e hasht,” literally “under the eight,” came to mean “behind bars.”<sup>46</sup> A variation was “zir-e hashti” (“someone under the eight,” or an “under-the-eighter”): a prisoner willing to collaborate with prison authorities, usually for a shortened sentence – a stool pigeon. This was because guards and administrators were posted at the hubs with eight ceiling vaults.<sup>47</sup>

Immediately after passing under the eight-vaulted hub, the prisoner would be given a cold bath using water from a small canal passing underneath; thus the expression “ab-e khonak khurdan” (“to drink cool water” or “get hit with cool water”) means to be sent to prison.<sup>48</sup>

Today Qasr prison is part of a museum complex, the “Qasr Garden-Museum,” with exhibits

about the history of the site and the prisoners held there, as well as information on Markov himself. Walking through it, one is struck by the beauty of the building, how closely it matches Foucault's description of the evolution of prison architecture: “The heaviness of the old ‘houses of security,’ with their fortress-like architecture ... replaced by the simple, economic geometry of a ‘house of certainty.’”<sup>49</sup> One is also surprised by the warmth accorded to its architect – designer of a prison at the behest of a discredited regime. The complex even houses a “Café Gallery Markov” for cappuccinos and announcements about poetry readings – not far off in feel from the local coffee house on any American college campus (and complete with Facebook page). The attractive aesthetic, Iranian architectural devices, and humanistic tradition inherited from the Quaker prison-reform movement, all seem to have combined to earn the building a warm spot in the hearts of Iranians, or at least the developers of the museum complex. It has even been argued that the museum-park over-prioritized the prison at the expense of the late eighteenth-century Qajar garden and mansion.<sup>50</sup>



**Figure 10.6** The 8-ribbed vaulted ceiling of the Qajar-style vestibules that Markov used to connect cellblocks gave rise to coded expressions in Farsi. © Kevin McNeer.

A second, purely political prison was added to the site in 1950. A crude box, which in no way takes into account the Qajar gardens or preexisting layout of the site, and has no space for exercise or recreation, this building also contributes by contrast to the attractiveness of Markov's structure. If the design (though not necessarily the use) of Markov's prison reflects the modern, “preventative, utilitarian, corrective conception” of incarceration, then the political prison added to the site in 1950, in addition to being crude and unattractive, architecturally represents the harsh punishment of the “old monarchical law,”<sup>51</sup> and this may partially explain the sympathy for the Russian architect evident in the restoration and exhibits at the Qasr Garden-Museum.

## **The New Cathedral of Saint Nicholas<sup>52</sup>**

When the Majles ratified the Soviet–Iranian Treaty of 1921 all property of the former tsarist state was officially transferred to the new Soviet state. Soviet diplomats arrived at the mission

in Tehran and threw the contents of the mission church of Saint Nicholas – icons, banners, and other decorations – into the street. Parishioners rushed to the other Orthodox church at the mission's summer residence in Zargandeh and managed to save its contents, removing the iconostasis in parts, so that the Bolsheviks found only a shell when they arrived.

The rescued iconostasis, crafted in Russia especially for the church, would find a new home in the church Markov was to build two decades later.<sup>53</sup> In the meantime, a makeshift chapel for the Russian émigré community was set up in the Armenian quarter of Tehran. The church in Zargandeh had been built with funds and materials from the Russian state; but now the parishioners had to organize and fund construction on their own. It was not until 1944 that enough funds were gathered to buy a plot of land and begin construction. The Russian owner of a jewelry store on Lalezar Street contributed 20,000 rials; the owner of an asphalt factory and the Russian wife of a wealthy Armenian also offered large sums.<sup>54</sup> The groundbreaking ceremony, when it finally happened, drew a large crowd who threw tsarist-era gold coins into the foundation pit. In the course of construction, however, the collected funds ran out and part of the newly purchased plot had to be sold off. The cathedral was eventually completed and blessed on 9 April 1945.<sup>55</sup> The architect himself served as a churchwarden.

Around the same time, Markov built a church for the Armenian community not far from the gates of the Soviet Embassy on a street later renamed after Stalin.<sup>56</sup> Did the house of worship at such close proximity to symbols of the atheist state give him satisfaction?

The authors of the wonderful book and only in-depth treatment of Markov's work, *Nikolai Markov: Architecture of Changing Times in Iran*, note similarities between Markov's church and the fifteenth-century Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Moscow Kremlin.<sup>57</sup> But even a casual comparison reveals more differences than similarities: the majestic Kremlin cathedral has nine domes; while Markov's smaller church has only one. The exterior of the Kremlin cathedral is richly decorated, while Markov's is a cluster of simple, boxed shapes. One wonders whether Markov himself cited the Cathedral of the Annunciation as an inspiration, or whether the connection was a tradition among the parishioners.

There was another “Annunciation” church within the Kremlin, with a slightly different name in Russian, which does bear similarities to Markov's church: a small, squared structure supporting a single dome. This building, the eighteenth-century Church of the Annunciation of the Holy Virgin on Zhitny Court, was destroyed by the Bolsheviks in 1932, and thus it might easily be overlooked today in a search for the model church. Markov, however, would certainly have seen this building before leaving Russia. Could it be that the Orthodox believer in exile, who had fought Bolshevik forces while serving in the Cossack Brigade, referenced – in his accustomed half-masked way – the church that his foes had destroyed?



**Figure 10.7** Church of St Nicholas and the no longer extant Church of the Annunciation on Zhitny Court. © Lana Ravandi-Fadai.

### **Amin al-Dowleh Mosque, Popularly Known as Fakhr al-Dowleh<sup>58</sup>**

This mosque in central Tehran is one of Markov's later works, when according to his son, the architect's overall fortunes were beginning to wane.<sup>59</sup> It was built in two phases: initial construction completed in 1945, and rebuilding and additions completed in 1949.<sup>60</sup> Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Falsafi has given an account of the inception of the project:

... there was undeveloped land there, and every year during the month of Muharram,<sup>61</sup> the local people would pitch tents. I would also come every year during the month of Moharram or Safar to participate [in the religious ceremonies], and one year several of the local people said to me, "This land is the property of Lady Fakhr al-Dowleh. There is no mosque in the neighborhood, and Lady Fakhr al-Dowleh has abundant means. Tell her to bequeath the land for the construction of a mosque." This was in the midst of the ten-days [of religious observance], and I raised the topic during a sermon. News of it reached Lady Fakhr al-Dowleh, or perhaps she was among the listeners. I don't know what the area of the plot of land was, maybe 200 square meters or less, but Lady Fakhr al-Dowleh said, "Very good. I will give you half the land for a mosque." But I said that the neighborhood was full of people and the lot would be too small. The next evening when I came to the ceremonies, I sent a message to the Lady that if during the nighttime vigil local men and women would want to gather in this place there would not be enough space: "Give all of the land in God's honor, and as the people do not have the means to construct a mosque themselves, take this responsibility on yourself." Lady Fakhr al-Dowleh agreed, and praise Allah, this work was realized. During the years that sermons of mourning were given in the Fakhr al-Dowleh mosque, Doctor Amini [Fakhr al-Dowleh's son] would come for an evening and his mother Fakhr al-Dowleh would come for four or five evenings of services.<sup>62</sup>

Fakhr al-Dowleh was not just any affluent lady. Her proper name was Ashraf al-Molk Fakhr al-Dowleh, and she was one of the wealthiest women in the country, an activist who introduced taxis to Tehran, and the daughter of Mozaffar ad-Din Shah, who had ruled Iran from 1896 to

1907. Among prominent Qajar offspring, only Princess Ashraf, as Fakhr al-Dowleh is popularly known, enjoyed the respect and good will of Markov's friend Reza Shah, who reportedly said there were only one-and-a-half men among the entire Qajar dynasty: the one being Princess Ashraf, and the half, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (the founder of the dynasty).

Fakhr al-Dowleh dedicated the mosque to her father-in-law, Mirza Ali Khan Amin al-Dowleh, who had served as prime minister under her father and died two years earlier. She lived opposite the mosque, and Markov, who had worked with members of her family previously, included a mezzanine level especially for her when she attended.<sup>63</sup>

But the project was not free of disagreements, perhaps partly because of certain unorthodox features introduced for a mosque. A court document signed by Markov bears witness to renovations made after the initial construction was completed. The Saham al-Dowleh mentioned here was likely a relative of the princess, representing her legally; while Doctor Pokrovsky must have been a colleague of Markov's:

On this Wednesday, the 14th of Tir, 1324 (5 July 1945<sup>64</sup>), at half past two in the afternoon, we parties have gathered regarding the dispute between Saham al-Dowla and Doctor Pokrovsky: Ostad Mirza `Ali representing the administration of the Most High Ministry of Foreign Affairs, esteemed Monsieur Markov on behalf of esteemed Doctor Pokrovsky, Ostad Hoseyn on behalf of Saham al-Dowleh [...] According to our assessment, [the following] renovations have been made by Doctor Pokrovsky: the renovation of the hall, faint painting work and the mehrab, renovation of the entrances (reduced weight of the columns and curtain wall), renovation of the façade, renovation of the decorative floor tiling in certain rooms, and renovation of the metal roofing. In accordance with our assessment and in the presence of Doctor Pokrovsky,<sup>65</sup> we find that Doctor Pokrovsky has performed repairs over and above those that were urgently needed. But as an Audit Office exists in order to determine such costs, it is not possible [for us] to provide an estimate of the cost indicated in the documents from Mr. Saham al-Dowleh or his attorney that are in possession of Doctor Pokrovsky. With the gentlemen's signature, however, we agree that this will be settled in court ....<sup>66</sup>



**Figure 10.8** “Princess Ashraf Mosque” with “sleeping dome” and faux minarets (note the loudspeaker in the center of the curtain wall). © Lana Ravandi-Fadai.

The attention to the weight of decorative columns and curtain wall at the entrance is noteworthy, as they are among the features contributing to the unusual appearance of the mosque. For, while Markov again employed his preferred traditional materials of bricks and decorated tiles, he departed from the canonical Iranian mosque in telling ways. Markov set the dome low – a “sleeping dome,” in Persian (*gombad-e khabideh*) – at variance with the usual preference for height and visibility. The minarets – the columns in the court document – were also small and low, more like faux-minarets, antithetical to the traditional notion that the minarets should be seen from afar. The larger, functional minaret is a later addition that stands outside the walled compound, and thus plays no role in the composition as seen from the courtyard. The princess's mezzanine was also removed during later reconstruction and her private entrance walled up. A section for female parishioners was added below ground, as well as some cosmetic alterations, such as decorative mirror-work in the interior. Several historians claim that Markov's low dome was raised,<sup>67</sup> although no archival records or photographs have been found to corroborate this.

While some of the tropes Markov employed can be seen in Qajar architecture,<sup>68</sup> nods to the client's illustrious Qajar heritage, the structure's composition,<sup>69</sup> nestled dome, and unobtrusive slender column-minarets recall the Byzantine architecture that was part of Markov's Orthodox heritage and in which he had been well schooled in St Petersburg, having drawn up plans for a large dome, undoubtedly in a Byzantine vein, as part of his thesis work.

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Toward the end of his career, Markov, due to financial necessity rather than taste, relaxed his conservatism somewhat and began to include steel constructions in residential homes. His son later wrote:

Unfortunately, financial rewards for architectural projects in 1930s Iran were quite paltry, which forced my father to take on contract work. Yet he was an artist and an idealist, and thus a poor businessman. Several times he suffered serious losses and died practically bankrupt. It hardly needs to be mentioned that the problems attached to contract work, beginning in the 1940s, greatly curtailed his architectural practice. This so affected my father that in a subsequent state of depression he destroyed the greater part of his architectural archive.

I have no documents relating to my father's works in Russia ....

A few preserved drawings by my father (several watercolors depicting Persian Cossacks, a small panorama of Alborz College, etc.) and my recollections of the beautiful sketches that once hung on the walls of his office bear witness to what a talented architect and artist he was. The buildings erected by my father are true works of art. He was an individual of the “old school” that was so saturated in culture and love for all that is excellent.<sup>70</sup>

It is tempting to relate this state of affairs also to the forced abdication of the architect's patron, Reza Shah, in 1941, yet Markov retained private clients and, his son's account notwithstanding, continued to build large-scale projects well into the 1940s. Among these is the Fakhr al-Dowleh Mosque.

Nikolai Markov passed away on 19 July 1957. Upon learning of Markov's death, his friend and fellow veteran, Vladimir Despotuli, wrote in a letter:

Markov was a crystal clean individual, deeply educated, and in love with Iran – whose language he knew perfectly; and yet he deeply loved Russia, which is why he preferred to leave her. He agonized over the Russian people, considering he shared the blame ... for all that had transpired.<sup>71</sup>

Despotuli was a newspaper editor and prominent cultural figure among the Russian diaspora in Germany, where he had resettled after serving with Markov under General Baratov in Iran.<sup>72</sup> In a detail characteristic of Markov's generation and conservative circle, Despotuli ends his letter by noting that among all of his friends, with only two did he ever use the Russian familiar personal pronoun “ty,” one of them having been Markov. It is doubtful that any of Nikolai's descendants from his second marriage remain in Iran. His youngest son, Alexei Nikolaevich Markov, followed in his father's footsteps, working as an architect in Iran until the Islamic Revolution, when he moved to London. His oldest, Lev, died after only a year of life in 1923.<sup>73</sup> Tatyana emigrated to the United States.<sup>74</sup>

Some of the émigrés in the Russian Cemetery in Dowlab blended in so well with their adopted country that today their nationality has become mutable in historiography. Buried near Markov is the photographic chronicler of late Qajar Iran, Anton Sevruguin (Sevryugin), whose photographic surveys of ancient Iranian monuments Markov likely consulted. Sevruguin is now claimed variously as Georgian, Iranian, Armenian or Russian; and Markov's own identity is in flux: Russian, Georgian or Iranian, depending on who is writing. But even with his passion for Iran and protean ability to engage different styles and religious codes in his work, Markov continued to see himself as Russian and remained an Orthodox believer to the end of his life – seemingly without experiencing any great sense of contradiction, perhaps partly due to his upbringing on the outer reaches of the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional Russian Empire. It is this mixture of conservatism and openness that distinguishes the elegant, subtly hybrid monuments he left behind in Iran, treading a middle path between exile and native.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

1. And perhaps elsewhere: After 1917, “General Lazar Bicherakov [under whose command Markov served] ... was particularly active, first in cooperating with the British Dunsterforce in Enzeli, and then forming White partisan units, crossing into the Caucasus and establishing contact with general Denikin and Admiral Alexander Kolchak. Britain also organized several minor military campaigns into Russian territories using Iran as a base.” Stephanie Cronin, “Deserters, Converts, Cossacks and Revolutionaries: Russians in Iranian Military Service. 1800–1920,” in *Iranian–Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (Oxford, 2013), 174.
2. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA) [Russian State Historical Archive]. Fund 789, Inventory [opis’] 12, case 92-I, 2, 28 (birth certificate № 2259).
3. Aleksei Markov, “Arkhitektor Markov – stroitel’ Tegerana,” *Nevskii arkhiv: Istoriko-kraievedcheskii sbornik* (Moscow, 1995), 454.
4. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, 27.
5. And grandfather of actor Peter Ustinov.
6. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, 30, 40, 46.
7. Ibid., 44.
8. Markov, “Arkhitektor Markov,” 454–5.
9. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, 58.
10. Ibid., 60.
11. No longer extant, the building was located on Semenovskii platz, now Pionerskaia ploshchad’ in St Petersburg.
12. Markov, “Arkhitektor Markov,” 455.
13. Ibid., 455; Lazar Fleishman, “Iz istorii zhurnalistiki russkogo zarubezh’ia, k biografii V.M. Despotuli (po pis'mam ego k K.G. Kromiadi,” in *Istoriia literatury. Poetika. Kino: Sbornik v chest’ Marietty Omarovny Chudakovoi*, (Moscow, 2012), 435.
14. Hegumen Aleksandr Zarkeshev, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov’ v Persii–Irane (1597–2001)* (St Petersburg, 2002), 113.
15. Salekh Mamedogly Aliev, *Istoriia Irana XX vek*, (Moscow, 2004), 87.
16. Ibid., 107.
17. The name usually indicates a Jewish convert to Islam.
18. Markaz-e asnad-e vezarat-e khareji-ye jomhuri-ye Iran [Central Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran], documents GH1336-K37-P2–32, GH1325-K19-P6-40.
19. Cronin, “Deserters, Converts, Cossacks”, 173.
20. Zarkeshev, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov'*, 139.
21. Central Archive of Iran, document GH1337-K51-P6-40.
22. Markov, “Arkhitektor Markov,” 455.

23. G. M Gorelik. *Rossiiskaia immigratsiia v iuzhnuu Afriku: vchera i segodnia* (Moscow, 2007), 94.
24. Obituary, Chasovoi/La Sentinelle, No. 379. Brussels: Sept. 1957, 18.
25. Markov's first wife, Liudmila Dimitrievna Gorlovskaiia, died in 1973 (around the age of 92) (Markov, "Arkhitektor Markov," 454). The archival trail sheds no light on why, how or when her marriage with Nikolai ended. One might conjecture that the impossibility of his return to Russia and unfeasibility of her leaving precluded its continuation. The two daughters from this marriage, however, emigrated from the USSR: the elder to France, apparently before World War II, and then South Africa (Gorelik, *Rossiiskaia immigratsiia*, 94); while the younger ended up in Brussels, where her daughter still lives and is a member of the local Russian Orthodox Church. I have not yet been able to establish contact with her.
26. Fleishman, "Iz istorii zhurnalistiki russkogo zarubezh'ia," 435; Markov, "Arkhitektor Markov," 454.
27. Markov, "Arkhitektor Markov," 455.
28. S. V. Volkov, *Russkaia immigratsiia v bor'be s bol'shevizmom* (Moscow, 2005), 340.
29. Talinn Grigor, "The King's White Walls: Modernism and Bourgeois Architecture," in *Culture and Cultural Politics under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran*, (Oxfordshire, 2013), 106.
30. Mina Marefat, *Building to Power: Architecture of Iran 1921–1941* (PhD dissertation, MIT, 1988), 117.
31. Website of the Italian Embassy in Iran: [http://www.ambteheran.esteri.it/Ambasciata\\_Teheran/Menu/Ambasciata/La\\_sede/](http://www.ambteheran.esteri.it/Ambasciata_Teheran/Menu/Ambasciata/La_sede/) (L'attuale edificio è il frutto dell' intervento architettonico operato sulla precedente struttura in quello stesso anno dall'architetto russo Markov, con una forte impronta "palladiana").
32. Markov, "Arkhitektor Markov," 455.
33. Ali Gheissari, "The American College of Tehran, 1929–32: A Memorial Album," *Iranian Studies*, v. 44/5 (2011): 671–2.
34. Manouchehr Sotudeh, "haftad o se sal dusti," *Bukhara* 38 (1383/2004): 73–8.
35. Shadmehr Rastin, "Darvazeh'ha-ye qarn-e bistom (barrasi-ye asar-e me`mari-ye Nikulay Markuf ba negahi be ketab-e "Me`mari-ye Nikulay Markuf")" *Ayineh-ye Khiyal* 7 (1387/2008): 122.
36. Victor Daniel, Bijan Shafi`i and Sohrab Soroushiani, *Nikulay Markuf: majmu`eh-ye me`mari-ye dowran-e tahavvol dar Iran* (Tehran, 1383/2004), 92.
37. Amos Butler, "Ninth International Prison Congress," in *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1925–6): 602–9.
38. Daniel, Shafi`i, Soroushiani, *Nikulay Markuf*, 92.
39. Farhad Diba. *Mohammad Mossadegh: A Political Biography* (Kent, 1986), 59.

40. “Concern that knowledge of a prison's layout poses a security threat is still very much a part of the thinking of many prison officials. The U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons, like many state prison bureaucracies, will not release plans of its prisons, revealing only block outlines without details, for ‘security reasons.’” Norman Johnston (with Kenneth Finkel and Jeffery A. Cohen), *Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions* (Philadelphia, 2010), 110, note 3.
41. Solmaz Sadeghi, “A Concealed Garden: Critical View on the Restoration of Ghasr Prison, Tehran, Iran,” paper delivered at the conference “Built Heritage 2013 Monitoring Conservation Management” (Milan, 2013), 560–1.
42. Alexis de Tocqueville to Mme Edouard de Tocqueville, 18 Oct. 1831. Quoted in Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 21, and in full in George Pierson, *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America* (New York, 1938), 458.
43. Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 26.
44. Interestingly, the society enjoyed the support of Russian philanthropists, see Johnston, *Eastern State Penitentiary*, 26.
45. James Buchanan, *Days of God: The Revolution in Iran and its Consequences* (New York, 2013), 44.
46. `Ali Reza Moqaddam Niya, Guide at Qasr Prison Museum Jalil Ahmadi, Sa`id Abdol, and `Ali Hoseyniyun, *Farhang va estelahat-e زندان va zendaniyan-e siyasi qabl az enqelab* (Tehran, 1387/2008), 74.
47. Ahmadi, Abdol, and Hoseyniyun, *Farhang va estelahat-e زندان*, 74.
48. `Ali Reza Moqaddam Niya, Guide at Qasr Prison Museum.
49. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1995), 202.
50. Sadeghi, “Concealed Garden”, 559.
51. Foucault, *Discipline*, 130.
52. Mofateh and Shomal Streets at Metro Station Taleghani.
53. Zarkeshev, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov`*, 124.
54. Ibid., 138.
55. Ibid., 140.
56. Ibid., 138.
57. *Nikolai Markov: Architecture*, 147, 149.
58. In Amin al-Dowleh Park, between streets Masjed Fakhr-Abad and Ibn Sina.
59. Markov, “Arkhitektor Markov,” 456.
60. A tile inscription on the mosque façade states that it was completed in 1324/1945. Another on the surrounding structure indicates 1328/1949.
61. A sacred time of religious observance, mourning and sermons for Shia Muslims culminating on the 10th day of the month.

62. Mohammad Taghi Falsafi, *Khatarat va mobarezat-e hojjat-e al-eslami-ye falsafi* (Tehran, 1382/2003), 299.
63. *Nikolai Markov: Architecture*, 154–5.
64. Markov has written 17 July 1945 under his signature, indicating he still used the pre-revolutionary Julian calendar discarded by the Soviets in 1918.
65. “Doctor” may simply be an honorific here.
66. Central Archive of Iran, document GH1339-K15-P06-24.
67. *Ibid.*, 152.
68. Daniel, Shafi‘i, Soroushyani, *Nikulay Markuf*, 154.
69. *Idem.*
70. Markov, “Arkhitektor Markov,” 456. (It should be noted that Alexei Markov's words were translated from English into Russian for *Nevsky Archive*, and then back into English for this article. Unfortunately, his original account in English could not be located.)
71. Fleishman, “Russian Journalism Abroad,” 434–6.
72. *Ibid.*, 371.
73. Markov, “Arkhitektor Markov,” 454.
74. Zarkeshev, *Ruskaia pravoslavnaia tserkov'*, 140.

## PART IV

# IDEOLOGY AND OCCUPATION: THE 1930S AND 1940S

# CHAPTER 11

## FROM THE IMPERIAL PERIPHERY TO THE BOUNDARIES OF POWER: SOVIET DIPLOMATIC OFFICIALS IN 1930S IRAN<sup>1</sup>

*Mary Yoshinari*

Throughout the 1930s, the Soviet government's decision-making processes were characteristically complex, bureaucratic, and “multi-centric”<sup>2</sup> – as opposed to a single chain of “top-down” commands to be fulfilled by local authorities. Furthermore, the Soviet Union's aspiration to establish diplomatic and economic pre-eminence in Iran yielded less than hegemonic results. Nonetheless, Soviet officials took appreciable steps towards the appeasement of their Iranian counterparts – especially in 1933–6 – which were indicative of new policy directives vis-à-vis rising global competition and the increasing probability of war. In fact, the characterization of power “as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than ... repression” aptly describes the exercise of Soviet authority in Iran during this decade.<sup>3</sup> Another dimension of Soviet power was personal, one that necessitates an understanding of its emissaries by tracing their origins and subsequent careers in the Soviet government. In particular, the Head Trade Representative (*Torgpred*) in Tehran, Mikhail L'vovich Shostak, was a remarkable example of an individual who rapidly transcended his initial socio-economic status and geographical limitations after 1917. Thus, a key aspect of comprehending Soviet power's scope in Iran entails what has been defined as the “ways in which revolutionizing the self and the transformation of others were intertwined ... [as] approaches toward the other were made in terms of the self, the periphery in terms of the center, the masses in terms of the elite.”<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, much scholarly analysis thus far has gravitated towards the apex of the Soviet diplomatic hierarchy while offering divergent views of Maksim Maksimovich Litvinov, who was the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs from 1930 to 1939. Mikhail Volodarsky goes as far to say that unlike his predecessor, Georgii Vasil'evich Chicherin, Litvinov “was wholly dependent on Stalin. In the 1930s the actual foreign-policy decisions began to come from Stalin.”<sup>5</sup> However, Sabine Dullin states otherwise, asserting that, “Throughout his career, Litvinov maintained a certain distance from Stalin and succeeded for the most part in avoiding any toadying behaviour towards him.”<sup>6</sup> Apart from these leader-centric interpretations of

Soviet diplomatic power, Denis Volkov has cast a wider net by highlighting the activities of not only the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (*Narkomindel*), but also those of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade (*Narkomvneshtorg*) and several state-run Soviet companies in Iran – which were “under the diplomatic aegis” – starting in the mid-1920s.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, from Volkov's perspective, the *Narkomvneshtorg's* endeavors represented one facet of a broader foreign policy approach, which was “gaining local knowledge” in the interests of enhancing Soviet power in Iran.<sup>8</sup>

Among the architects of this new approach was Sergei Konstantinovich Pastukhov, who “virtually formulated the Soviet policy towards Iran in the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s,”<sup>9</sup> and who served as the USSR's Plenipotentiary (*Polpred*) in Tehran from 1933 to 1935. Besides being a diplomat, Pastukhov actively contributed to the establishment and functioning of Persian studies at academic institutions in the USSR. In this respect, Volkov's research rests on a similar premise to that of Francine Hirsch, who has linked the governmental practices of the tsarist regime with its communist successor. More specifically, Hirsch has identified the role played by “former imperial experts such as ethnographers and economists,” who “like the Bolsheviks ... saw Russia's problems and potential through the prism of Europe's experiences,” also sharing their “enormous faith in the transformative power of scientific government and in the idea of progress.”<sup>10</sup> Aside from their mutual belief in Enlightenment ideals, she points out that there was an immediate need for these experts on a practical level. The substantial volume of documentation produced by the *Narkomvneshtorg's* representatives in Iran – at least until 1939–40 – lends support to the assertion that a salient facet of interwar Soviet power entailed the acquisition of information.

Notwithstanding their merits, these depictions of Soviet officials mostly refrain from delving into class analysis. Here, the earlier research of Teddy Uldricks is somewhat useful for drawing a line between “the Old Bolshevik leaders [who] had been cosmopolitans of largely middle class origins,”<sup>11</sup> and “the new Stalinist cadres which were coming to dominate Soviet politics [who] sprang from lower, coarser stock” in the mid- to late 1920s.<sup>12</sup> Uldricks also mentions that the first generation of foreign-service personnel were typically well educated individuals of middle-class, bourgeois, and sometimes even noble origins,<sup>13</sup> many being cosmopolitan, college-educated, radical émigrés who had returned to Russia after the 1917 Revolution.<sup>14</sup> Whereas Chicherin – and even Litvinov – are discernible in these categories,<sup>15</sup> the “Stalinist” definition befits those who had risen through the diplomatic ranks as a result of the Great Purges (1936–40); it does not adequately account for three prominent Soviet officials who served in Iran at various stages of the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> These individuals came to be involved in the Soviet foreign service (and the Communist Party) vis-à-vis their respective trajectories of migration to Moscow from the peripheral regions of Belarus, the Crimea, and Buryat-Mongolia, via Azerbaijan. At best, Uldricks briefly explains that the *Narkomindel* “was open to middle and even lower class elements ... and ethnic minorities (especially Jews) to a much greater degree than were other European foreign services.”<sup>17</sup> On a par with the Baltic Germans of Imperial Russia, Jewish diplomats characteristically excelled in the Soviet foreign service – most notably, Iakov Zakharovich Surits, Adol'f Abramovich Ioffe, and Ivan

Mikhailovich Maiskii.<sup>18</sup>

The first individual, Aleksei Sergeevich Chernykh, an ethnic Russian hailing from Selenginsk, had commenced his studies for a law degree at Imperial Moscow University in 1913.<sup>19</sup> Chernykh's birthplace was about 130 km from Lake Baikal and Ulan-Ude, and even closer to the Buddhist monastery, Tamchinsky Datsan.<sup>20</sup> By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Trans-Siberian Railway had penetrated this region, which had begun to receive a considerable number of Russian peasant-settlers migrating eastwards after the serf emancipation reform of 1861. While it is not known why his parents had ended up on the frontiers of Imperial Russia,<sup>21</sup> Chernykh experienced a double immersion in the East – by growing up in Buryat-Mongolia and Azerbaijan – mirrored by his last two diplomatic posts in China and Iran.<sup>22</sup> Apparently, after joining the Communist Party in Moscow in August 1917, he started working in the Housing Department and the Department for Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop).<sup>23</sup> Chernykh embarked on diplomatic assignments to Switzerland, Finland, and Latvia from 1918 onwards. Eventually returning to Moscow in 1927, he held a series of prestigious government positions related to statistics, state planning, agriculture, and radio broadcasting in the USSR.<sup>24</sup> In May 1935, Chernykh, the new *Polpred* in Tehran for the next four years, expressed his enthusiasm for recent developments in Iran–Soviet economic relations and an upcoming Iranian cultural delegation to Leningrad. In this initial encounter with Mozaffar A`lam, the Head of Iran's General Trade Department, he proposed the intensification of cultural ties (akin to those already established with Turkey) and the establishment of a joint scientific research institute.<sup>25</sup> Compared with his previous diplomatic posts, Chernykh would have had considerably greater influence and decision-making power in 1935, thanks to a decree issued eight years earlier.<sup>26</sup>

Another important figure in Iran–Soviet relations was Vladimir Moiseevich Tsukerman, who came from the future capital of the Crimea, and later attended universities in Liège and St Petersburg.<sup>27</sup> His birth was part of a major population increase in Simferopol's Jewish community during the 1890s. At the age of twenty, Tsukerman completed his studies at a local private gymnasium.<sup>28</sup> Then, after a year of study in Belgium, he managed to enroll in the Faculty of Law at the V. M. Bekhterev Psychoneurological Institute in 1912.<sup>29</sup> References to the elusive Tsukerman encountered thus far suggest that he was an efficient and versatile official – capable of assessing tense political situations and acting as a mediator. Circumspection was another personal quality that must have served Tsukerman well in dealings with the Eastern peoples under his purview.<sup>30</sup> Although the entire scope of his duties in Central Asia remains unclear, multiple diplomatic assignments saw him posted to Tashkent and Bukhara between September 1919 and July 1922.<sup>31</sup> Tsukerman was rewarded for his service by receiving the Order of the Red Banner of Labor, as well as subsequent appointments to the *Narkomindel's* administrative center: Head of the Political Department of the Middle East in July 1922 and then the First Eastern Department in September 1933,<sup>32</sup> thereby remaining primarily ensconced in the USSR's capital for almost fifteen years. In addition, he served as “Counselor” (Chargé d'Affaires ad interim) of the Soviet Union's Embassy in Tehran from March 1931 until September 1933 – in support of its *Polpreds*, Adolf Markovich Petrovskii and Pastukhov.<sup>33</sup>

Apart from his diplomatic career, Tsukerman was Commissar of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the M. V. Frunze Military Academy of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (RKKA),<sup>34</sup> as well as being an “orientologist-practician” and a member of the Presidium of the Middle East Section of the All-Union Scientific Association of Orientology (VNAV).<sup>35</sup>

Lastly, it seems all the more improbable that Shostak, who was born in Minsk and lacked any formal education, could have become the Soviet Union's *Torgpred* in Tehran. Fortunately, as with Tsukerman, his personal file reveals a great deal about his origins and subsequent career. Based on his profile, it is fair to say that he did not fit within Uldricks' definition of an “Old Bolshevik” (i.e., he was not accepted into the Communist Party until June 1919).<sup>36</sup> Whereas Arkadii Pavlovich Rozengol'ts, the People's Commissar of Foreign Trade, was able to obtain a PhD in economics, Shostak explained in his autobiography that his family's poverty had been a barrier to formal education, even in a Jewish school. Moreover, he had never been a functionary linked to the former tsarist system, in contrast to a number of diplomatic personnel and ethnographers who were recruited during the post-1917 decade. As a Jew born and raised in the Pale of Settlement, in Minsk, Shostak had been barred from government positions until his late twenties. While he had neither the requisite education nor the appropriate class background corresponding to his professional milieu, such humble origins – coupled with his ethnic identity – may have enhanced his ideological credentials in the eyes of the Bolsheviks. That said, his admission to government positions after 1917 was, in all likelihood, a reflection of the urgent need for skilled personnel coupled with the goal of assimilating more Jewish adherents into the Communist Party.<sup>37</sup> Both Tsukerman and Shostak were categorized by the Soviet government as ethnic Jews – like their superiors, Litvinov and Rozengol'ts – although their attitudes toward Judaism are wholly unknown.

There is no indication that Shostak had received any formal training, which would have been limited until 1931, when the All-Union Academy of Foreign Trade was finally established. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine how he could have risen to prominence until one reads his autobiography and curriculum vitae. After teaching himself Russian, he started out as an errand boy in the Jewish Immigration Bureau in Minsk at age fourteen, working his way up to the position of secretary by the time he was twenty. He subsequently worked for the Jewish Colonization Society (EKO) in 1912–14,<sup>38</sup> the Labor Bureau in 1915, the Jewish Aid Society to the Poor (EVOPO), and the Society of Craftsmen and Agricultural Labor (OR) from 1916 onwards. Between the February and October Revolutions, he was a member of the Presidium and secretary of the Livenskii Council of Workers' Deputies.<sup>39</sup> After acquiring the relevant administrative skills, Shostak was a man on the move: from the 1920s onwards, he was posted to Tashkent, Moscow, Leningrad, Novosibirsk, the Urals, Berlin, London – and finally, to the Soviet Union's Trade Office (*Torgpredstvo*) in Tehran between 1933 and 1936. Gradually, he accumulated career experience in the fields of management, finance, accounting, labor, food distribution, and foreign trade. Intent on seeking a new position in April 1925, he presented the details of his employment history, followed by a simple statement, “I consider it expedient to utilize me in economic or professional work.”<sup>40</sup>

It is unclear whether Shostak had been assigned to Tehran by Litvinov himself,<sup>41</sup> or thanks

to recommendations from Shalva Zurabovich Eliava, Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Trade (1931–6), Lev Mikhailovich Karakhan, Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs (1927–34) – or Tsukerman.<sup>42</sup> It is known that he was posted to Turkestan (as Head of Turkbiuro's Organizational Department and later, its Executive Secretary; Deputy Regional Commissar of Food Supplies [Prodkomissar]; Deputy Chairman of Turkestan's Central Union of Consumer Societies [Turktsentrosojuz]) in 1921–2,<sup>43</sup> and that these three officials had served in the same region.<sup>44</sup> Another possibility is that he may have been known to Rozengol'ts,<sup>45</sup> who was from neighboring Vitebsk.

A more intriguing question is what might have motivated Shostak and his colleagues, Chernykh and Tsukerman, to join the ranks of the Soviet foreign service. The prestige of the diplomatic profession, as suggested by Alastair Kocho-Williams, may have been one reason for this decision.<sup>46</sup> In addition, some combination of revolutionary zeal, wanderlust, cosmopolitanism, and curiosity about foreign cultures probably attracted like-minded applicants to these professions.<sup>47</sup> More to the point, growing up in provincial urban centers – within the confines of Imperial Russia's periphery – could have been a significant impetus for Shostak, Tsukerman, and Chernykh to see the larger world.<sup>48</sup> Besides the desire to expand their geographical horizons, Shostak and his contemporaries may have been partially motivated by observations of the exotic in the familiar, that is, the Eastern communities in their immediate environs – the Tatars of Minsk and Simferopol, the Azeris of Azerbaijan, and the local Buryat villages around Selenginsk. Chernykh, for one, informed Prime Minister Mohammad `Ali Foroughi in their initial meeting that “with great interest I arrived to this country,”<sup>49</sup> thus echoing the sentiments of his country's “government and social circles” with regard to the recent development of Iran's economy and nationhood.

By the same token, it is conceivable that these officials would have drawn upon their own encounters with early twentieth-century modernity in distant regions when approaching Iran, a remote yet newly industrializing country. For example, by the time Shostak had been born, Minsk was already developing a modern transportation and industrial infrastructure. Simultaneously, the borderland city resembled a large Jewish marketplace to some late-nineteenth century travellers, as well as being a major trade and transportation hub between Poland, Lithuania, and Russia.<sup>50</sup> Chernykh would have been witness to Baku's massive industrial and population growth, as the late nineteenth-century oil boom attracted increasing numbers of Russians, Armenians, and Iranians<sup>51</sup> – although the Azeri population still predominated throughout the country. Growing up in multi-ethnic Simferopol, Tsukerman must have known its original name, Akmescit, situated between the neighboring towns of Bakhchysarai and Karasubazar, which “retained most of their Tatar character up until the end of the tsarist empire.”<sup>52</sup> His own city contained numerous artisanal workshops and small-scale factories producing wine, leather, tobacco, and foodstuffs made from local fruit, generated by the construction of railway lines in the Crimea during the 1870s.<sup>53</sup>

At the outset, Tsukerman and Chernykh were both drawn away from their local environs by the quest for higher education. In contrast to Chernykh, who relocated to Moscow in 1910,<sup>54</sup> Tsukerman went as far as Europe in 1911–12 because the “doors of the university were closed

to me” in Simferopol.<sup>55</sup> Shostak's ascending position in Soviet society, which paralleled the aspirations of his colleagues, may have served as a frame of reference for his perception of Iran's rapidly changing economy and society. His initial and subsequent class identities revealed transmuting layers: firstly, in accordance with the tsarist estate (*soslovie*) designation,<sup>56</sup> his family belonged to the *meshchanstvo*, which was a catch-all term for petty townspeople, small traders, and craftsmen,<sup>57</sup> as well as being the typical categorization for Jewish inhabitants of Imperial Russia.<sup>58</sup> Shostak himself mentions that he was born “in a family of woodworkers,”<sup>59</sup> thus making artisan the most appropriate descriptor. From the age of twelve, his older brothers and sisters apprenticed with craftsmen; in addition, one was a tailor – and a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, Tsukerman's autobiography begins with the statement that he was born “in a Jewish merchant family,”<sup>61</sup> his father having been the proprietor of a tobacco shop. Eventually, Shostak arrived at his own professional definitions of self, namely “white-collar worker” (*sluzhashchii*) and “administrator-economic manager” (*administrator-khoziaistvennik*).<sup>62</sup>

Having “modernized” himself,<sup>63</sup> the future *Torgpred* proceeded to the rest of the world. On 8 June 1935, Shostak and Mamlei, the Deputy of the Economic Planning Sector in the Trade Office, informed their superior, Eliava,

Recently we have decided to elucidate the conditions of an individual sphere of Iran's national economy from the perspective of our practical trade work ... the introduction of mechanized technical exports to Iran, including ... the possibility of our participation in the construction of textile factories.<sup>64</sup>

Shostak referred to a report by S. Maizel', which had concluded that the USSR would “easily assume the role of industrializer” in Iran and other Eastern countries, based on the model of a textile combine in Kayseri, Turkey.<sup>65</sup> The report justified these recommendations in its observation that “Iranian hand-woven and factory-made garment textiles ... do not satisfy more than 5–10 percent of the country's entire needs ... for this reason, Iran's textile industry (factory-weaving) still must be created.”<sup>66</sup> While these officials were proponents of Iran's industrialization, the same report predicted that 35,000 workers would be a major labor force upon the Trans-Iranian Railway's completion in two or three years' time – and it drew attention to the plight of men, women, and child workers at the Kazeruni (Vatan) factory in Isfahan.<sup>67</sup> Given his former affiliation with the General Jewish Labor Bund and subsequent membership in the USSR's professional trade unions,<sup>68</sup> Shostak would have judged such working conditions to be exploitative, and may have requested this information himself.

Admittedly, this Enlightenment-inspired plan to elevate its Eastern neighbors was also guided by the Soviet Union's economic pragmatism and political objectives. In one of the rare documents authored by Tsukerman, he advised in April 1935 that:

The First Eastern Department considers it expedient to conduct repairs of four locomotives for the Iranians, particularly since we ourselves are interested in the normal

functioning of the [Trans-] Iranian Railway from the viewpoint of our trade turnover with Iran.<sup>69</sup>

A host of other high-ranking Soviet officials in the Commissariats of Foreign Trade and Foreign Affairs evinced much the same reasoning. In one such case, Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Trade, Mechislav Antonovich Loganovskii, approved the transit of an order of Škoda's equipment across the USSR to Iran – even though the Czech firm was a major competitor – adding that it would result in a profit of about £210,000 for the Soviet government.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Eliava received a proposal on 16 October 1934, from Exportstroi's Assistant Manager, Markhov, requesting that German imports be substituted for equipment not readily available in the USSR, in order to win a contract for the construction of a tobacco factory in Iran.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, the Soviet Union's desire to intensify its political influence in Iran, added to its economic interests, overrode any concomitant misgivings about its competitors, even to the point of engaging in trade transactions with Germany – which was contrary to Litvinov's aim of collective security.<sup>72</sup>

Still, these rivals caused the *Narkomvneshtorg's* representatives to have serious doubts about their own position in Iran, as a steady stream of lengthy, detailed economic reports was produced in the mid-1930s. At the end of 1934, the appraisal of the previous three years by Shostak and Pastukhov noted that the Iranian government had rapidly accomplished its goals for the monopolization of trade, which also facilitated “the expansion of existing factories, constructed according to the European model.”<sup>73</sup> By all appearances, the protracted trade dispute with Iran, which lasted from December 1932 until July 1933, had resulted in the Soviet Union being “outdistanced by foreign firms,”<sup>74</sup> who were already involved in the construction projects of Iranian industrial enterprises. The previous year had been an eventful one in Europe, as well. In 1933, the final months of the Iranian merchants' boycott against Soviet imports roughly coincided with the unexpected rise of Hitler.<sup>75</sup> As a consequence of the shift towards fascism in Germany, the gains being made in its economic and political relations with Iran began to take on a greater significance, and were subject to increasing scrutiny by the Soviet government and its diplomatic officials in Tehran. Additionally, robust competition from Eastern European neighbors such as Poland and Czechoslovakia was being monitored by the *Torgpredstvo*.<sup>76</sup>

Concurrently, Shostak and his colleagues had an ample supply of information about Iran's inhabitants – in particular, socio-economic analyses of local merchants of greater and lesser influence, as well as generalized descriptions of engineers, factory workers, and peasants – which sometimes shaded towards ethnography. One such report profiled the inhabitants of Astara, a border transit point for Iran–Soviet trade, providing brief portraits of its governor, Shahrdir, customs officials, and a multitude of merchants. As opposed to Astara's governor, the Head of the Post and Telegraph, Mr. 'Izazi, was described in favorable terms: “Relates exceptionally well to us. Understands Russian. Polite. Doesn't delay our mail ... Doesn't drink.”<sup>77</sup> Another defined Iran, citing the terminology of the Russian Marxist historian, Mikhail Nikolaevich Pokrovsky, as “a police-bureaucratic state” with multiple layers of merchant

capital,

connected with various sectors of the national economy ... [each] having completely different aspirations ... one of the significant segments ... [being] connected with the export-import trade ... [and] here is located the juncture between the supporting circles of government, noble-landlord circles and the apex of trade capital.<sup>78</sup>

A different one warned that,

as long as trade and agrarian capital remain in the form of conjoined twins, Iran's agriculture and industry will remain at a low level of development. As long as the landlord and the merchant pass for one and the same person, trade capital will ... go to industry, but agrarian capital, existing on the ground-fortress of peasant labor, will not be interested in the transfer of agriculture to a much higher technical degree.<sup>79</sup>

Ostensibly, these were all concerted attempts to better understand the sociological underpinnings of Iran's economy – albeit in the interests of finding “windows of opportunity” for Soviet technical assistance and economic expansion in the country and, hence, a firmer political footing.

Hinting at viable strategies that could win the Iranians over following the boycott, Eliava had placed considerable emphasis on the “psychological atmosphere” as a significant factor in negotiations.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, his directives set the tone for Shostak's initial meeting with Iran's Minister of Finance, `Ali Akbar Davar, on 3 August 1934. The new *Torgpred* soon established an excellent rapport with the Finance Minister by passing on Eliava's words of praise: Davar was considered to be “the most prominent statesman of Iran, single-handedly guiding the establishment of his country's new economy.”<sup>81</sup> Shostak wisely deployed the word “sympathy” to express his government's response to Iran's economic modernization, which Eliava's report had noted in the previous year. Accompanying the Iranian delegation in Moscow as their official guide, Shostak was featured in numerous photo ops by the Iranian press (at least, in the journal of the Iranian Chambers of Commerce, *Otaq-e Tejarat*, and the most important newspaper, *Ettela`at*, both under `Abbas Mas`udi's editorship).<sup>82</sup> Besides relating well to Davar, he engaged in varying levels of camaraderie with other prominent Iranian officials – most notably, Mohammad Sa`id, Fazlollah Khan Zahedi, Mozaffar A`lam, and Mostafa Qoli Bayat. In a gesture of solidarity, Ambassador Sa`id casually circumvented official protocol by putting his arm around the *Torgpred* for a group photo taken with the Moscow Chamber of Commerce. Positive rhetoric aside, Shostak's personality, physical appearance, and life experience quite likely made him more appealing to the Iranians, who might have viewed him as a “European” expert and/or an “Easterner,” ergo closer to themselves.<sup>83</sup>

Put yet another way, could the Iranians have identified with Shostak, given his ethnic particularity, or conversely, his cosmopolitanism?<sup>84</sup> If these potential identities sound contradictory, consider the following passage written by Judeophilic members of the Russian intelligentsia in 1915: “the Jews ... have served and continue to serve more vigorously than

any other the arduous and great cause of the Europeanization of our semi-Asiatic country.”<sup>85</sup> For his part, Shostak may have recognized parallels between Tehran's Grand Bazaar and the Jewish markets of Minsk.<sup>86</sup> Given the Bazaar's proximity to the Soviet Trade Office, which was situated on Pamenar Street, there would have been ample opportunities to explore its labyrinthine passages in his leisure hours. In certain respects, the *Torgpred's* job description did not vastly differ from that of a merchant – or a middleman, either. Contrary to the impoverished circumstances of his childhood, Shostak later dealt with the import and export of foodstuffs among other goods throughout his career, particularly in Gostorg.<sup>87</sup> Even Meyer Tueg & Joseph Moshi, a major trading firm in Iraq, sought his support for a proposal to export dates from Basra to the USSR, implying that local markets could be opened to the sale of Soviet goods by this transaction.<sup>88</sup> The entire process of finalizing trade deals (and ultimately receiving the commodities) had its tedious and mundane sides, as well. As a rule, the Soviets were extremely selective about imports: when the Iranians offered an assortment of dried fruits, the Russians only wanted sultanas,<sup>89</sup> whereas Iran's livestock and Persian lamb were in constant demand.



**Figure 11.1** Far left, front row: Tsukerman, Shostak, Sa`id, Eliava, and various other officials in a photo taken with the Moscow Chamber of Commerce. “Hey`at-e e`zami-ye Iran dar mowqe`e pazira`i-ye otaq-e tejarat-e Mosko,” *Otaq-e Tejarat*, Nos. 130–31 (Esfand-Farvardin 1314–15/March 1936), 16. Image reproduced with permission from Dr. `Ali Tatari, Manager of Project, Compilation, and Scientific Regulation of *Gozari-ye panjah saleh bar majalleh-ye Otaq-e Tejarat ta Otaq-e Bazargani va Sanaye` va Ma`aden-e Iran 1308–1357 khorshidi*, published by the Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament in cooperation with the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture.

Shostak's career experience in Central Asia, like that of Tsukerman, would have served as a basis for interacting with his Iranian counterparts and adapting to local conditions in Tehran. Analogously, Chernykh would have been able to draw upon his memories of Azerbaijan, a country once linked to northern Iran in the same territorial entity. Akin to Stephen Kotkin's proposal that we “examine the Soviet Caucasus in light of developments in Iran as well as Turkey,” the assignment of this cohort to Iran suggests that the Soviet government had begun to place a greater emphasis on relevant – and proven – field experience in Eastern countries for these posts. Such policy decisions also conformed to the Soviet Union's geopolitical strategy at this time, whereby its “authorities were interested in having their country appear to be a part of Asia for Asians, and a part of Europe for Europeans.”<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, export strategies could

not be applied universally to all of the countries under the auspices of the Soviet Union's First Eastern Department. For example, Soviet vehicles sold very well in Turkey during the 1930s but struggled to make headway in Iran, where American cars dominated the market. Likewise, news of Soviet technical assistance in the construction of Turkish textile complexes in Kayseri and Balıkesir had not reached Mirza Mohammad Ja`far, Director of the Kazeruni factory. Instead, Ja`far told the *Narkomvneshtorg*'s representatives that much of his factory's equipment had come from Germany, adding that an Exportmachine product ordered several years before had arrived very late – and without a reply concerning the conditions of the transaction.<sup>91</sup>



**Figure 11.2** A dapper Communist functionary, Shostak in a passport photo from 1928, taken in London. Image reproduced with permission from the Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE), f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068.

Surprisingly, dynamic visions of the USSR's First Five-Year Plan (1928–32), notable in Soviet avant-garde posters, were not showcased in the aforementioned Iranian publications (*Otaq-e Tejarat* and *Ettela`at*) under Mas`udi's editorship, either.<sup>92</sup> With the exception of a few illustrated Soviet ads (e.g., Gosstrakh's shipping insurance, Parz-Az Neft's petroleum products, Singer sewing machines sold by Gosshveimashina, and Ford vehicles sold by Sharq),<sup>93</sup> the majority – including Exportstroi's – were incongruously old-fashioned, consisting only of simple phrases written in Persian.<sup>94</sup> Meanwhile, the advertisements of German,

American, Czech, and Hungarian firms emphasized their modernity with eye-catching images of cars, machinery, and factories.<sup>95</sup> The *Narkomvneshtorg* could have used the services of Soviet avant-garde artists working on the journal *USSR in Construction*.<sup>96</sup> Even so, Soviet officials observing local conditions would have noted the incomplete literacy rate in Iran – and orientologists such as Pastukhov were surely aware of the Iranians' fondness for visuals to accompany text, dating back to their national epic, the *Shahnameh*, as well as their Shi'ī iconography. Employees tasked with selling Soviet machinery in Iran also attributed their lack of sales to “catalogues with unsuccessful photographs,” poor quality paper, mistakes in foreign-language translations, and not enough detail about prices.<sup>97</sup>

Added to its economic, political, and geopolitical goals, as Michael David-Fox asserts, the Soviet Union sought to create a “superior alternative” through its “unprecedented étatismé,” which was driven by a “powerful civilizing mission” in reaction to “the West and its cultural and material allure,” as well as an “intense inferiority/superiority complex.”<sup>98</sup> That said, Pastukhov and Shostak adroitly sidestepped any hint of defeatism without insisting on the absolute pre-eminence of Soviet technology in a co-authored report to the Commissariats of Foreign Affairs and Trade, envisioning that a permanent exhibition of Soviet technical exports at the *Torgpredstvo* would provide “a visual impression of the actual achievements of Soviet industry and ... that its products are *better rather than equal* to foreign ones (*but already of course not worse than them*) [italics added].”<sup>99</sup> In the spring of 1934, Shostak advised the USSR Chamber of Commerce that “an exposition of technical exports should occupy the dominant position ... [with] examples of new machinery and components, which could be sold in Iran. First and foremost ... agricultural machinery.”<sup>100</sup> Circulating throughout the *Narkomvneshtorg*'s bureaucracy, Shostak's plan eventually received approval – after being pondered over by one official, who had doodled houses in the page margins. Almost a year later, his proposal faced a further hurdle, when the USSR Chamber of Commerce asked the *Narkomvneshtorg* to intervene and take steps towards “the firm leadership” of the exhibition's organization, owing to Exportstroi's refusal to share a copy of its plan.<sup>101</sup>

Just as these bureaucratic bottlenecks could potentially hinder mutual collaboration between the *Narkomvneshtorg* and other institutions, the optimal functioning of the Trade Office in Tehran faced barriers related to the competence of individual employees and interpersonal dynamics between co-workers. One case in point was work discipline in the *Torgpredstvo*: there was a noticeable uptick in official decrees issued during the first months of 1935 that reprimanded several individuals for tardiness and staff in general for “aimlessly pacing, chatting ... [and] gathering on the stairs in the corridors” during office hours.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, the scheduling of bi-monthly courses for employees of the Trade Office and its related organizations from the end of 1934 – with proficiency exams to be held early in the following year – meant that shortcomings had been identified in the requisite knowledge for these positions. Along with Shostak and other specialists, the *Torgpredstvo*'s “Dragoman-Consultant,” Nikolai Aleksandrovich Belgorodskii, was designated to instruct these personnel.<sup>103</sup> Formerly an employee of Ruspersbank and a professional Iranologist<sup>104</sup> Belgorodskii, covered important facets of Iran's national economy, including its laws, foreign

trade monopoly, monopoly goods, contingents, licence system, and export certificates. In addition to authoring several reports on Iran's economy and translating articles from the Iranian press, he accompanied Shostak (whose languages were Russian, Yiddish, and rudimentary English) to his negotiations with Davar.<sup>105</sup>

Evidently, the *Torgpred's* senior rank within the hierarchy of the Trade Office did not provide immunity from the implicit criticism of colleagues directly under him. Shostak drew a disapproving glance from Belgorodskii in one photograph for continuing to read a newspaper while the Iranian trade delegation posed with the manager of a Soviet tractor factory. Whether Shostak had been unaware that a photograph was about to be taken, or intended to present himself as an “enlightened” individual,<sup>106</sup> his subordinate's reaction may have been reflective of rivalries (and divergent understandings of diplomatic protocol) between senior staff within the upper echelons of the *Torgpredstvo*. Like Shostak, who had succeeded in moving up the ranks from Deputy to Head Trade Representative in Tehran, Belgorodskii's career had been advanced by his employment skills, personal connections – and ample ambition.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps the Dragoman-Consultant even considered himself a cut above the *Torgpred*, given his academic specialization, fluency in Persian, and more extensive career experience in Iran. In fact, salaries at the top were nearly equal, which may have been a further indication of complex power relations in the *Torgpredstvo*.<sup>108</sup> That said, the onus was on the *Torgpred* to manage his staff, as well as the budgetary affairs of the Trade Office and economic transactions with the Iranians.



**Figure 11.3** Far left, Shostak, reading a newspaper. Other officials, left to right: Vakili, Qovanlu, Zahedi (aka “Napoléon”), Belgorodskii, Schatz, Vernusi, Sepanlu, and A`lam. “Hey'at-e e`zami-ye Iran hangam-e bazdid-e mo'assesat-e eqtesadi-ye Shuravi,” *Ettela`at*, No. 2494, 6 Khordad 1314/May 28, 1935, 1. © Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament.

Shostak also faced a rapidly evolving economic and political environment in which plans to increase Soviet exports did not always unfold as originally envisioned. At one stage or another, initial orders could be altered, cancelled, or otherwise unravel. For instance, a series of trade deals between Shostak and Davar that were part of the 1935 Treaty of Establishment, Commerce, and Navigation between Iran and the Soviet Union were partially undone by

officials on both sides – especially after both men were no longer on the scene.<sup>109</sup> Others were subject to protracted delays, as with Davar's order for agricultural machinery, which was not fulfilled until the following year – amounting to the sale of 1,097 horse-drawn ploughs, 1,863 sprayers, 261 cultivators, 251 grain-cleaning machines, 20 MK110 tractor-operated threshers, and similar types of equipment.<sup>110</sup> Fortunately, this order of Soviet agricultural machinery was not withdrawn by the Iranians despite a live tractor demonstration on 26 October 1936 in Karaj that fell short of expectations when an XTZ model (driven by the factory mechanic, engineer Zisser) was outdone in terms of fuel efficiency and ploughing power by its American competitor, McCormick.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, Soviet trade officials were often confronted by the reality of “bazaar” purchasing practices on the Iranian side, e.g., shopping around, haggling, and sudden changes in the decision-making process. Arguably, Iran was the most challenging trade partner of all Eastern countries in the region – yet financially rewarding – whereby its sophisticated import–export network with Europe generated supplementary revenue for the Soviet government, as an abundance of goods flowed through the USSR's vast territory.<sup>112</sup>

A further cause of consternation for the *Torgpredstvo* arose from amendments to state economic regulations in Iran. In March 1936, Shostak deemed the new foreign currency monopoly law evidence of the Iranian government's “draconian measures.”<sup>113</sup> Exasperated as he may have been, the *Torgpred* was far from confounded by the Iranians, however. Not unlike his own country, he acknowledged that Iran needed these currency reserves for railway construction, building up its industry and ports, and military orders. Accordingly, Iran needed clearing agreements with Austria, Italy, Belgium, and Turkey, besides those already signed with Germany.<sup>114</sup> Explaining Iran's position, the *Torgpredstvo* provided the following rationale: “The monopolization of principal export goods has afforded the Iranians the opportunity to utilize the country's export resources in the direction of coping with its currency strain.”<sup>115</sup> In a similar vein, the Head of the Eastern Sector of the *Narkomvneshtorg*, Pavel Ivanovich Kushner, supposed – with a slightly condescending tone – in 1935:

We do not appear to be the advisors of the Iranian state; but it is possible that the Iranian government, seeing our planned system, our trade monopoly, has adopted their outward form, [although] not particularly deep in their content.<sup>116</sup>

Plausibly, the *Narkomvneshtorg*'s “national interest”<sup>117</sup> guided its relations with Iran in ways much like those with Turkey and Italy during the 1930s, alliances that Samuel J. Hirst has characterized as indicative of “shared discontent with western power and the western liberal order.”<sup>118</sup> However, the prospect of such a broad international configuration diminished after 1935, with heightened Soviet fears of fascist encirclement and suspicions regarding Germany's presence in Iran.

Obligated to formulate trade policies in view of Iran's economic transactions with the capitalist world, Soviet power had to negotiate with a growing base of Iranian power, amounting to a centralized network of government officials, merchants, and other economic actors who possessed sufficient capital and/or influence, buttressed by protectionist

legislation.<sup>119</sup> A prime example was Mirza `Ali Khan Vakili, known as the “consultant and right hand of Davar in trade matters,” and “an influential and active person in Tehran's trade circles.”<sup>120</sup> Regarding a major contract for brick factories, one *Narkomvneshtorg* official pointed out that “the Iranians have become accustomed to impeccable standards in foreign bids,” after Iran's Building Corporation sought out several German firms – who were quick to respond with offers. This report's author regretfully concluded that a protracted delay in receiving the requested specifications had not only caused the loss of this project but also gave Soviet firms a bad reputation.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, Exportstroi's employees complained of the difficulty in becoming conversant with their products when catalogues and other promotional materials sometimes arrived a day before the actual goods themselves. With the “multi-front radicalization” of World War I, the Soviet Union was one of the major European powers that had enlarged its bureaucratic “capacity,” which affirmed to the rest of the world that it was “modern, advanced, progressive, [and] inevitable.”<sup>122</sup> On the other hand, this “ballooning of the state” resulted in a rather unwieldy apparatus.

On top of its colossal administration, the USSR's metropole – rather than its periphery – may have been the weakest link. As another Exportstroi employee lamented:

A major defect in our work appears to be extreme inflexibility. We are obliged for every, at times, insignificant question to communicate with Moscow. In order to receive an answer ... it turns out to be a necessarily significant amount of time, amounting to months. The customer, interested in the prompt receipt of an answer, displays understandable dissatisfaction with our extreme sluggishness and, in the end, loses faith in us.<sup>123</sup>

In 1931, a Soviet factory worker reported that those producing the machines were experiencing an analogous problem:

When we send goods, we don't get any feedback about them, only an acceptance document ... But every machine is unique, and if the exporter would say that in purchasing the given goods the buyer made such-and-such remarks ... We would try to change our work, eliminate the defects.<sup>124</sup>

According to John B. Quigley, the Soviet foreign trade monopoly of the early 1930s spawned competition – rather than cooperation – between the *Narkomvneshtorg*'s agencies and industrial production agencies. The upshot was “a communications barrier between enterprise and foreign trade personnel,” on the one hand, and “between enterprise personnel and foreigners,”<sup>125</sup> on the other.

By 1936, an array of insightful reports covered virtually all facets of Iran's economy, yet a report on Technoexport's “lack of proper work in the sale of electrical equipment,” blamed its employees for not having “fully studied the competition's activity and work methods ... the market ... and the various regions of Iran.”<sup>126</sup> In the same year, the *Narkomvneshtorg*'s Deputy, Loganovskii, admitted, “Our difficulty is that we don't know our domestic industry well

enough; we don't know the capabilities of this industry,"<sup>127</sup> meaning that there was a lack of information about the location of individual plants and the type of goods they produced. The Chief of the Commissariat's Planning and Economic Section, M. Iu. Taits, put the matter even more succinctly, stating: "we do not yet have an adequate study of our internal economy."<sup>128</sup> Whichever factor had the greatest impact – i.e., the study of the USSR's competition, Iran's markets, or Soviet industrial production – these observations all drew attention to the quality of information required and its assimilation. Unfortunately, these varying perspectives, which were evidence of the intellectual capabilities of their authors (the Deputy of the *Torgpredstvo*'s Economic Planning Sector, Mamlei, Shostak, and others such as engineer Gaglan), had dwindled at the close of the 1930s. On 7 July 1937, Mamlei wrote to the *Narkomvneshtorg*'s Eastern Bureau, advising that,

In order to compose a more or less complete presentation of the current conditions, it is necessary to systematically track individual market phenomena and scrupulously compile the required materials, using, in this case, the central and peripheral operational apparatus. But there is no such economist who could organize this field of work in the Trade Office.<sup>129</sup>

Instead, towards the end of the 1930s, the *Torgpredstvo* had to rely on outdated reports, whose authors were no longer in Iran – since its own analysis of local economic and political developments had been reduced to translations of Iranian newspapers.

Tempting as it might be to conclude that economic relations with Iran were considered to be less crucial than those with the major European powers and the United States, Litvinov – among other top decision-makers at the Commissariats of Foreign Affairs and Trade – continued to support economic cooperation with Iran, even at the height of tensions. On 5 August 1938, he replied promptly to Politburo member and Trade Specialist, Anastas Ivanovich Mikoian, issuing a warning in the final sentence of his secret correspondence:

If the negotiations are prolonged, the Iranian government by way of "insurance" might, not waiting for the conclusion of an agreement with us, conclude a series of major import and export deals with other countries, in particular, Germany, which, of course, will be detrimental to our trade with Iran and will weaken our political position.<sup>130</sup>

In effect, the USSR's economic and political interests were intertwined, as were their corresponding Foreign Commissariats. Regardless of whether Eliava, Pastukhov, Tsukerman, or high-ranking officials in the *Narkomindel*'s Collegium, such as Karakhan, had been masterminds behind the "new approach" towards Iran, Litvinov ultimately sanctioned it. In March 1934, he advised, "Each of our polpreds must attend to the maintenance of best relations with the country of his residence,"<sup>131</sup> including the expansion of social contacts. For instance, Boris Spiridonovich Stomoniakov, the Second Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, recommended in June 1935 that "leading figures in science, art, and journalism"<sup>132</sup> of the host country be invited to receptions at the Soviet Embassy – in this case, in Warsaw.

By 1937, however, such directives were being undermined by the ruthless elimination of an entire cadre of Soviet diplomatic and foreign trade officials throughout the world,<sup>133</sup> thereby paving the way for a return to militarism – and the occupation of Iran once again. Gone were the days of the 1935 treaty's ratification when Shostak and Chernykh had sat around a small table – as if in the midst of a poker game – with Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Seyyed Mirza Baqer Khan Kazemi.<sup>134</sup> Nor was Davar around to promote economic relations with the Soviets. Diplomacy continued with a whole new contingent of Soviet officials. In *Otaq-e Tejarat*, Matvei Evdokimovich Filimonov, the Soviet Union's *Polpred* in Tehran from September 1939 onwards, and A`lam, now Iran's Foreign Minister, were depicted in separate photos signing the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation of 25 March 1940,<sup>135</sup> which suggested that the formalities associated with diplomatic protocol had been re-established, and the Soviet government had abandoned its “new approach,” including the intensive experiment with social scientific methods. Yet, despite the lapse of the 1935 treaty after July 1938,<sup>136</sup> Soviet economic, political, and cultural relations with Iran continued well into the next decade. In less than ten years, for instance, the proposal of Technoexport's Representative in Iran, Titov, who had recommended on 22 November 1936 that Soviet “rolling stock” (i.e., locomotives, freight cars, and passenger coaches) be exported to Iran,<sup>137</sup> was finally put into practice. In fact, transactions involving the Trans-Iranian Railway, which had begun with decrees for the exportation of track in the late 1920s, were a key aspect of Iran's economic relationship with the Soviet Union – albeit in a wartime context.

The Soviet Union's attempts to project itself – by virtue of its own economic modernity project – onto Iran's nascent industrialization drive encountered an array of competing versions, beginning in the early 1930s.<sup>138</sup> Nonetheless, the fact that orientologists, economists, and diplomats – most notably, those with career experience in revolutionary Central Asia and the Far East – worked together and wielded considerable influence over the direction of Soviet foreign policy in Iran was a remarkable enterprise in its own right. Arguably, the polymorphic nature of Soviet power at this time blurred the conceptual dichotomy of East and West as mutually exclusive categories. Shostak and his fellow standard-bearers of Soviet modernity had undergone transformative experiences within their own respective regions of Imperial Russia. After lives that had begun in restricted zones of territory, they suddenly had the chance to travel and work in other regions of the USSR, including its capital, even venturing far beyond its borders.<sup>139</sup> Seizing upon this new opportunity to its fullest extent, Shostak went eastwards as far as Turkestan in 1921, northwestward to London in 1928, and eventually, southwestward to Tehran by 1932. Over the course of thirty years, he had worked in approximately twenty different positions. Similarly, Chernykh amassed more than two decades of career experience and Tsukerman worked for the *Narkomindel* in excess of fifteen years – each with their fair share of assignments to European and Eastern capitals.<sup>140</sup> What effect, if any, did the self-empowerment of these individuals have on the expression of Soviet power in Iran at this time?



**Figure 11.4** Left to right, foreground: Shostak, Chernykh, and Kazemi at the signing of the 1935 Treaty. An Iranian translator stands in the background. “Dar `emarat-e vezarat-e omur-e kharejeh: marasem-e emza-ye ‘ahdnameh’ha-ye tejarati fimabeyn-e dowlateyn-e Iran va Shuravi,” *Ettela`at*, No. 2571, 5 Shahrivar 1314/August 28, 1935, 1. © Library, Museum and Document Center of the Iranian Parliament.

Obviously, the Soviets' goal of maintaining – and gaining – influence over their Eastern neighbor outweighed any possible ideological misgivings. Contrary to the hypothesis of Kocho-Williams that “adherence to Soviet values was a limiting factor on Soviet diplomats when competing with their foreign counterparts,”<sup>141</sup> a considerable number of pictures were taken of Soviet officials – as opposed to Germans, Americans, British, or even Turks – with their Iranian counterparts. Perhaps partly due to Mas'udi's pro-Soviet sentiments, multiple images featured Shostak, Chernykh, Eliava, and Rozengol'ts in *Otaq-e Tejarat* and in Iran's premier newspaper, *Ettela`at*. In the Moscow Chamber of Commerce photo, Tsukerman presents himself in a very humble, sympathetic manner by casually posing sideways and turning his face towards the viewer. These expressions of informality were reinforced by mutual invitations to lunches and dinners, even one hosted by Chernykh that brought together members of the Majles and the local Russian community in Tehran. Therefore, the conclusion that Soviet diplomats “were less free to engage in the social world of diplomacy than were foreign diplomats, in part because of fears that they might be seduced by the bourgeois trappings of the diplomatic world,” does not hold up to scrutiny in the case of Iran.<sup>142</sup> Just as Soviet foreign trade had to operate outside its ideological boundaries within a wider world, Soviet diplomacy had to tailor its approach to local cultures if it hoped to achieve any measure of success. In June 1936, Chernykh urged that a gathering organized by the Iranians in honor of the Soviet writer, Maxim Gorky, be covered in the Soviet press – warning the *Narkomindel*, “otherwise, our Iranian friends will be upset and official circles will be offended.”<sup>143</sup> By this time, Tehran's *Polpred* had become conversant with the Iranian penchant for publicity.

Irrespective of how receptive Chernykh, Shostak, and Tsukerman may have been to their foreign counterparts, there is no evidence that would call into question the depth of their political commitment.<sup>144</sup> While membership was not always an effective indicator of

ideological sincerity, many within the *Narkomindel* (and presumably, the *Narkomvneshtorg*) had joined the Communist Party before, during, or soon after 1917.<sup>145</sup> Given that these officials had all risen to positions of prestige and high mobility – above all else, thanks to the 1917 Revolution – in spite of their less-than-aristocratic origins and gaps in their formal education, what would have prevented any of them from accepting the fundamental tenets of Soviet Communism?<sup>146</sup> Motivations and credentials for Party membership undoubtedly overlapped: all three had come from the *meshchanstvo*, and must have been discontented with their limited access to higher education, employment – and, in Shostak's case, geographical mobility up to 1917. Furthermore, Tsukerman and Shostak had quite likely been politicized by the violent 1905 pogroms in Minsk and Simferopol as teenagers.<sup>147</sup> As Uldricks has reasoned, “Diplomacy was too important a defensive weapon, given the encirclement of the weak socialist state by antagonistic capitalist powers, for Lenin or Stalin to undermine the efficiency of the *Narkomindel* by dumping quantities of oppositionists into its ranks.”<sup>148</sup> Moreover, our two mandarins of foreign affairs were appointed to state academic institutions: Tsukerman as Military Commissar at the M. V. Frunze Military Academy of the RKKA in 1922–7 and Chernykh as Vice-President of the V. I. Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VASKhNIL) in 1931–3, even though neither had graduated from such an institution himself.<sup>149</sup>

Scholarly appraisals of Soviet foreign policy in Iran and, more broadly speaking, in the Middle East, have highlighted the role of the military, espionage, or formally qualified orientologists such as Pastukhov. In other words, such scholarship has either conformed to conventional understandings of Soviet power or has gravitated towards Soviet academics affiliated with Oriental studies.<sup>150</sup> Practical orientologists are mentioned in passing, and Inessa Axelrod-Rubin maintains that such individuals “were always to a greater or lesser degree connected with the Soviet secret service.”<sup>151</sup> However, the *Narkomindel* did not always comply with the expectations of the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU), often preferring the intelligence services of private individuals.<sup>152</sup> In spite of the scant documentation, it is possible to assemble a reasonably coherent picture of Tsukerman's duties at the headquarters of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, which was located on Kuznetskii Most during the interwar period. Both the Eastern and Western Departments “managed diplomatic relations with the governments” of their respective geographical regions and “exercised control over Soviet institutions that maintained relations with the aforementioned governments.”<sup>153</sup> While there is no record of relations between Tsukerman and Pastukhov, their offices were next door to one another (No. 73 and No. 75,<sup>154</sup> respectively) for the greater part of a decade and both were active in the All-Union Scientific Association of Orientology (VNAV).<sup>155</sup> As of 1936, Tsukerman's contingent of three assistants and seven reviewers in the First Eastern Department was larger than that of its Second Eastern counterpart and all three of the Western Departments – an indication of the Near East's increasing strategic importance.<sup>156</sup>

The scope of the First Eastern Department was expansive, covering the Caucasus, the Middle East, and North Africa.<sup>157</sup> Tsukerman's familiarity with Iran would have been enhanced by his sojourn in Tehran during the country's protracted dispute with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) in December 1932, when he reported on the Iranian government's position

and established a positive rapport with Prime Minister Mohammad `Ali Foroughi, reassuring him of Soviet sympathies.<sup>158</sup> Being at the nexus of Soviet governmental organs and institutions related to foreign affairs, it is apparent that Tsukerman's practical experience, political commitment, and proven competency in the field trumped a formal degree in Oriental studies or specialized diplomatic training.<sup>159</sup> Likewise, his colleagues brought their management skills and technical knowledge to Tehran – Chernykh having been the Chairman of Gosplan's Labor Section in 1930 and Shostak being tasked with balancing the *Torgpredstvo's* accounts. They arrived in Tehran at a critical juncture in Iran–Soviet relations, much like their previous assignments in Peking and London. Yet the stakes were markedly different in Iran during the 1930s. The Soviets faced increasing pressure from Germany and less alarming competitors, all vying for an economic and political foothold in the country.

Originating in Imperial Russia's colonized territories – each with a distinctive history of interaction with Eastern peoples – this cohort inverted conventional center-periphery dynamics by becoming enmeshed in centralizing Soviet power at its boundaries.<sup>160</sup> The formation of the USSR provided a potent boost to the careers of Tsukerman and Shostak, who both participated in the consolidation of Soviet control over Central Asia during the early 1920s. Conversely, Chernykh's diplomatic career had been furthered by his performance in China as well as various posts in Europe, leading to government positions in Moscow. It is certain that this cohort contributed to the development of a more productive network of Soviet power, which was seemingly a coordinated effort on the part of the *Narkomindel*, hence not strictly limited to Iran. Concurrently, the *Narkomvneshtorg* expanded and gained prominence,<sup>161</sup> as the USSR emerged from its First Five-Year Plan, while shifting its policy focus in response to Iran's economic nationalization, already well underway. Therefore, the dispatch of these officials to Tehran was opportune and, arguably, overdue, as the Soviet government sought to strengthen economic, political, and cultural ties between the two countries.<sup>162</sup> Regrettably, Soviet paranoia, partly fueled by the rising prospect of war, overshadowed their efforts – which were neither properly acknowledged nor rewarded. Instead, Soviet power would recalibrate itself in hegemonic forms while continuing to foster cultural and scientific cooperation with the Iranians during the 1940s.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, this volte-face in Soviet foreign policy does not diminish the instrumental role played by Tsukerman, Shostak, and Chernykh in the revival and reshaping of Iran–Soviet diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations, which served to advance the interests of Soviet power.

## Notes

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State Archive of the Economy, the Russian State Archives, the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, and the Petro Jacyk Central & East European Resource Centre at the University of Toronto.

2. Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York, 1985), 238.
3. Michel Foucault, *Power*, Volume 3 of *Essential Works of Foucault: 1954–1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: New Press, 2000), 120. Foucault proposes that power “traverses and produces things ... induces pleasure, forms knowledge, [and] produces discourse.” The unfortunate irony is that Soviet power ultimately repressed its own representatives.
4. Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh, 2015), 127.
5. Mikhail I. Volodarsky, *The Soviet Union and Its Southern Neighbours: Iran and Afghanistan, 1917–1933* (Ilford, UK, 1994), xi.
6. Sabine Dullin, *Men of Influence: Stalin's Diplomats in Europe, 1930–1939*, trans. Richard Veasey (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 17. See also Teddy J. Uldricks, “The Impact of the Great Purges on the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs,” *Slavic Review* 36/2 (1977), 198. Likewise, Uldricks concurs with the assertion of former Deputy Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Francis Paul Walters, that Litvinov “had at least as free a hand as was generally given to the Foreign Ministers of the democratic powers.”
7. Denis V. Volkov, “Rupture or Continuity? The Organizational Set-up of Russian and Soviet Oriental Studies before and after 1917,” *Iranian Studies* 48/5 (2015): 703. For Pastukhov's biographical details, see Yaroslav Vassilkov and Marina Sorokina, *Liudi i sud'by: bibliograficheskii slovar' vostokovedov – zhertv politicheskogo terrora v sovetskii period 1917–1991* (St Petersburg, 2003), 297.
8. Volkov, “Rupture or Continuity,” 703.
9. *Ibid.*, 704.
10. Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY, 2005), 7.
11. Teddy J. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology: The Origins of Soviet Foreign Relations, 1917–1930* (London, 1979), 84. In fact, the term “Old Bolshevik” is being loosely applied by Uldricks here. As Dullin points out, the Society of Old Bolsheviks, formed by Stalin in 1922, only included “continuously active militants” who had “joined the Bolshevik party before 1905.” For instance, “Litvinov took his status as an Old Bolshevik seriously.” See Dullin, *Men of Influence*, 51.
12. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 84. According to Uldricks, the Stalinist cadres “tended to view the Narkomindel staff with suspicion and hostility – all the more so since the Commissariat included veterans of the Imperial Foreign Service as well as former Mensheviks, Kadets and other supposedly ‘class hostile’ elements.”

13. Ibid., 99–101.
14. Ibid., 190. In the early 1920s, the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs utilized “a body of new employees who were familiar with social and political conditions throughout Europe and who had mastered numerous foreign languages – the men of the Russian pre-revolutionary, radical emigration ... forced to flee Imperial Russia because of their political beliefs.” A perfect example was Iakov Zakharovich Surits, the Soviet Union's *Polpred* in Germany from 1934 until 1937. Surits had previously been posted to Afghanistan, Turkestan, and Turkey. See also Boris Morozov, “Surits, Iakov Zakharovich,” in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, last modified October 21, 2010, accessed 21 Jan. 2016, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Surits\\_Iakov\\_Zakharovich](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Surits_Iakov_Zakharovich) and L. N. Nezhinskii, “NKID na etape obrazovaniia SSSR i v gody ‘polosy priznaniia’ (pervaia polovina 20-kh gg.),” in *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del Rossii: tom vtoroi, 1917–2002 gg.*, ed. A. V. Torkunov et al. (Moscow, 2002), 88. Fortunately, Surits had a long career and lived until 1952.
15. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 28–9. In spite of being a diplomat with a “noble lineage,” Chicherin eventually became a supporter of the Bolsheviks.
16. My point here is that these men had already been shaped by their formative experiences prior to the advent of Stalinist policies, which came into full force in the 1930s.
17. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 191. See also Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington, IN, 2013), 39. Bemporad concludes that, “the revolution left a deep impact on the socioeconomic makeup of the Jewish population of Minsk ... granting unprecedented upward mobility to many of its members ... If in 1897 only nineteen Jews were employed in the public sector, which traditionally excluded Jews, in 1926 local Soviet agencies employed nearly three thousand Jews ... They played a key role ... in the management of the republic's economy ... In the mid-1920s, more than 50 percent of the staff in the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy of Belorussia (VSNKh BSSR) was Jewish.”
18. Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, 2004), 237. For more information about these diplomats, see footnotes 14, 48, and 163. Benjamin Pinkus makes a similar observation, noting that, “the Jews in the Soviet Union took over the privileged position, previously held by the Germans in tsarist Russia.” See his *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge, 1988), 83.
19. Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv goroda Moskvyy (TsGA Moskvyy), f. 418, op. 324, d. 2140, l. 9. This information was obtained by Mr. Gennadii Ryzhenko, Researcher at the Museum of the History of Moscow State University's Faculty of Law.
20. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the town (renamed Novoselenginsk) was relocated to the left bank of the Selenga River.
21. TsGA Moskvyy, f. 418, op. 324, d. 2140, l. 21.
22. “50. Telegramma Poverennogo v Delakh SSSR v Kitae v Narodnyi Komissariat Inostrannykh Del SSSR,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 10, 1927 (Moscow,

1965), 101.

23. Nina Evgen'evna Lebedeva, "Aleksi Sergeevich Chernykh – Posol Sovetskogo Soiuza," (unpublished article, 24 Dec. 2015), 5.
24. M. M. Narinskii, A. Iu. Sidorov, and A. V. Shchipin, "Sovetskaia vneshniaia politika i sozдание sistemy kollektivnoi bezopasnosti v 30-e gg.," in *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del Rossii: tom vtoroi, 1917–2002 gg.*, ed. A. V. Torkunov et al. (Moscow, 2002), 228.
25. "239. Zapis' besedy Polnomochnogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Irane A. S. Chernykh s Nachal'nikom Glavnogo upravleniia trgovli Irana Aaliomom," *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 18, 1935 (Moscow, 1973), 359.
26. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 82. Uldricks notes that "A decree of 27 June 1927 clearly established the *Polpred* as the chief executive of the entire Soviet mission in a foreign capital. He could suspend the decisions, not only of fellow diplomats, but also of other Soviet functionaries (e.g. trade representatives, military attachés, police officials) within the mission."
27. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Simferopol underwent light industrialization and acquired a railway line with Kharkhiv.
28. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Krym, f. 105, op. 1, d. 20, ll. 78-78ob. Tsukerman's birth name (Vol'f) appears on his diploma from the M. A. Voloshenko Gymnasium. See also f. 105, op. 1, d. 20, l. 101. In June 1911, Tsukerman used the name "Vladimir" on his application to the Faculty of Mathematics at Imperial Moscow University. Regarding this documentation, I would like to thank Asie Selimovna Zaripova, Chief Archaeographer.
29. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, ll. 9–10. Tsukerman states that "Jews were accepted beyond the percentage norm" at this institution. Unfortunately, his university studies were soon derailed by military conscription in September 1913. Undeterred, he received permission to write the state exams in 1917. See also James C. McClelland, *Autocrats and Academics: Education, Culture, and Society in Tsarist Russia* (Chicago, 1979), 16. Quotas imposed on Jews throughout the Russian empire restricted their access to higher education up to 1917.
30. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *O Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane*, comp. M. N. Gurevich et al., ed. Kh. T. Tursunov and V. G. Chebotareva (Tashkent: "Uzbekistan," 1982), 658. Tsukerman was the *Narkomindel's* Deputy Plenipotentiary in the Turkestan Republic. In December 1921, he telegraphed Chicherin requesting that I. M. Byk (Bek), the *Polpred* RSFSR under the Government of the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, be replaced with a "more even-tempered employee." Evidently, Tsukerman was referring to Iosef Moiseevich Byk-Bek, whose biographical details are listed on the Sakharov Center's website – see n. 133. See also Michael Parrish's *Soviet Security and Intelligence Organizations, 1917–1990: A Biographical Dictionary and Review of Literature in English* (New York, 1992), 37.
31. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 99. Uchetno-partiinye dokumenty. Registratsionnyi blank na partiinyi bilet No 0079935 obraztsa 1936 g., l. 1. See also "194. Ekonomicheskoe soglashenie

- mezhdru RSFSR i Khorezmskoi Sovetskoi Narodnoi Respublikoi,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 5, 1922, (Moscow, 1961), 463–5. This economic treaty confirms that Tsukerman had become the *Narkomindel*'s Deputy Plenipotentiary in Central Asia.
32. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 99. Uchetno-partiinye dokumenty. Registratsionnyi blank na partiinyi bilet No 0079935 obraztsa 1936 g., ll. 1–2.
  33. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 4. Tsukerman was in Tehran for thirty-one months. Pastukhov had arrived in Tehran by the summer of 1933.
  34. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 102–3. Since the *Narkomindel* “did not develop adequate institutions for the training of its personnel in the 1920s,” it cooperated with First Moscow State University and the M. V. Frunze Military Academy.
  35. Vassilkov and Sorokina, *Liudi i sud'by*, 405. See also *Nauchnye rabotniki Moskvyy* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1930), 367 and 494. Tsukerman and Pastukhov are listed under the general heading of “Orientology. Asia. The East. The Soviet East,” but Karakhan and Eliava are not.
  36. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 113. Uldricks defines “Old Bolsheviks,” as those “who had joined the party before 1914,” versus “Bolsheviks,” who had become party members between 1914 and October 1917. Hence, Shostak could be termed a “junior Bolshevik,” or an “old leftist,” according to his former Bundist affiliation.
  37. Zvi Y. Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (Bloomington, IN, 2001), 64. Gitelman points out that “The Bolsheviks were aware of their weaknesses among the Jews. Before the revolution they had far fewer Jewish members than the Mensheviks and, of course, the [General Jewish Labor] Bund.”
  38. Eugene M. Avrutin, *Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY, 2010), 136–8. The Jewish Colonization Association assisted Russian Jews with emigration to Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and Mexico, as well as subsidizing information bureaus throughout the empire.
  39. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068, l. 48. Concurrently, Shostak was a member of the Food Supply Board – having migrated to the Livenskii district of the neighboring Orlovskaiia region.
  40. RGAE, f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068, l. 49.
  41. Alastair Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy, 1900–39* (New York, 2012), 112. Litvinov “had forged many friendships during his years in exile and he continued to use these during his time as Foreign Commissar ... diplomats could use their alliance with Litvinov as a means of ensuring their own security.”
  42. RGAE, f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068, l. 48ob. Shostak mentions that his candidacy for the Presidium of the Orlovskii Council of Unions was endorsed by “a fraction of the Bolsheviks” in September 1918. See also Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Orlovskoi oblasti, f. P-910, op. Л/С, d. 5, l. 14. Shostak's birth name was Moisei. In late November 1920, he received the following recommendation from the Bolshevik fraction: “Working all the

time in the trade union movement, comrade Shostak took an active part in Soviet and party work.” Here, I am grateful for the assistance of Director A. Iu. Valer'evna and S. N. Vorob'eva, Head of the Archive Fund OPOD.

43. RGAE, f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068, ll. 26ob. and 48-48ob. Between January 1921 and November 1922, Shostak was transferred from Tashkent to Syr-Darya province and back again.
44. Oliver Bast, “The Council for International Propaganda and the Establishment of the Iranian Communist Party,” in *Iran and the First World War: Battleground of the Great Powers*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London, 2006), 165–7. Stationed in Turkestan in 1919–20, Eliava had been the Chairman of the Turkestan Commission (Turkkomissiiia). See also Shoshana Keller, “The Central Asian Bureau, an Essential Tool in Governing Soviet Turkestan,” *Central Asian Survey* 22/ 2–3 (2003): 281–4.
45. David R. Shearer, *Industry, State and Society in Stalin's Russia, 1926–1934* (Ithaca, 1996), 78–9, 82–3, 96, and 242. These pages contain biographical information on Rozengol'ts.
46. Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy*, 8. Kocho-Williams refers to “symbolic capital ... conferred from the status of the office held by a diplomat.”
47. Some applicants to the Soviet foreign service might have been inspired by official propaganda of the 1920s, such as Dziga Vertov's film, *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926), which celebrated the USSR's multi-ethnic dimension, vast economic resources, industrialization, and expanding foreign relations. However, Shostak, Chernykh, and Tsukerman had already embarked on their careers prior to its release.
48. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 11. Thanks to a recommendation from the new *Polpred* in Berlin, Adol'f Abramovich Ioffe, Tsukerman was able to launch his career in Moscow with the *Narkomindel* at the beginning of 1918. Being a native of Simferopol himself, Ioffe knew Tsukerman's family well. See also Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System*, 234 and 247. The Soviet governmental practice of *vydvizhenie* (promotion campaigns) provided workers with opportunities to obtain offices and higher positions during this period.
49. “238. Zapis' besedy Polnomochnogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Irane s Predsedatelem Soveta Ministrov Irana Forugi,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 18, 1935 (Moscow, 1973), 351. The meeting was held on 28 May 1935.
50. Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews*, 16–19. Bemporad paints the following picture of Shostak's birthplace: “The demographic nature of Minsk contributed to its perception as a ‘Jewish city’ ... With their merchandize, their Sabbath, their streets, and their institutions, Jews – and not Russians, Poles, or Tatars – seemed to dominate the city landscape ... On the eve of World War I, 51.9 percent of 102,000 inhabitants of Minsk were Jewish.”
51. Touraj Atabaki, “Disgruntled Guests: Iranian Subaltern on the Margins of the Tsarist Empire,” *International Review of Social History* 48/3 (2003): 413–17.

52. Hakan Kırımlı, *National Movements and National Identity among the Crimean Tatars (1905–1916)* (Leiden, 1996), 19–20. According to Kırımlı, “Bahçesaray was a microcosm of the authentic and traditional Crimean, Eastern, and Tatar city.”
53. Boris Chupikov and Magdalina Petrovskaiia, *Simferopol': istoriko-kraevedcheskii ocherk* (Simferopol: Izd-vo “Tavriia,” 1984), 56–8.
54. TsGA Moskv, f. 418, op. 324, d. 2140, l. 12. Chernykh was dismissed from the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics in February 1911 because he did not have the legal right of residence in university towns, e.g., Moscow. After petitioning, he was readmitted to Imperial Moscow University and – akin to Tsukerman – switched to the Faculty of Law.
55. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 8.
56. Gregory L. Freeze, “The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History,” *The American Historical Review* 91/1 (1986): 11–36.
57. William L. Blackwell, *The Beginnings of Russian Industrialization, 1800–1860* (Princeton, 1968), 104–5. Blackwell explains that “The economic position of different members of the *meshchanstvo* ... [ranged] from moderate wealth to dire poverty.” Chernykh's father was a *meshchanin*, too. See also RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 3. While Tsukerman's parents shared this classification, they were probably middle class.
58. Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews*, 16. Almost three-quarters of Minsk's Jews were working as shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, and turners by the end of the 1800s – the majority lived in poverty.
59. RGAE, f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068, l. 48.
60. Ibid. This brother, with whom Shostak had been living as a teenager, was exiled to Siberia. The rest of his older siblings had emigrated to the USA and two younger sisters remained in Minsk. See also Gitelman, *Century of Ambivalence*, 52. At the end of the nineteenth century, many Jews were transitioning from the artisanal sector to industrial labor or emigrating overseas.
61. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 8.
62. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 3. Tsukerman's self-definition was *sluzhashchii*, as well. See also RGAE, f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068, l. 46. Shostak's specialization was “cooperative and professional work.” From May 1927, he was affiliated with a trade union for Sovtorg's employees. For more information on Sovtorg, see Shearer, *Industry, State, and Society*, 60.
63. By all accounts, Shostak was the Soviet equivalent of a self-made man. Therefore, “modernized” is an apt term.
64. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1386, l. 35.
65. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1386, l. 40.
66. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1386, l. 38. This figure was probably an underestimation of the capacity of Iran's textile industry.
67. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1386, l. 39. Men were said to receive 2–3 rials for a day's

work, whereas women were reportedly paid 1–1½ rials for “dawn-to-dusk” or night shifts, and children very likely received even less.

68. RGAE, f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068, l. 48ob. As a Bund member from 1911 to 1918, Shostak had participated in the organization of strikes.
69. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3496, l. 22. This document was co-authored by a referent, Shereshevskii.
70. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. P5446, op. 20a, d. 348, l. 3. Loganovskii served in this position in 1934–7.
71. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3408, l. 65.
72. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 90. Uldricks situates Litvinov's policy of collective security within the context of “external developments – namely, the cooling of German ardor for the alliance, the rise of Hitler and the increasing political possibility of Soviet ties with the Western states.” See also Dullin, *Men of Influence*, 118. Dullin contends that economic negotiations concluded with Germany in April 1935 “created difficulties for the policy of collective security then being pursued by Soviet diplomats,” whereas Litvinov “insisted that good trade links had to be subordinated to political relations between the USSR and its partners.”
73. “428. Pis'mo Polnomochnogo Predstavitelia i Torgovogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Persii v Narodnyi Komissariat Inostrannykh Del SSSR i Narodnyi Komissariat Vneshnei Torgovli SSSR,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki*, vol. 17, 1934 (Moscow, 1971), 744.
74. *Ibid.*, 745.
75. “265. Telegramma Polnomochnogo Predstavitelia SSSR i i.o. Torgovogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Persii Zamestiteliu Narodnogo Komissara Inostrannykh Del SSSR,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 16, 1933 (Moscow, 1970), 476 and 820–1 n. 65. Local merchants in northern Iran boycotted Soviet goods from December 1932 until July 1933. See also Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy*, 112. Foreign relations gained additional significance with the Soviet government's focus on collective security from the early 1930s onwards.
76. Iran's trade with Eastern Europe at this time has been noted by Seyed Ali Moujani, Senior Expert of the Ministerial Office of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
77. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3316, ll. 27–9.
78. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3500, l. 12. The Head of the Eastern Sector of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade, Pavel Ivanovich Kushner, defined “police-bureaucratic state” in this report to the All-Union Chamber of Commerce on 14 September 1935, as “a state with a predominance of landlordism, with a gentry as the ruling class.”
79. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3502, l. 7.
80. “162. Soobshchenie Polnomochnogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Persii o besede Zamestitelia Narodnogo Komissara Vneshnei Torgovli SSSR Sh. E. Eliavy s Ministrom Finansov Persii Daverom,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 17, 1934 (Moscow, 1971), 325.

81. “297. Zapis' besedy Torgovogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Persii M. L. Shostaka s Ministrom Finansov Persii Daverom,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 17, 1934 (Moscow, 1971), 536.
82. RGAE, f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068, l. 26ob. Likewise, Shostak had been the editor of *Izvestiia* in the Orlovskaiia region for three months in 1920.
83. There were numerous foreign technical consultants, particularly from Germany, employed in Iran's factories during the 1930s. Shostak also resembled Iranian entrepreneurs of this period, such as Mohammad `Ali Gilanpur, Nosratollah Ghaffari, Roman Arzmanian, and Jabra'il Sahakian. For photos of these individuals, see Mary Yoshinari, “Assessing the Role of Iranian Entrepreneurs in the Interwar Period via *Utaq-i Tijarat*,” *Iran Nameh* 30/1 (2015): LXVIII–LXIX.
84. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 128. Uldricks concludes that, “the employees of the Commissariat were, indeed, a rather cosmopolitan group.” In contrast to those exiled prior to 1917, Shostak's career-driven travels would have undoubtedly broadened his conception of the world. The same could be said of Chernykh and Tsukerman.
85. Viktor Kel'ner, “The Jewish Question and Russian Social Life During World War I,” *Russian Studies in History* 43/1 (2004), 19. Among these intellectuals was Maxim Gorky.
86. Samuel D. Kassow, “Communal and Social Change in the Polish Shtetl: 1900–1939,” in *Jewish Settlement and Community in the Modern Western World*, ed. Ronald Dotterer, Deborah Dash Moore, and Steven M. Cohen (Selinsgrove, PA, 1991), 72. In 1897, Minsk was a Jewish market town and a transfer point for the sale of Warsaw's manufactured goods.
87. RGAE, f. 4039, op. 3, d. 4068, ll. 31-2, 48ob, and 73. After working for almost two years as the Head of the *Narkomvneshtorg*'s Organizational Department, Shostak became the Assistant Director-Manager of Gostorg's Central Grain Bureau in August 1924 and Director-Manager of Maslogostorg's Central Oil Export Bureau (based in Leningrad) in August 1926. As of 10 September 1928, he was working in London for Gostorg's All-Russian Co-operative Society (ARCOS). Gostorg was engaged in the sale of imports to private and public companies.
88. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1385, ll. 32–35. The Iraqi firm's letter was dated 9 March 1936.
89. “299. Pis'mo Vremennogo Poverennogo v Delakh SSSR v Persii Zamestiteliu Narodnogo Komissara Inostrannykh Del SSSR N. N. Krestinskomu,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 17, 1934 (Moscow, 1971), 549.
90. Stephen Kotkin, “Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjunction,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2/1 (2001), 154.
91. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3411, ll. 2-2ob. S. Maizel visited Isfahan in October 1934, accompanied by engineers Ginesin and Sud'bin.
92. Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Iran, 1941–1971*. Vol. 1. (Syracuse, 2008), 396. Mas'udi made multiple visits to the Soviet Union from

1930 onwards, being impressed by the USSR's quick pace of development, and the implementation of an economic system whereby the state endeavored to employ all of its citizens.

93. "Sharq," *Iran*, No. 2956, 24 May 1929, n. p.
94. "Exportstroi," *Otaq-e Tejarat*, No. 171, Azar 1316/December 1937, 34. Similar advertisements appeared in August 1935.
95. "Do manzareh az karkhaneh-ye risbaf-e Esfahan," *Ettela`at*, No. 2628, 12 Aban 1314/ 4 November 1935, 1. *Ettela`at* featured sophisticated photos of AEG (Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft AG) factory machinery in Iran. Advertisements for Škoda equipment, Bata shoes, and Tungstram light bulbs were quite dynamic, as well.
96. For example, see Catherine Nygren and Craig Harkema, "Soviet Railways: USSR in Construction," University of Saskatchewan, accessed 10 Jan. 2016, <http://library2.usask.ca/USSRConst/gallery/railways>.
97. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1390, l. 96.
98. David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, 70.
99. "428. Pis'mo Polnomochnogo Predstavitelia i Torgovogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Persii v Narodnyi Komissariat Inostrannykh Del SSSR i Narodnyi Komissariat Vneshnei Torgovli SSSR," *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki, SSSR*, vol. 17, 1934 (Moscow, 1971), 747 and 832 n. 314. The *Torgpredstvo's* planned renovations were to include the construction of a special exhibition hall for Soviet machinery and technical equipment. Negotiations for its establishment had not been concluded in 1934, though.
00. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3408, l. 27.
01. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3408, l. 26.
02. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 844, l. 71.
03. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 844, l. 9. The presentations and lectures were to be held in the *Torgpredstvo's* club.
04. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3410, l. 26. Belgorodskii was employed by the bank in 1931. In 1924, he graduated from the Leningrad Eastern Institute, where he later became a docent. Additionally, he was a member of the N. Ia. Marr Institute of Language and Thought. For his biography, see Vassilkov and Sorokina, *Liudi i sud'by*, 62.
05. "297. Zapis' besedy Torgovogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Persii," *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, 536. Belgorodskii was present at Chernykh's initial meeting with Forughii, as well. See also "238. Zapis' besedy Polnomochnogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Irane," *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, 351.
06. David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, 129. Shostak's pose was not unlike that of a Soviet worker reading *Pravda* in a poster from 1936, which presented "values propagated in the mid-1930s 'culturedness' (*kul'turnost'*) campaign."
07. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1387, ll. 4–5. Following Shostak's recall to Moscow in October 1936, Belgorodskii assumed his alternative title, "Scientific Consultant," and he became

more actively involved in trade negotiations with the Iranians.

08. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 844, l. 118. The Dragoman-Consultant received 4,265 rials per month, whereas the monthly salaries of the Assistant and Head Trade Representatives were the same, i.e., 4,690 rials. See also RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 849, l. 10. In Persbiuro's case, the hierarchy of power relations was inverted: its translator, accountant, and chauffeur all received a pay raise – unlike its director, whose monthly salary was docked.
09. The treaty was signed on 27 August 1935.
10. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1386, l. 48.
11. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1386, l. 50. The XTZ model used 22 kg. of kerosene at a maximum ploughing depth of 14 cm., versus 16 kg. at 16 cm. for McCormick's. Ads for McCormick-Deering tractors appeared in *Izvestiia* – see No. 300 (5231), 11 Dec. 1933, 4.
12. Alexander Baykov, *Soviet Foreign Trade* (Princeton 1946), 130–3, see Table VII. Overall, interwar trade with Iran was consistently better than with Turkey or Afghanistan. See also Robert Wesley Davenport, *Soviet Economic Relations with Iran, 1917–1930* (New York, 1953), 214–25. Davenport draws attention to the importance of Iran's transit trade via the USSR for both countries from 1925 onwards.
13. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1393, l. 12.
14. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1394, l. 4.
15. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1394, l. 13.
16. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 3500, l. 13.
17. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 161. Uldricks asserts that “Neither sentiment nor Marxist scruple was allowed to overshadow *raison d'état*. The NKID established good relations with Kemal Pasha's Turkey and Mussolini's Italy, despite the savage repression meted out to communists in those countries.”
18. Samuel J. Hirst, “Anti-Westernism on the European Periphery: The Meaning of Soviet–Turkish Convergence in the 1930s,” *Slavic Review* 72/1 (2013), 38. Hirst discusses the alignment of the Soviet Union and Turkey with “the major revisionist powers of interwar Europe, Germany and Italy.”
19. See the author's aforementioned publication, “Assessing the Role of Iranian Entrepreneurs,” XLVIII–LXIX.
20. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 2190, l. 71.
21. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1390, l. 96.
22. Kotkin, “Modern Times,” 157.
23. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1390, l. 96.
24. John B. Quigley, *Soviet Foreign Trade Monopoly: Institutions and Laws* (Columbus, OH, 1974), 179.

25. Ibid., 178–9. In Quigley's estimation, the Soviet monopoly system encouraged “departmental interests” instead of providing industrial enterprise with enough incentives to participate in export production.
26. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1386, l. 55.
27. Quigley, *Soviet Foreign Trade Monopoly*, 180.
28. Ibid.
29. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1840, l. 67.
30. GARF, f. 5446, op. 22a, d. 781, l. 2. See also Dullin, *Men of Influence*, 107. Dullin emphasizes that “Litvinov considered trade links crucially important from a political perspective as a way of reinforcing a sphere of influence.”
31. Narinskii, Sidorov, and Shchipin, “Sovetskaia vneshnaia politika,” 178.
32. Ibid.
33. Dmitrii Belanovskii, “Martirolog,” *Kaliaevskaya 5*, accessed 19 Jan. 2016, <http://www.kaliayevskaya-5.ru/история-дома/мартиролог>. Shostak and Tsukerman were among a number of other inhabitants residing in the same apartment building who were arrested and executed from 1937 onwards. See also “Martirolog zhertv politicheskikh repressii, rasstrel'iannykh i zakhoronennykh v Moskve i Moskovskoi oblasti v 1918–1953 gg,” *Pamiat' o Bespravii*, Proekt Muzeia i obshchestvennogo tsentra “Mir, progress, prava cheloveka” imeni Andreia Sakharova, accessed 9 Jan. 2016, <http://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/martirolog/>. Chernykh and Pastukhov were both executed in 1940. Belgorodskii was “repressed,” according to his biographical details – see n. 104.
34. “Qarardad'ha-ye tejarat va eqamat va bahr-e peyma'i beyn-e Iran va Shuravi,” *Otaq-e Tejarat*, No. 117, Shahrivar 1314/August 1935, 11.
35. “Qarardad-e bazargani va bahr-e peyma'i beyn-e dowlat-e shahanshahi-ye Iran va Ettihad-e Jamaher-e Shuravi-ye Susyalesti,” *Otaq-e Bazargani*, No. 224, Ordibehesht 1319/April 1940, 9 and 11.
36. Narinskii, Sidorov, and Shchipin, “Sovetskaia vneshnaia politika,” 228–9. Notwithstanding the stalled trade treaty negotiations, diplomatic relations between the two countries continued. From January 1939 onwards, Isaak Abramovich Kartashev was the Soviet Union's Chargé d'Affaires ad interim in Tehran.
37. RGAE, f. 413, op. 13, d. 1386, l. 55. Titov advised, “Considering a series of upcoming purchases of rolling stock for the Trans-Iranian Railway, it is requested that the NKVT [*Narkomindel*] pose the question to government organizations of the possibility of exporting rolling stock produced by our industry to Iran.”
38. David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, 54. David-Fox advises that we “avoid fusing various trajectories into a single European modernity.”
39. The topic of migration is covered extensively in *Russia in Motion: Cultures of Human Mobility since 1850*, ed. John Randolph and Eugene M. Avrutin (Urbana Ill, 2012).

40. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 3. Besides Iran and Central Asia, Tsukerman had traveled on official business to Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, and Greece.
41. Kocho-Williams, *Russian and Soviet Diplomacy*, 116.
42. Ibid. Kocho-Williams erroneously argues that the *Narkomindel's* diplomats only wore “a mask of diplomatic respectability.”
43. “228. Telegramma Polnomochnogo Predstavitelia SSSR v Irane A. S. Chernykh v Narodnyi Komissariat Inostrannykh Del SSSR,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 19, 1936 (Moscow, 1974), 372. The event, attended by Prime Minister Mahmud Jam, was featured in *Izvestiia* on 23 July 1936 – see No. 170 (6027), 4.
44. Georgii Sergeevich Agabekov, *Chk za rabotoi* (Berlin, 1983), 254. Agabekov's negative appraisal of Tsukerman's “political value” could very well have been reflective of professional jealousy. By the time *Chk za rabotoi* was originally published in 1931, its author had defected to the West. See also RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 3. Tsukerman joined the Communist Party in June 1917 – earlier than either Chernykh or Shostak.
45. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 99. Uldricks bases his assertions on the following statistics: “Many of the Narkomindel staff who had previously belonged to non-Bolshevik political movements apparently joined the Communist party after the October revolution. In 1927 the Commissariat reported that 376 of its 483 “responsible workers” (about 78 percent) were party members. The NKID appears to have been the most completely ‘Bolshevized’ department of government ... by 1929 ... 51 percent of the ‘specialists’ and 76 percent of the senior and medium rank officials held party cards.”
46. Gitelman, *Century of Ambivalence*, 61–2. The General Jewish Labor Bund, “with a membership of nearly 34,000 in 1917, was more intensely involved in Russian politics ... Most Bundists shared the Menshevik view of the revolution ... [however] in 1918 when a series of strikes and political uprisings in Germany seemed to signal the spread of the revolution into areas where capitalism was highly developed and where Marxists had expected socialist revolutions to occur first ... ‘Left’ factions began to appear in many Bundist organizations, advocating cooperation with the Bolshevik-dominated government.”
47. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 8. Tsukerman writes that his father's paralysis was hastened by the shock of the 1905 pogrom in Simferopol.
48. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology*, 133.
49. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, ll. 5 and 14; f. 17, op. 3, d. 825, l. 11.
50. Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford, 2011), 88–110. One such example is Tolz's section on the orientological scholarship of Vasilii Vladimirovich Bartol'd, Nikolai Iakolevich Marr, and Sergei Fedorovich Ol'denburg.
51. Inessa Axelrod-Rubin, “The Jewish Contribution to the Development of Oriental Studies in the USSR,” in *Jews in Soviet Culture*, ed. Jack Miller (New Brunswick, NJ, 1984),

267–8. Here, Axelrod-Rubin refers to Moisei Markovich Aksel'rod, who had a degree from the Arabic Department of the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies and later worked as a Soviet intelligence officer.

- .52. Jonathan Haslam, “‘Humint’ by Default and the Problem of Trust: Soviet Intelligence, 1917 to 1941,” in *Secret Intelligence in the European States System, 1918–1989*, ed. Jonathan Haslam and Karina Urbach (Stanford, 2014), 18.
- .53. *Vsia Moskva: adresnaia i spravochnaia kniga na 1925 god* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo M. K. Kh., 1925), 215.
- .54. *Vsia Moskva: adresnaia i spravochnaia kniga na 1930 god* (Moscow, 1930), 38 and RGASPI, f. 17, op. 99. Uchetno-partiinye dokumenty. Registratsionnyi blank na partiinyi bilet No 0079935 obraztsa 1936 g., l. 1. Until mid-1933, Pastukhov was Head of the First Eastern Department – formerly, the Political Department of the Near East during the 1920s. Tsukerman was the Head of the Third Eastern Department until February 1931 – which up to 1929 had been called the Political Department of the Middle East, covering Khiva, Bukhara, Afghanistan, Western China, Turkestan, and India.
- .55. “Khronika: deiatel'nost' Nauchnoi Assotsiatsii Vostokovedeniia pri TsIK SSSR,” *Novyi Vostok* 23–4 (1928), 432. Along with Sergei Fedorovich Ol'denburg and the Chairman, Fedor Fedorovich Raskol'nikov, Tsukerman was among those re-elected to the Presidium of VNAV's Middle East Section in 1928.
- .56. *Vsia Moskva: adresnaia i spravochnaia kniga na 1936 god* (Moscow, 1936), 32. Tsukerman remained Head of the First Eastern Department until his arrest in 1937. See also *Vsia Moskva: adresnaia i spravochnaia kniga na 1931 god* (Moscow, 1931), 36 and N. Iu. Vasil'eva, “Deiatel'nost' NKID na Aziatskom i Amerikanskom napravleniakh vo vtoroi polovine 20-kh – nachale 30-kh gg.,” in *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del Rossii: tom vtoroi, 1917–2002 gg.*, ed. A. V. Torkunov et al. (Moscow, 2002), 144–5 and 172 n. 31. With Tsukerman's departure for Iran in March 1931, the Third Eastern Department was abolished in accordance with Litvinov's earlier proposal from June 1929.
- .57. Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, North Africa, Egypt, Abyssinia, Arabia, Syria, and Mesopotamia were all under the auspices of the First Eastern Department.
- .58. “485. Telegramma Vremennogo Poverennogo v Delakh SSSR v Persii v Narodnyi Komissariat Inostrannykh Del SSSR,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 15, 1932 (Moscow, 1969), 687–8. Tsukerman informed Forughhi of the dispute's coverage in *Izvestiia*, which had appeared on a daily basis from 6 December 1932. For a more detailed discussion of this conflict, see Mohammad Malek, “Oil in Iran between the Two World Wars,” in *Anglo-Iranian Relations since 1800*, ed. Vanessa Martin (London, 2005), 131–2.
- .59. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 100, d. 149339, l. 5. Apart from Russian, Tsukerman had a minimal knowledge of French.
- .60. Coincidentally, Tsukerman, Chernykh, and Shostak were nearly the same age, the first being born in 1891 and the last two in 1892.

61. *Vsia Moskva na 1936 god*, 30–3. The *Narkomvneshtorg* spans two and half pages in this directory, followed by the *Narkomindel*, which occupies two columns.
62. “148. Telegramma Zamestitelia Narodnogo Komissara Inostrannykh Del SSSR Vremennomy Poverennomy v Delakh SSSR v Persii V. M Tsukermanu,” *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki SSSR*, vol. 16, 1933 (Moscow, 1970), 292. Tsukerman was tasked with ascertaining whether the Iranian government desired to participate in Vostokino's film project, commemorating the millennial jubilee of Ferdowsi. See also GARF, f. P5283, op. 4, d. 242, l. 2. Along with Tsukerman, the Iranian scholar and writer, Sa'id Nafisi, representing the Iranian Academy of Sciences, was present at a luncheon that took place at Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo Kul'turnoi Sviazi s zagranitsej (VOKS) on 25 September 1936.
63. Narinskii, Sidorov, and Shchipin, “Sovetskaia vneshniaia politika,” 178. Especially from the mid-1930s onwards, “Soviet diplomats were paying greater attention to the development of international scientific and cultural relations.” Early in 1936, Ivan Mikhailovich Maiskii, the Soviet Union's Ambassador in Great Britain, recommended that “the work of VOKS [Vsesoiuznoe Obshchestvo Kul'turnoi Sviazi s zagranitsej] and Soviet foreign policy propaganda be realigned and improved in toto.” See also James Pickett, “Soviet Civilization through a Persian Lens: Iranian Intellectuals, Cultural Diplomacy and Socialist Modernity 1941–55,” *Iranian Studies* 48/5 (2015): 806–10.

## CHAPTER 12

# CONVENIENT COMRADES: RE-ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SOVIET UNION AND THE TUDEH PARTY DURING THE BRITISH–SOVIET OCCUPATION OF IRAN, 1941–5

*Rowena Abdul Razak*

In 1918 the Soviet writer, Troianovskii, prophesied that if Iran fell to communism, the rest of the region would follow.<sup>1</sup> This never occurred, but the story of the Left in Iran continues to be a fascinating topic of study precisely because, despite a colorful career, this movement never achieved widespread success in the country. This is largely due to a number of key factors, ranging from a lack of nationwide popularity to governmental suppression to erratic support from the Soviet Union. Central to this story, particularly from the start of World War II onwards, is the Hezb-e Tudeh-ye Iran (the Party of the Masses). The Tudeh Party is remembered today as a pro-Soviet entity, prepared to do Moscow's bidding at significant cost, even at the expense of Iranian sovereignty and political independence. Although this was true from 1946 onwards with the party's acquiescence during the Azerbaijan crisis, a study of the Tudeh's early history provides some valuable insight into the party's prior relationship with the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> This chapter pays particular attention to the years of the British–Soviet occupation of Iran, from the party's foundation in 1941 to the eve of the Iranian Azerbaijan crisis.

By placing the Tudeh within the wider context of the occupation and the Soviet Union's relationship with Britain, we see a richer and more nuanced picture emerge. It will be shown that, at the start of the occupation, a perception of Soviet–Tudeh closeness barely existed. At this point, the Tudeh as a new political entity seemed to serve a wider joint purpose for both the Soviets and the British. However, as relations between the two occupying forces deteriorated, the perception of a close relationship between the Tudeh and the Soviet Union began to emerge. Indeed, it would appear that the Tudeh's links with the Soviets depended on other factors: namely, the party's domestic political clout and the Soviet Union's relationship with Britain.

This chapter is essentially a study of early Soviet–Tudeh relations, a story that has not been told in much depth. British documents were used extensively in this research, as they paint an invaluable picture of that relationship and place the early story of the Tudeh within an international context. It is first and foremost a story of how British officials in Iran and London perceived the Tudeh, and why this impacted the party's international reputation as an Iranian political entity in the service of Moscow. This chapter is divided into two sections: the first discusses the early years of the occupation, and the second examines the latter half of it. The year 1943 serves as a key turning point between the two periods in British–Soviet relations and the resumption of their rivalry in Iran following the Red Army's victory at the Battle of Stalingrad. At this point, the perception of the Tudeh in the eyes of the British changed, and the party came to be seen as a tool of the Soviets, and thus a convenient scapegoat to undermine Moscow's influence in Iran.

### **Soviet–Tudeh Relations in the Early Years of the Occupation, 1941–3**

In order to examine the nature of the early relations and interactions between the Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party, it is first necessary to understand the early dynamics behind the British–Soviet occupation. There has already been sufficient study on the reasons behind the occupation itself.<sup>3</sup> What is of interest is how British–Soviet relations at the start of their joint occupation of Iran impacted the early nature of the Tudeh and its interaction with the Soviets in the country.

Officially, the pretext for the Allied invasion was Reza Shah Pahlavi's refusal to dismiss German personnel from the country. Soon after the arrival of British and Soviet troops on Iranian soil, he abdicated in favour of his 21-year-old son, Mohammad Reza.<sup>4</sup> In reality, Britain and the Soviet Union were motivated mostly by economic factors, primarily the protection and uninterrupted supply of the oil wells and refineries in Abadan.<sup>5</sup> Strategically, Iran was also an important land route for the transportation of supplies from the Persian Gulf to the Soviet Union. Under the premiership of Mohammad `Ali Foroughi,<sup>6</sup> the central government in Tehran did not resist the Allied troops and essentially allowed the two powers to not only occupy the country but also to intervene in domestic affairs as and when deemed necessary.<sup>7</sup>

Before the occupation, the British and Russians were keen rivals in Iran. Throughout the nineteenth century, the two powers had been engaged in what became known as the “Great Game” – a struggle for power and influence, with conflicting claims and interests over the region. In 1907, they signed an agreement dividing the country into spheres of interest: a British one in the southeast and a Russian one in the north. During World War I, Iran became “one of the major battlefields” between the Russians, British and Ottomans, and parts of the country were jointly occupied by British and Russian troops. Following the end of that occupation, the Bolsheviks were engaged in Gilan, aiding the Jangali movement to establish a Socialist Republic.<sup>8</sup> Less than thirty years later, they were again engaged in a military occupation of Iran. To begin with, the two powers were forced to put aside earlier rivalries and concentrate on fulfilling wartime objectives, namely the restoration of order and the

weeding out of Nazi influence in the country.

The Allied occupiers spent substantial energy and resources trying to defeat the Nazi presence and influence in the country. This took the form of shutting down Axis embassies and arresting Axis personnel.<sup>9</sup> A major focus was on suspected pro-Nazi Iranian sympathisers. A number of influential members of the traditional elite were arrested, most notably, the former Prime Minister, Ahmad Matin-Daftari, and the prominent *mojtahed* Ayatollah Abolqasem Kashani.<sup>10</sup> The Qashqa'i tribe was approached by British officials in the south for information regarding the German presence in exchange for support and assistance.<sup>11</sup> Not only did these initiatives and activities help undermine German activities within the tribe, but they also built Britain's tribal connections that would later be utilized towards challenging the Soviet and Tudeh influence among the oil workers in 1946 during the strikes in Khuzestan.

Following Adolf Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and their entry into the war on the side of the Allies, the Soviets reduced their ambitions of expanding communism in Iran as well as in other parts of the world. Soviet officials would later inform the Marxist elements in the Tudeh that they would not support a communist party in the country.<sup>12</sup> In China, for instance, Moscow encouraged the communists to cooperate with the nationalist forces, the Kuomintang, against the invading Japanese army.<sup>13</sup> The Soviets in Iran were also concerned about how their actions would be perceived by their partner in occupation: there was an awareness of not wanting to even appear to be spreading influence. Even though the northern part of the country was within the Soviet sphere of influence, the Soviet Consul General in Tabriz withdrew assistance to the members of the Democratic Club after his British counterpart raised some objections.<sup>14</sup> During the early years of the occupation, the Soviets and the British cooperated closely and appeared to have put aside their imperial inclinations in order to fulfil the objectives of the occupation.

In the early years of the war, the British supported and encouraged the establishment of anti-Fascist fronts in Iran. At the beginning of the occupation, this included the recruitment of communist activists and parties. Already in Europe, the communist parties were deeply involved in anti-Fascist activities with other groups – of particular note was the French Resistance – and in leading the struggle against the Nazi forces occupying Europe.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the British were also employing communist forces in the Far East and forming alliances with these to combat the invading Japanese forces. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP), for instance, cooperated with the British forces and launched several guerrilla campaigns against the occupying Japanese army.<sup>16</sup> This strategy of allying with left-wing parties against the Axis powers extended to Iran, and the Tudeh sought to fit in with the local struggle against the Nazi presence in the country.

Against this background and keeping this wide context in mind, we now turn to the Tudeh Party's emergence and formation.

On the surface, the story of the creation of the Tudeh Party is relatively straightforward. Of interest here, however, is what exactly was the role the Soviets played in its establishment. An important result of the occupation was the removal of the arbitrary and authoritarian Reza

Shah, who had suppressed his country's political opposition and who was particularly fearful of communist activity.<sup>17</sup> With the restoration of political freedom in 1941, Iran entered a new phase of its political development. Following Reza Shah's forced abdication, many political rights were restored and some measure of freedom of speech was allowed, with freer editorials and the opening of publishing houses. Under a general amnesty, many political prisoners were also released.<sup>18</sup> Although the abdication of Reza Shah allowed more open politics, the occupation caused great strain on the Iranian economy, resulting in acute food shortages, which invariably led to hoarding and widespread rioting.<sup>19</sup> In the south, chaos broke out among the tribes determined to restore their authority and power in the absence of Reza Shah's design to reduce their position.<sup>20</sup> Tribal independence in the south conflicted with the oil interests of the Great Powers, making it necessary to establish order through military means.<sup>21</sup>

For the Soviets, the occupation of Iran was designed to assist their general war effort and, at first, did not include the encouragement of openly Marxist or communist groups. As a further show of this commitment, the Comintern was dismantled in May 1943.<sup>22</sup> In the early years of the occupation, the Soviets primarily maintained an outwardly anti-Fascist stance, geared mainly to ensuring cooperation in their alliance with the British in Iran. The founding of the Tudeh probably occurred with the full knowledge of not just the Soviets but also of the British – throughout the years of the occupation, the nature and perception of the party changed.

The stars aligned: conditions and the environment were ripe for a party like the Tudeh to emerge.

Among the left-wing activist groups imprisoned during the reign of Reza Shah was a loose coalition of Marxists known as Panjah-o seh nafar (the Group of Fifty-Three). Their de-facto leader was Dr Taqi Arani,<sup>23</sup> who died in prison before he could see the Tudeh emerge. They had been accused of organizing strikes and translating Marx's *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto*. Mainly hailing from the intelligentsia of Tehran, they varied in terms of occupation.<sup>24</sup> At their trial, they admitted to discussing socialism but denied having any international connections.<sup>25</sup> Although some members were not initially inclined towards Marxism, they became converts during their imprisonment.<sup>26</sup> This implies that the Soviets were absent during the formation of the group in prison.

Together with other political prisoners, the surviving members of the Group of Fifty-Three were freed under a general amnesty in the autumn of 1941. The British were keen to show that the occupation was beneficial to Iran's political development, and looked upon the amnesty most favorably. Upon the group's release, they formed the Tudeh Party, with the seasoned political figure, Soleyman Mirza Eskandari, as leader. He was an interesting choice: an unlikely communist, he was a Qajar prince who had fought in the Constitutional Revolution. His appointment was a sign that the moment acknowledged Iran's most important democratic development at the start of the century. And thus, the Tudeh began to develop its early ideology and persona. Posthumously, Arani was proclaimed the spiritual leader of the Tudeh and was celebrated as such.<sup>27</sup> At the commemoration of his death some years later, a Soviet

representative was markedly present. But what was the Soviet role in the foundation of this new party?

The historiography on the Soviet Union's role in the founding of the Tudeh is varied. On one extreme, it has been suggested that the Tudeh was completely a Soviet creation. The main evidence for this is the presence of Rostam Aliev, a member of the Soviet Embassy, at the founding meeting of the Tudeh.<sup>28</sup> The writer, Colonel `Ali Ziba'i, mainly propagated this claiming that Aliev not only deterred the members from labeling their new entity communist in order to conceal its true purpose, but also named it. As a member of Mohammad Reza Shah's intelligence service, SAVAK, Ziba'i was keen to discredit the Tudeh by depicting it as a Soviet creation. However, both Iraj Iskandari and Nureddin Kianouri, the party's two General Secretaries and members of the party's Central Committee since 1945, supported the claim and attested that Aliev was present at the time.<sup>29</sup>

Sepehr Zabih, who has worked extensively on the Iranian Left, also mentions the presence of Aliev at the foundation of the Tudeh as the Comintern representative and as the liaison between the party and the Soviet Communist Party. He further states that such a link was no different from the one between the Persian Communist Party (PCP) and Moscow.<sup>30</sup> Although not directly linked to the Persian Communist Party, the Tudeh claimed in its party programme to be the party's successor.<sup>31</sup> The Deputy Soviet Foreign Secretary, N. N. Semenov, echoed this claim.<sup>32</sup>

Cosroe Chaqueri has vehemently rejected the claim that Aliev was present at the founding of the Tudeh, arguing that Aliev was born in 1930 and would have been eleven years old at the time of the Tudeh's establishment.<sup>33</sup> He does categorically state that “there is now little doubt that the creation of the Tudeh Party as a “democratic front”, with a group of Communist cadres as its nucleus, was a plan proposed by the Comintern, and effected by the Political Department of the Soviet Army occupying northern Iran<sup>34</sup>.

According to a Red Army Intelligence Report, the Brigade Commissar Colonel Il'ichev Seliukov met with Soleyman Mirza on 29 September 1941 in the latter's Tehran home. During their discussion, Soleyman Mirza is purported to have stated that the Red Army was an essential component of the improvement of conditions in Iran. This prompted the Soviet Army office to suggest that the time was ripe for the creation of a new party and that the Soviets were prepared to provide assistance with this effort. The organisation of the party would be left to him and his supporters while the Soviets would grant their assistance with the restoration of civil rights. According to this narrative, it was primarily Soleyman Mirza who organized the formation of the party, with Seliukov providing practical advice and guidance during the initial stage of the Tudeh's formation.<sup>35</sup> In line with this, the two worked together to coordinate its organization and activities. It seems that Josef Stalin and his key associates were aware of the creation of the Tudeh.<sup>36</sup> At another extreme, Ervand Abrahamian has taken a more Soviet-independent view of the Tudeh's foundation, leaving out their involvement in the party's formation. The notion that the Tudeh would have formed independently and organically can be dismissed as quite improbable seeing that the country was under occupation and therefore

under strong scrutiny by both occupying forces.

The real answer to the Soviet Union's involvement in the Tudeh's foundation probably lies somewhere in between. As both occupying forces were in tune with the political climate in Iran at the time, it is not surprising that each was naturally predisposed to take an interest in groups closest to its inclinations. Like their allies the British, the Soviets may indeed have taken an active interest in the Tudeh's formation: with the country going through readjustment and facing hardship from the occupation, the situation was suitable for such a party to not only emerge but also gain political ground.

Outside the Tudeh circle, members of the local intelligentsia were active in producing pamphlets, holding political debates and establishing discussion circles.<sup>37</sup> The Tudeh as an entity fitted in consistently with Iran's domestic political landscape of the time. In such an environment the party did not have to rely on Soviet support and direction alone. Committed to democratic values, the party attracted loosely left-wing Iranians who were not necessarily communist but who professed their commitment to reform and change. True to the trend in Iran at the time, the party upheld freedom of speech, press and assembly.<sup>38</sup> The Tudeh was still developing its support base and, by avoiding the "communist" or "Marxist" label, it was able to market itself broadly. On the one hand, this ties in well with the Soviet Union's persona at the time. But it also suggests the pragmatic and flexible nature of the party.

The British were aware of the formation of the Tudeh although there is no evidence to suggest that they had anything to do with its foundation. However, they did not object to it and did not perceive it to have any strong linkages with the Soviets. Homa Katouzian advocates a more balanced approach to the Allies' involvement in the founding of the Tudeh when he suggests that the party had their unspoken approval.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, the question of Soviet involvement at this point is only important insofar that it informs us of the possible direction the Tudeh could have taken. The perception at this time was that the Soviets were not keen to pursue any political expansion in Iran out of pragmatism having to do with their alliance with the British. As such, even if the Soviets actively encouraged the Tudeh's foundation, it pursued an outlook that was approved by both Moscow and London. The Tudeh was a quintessential example of political flourishing that was occurring in Iran under their watch. Furthermore, the party's formation indicated that the two former rivals were able to cooperate and were not keen on pursuing proxies.

As such, the presence of the Tudeh served a particular wartime purpose. As Moscow's interest and focus was anti-Fascist at this point, it comes as no surprise that the Tudeh followed a program that suited this view. Aligned with the Allies' policy of combatting the Nazi presence in Iran, the Tudeh's early persona was primarily anti-Fascist and its first program in February 1942 declared a commitment to the international fight against fascism.<sup>40</sup> In addition to this declaration, they published anti-fascist material and articles in their journal, initially entitled *Siyasat* (Politics), to be renamed *Mardom* (the People) at a later stage.<sup>41</sup> During this phase of Tudeh activity, some members worked together with the British. Bozorg Alavi, for instance, the Marxist writer and member of the central committee, was introduced to Ann Lambton, the head of Britain's Public Relations Bureau. He worked as her assistant in

Victory House, the Allies' anti-German propaganda center in Iran.<sup>42</sup>

The fulfilment of wartime objectives was and remained a priority for the allied forces, and at times “rapid decisions” had to be made regardless of Iranian interests.<sup>43</sup> As the Allies were interfering in domestic affairs, Britain in particular was sensitive to appearing undemocratic in Iran. The Tri-Partite Alliance, signed in January 1942 by Iran, now ruled by a new shah, Britain and the Soviet Union, was meant to bind the Allied powers to protecting Iranian sovereignty. The existence of the Tudeh therefore served also a specific purpose: it showed that Iran was experiencing political freedom despite the military occupation. So even if a subtle Soviet hand initially guided the party, Britain tolerated the Tudeh as it served a wider, more important wartime purpose. Similarly, an important wartime objective was the cultivation of political change in Iran, in light of a proliferation of factionalism and the continuation of the old order of politics within the Majles. British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, voiced a desire to promote “honest young men,” while the US State Department echoed similar sympathies. And where else would they find this new political animal than “from the progressive elements” within the country?<sup>44</sup> With its democratic platform and appeal, the Tudeh easily fitted within such designs and as such Soviet closeness to the Tudeh was perceived and presented as minimal.<sup>45</sup>

### **Soviet–Tudeh Relations in the Second Half of the Occupation, 1943–5**

Nineteen forty-three was a significant year both for the war and for how the Tudeh–Soviet relationship would be perceived. In February, the Soviet Union halted Nazi Germany's advance at the battle of Stalingrad, thus turning the tide in favor of the Allies. The significance of this was felt in Iran, altering the nature of the alliance and the respective positions of Britain and the Soviet Union. Moving away from their war-focused stance, both Britain and the Soviet Union began planning for the post-war period, in Iran and elsewhere. The Tudeh Party figured in this process in a most interesting way. The perception of Soviet closeness with the Tudeh began to be displayed more obviously and extensively, thus affecting how the party would be viewed from then on. As the British actively brought out the close ties between the Tudeh and the Soviets, the party invariably became a convenient target for anti-Soviet propaganda. In other words, to undermine the Soviets, one simply had to discredit the Tudeh. It worked the other way too. As the Tudeh grew in strength, the party was accused of being too aligned with Moscow, which meant that it worked against Iran's best interests.<sup>46</sup>

The changing nature of the Soviet Union's relations with its allies, Britain and the United States,<sup>47</sup> was a major factor in this change of perception. Ever since the start of the occupation, the Allies knew that the priority was the war; however, tensions between the Soviets and the British began to surface when the Soviets regained their confidence following their victory at the Battle of Stalingrad. Initially, the main problem that came to light was the distribution of food throughout the country, mainly because the northern, and therefore Soviet-occupied, zone produced most of Iran's food supplies.<sup>48</sup> British minister, and later ambassador to Tehran, Reader Bullard, expressed that the Soviets, and not the local authorities, were the main reason

why Tabriz did not supply wheat to the rest of Iran.<sup>49</sup> However, low-key disputes soon spilled over into the political sphere of the country, and Russia and Britain became engaged in a rivalry over influence and clout.

Following Stalingrad, the British were convinced that it was in Moscow's interest to maintain chaos in Iran after the war.<sup>50</sup> The Soviets looked towards openly and more actively expanding their influence in Iran. The Tudeh increasingly seemed to fit into this scheme. In the spring of 1943, the Soviet ambassador in Tehran told the Iranian minister of war that the “Soviet Union was the best administered country in the world,” implying that Iran should look to its northern neighbor for development and reform.<sup>51</sup> Among the poorer classes and in the north, the Soviets were known to “encourage communistic ideas,” raising British and American suspicions that their ally was keen to expand its political influence and gain friendly parties in Iran.<sup>52</sup> Increasingly confident, the Russians also increased the volume of their propaganda to gain support from ordinary Iranians by roping them into Bolshevik-style organizations and providing them with hammer-and-sickle badges.<sup>53</sup> At the same time they enhanced their visibility and influence among ethnic groups, most notably the Kurds and the Azeris, making the scenario in which the Soviets would help establish independent states within Iran even more plausible.<sup>54</sup> In the southwestern part of the country, the Soviets launched a scientific expedition, which was probably a cover to spy on British troop movements.<sup>55</sup> The increase in Soviet activities worried British officials in both Iran and Whitehall – at this point they were concerned that their Soviet comrades were gaining in popularity and prominence in Iran.<sup>56</sup>

Akin to a popularity contest, the Soviets' apparent campaign to “discount” Britain prompted the launching of a pro-British campaign to improve its image in the country and also break Moscow's spell.<sup>57</sup> For example, when the Soviets concluded an agreement with the Iranian government for the operation of various munitions factories in the country, punishing the workers severely for any delay in delivery, the British saw this as an excuse to highlight the Soviets negatively.<sup>58</sup> The Tudeh Party came to be seen more and more aligned with the Soviets, due to the party's closeness to the labor movement. This made it easier for the British to discredit and undermine the Soviets by distorting Tudeh politics.

By 1943, the Tudeh was emerging as a recognizable and viable political party. Bullard himself regarded it as a party that was coherent, determined in its policy, and especially active in the provinces.<sup>59</sup> This positive review of the party reflected Britain's recognition of its position of strength and future potential in the country. In the early months of that year, the Tudeh still pursued a program that was reformist rather than communist. In their policies for Tabriz and Qazvin, their demands were constitutional, seeking the amelioration of conditions of the poorer classes.<sup>60</sup> Since the party leadership sought a broad base of support, vagueness in their program was necessary so as not to alienate traditional pockets of society that would have been naturally wary of communist ideas and rhetoric.

Whereas in the early years of the occupation the party stood out for its anti-fascism, 1943 marked a change in that the Tudeh began to be perceived increasingly as a pro-Soviet entity.

When Soleyman Mirza died in 1944, some members of the Soviet embassy attended the funeral.<sup>61</sup> Within the domestic sphere of Iranian politics, Farajollah Bahrami, the Minister of the Interior, accused his political rival Ahmad Qavam al-Saltaneh,<sup>62</sup> of trying to please the Soviets by favoring the Tudeh Party.<sup>63</sup> Indeed when Qavam became prime minister, he included members of the party in his cabinet. Doing so further encouraged the way the British perceived the Tudeh as being more aligned with the Soviets.

Despite a moderate political program, Tudeh activism certainly became more overtly communist in approach and outlook, especially through their increased alignment with the labor movements in Iran. Their presence was becoming increasingly felt in Isfahan, a manufacturing hub, as well as in Abadan, the country's oil-producing center.<sup>64</sup> It was also no coincidence that with the exception of Isfahan and Ahwaz, most Tudeh activities were concentrated in the Soviet-occupied zones, as their participation in the 14th Majles elections showed. Already the Tudeh had organized low-key strikes among the laborers and oil workers so as to improve working conditions and increase wages. Although these were usually suppressed, collectively, industrial workers were already quite radicalized.<sup>65</sup> Where worker activism already existed, the Tudeh began taking on a more direct leadership role.

Once circumstances were favorable, the Soviets eventually would be inclined to actively encourage communist activity in the country during the occupation. British officials in Iran were aware of this possibility, as they believed that Iranian intellectuals harbored strong tendencies towards communism.<sup>66</sup> Perceptions varied throughout the joint occupation: at the start, reform and change were encouraged and thus the Tudeh was not objectionable; as relations with Moscow deteriorated, however, this perception took on a more negative hue. Bullard had already predicted the possibility of communist deputies being elected in the Soviet-controlled northern provinces.<sup>67</sup> In 1942, such appointments were not seen as threatening: Bullard considered the election of communist deputies as “scarcely more mischievous than the present gang.”<sup>68</sup> In 1943, however, on the eve of the fourteenth Majles elections, the British had become wary of the possibility, and it was obvious during these elections that the British began to see and depict the Tudeh as a tool of the Soviet Union.

The elections were important for two main reasons: they were to be held under military occupation and it was the first time the Tudeh would be participating. Together with Mustafa Fateh's Comrades' Party (Hezb-e Hamraham), the Tudeh stood under the banners of the “Anti-Fascist Society,” which superficially showed that the party still wanted to be seen as part of a wider coalition. Their policies superficially matched and were aimed at promoting political equality. However, the Tudeh were not naturally inclined to ally with Fateh.<sup>69</sup> Unlike the Tudeh, the Comrades' Party focused its activities mainly in the British occupied territories while the two had quite different party programs.<sup>70</sup> The Foreign Office realized that even with Soviet support, the Tudeh would not be “more or less desirable than the others ... and from the point of view of the Persian electorate they may well be less corruptible.”<sup>71</sup> The Tudeh was considered domestically to possess political legitimacy.

The actual freedom of the proceedings is questionable as the elections invariably were held

under British and Soviet auspices. Both the British and the Soviets had their preferred candidates in the elections. Although the British acknowledged that it was necessary for the Soviets to have some representation in the Majles, they did try to influence the situation away from Soviet favor. London regarded the entry of a Tudeh bloc into parliament with trepidation.<sup>72</sup> Bullard and his colleagues were concerned that, under Soviet influence, the party might advocate an unfriendly attitude vis-à-vis Britain and its interests.<sup>73</sup> For example, as the suppression of unfriendly newspapers was part of British policy in Iran, the Tudeh's support for free speech would encourage the publication of anti-British articles and other printed material. Bullard showed a willingness to delay elections and prolong the thirteenth Majles with `Ali Soheyli as prime minister as a way to avoid a "new Majles containing a considerable Tudeh element sworn to uphold the freedom of the press."<sup>74</sup> By calling it a Soviet proxy, the British were able to reduce Tudeh chances, thereby undermining whatever Soviet influence held sway in the north of the country.

Electoral inspectors and British officials in Iran followed closely Soviet interference in the elections and their support for the Tudeh. Initially, Bullard acknowledged the lack of any real evidence for such interference and he believed the Soviet authorities' disclaiming any interest in the Tudeh Party.<sup>75</sup> Initially, the Soviets were not prepared to use force to persuade the electorate; neither was the central government ready to rig the elections to please the Soviets, especially because there was so much hope for true democratic elections.<sup>76</sup> A few months later, however, Bullard declared that he had no doubt that the Soviet authorities supported the Tudeh in the elections.<sup>77</sup> Yet the Soviets did openly support the Tudeh on a number of occasions. In Tabriz, the Soviet consul, Kuznetsov, openly and aggressively encouraged to get his candidates elected. The Tudeh candidates were not particularly popular among the population, further suggesting that they would not be elected without Soviet help. The Soviet chargé d'affaires wanted to secure the candidature of the editor of the Tudeh Party newspaper.<sup>78</sup> The Soviets also showed dissatisfaction with the Minister of War, General Amir Ahmadi, who openly opposed Tudeh influence.<sup>79</sup>

According to the reports of the election inspector in Tabriz, Soviet-backed candidates were not widely supported by the main electorate and would only be able to gain a small minority vote.<sup>80</sup> The British Consul suggested that the Tudeh in the north would only get votes if the Soviet Consul there exerted pressure.<sup>81</sup> In Azerbaijan, the Tudeh possessed neither local influence nor popularity.<sup>82</sup> As such, Soviet support was needed in order for the successful election of their candidates.<sup>83</sup> The British consul in Tabriz claimed that Kuznetsov, his Soviet counterpart, was persistently imposing candidates who, from a British perspective, were unsuitable because of their subservience to the Soviets.<sup>84</sup> In addition to this, the British Legation began to suspect that Soheyli was becoming more conciliatory towards the Soviet Union by encouraging some Tudeh members to enter the Majles.<sup>85</sup> Soviet activity made the Tudeh look not only reliant on their support but also clearly aligned with them.

As the occupation wore on, the British became increasingly concerned about the interference in the elections on the part of their ally. In February 1944 Eden expressed surprise

at Soviet intervention, especially since Moscow had previously followed a policy of “non-intervention in internal affairs.”<sup>86</sup> A few months later, the British Consul in Isfahan, Charles Gault, suspected Soviet interference in the election process in Shahreza.<sup>87</sup> In Tabriz, the Soviets were trying to secure at least two-thirds of the nine deputies they supported. The Tabriz elections were particularly difficult and the central government, especially because the candidate list was made up of mainly pro-Soviet figures, such as Maschinchi, Ipechian, Musavi, Rafii, and Sadigi,<sup>88</sup> while the Tudeh party list included Pishevari and Nami who were pegged for their pro-Soviet attitude.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, according to the British Consul in Tabriz, Pishevari and Ipechian were considered to be Soviet “creatures.”<sup>90</sup> This reinforced the growing British conviction that the Tudeh and the Soviets were aligned.

Throughout the course of the elections, Britain made efforts to counter Soviet influence, and by doing so invariably jeopardized the chances of the Tudeh. Bullard regarded Soviet support of the Tudeh as “not in favor of strengthening either the crown or the army.”<sup>91</sup> Whitehall put pressure on the British Embassy in Tehran to assert more control in the south so as to counterbalance the Soviets.<sup>92</sup> Bullard found it reasonable for the central government to use moral influence against “dangerous candidates” but wanted to avoid direct interference, as the British would be blamed for it.<sup>93</sup> Local opposition to the Tudeh included the National Union Party (Hezb-e Ettihad-e Melli), with its adherence to American-style democracy. The most extreme of the anti-Tudeh factions was probably Sayyed Ziya Tabata'i's Fatherland Party (Hezb-e Vatan).<sup>94</sup> The latter found its main audience amongst the merchants, religious leaders and tribes in an effort to combat Tudeh for its communist leanings.<sup>95</sup> At times, independent candidates would run against Tudeh ones; for example, in Isfahan, Sayyed Hashem al-Din Dowlatabadi stood as the main opponent to Taqi Fadakar, the Tudeh candidate.<sup>96</sup>

In Bam, Bullard successfully secured for the candidacy of Mehin together with that of Behzadeh. Both were known to be pro-British and would not “deliberately do anything contrary to our interests.”<sup>97</sup> Directly engaging against the Tudeh, the British Embassy warned the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs that they would regard the election of the Tudeh candidate Amir-khizi with “great disfavor” due to an anti-British speech he made.<sup>98</sup> The British backed would-be politicians who were malleable to British influence and those who could act as a buffer against the Left. For example, in the Tabriz elections, the British regarded the Iranian diplomat, Abo'l Seqqat al-Eslami, as independent from the Soviets, and an appropriate representative of the mullahs, landowners and educated locals.<sup>99</sup> Even if the Tudeh could not be directly countered, the British at least had candidates favorable to them.

After the Soviet Consul tried to force the candidacy of two Tehran-based Tudeh members, the central government was called upon by the British to suspend the elections in the north.<sup>100</sup> The elections were briefly suspended, and when they resumed the Soviet Consul in Tabriz continued to do whatever necessary to ensure the election of his candidates.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, in Ardabil the prime minister suspended the elections when the Soviet authorities asked two local candidates to retire in favor of their choice, a local mullah.<sup>102</sup> Besides Soviet interference, the local population regarded Tudeh interference with trepidation. As a way to counterbalance the

perceived “godless influence... from the north,” referring specifically to the Tudeh, the mullahs in Qom demanded from the shah more political power, greater freedom for preachers and, importantly, for the election of five prominent *mojtahed* to the Majles.<sup>103</sup> In the Tudeh journal *Rahbar*, several telegrams were printed complaining about the interference of the central government in elections in Fars.<sup>104</sup>

As the elections continued, the British in general increasingly viewed Soviet interference more negatively.<sup>105</sup> Despite their denial that they were directly supporting the Tudeh, British and Iranian officials constantly accused the Soviets of rigging the elections in the north of the country.<sup>106</sup> These accusations further exacerbated the already poor relations between the British and the Soviets, particularly in Tabriz.<sup>107</sup> Pressure to deal with Soviet interference grew. Tehran was asked by the British Legation to object to Soviet ambassador Maksimov's interference in the elections so that Moscow would reprimand him.<sup>108</sup> Eden also wanted the British representative in Moscow to discuss the matter with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Viacheslav Molotov.<sup>109</sup> At one point, Soheyli proposed to transfer Dr Esma`il Marzban from Reza'yeh to become the governor of Tabriz since he was considered capable of preventing the elections from being hijacked by the Soviets.<sup>110</sup> As a significant number of the candidates favored by the Soviets were from the Tudeh, interference in the elections was necessary to jeopardize their success.

As most Soviet-backed candidates eventually proved rather unpopular, the Soviets lessened their propaganda and enthusiasm. This waning of interest and drive resulted in dissatisfaction on the part of the candidates. An unsuccessful Tudeh candidate alleged that not all ballot boxes were sent by the Soviets, thus reducing his actual votes. The British Consul in Tabriz saw this as an indication that the Soviets were beginning to show more respect toward the local authorities.<sup>111</sup> Following the elections, the British described the successful Tudeh candidates as “as good as any.”<sup>112</sup> Ultimately the influence of the Soviet Union and the impact of the Tudeh on the elections proved to be quite small. In the north, only two constituencies went to communist candidates,<sup>113</sup> while in Tehran not one Tudeh deputy was elected.<sup>114</sup> Possibly responding to Britain's constant objections to Soviet interference in the elections, the Soviets reduced the number of their candidates in Tabriz to two from seven, placating the British Consul-General and the central government. As the elections were wrapping up, and the Tudeh candidates were not performing as well as predicted, Bullard felt it was safe to refrain from saying anything more to the Soviets regarding the elections.<sup>115</sup> The Tudeh's election chances were stunted by British interference as it was seen as a way to undermine Soviet influence and presence in Iran. Importantly, this behavior and attitude placed the party within the Soviet camp. From now on, the British were convinced that the Tudeh was in league with the Soviets and that, in order to counter Soviet influence, the party had to be targeted.

In September 1944, Moscow sent Soviet Assistant Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Sergei Kavtaradze, to Iran to begin negotiations on the granting of an oil concession to the Soviets. Although the Soviet demands in 1944 were the most prominent, other foreign companies such as American Standard Vacuum were also in the bid for Iranian oil. Lavrentii Beria, head of the Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (NKVD), predecessor of the Komitet gosudarstvennoi

bezopasnosti (KGB), wanted to secure northern Iran as a source of oil. The Soviets assured Mohammad Reza Shah that an oil concession granted to them would benefit Iran as well. However, the British and the Iranians saw this as a political tactic rather than a commercial initiative. After all, the concessionary territories would also have included territories that had been recognized as tsarist spheres of interest in the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907.<sup>116</sup>

Initially, the matter of granting an oil concession was left completely to the Iranian government. By doing so, national initiative helped to block Soviet ambitions and advances with regard to the exploration of oil in Iran. If the Soviets wanted to compete for oil in the south, Bullard stated, "it would be for the Persian Government to say whether they wanted a foreign Government exploiting oil deposits in its territory."<sup>117</sup> In the Iranian Parliament, the Soviet bid for oil was extensively discussed. It was during this period that the parliamentarian and later prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq, vocalized his campaign for Iranian independence. His foreign "policy of negative balance" (*siyasat-e movazaneh-ye manfi*) called for freedom from both the British and the Soviets. Under his influence, the deputies successfully passed a parliamentary bill forbidding the government to grant any oil concession without a debate or parliamentary decision. Even though Stalin had ordered for preliminary geological work to start, the parliamentary bill effectively halted the Soviet Union's oil dream in Iran.<sup>118</sup>

The role of the Tudeh and its support of the Soviet Union's demand for an oil concession in the north were clear evidence of their closeness, especially when members of the party took to the streets in large numbers in favor of the Soviet bid. On balance, it could be argued that their support could have stemmed from a nationalist need to counter-balance Britain's predominance in Iran.<sup>119</sup> *Rahbar* asserted that Kavtaradze left Iran because he felt ignored and that the ruling class was making it difficult for him to obtain anything. According to the Tudeh, the Soviets did not want to obtain imperialist concessions but wanted to prevent imperialist influence in Iran.<sup>120</sup> Regardless of their true intention, the Tudeh's open support was enough to confirm that they were now in the Soviet camp.

The Tudeh's later support of the Soviets contradicted the party's earlier resistance to any foreign presence in the country. Party member and editor of *Mardom*, Ehsan Tabari, justified this turn in policy by saying that it was impossible not to grant a concession in light of Iran's bankruptcy problem and chaotic politics.<sup>121</sup> The Tudeh implemented a number of strategies to show its support for the Soviet bid, from propaganda to demonstrations.<sup>122</sup> These tactics extensively undermined Prime Minister Sa'id by relentlessly accusing him of being a fascist and the main obstacle to good relations with the Soviet Union. Tabataba'i also became a target for demonstrators, having received British support to mobilize opposition against the Soviet demands.<sup>123</sup> *Rahbar* also carried stories against the Chief of General Staff, 'Ali Razmara, especially following action taken against the Tudeh by his ally, the Military Governor, Hejazi.<sup>124</sup> During this period, local Iranian politicians perceived the Tudeh to be a tool of the Soviets and questioned their loyalty to Iran. At the height of Soviet aggression, the Governor-General of Khurasan was also concerned that the Soviets were encouraging local Tudeh branches in that province.<sup>125</sup>

When the newspaper *Vatan* published a cartoon depicting the Tudeh demonstrating with Soviet tanks in the background, the Soviet Consul in Isfahan, Marchenko, demanded that it be suppressed and he called for the expulsion of its editor, Ali Bisharat.<sup>126</sup> Bullard was of the opinion that an amicable solution between Moscow and the Tehran government over the oil concession issue could have been achieved if it had not been for these Tudeh demonstrations, which was further exacerbated by Soviet protection of the demonstrators. The involvement of the Tudeh made it difficult for the Majles to vote on a favourable agreement without appearing impartial to Iranian independence.<sup>127</sup> Bullard clarified this opinion further by saying that Kavtaradze was well intentioned but had been “misled by the Soviet Embassy and the Tudeh,” alluding to the disconnection between Moscow and the Soviet officials in Iran.<sup>128</sup> The concession crisis would not reach a satisfactory conclusion until much later, when the Soviets were granted a promise to a concession in exchange for the withdrawal of their troops from Azerbaijan. The Tudeh's open support for the Soviets during the oil concession episode serves as a clear indicator of Soviet–Tudeh alignment: the perception of their closeness was confirmed.

## Conclusion

What seems most marked about the story of early Soviet–Tudeh relations is the absence of an obviously intimate relationship at the start of the occupation. The perception of their closeness developed gradually and was clearly a function of other factors: the war in Europe and Soviet relations with the British. During the early years, Tudeh activities were geared towards specific wartime efforts, namely the propagating of anti-fascist material and the promotion of Allied-approved internal political reform in Iran. Cynically, it could be argued that this helped to downplay the economic and social problems that had occurred as a result of the occupation. Its formation demonstrated that a new and freer political era had begun under the auspices of the occupying forces. As such, the perception of the Tudeh as a tool of Moscow was generally downplayed not only by the British but also by the Soviets themselves. The perception of this closeness developed gradually and it was only following the fourteenth Majles elections and the Tudeh's role in the Soviet bid for the oil concession that this relationship truly emerged. When the nature of the war changed and the Soviets became more confident in Iran, Soviet–Tudeh closeness was expressed more openly, so much so that in order to undermine Soviet influence in the country, the Tudeh was henceforth demonized as a Russian stooge by the British and the Iranian central government.

## Notes

1. Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (Berkeley, 1966), 7.
2. In Iranian Azerbaijan, Soviet troops remained behind despite the conclusion of the occupation in order to prop up the autonomous Azerbaijan Democrat Party (ADP) government established in Tabriz under the leadership of Ja'far Pishevari. The Tudeh branch of Azerbaijan had been assimilated into the ADP in mid 1946 and the central party

was unopposed, despite its previous opposition to a separate Azeri identity. For a comprehensive study on this episode, see Louise Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (Cambridge, 1992).

3. For a detailed study and discussion on Soviet motivations, see Nikolay A. Kozhanov, "The Pretexts and Reasons for the Allied Invasion of Iran in 1941" in *Iranian Studies*, 45/4 (2012): 479–97. For a military and strategic perspective, see Richard A Stewart, *Sunrise at Abadan: The British and Soviet Invasion of Iran, 1941* (New York, 1988).
4. Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (New Haven, 2010), 230.
5. Kozhanov, "The Pretexts and Reasons for the Allied Invasion of Iran," 493.
6. An experienced politician, he was appointed in August 1941 to replace `Ali Mansur. See Fakhreddin Azimi, *Iran, The Crisis of Democracy: From the Exile of Reza Shah to the Fall of Mussadiq* (New York, 1989), 35.
7. *Ibid.*, 79.
8. See Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920–1921: Birth of the Trauma* (Pittsburgh, 1995) for a comprehensive study on this episode.
9. PRO, FO 371/27212, E5453, Commander in Chief, India to War Office, 9 Sept. 1941.
10. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran: Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, 1982), 241; and Azimi, *Iran, The Crisis of Democracy*, 85.
11. PRO, FO 248/1409, 29/196/42, Consul, Shiraz to Bullard, Tehran, 24 Nov. 1942.
12. Homa Katouzian, *Mussadiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (New York, 1990), 49.
13. Kermit E. McKenzie, *Comintern and World Revolution, 1928–1943* (New York, 1963), 177.
14. PRO, FO 248/1410, 144/1/42, Cook, Tabriz to Bullard, Tehran, 29 Dec. 1941.
15. Mark A Heller, *The Dynamics of Soviet Policy in the Middle East: Between Old Thinking and New* (Jerusalem, 1991), 11.
16. Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation, 1941–1946* (Singapore, 1987), 67.
17. Touraj Atabaki, "The Comintern, the Soviet Union and Labour Militancy in Interwar Iran", in Iranian -Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800, Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Iranian -Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800* (London, 2013), 303–12.
18. PRO, FO 371/31400, E1036, Racliffe, Ministry of Information, to Lockhart, 14 Feb. 1942.
19. PRO, FO 371/31387, E7167, Bullard, Tehran, to Foreign Office, 9 Dec. 1942.
20. Stephanie Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921–1941* (Abingdon, UK, 2007), 192–3.
21. Azimi, *Iran, The Crisis of Democracy*, 42–3.

22. Yassamine Mather, "Iran's Tudeh Party: A History of Compromises and Betrayals," *Journal of Socialist Theory* 39/4 (2011): 614.
23. For his comprehensive biography and information about his exposure to the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 156–7.
24. Their occupations included that of teacher, factory worker, doctor, peasant, tailor, cobbler, lawyer and businessman. *Ibid.*, 155.
25. *Ibid.*, 156.
26. *Ibid.*, 172–3.
27. *Ibid.*, 62.
28. Cosroe Chaqueri, "Did the Soviets Play a Role in the Founding of the Tudeh Party in Iran?" in *Cahiers du monde russe: Russie, Empire russe, Union soviétique, États indépendants* 40/3 (1999): 497. It should be noted that personal bias and prejudice permeate the work of many scholars who work on the Left in Iran, and who tend to be leftists themselves. Chaqueri is no exception to this.
29. Chaqueri, "Did the Soviets Play a Role?," 497–8.
30. Sepehr Zabih, "Communism ii. In "Persia from 1941 to 1953" in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/communism-ii>, accessed 7 Dec. 2014.
31. The PCP was the end-result of nearly two decades of communist activity among Iranian workers and intellectuals. Very much influenced and driven by the Bolsheviks, these organized themselves into an actual political party in 1920. However, it was often subjected to the volatile domestic and international landscapes and was affected when Tehran and Moscow improved government-to-government relations. During the reign of Reza Shah, party activities were suppressed and suffered under the government's anticommunist legislation. The party was dismantled and many of its leaders fled to the Soviet Union where they became victims of Stalin's purges. Cosroe Chaqueri, "Communism i. In Persia to 1941" in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/communism-i>, accessed 22 Oct. 2015.
32. Chaqueri, "Did the Soviets Play a Role?," 498.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran, 1941–1957* (London, 2011), 13.
35. This even included getting Soleyman Mirza to write down his general attitude towards the current situation in Iran as well as his ideas on what would help advance the country. Seliukov also suggested coming up with a basic program for the party. Col. Seliukov, "Transcription of conversation with Solayman Mirza," 8 November 1941, Rossiiskii Tsentr Khraneniia i Izucheniia Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii (RTsKhIDNI), 495/74/192. As quoted in Chaqueri, "Did the Soviets Play a Role?," 499–504.
36. From Letter by Dimitriov, 15 Dec. 1941 to Artashes, Avanesian, RtsKhIDNI 495/74/192, quoted from Mather, "Iran's Tudeh Party," 614.
37. Abrahamian, *Iran, The Crisis of Democracy*, 282.

38. Sepehr Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran* (Kent, 1986), 3.
39. Katouzian, *Mussadiq*, 48.
40. Azimi, *Iran, The Crisis of Democracy*, 282.
41. The editor of *Mardom* requested for anti-Nazi cartoons from the Americans producing propaganda material for publication in his journal. USNA/RG 84/Box5, 1942, Editor of *Mardom* to American Legation (Tehran), 17 Oct. 1942, taken from Chaqueri, *The Left in Iran*, 376.
42. Anvar Khomeh'i, *Forsat-e bozorg-e az dast rafteh* (Tehran, 1983), 32.
43. NA (National Archives, London), FO 371/31386, E6821, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 20 Nov. 1942.
44. NA, FO 371/31385, E1438, Memorandum: On Persia in Cairo (Lytleton) to Foreign Office (Eden), 5 March 1942.
45. Zabih, "Communism ii. In Persia from 1941 to 1953."
46. From Letter by Dimitriov, 15 Dec. 1941 to Artashes, Avanesian, RtsKhIDNI 495/74/192, quoted from Mather, "Iran's Tudeh Party," 614.
47. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States joined the Allied Forces formally in 1943.
48. NA, FO248/1427, G544/11/43, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 1 March 1943.
49. NA, FO248/1427, G544/11/43, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 1 March 1943.
50. NA, FO248/1427, G544/44/43, Minister of State to Foreign Office, 22 April 1943.
51. NA, FO248/1427, G544/33/43, Bullard, Tehran to Eden, Foreign Office, 6 April 1943.
52. NA, FO248/1427, G544/12/43, British Legation Tehran Minutes, 29 Feb. 1943.
53. Conversation with Dr Taheri, 27 Feb. 1943, PRO, FO248/1427, [Classmark unavailable].
54. NA, FO248/1427, G544/12/43, British Legation Tehran Minutes, 1 March 1943.
55. NA, FO248/1427, G544/33/43, Bullard, Tehran to Eden, Foreign Office, 6 April 1943.
56. NA, FO248/1427, G544/15/43, Eden, Foreign Office to Tehran, 17 March 1943.
57. NA, FO248/1427, G544/12/43, British Legation Tehran Minutes, 29 Feb. 1943.
58. NA, FO248/1427, E1811/82/34, Pelison, Foreign Office to Knatchbull-Hugessen, Angora, 10 April 1943.
59. Reader Bullard, E. C. Hodgkin, ed., *Letters from Tehran: A British Ambassador in World War II Persia* (London, 1991), 193; See also NA, FO248/1427, G544/76/43, Political Situation (Bullard), 29 June 1943.
60. NA, FO248/1427, G544/13/43, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 11 March 1943.
61. NA, FO248/1442, G150/44/44, British Embassy Tehran (Bullard) to Foreign Office (Eden), 6 April 1944.
62. Long experienced in politics, Qavam was one of Iran's last Qajar prime ministers,

serving from June 1922 to 1923. During the occupation, he briefly served as prime minister, again, from August 1942 to February 1943, during which time he was open to Russian aid. See Azimi, *Iran, The Crisis of Democracy*, 63–79.

63. Qavam disapproved of Bahrami's halting of a Tudeh demonstration, causing Bahrami to label Qavam a Tudeh supporter. NA, FO248/1427, G544/9/43, Interview with Farajullah Bahramy, 22 Feb. 1943.
64. NA, FO248/1427, G544/13/43, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 11 March 1943; Described as the “Manchester of Iran”, Isfahan was home to nine large textile mills, which employed some 11,000 workers. In Abadan, Khuzistan there were 16,000 workers alone at the refinery. See Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 147; PRO, FO248/1442, G150/44/44, Bullard, Tehran to Eden, Foreign Office, 6 April 1944.
65. Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 162–3.
66. NA, FO 371/31400, E1036, Radcliffe, Ministry of Information to Lockhart, 14 Feb. 1942.
67. NA, FO 371/31385, E2493, Bullard, Tehran, 22 April 1942.
68. Ibid
69. NA, FO248/1427, G544/76/43, Political Situation (Bullard), 29 June 1943.
70. Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 188.
71. NA, FO371/40171, E94, Foreign Office Minutes, 5 Jan. 1944.
72. Of the Tudeh Party, they did however support Khizi, Pishevari and Musavi. From the Workers’ Union, they supported Rahim Hamdad and from the Anti-Fascist Party, they pushed for the candidacy of Aqazadeh and Ispahani. Additionally, they also backed the Russian candidates Ipekchian, Mashinchi and Panahi. NA, FO248/1435, 22/149/44, British Embassy Tehran Minutes, 17 May 1943. The British consul in Isfahan also supported Taqi Fidakar, the city's labor leader. NA, FO248/1428, 636/368/43, Consul-General, Isfahan, to Bullard, Tehran, 27 Nov. 1943.
73. NA, FO248/1427, G544/19/43, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 24 March 1943.
74. Soheyli was already prime minister briefly from March to July 1942 and was again appointed in February 1943 overseeing the rest of the elections. Soheyli had proven his worth in the eyes of the British by tightening the government's grip over the press and by granting Millspaugh wider powers. At the time, Britain was struggling with bad press and pressured Soheyli to suppress certain newspapers and editors. NA, FO248/1427, G544/19/43, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 24 March 1943.
75. NA, FO248/1427, G544/129/43, Bullard, Tehran to Eden, Foreign Office, 15 Sept. 1943.
76. NA, FO371/40171, E491, British Consulate-General, Tabriz to Bullard, Tehran, 22 Dec. 1943.
77. NA, FO371/40171, E491, British Consulate-General, Tabriz to Bullard, Tehran, 22 December 1943; this is not to say that the British were always convinced of Soviet interference. Indeed, Rapp declared that it was not easy to determine the exact nature or extent of their counterpart's prominence in the elections. NA, FO371/40171, E491,

British Consulate-General, Tabriz, to Tehran, 18 Dec. 1943.

78. This candidate remained unnamed; however it can be deduced that it might have been Ardashez Hovhannasian, on the editorial staff of *Mardom*, and later *Rahbar* and *Razm*. In supporting this candidature, the Prime Minister declared that he was acting under the orders of the shah, who saw it as a way in which he could return the Soviets' favor for being more conciliatory. NA, FO248/1427, G544/144/43, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 25 Oct. 1943.
79. NA, FO248/1439, G69/1/44, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 4 Jan. 1944.
80. NA, FO248/1435, 22/66/44, Tabriz to Bullard, Tehran, 18 Jan. 1944.
81. NA, FO248/1428, 636/394/43, Consul-General, Tabriz, to British Legation Tehran, 16 Dec. 1943.
82. NA, FO248/1428, 636/408/43, Rapp, Tabriz to Bullard, Tehran, 22 Dec. 1943.
83. NA, FO248/1439, G69/1/44, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 4 Jan. 1944.
84. NA, FO248/1428, 636/408/43, Rapp, Tabriz to Bullard, Tehran, 22 Dec. 1943.
85. NA, FO248/1527, G544/14243, Soheyli Cabinet, 20 Oct. 1943; However, Bullard believed that as long as Soheyli supported the Allies in Iran, he could support one or two Soviet-picked deputies. Bullard did concede that Iraj Eskandari would become a mouthpiece for the Soviets. NA, FO248/1527, G544/14243, Soheyli Cabinet, 20 Oct. 1943.
86. NA, FO248/1439, G69/12/44, Eden, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 19 Feb. 1944.
87. NA, FO248/1434, 10/37/44, Gault, Isfahan to Bullard, Tehran, 8 April 1944.
88. NA, FO248/1435, 22/66/44, Tabriz to Bullard, Tehran, 18 Jan. 1944.
89. NA, FO248/1428, 636/394/4, Tabriz to Bullard, Tehran 16 Dec. 1943.
90. Pishevari was a native of Tabriz and had been imprisoned as a Bolshevik during Reza Shah's reign. He was a prominent figure of the Tudeh Party. Ipekchian had briefly lived in Russia. He was elected as a Tudeh deputy during the 14th elections. NA, FO248/1435, 22/152/44, Rapp, Tabriz to Trott, Tehran 20 May 1944.
91. NA, FO248/1439, G69/1/44, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 4 Jan. 1944.
92. NA, FO248/1427, G544/76/43, Political Situation (Bullard), 29 June 1943.
93. NA, FO248/1435, 22/76/44, Bullard, Tehran to British Consulate-General Shiraz, 6 Feb. 1944.
94. Sayyed Zia together with Reza Khan had led the coup in 1921. Sayyed Zia was briefly made prime minister but had spent most of Reza Shah's reign in exile in Palestine. In September 1943, he returned to Iran. He was favored by the British embassy as a possible prime minister throughout the occupation and beyond. Although this never materialized, he was elected to the fourteenth Majles for the Yazd seat. Katouzian, *The Persians*, 236; see also Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women who made Modern Iran, 1941–1979*, 2 vols (New York, 2008), 1: 311–526.

95. Abrahmian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 193.
96. Ibid., 195.
97. NA, FO248/1435, 22/95/44, British Consulate-General Kerman to British Legation Tehran, 4 Feb. 1944.
98. NA, FO248/1435, 22/92/44, British Embassy Tehran Minutes, 7 Feb. 1944; NA, FO248/1435, 22/77/44, Bullard, Tehran, to Rapp, Tabriz, 6 Feb. 1944.
99. NA, FO248/1435, 22/152/44, Rapp, Tabriz to Trott, Tehran, 20 May 1944.
100. NA, FO248/1428, 636/396/43, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 20 Dec. 1943.
101. NA, FO371/40171, E94, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 4 Jan. 1944.
102. Soviet favorite, Hussein Lankurani was against Tabatabai as well. NA, FO248/1435, 22/153/44, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 30 May 1944.
103. NA, FO248/1427, G544/76/43, Political Situation (Bullard), 29 June 1943.
104. These telegrams were addressed to Tehran deputies and newspapers, and were signed by members of the Association of Free Men of Fars (Jami`at-e Azadegan-e-Fars). NA, FO248/1435, 22/67/44, Trott, Tehran to Gardener, Shiraz, 2 Feb. 1944.
105. Maksimov, the Soviet ambassador to Tehran, however denied any interference in the elections, indicating either avoidance or a disconnection between the different arms of the Soviet machinery. NA, FO248/1428, 636/386/43, Azerbaijan Elections (Bullard), 13 Dec. 1943.
106. NA, FO248/1427, G544/76/43, Political Situation (Bullard), 29 June 1943.
107. The representative at the British Legation related his experiences and interactions with the Soviets as superficial and not particularly informative. NA, FO248/1428, 636/406/43, Rapp, Tabriz to Bullard, Tehran, 18 Dec. 1943.
108. NA, FO371/40171, E491, British Legation Tehran to Baxter, Foreign Office, 4 Jan. 1944.
109. NA, FO248/1439, G69/12/44, Eden, Foreign Office to British Embassy Moscow, 19 Feb. 1944.
110. NA, FO248/1428, 636/415/43, Bullard, Tehran to British Consulate Tabriz, 31 Dec. 1943.
111. NA, FO371/40171, E1313, British Consul-General, Tabriz to Foreign Office, 6 Feb. 1944.
112. NA, FO248/1428, 636/368/43, British Consul-General, Isfahan to Bullard, Tehran, 27 Nov. 1943.
113. In Darajez, Durri was elected, and in Pahlevi – Dr. Kishavarz. NA, FO248/1427, G544/153/43, Bullard, Tehran to Eden, Foreign Office, 3 Nov. 1943.
114. NA, FO248/1442, G150/44/44, Bullard, Tehran to Eden, Foreign Office, 6 April 1944.
115. NA, FO248/1428, G69/26/44, Bullard, Tehran to British Embassy Moscow, 11 March 1944.
116. NA, FO248/1428, G69/81/44, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 2 Oct. 1944.

17. NA, FO248/1428, G69/81/44, Bullard, Tehran, Foreign Office, 2 Oct. 1944.
18. "Decree of the USSR State Defense Committee No 9168 SS Regarding Geological Prospecting Work for Oil in Northern Iran," 21 June 1945, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, State Archive of Political Parties and Social Movements of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku (GAPPOD AzR), f. 1, op. 89. d.104, obtained by Jamil Hasanli, translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldber, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113099>, accessed 10 Dec. 2014.
19. Mohammad Musaddiq, Homa Katouzian, ed., *Musaddiq's Memoirs* (London, 1998), 21
20. NA, FO28/1442, G150/89/44, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 11 Dec. 1944.
21. Azimi, *Iran, The Crisis of Democracy*, 109–10.
22. It should be added that demonstrations were not solely staged to further the Soviet demand. According to its political platform, the Tudeh was to voice their grievances and policies. A demonstration was held in Tabriz on 15 December 1944 in commemoration of a worker killed by the police a few weeks earlier, during which Tudeh leaders demanded the punishment of the Commandant of Persian troops in Tabriz. NA, FO 248/1439, G69/148/44, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 22 Dec. 1944.
23. Azimi, *Iran, The Crisis of Democracy*, 110.
24. NA, FO248/1442, G150/198/44, Persian Government and Internal Situation (Tehran), 16 Dec. 1944.
25. NA, FO248/1439, G69/123/44, Skrine, British Consul Baluchistan to Delhi, 4 Dec. 1944.
26. NA, FO248/1439, 895/5/2/25, British Consulate (Isfahan) to Bullard, Tehran, 24 Dec. 1944.
27. NA, FO248/1442, G150/203/44, Bullard, Tehran to Foreign Office, 21 Dec. 1944.
28. NA, FO248/1442, G150/203/44, British Embassy Tehran (Bullard) to Foreign Office, 21 Dec. 1944.

# CHAPTER 13

## THE USSR AND ALLIED OCCUPATION OF IRAN IN AUGUST 1941: THE UNTOLD STORY OF A DIFFICULT DECISION

Nikolay A. Kozhanov

The importance of the events of August–September 1941, when the armies of the Soviet Union and Great Britain invaded neutral Iran on a relatively hollow pretext, is difficult to overestimate. These developments not only opened a new page in the history of Iran and its quest for freedom and democracy which ended with the emergence of the National Front and the nationalization of Iranian oil, but changed the political geometry of the Middle East. Once and for all, Nazi Germany was deprived of a chance to leave the British armed forces without access to the main regional oil reserves and to cut the route of Lend-Lease supplies to the USSR. Although the development of the situation in Iran and the Middle East prior to the Allied invasion as well as the political, economic and cultural aftermath of the occupation are well described by such prominent scholars of Iran as Ervand Abrahamian, Touraj Atabaki, Fakhreddin Azimi, Zaven Arabadzhan and others, our knowledge about the period August–September 1941 itself is still limited and full of blank spots.

### **Introduction**

Most of the above-mentioned blank spots are related to the Soviet participation in the invasion. For instance, it is still unclear how, after decades of political feudings with Moscow, it took the British authorities only a month to persuade the Soviets to launch a joint military operation. There is no answer on why the Kremlin, whose armed forces were sustaining heavy losses in the European front, agreed to allocate three armies to take part in the military actions far away from the main theatre of hostilities. Finally, there are questions about the role that Moscow played in the resignation and abdication of Reza Shah (1925–41) and the ascent of his son, Mohammad Reza (1941–79), to the Iranian throne in September 1941.

For decades, these questions were left without clear answers. Moreover, until the end of the Cold War these issues remained hostage to the ideological confrontation between the USSR and its allies, on one hand, and the West, on the other. None of these adversaries could afford

the luxury to acknowledge that the occupation of Iran was the result of Soviet and British ambitions that had little to do with the neutralization of the Nazi threat in Iran. Doing so would have damaged their image of the post-World War II international arena.

However, with the fall of the USSR and the gradual declassification of the Soviet archival documents related to the period 1939–45, new primary sources became available to the public. Now, they permit the shedding of more light on the Russian role in the events of August–September 1941.

## Who Was the First?

According to Russian documentary sources, the British government started talking about the necessity of working out a joint strategy on Iran and the Middle East immediately after the Nazi invasion of the USSR. The Soviet archives contain the records of the three meetings held on 22–3 June 1941 between high-ranking British and Soviet officials in Moscow, London and Tehran. All of these were initiated by the British. Thus, on 22 June 1941, the deputy head of the NKID<sup>1</sup> Andrey Vyshinsky (1883–1954), was visited by the British chargé d'affaires ad interim in the USSR, H. L. Baggaley. At the very beginning of the meeting the latter informed the Russian official that, although the diplomatic mission in Moscow had not yet received any instructions from London, he was ready to discuss the possible options for cooperation between the two governments in the Middle East and the creation of the transport corridor for the Lend-Lease supplies to the USSR through the Persian Gulf and Iran as well as through Vladivostok.<sup>2</sup>

Earlier that day, the Soviet ambassador to Great Britain, Ivan Maiskii (1884–1975), was summoned to the Foreign Office where he met its head, Sir Anthony Eden (1897–1977). During these consultations, the high-ranking British diplomat declared that the authorities of his country considered it necessary to work out a joint strategy towards the Middle Eastern countries and, first of all, towards Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, on 23 June 1941, the Counsellor of the Soviet Embassy in Tehran, Nikolaev, reported to the NKID on the visit of the British military attaché in Iran, Col. Underwood, who stated the intention of the British authorities to cooperate fully with the Soviets in Iran.<sup>4</sup> Col. Underwood also warned the Russian diplomat that, after the beginning of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, official Tehran might have “become braver in its activities towards the USSR since ... Moscow would weaken its influence [in Iran] with its attention drawn to the battle against Germany.”<sup>5</sup> According to the British military attaché, this, in turn would “undermine the Soviet capacities to influence the policy of the Iranian government in the case of necessity”.<sup>6</sup> He argued that this would be especially undesirable given the growing influence of Germany on the shah. Yet, Col. Underwood made a reservation that the presence of Berlin in Iran should not be considered as the main and decisive factor that would determine the behavior of Tehran: according to the British officer, everything was expected to be determined by the success of the joint efforts of the Allies in their struggle against the Nazis.<sup>7</sup>

These three meetings allow us to draw several conclusions. First of all, by 22 June 1941, the British government had a certain plan of action related to Iran that should have been executed in the case of the German invasion of the USSR. As demonstrated by the above-mentioned conversation between Vyshinsky and Baggaley the British diplomats were well aware of the existence of this plan and started implementing it immediately after the beginning of the Nazi offensive without additional instruction from London and consultations within the British authorities. The fact that London foresaw the beginning of the war between the USSR and Axis is not surprising. The decision to invade the Soviet Union was taken by Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) on 31 June 1940 and, by June 1941, this intention was not a secret for the Russian intelligence apparatus and, probably, not for the British either.<sup>8</sup> It is much more important that London was interested in using the overall situation to nudge Moscow to help Great Britain in achieving its goals in Iran.

The fact that the British were extremely interested in coordinating their efforts with the Soviets not in the Middle East but solely in this country became obvious within several weeks of the beginning of the German invasion of the USSR. If, initially, the government of Great Britain provided the authorities of the USSR with a list of the Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries requiring the joint attention of London and Moscow (including Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Turkey), by 10 July 1941, when the British ambassador to the USSR, Richard Stafford Cripps (1889–1952), was meeting with Joseph Stalin (1878–1953), there were only two countries left on the British agenda – Iran and Afghanistan. Moreover, in the case of Afghanistan the authorities of Great Britain offered to limit the possible actions to purely economic measures, whereas in the case of Tehran there was no alternative to a military operation.<sup>9</sup> During the period 22 June–10 July, London also politely informed Moscow that military–political collaboration in the Middle East would be the only objective of the new British–Soviet partnership. Initially the British government even refused to sign the comprehensive agreement on the alliance with Moscow in the war with Germany. According to Cripps, due to the country's limited economic and military resources of the British government was not interested in such a treaty. London instead offered the Soviets to concentrate attention on several local issues most of which were related to Iran. In other words, the British insisted on the formation of a temporary ad hoc coalition that would act in their interests in the region.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, on 8 July 1941, during a meeting with Stalin, Cripps stated that even if his government decided to sign an agreement on a comprehensive alliance its main point would still be cooperation on Iran and the Middle East.<sup>11</sup>

The British authorities probably saw the conflict between the USSR and Germany as a temporary window of opportunity to achieve certain goals in the Middle East and, more particularly, in Iran. Obviously, these aims required the assistance of the USSR, which could be gained only during the war between Moscow and Berlin when the Soviets were interested in collaboration with the Allies. As a result, the British authorities were obviously in a hurry. During the very first months of the conflict, they believed that the end of the military confrontation between the Soviet Union and Germany could be very close: the military doctrines of both belligerents implied the effective usage of armored forces and, thus, theoretically guaranteed fast victory.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the defeat of either the Germans or

Soviets would mean the restoration of the pre-war status quo when the formation of a temporary alliance between Great Britain and the USSR would be impossible.

## **Bargaining over Iran**

Under these circumstances, the British government demonstrated their best diplomatic skills in order to channel Soviet attention in the necessary direction. The task was not that easy: although Moscow was actively discussing the Middle Eastern issues with London, the government of the USSR persistently emphasized that this region had secondary importance for the victory over Berlin and that it needed British assistance in the European theatre of hostilities.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the Soviet authorities were initially annoyed by the fact that the British were ready to discuss options for joint military efforts only in connection to the Middle East.<sup>14</sup>

In order to make the Russians more cooperative London tried to draw Moscow's attention to Iran by informing the Soviets about the possible threat to the Allied interests in the Middle East caused by the activities of German intelligence in Iran and by discussing the possibility of using Iranian territory as a safe route for military supplies to the USSR.<sup>15</sup> These two main British statements were formulated almost simultaneously, and, during the first weeks of the Soviet–German war, the main task of English diplomats was to determine which of the above-mentioned reasons could compel the Russians to join efforts in Iran. Thus, on 27 June 1941, Cripps met with the head of the NKID, Viacheslav Molotov (1890–1986). During this meeting, the British ambassador argued that the main attention and joint efforts of the USSR and Great Britain should be aimed “at the prevention of the penetration of Germany and its allies to ... the countries of ... the East. This is especially important regarding Iran.”<sup>16</sup> From that moment onward, the British authorities periodically informed the Soviets on the activities of the German intelligence in the realm of the shah.<sup>17</sup> For instance, on 20 July 1941, a detailed account regarding Nazi spies in Tehran was given to Molotov by Cripps.<sup>18</sup>

However, the reaction of the Kremlin to these statements was less than modest. From the very beginning, Moscow considered such messages from London another propagandistic move by the British.<sup>19</sup> This might be explained by the fact that, when preparing the above-mentioned accounts, British diplomats demonstrated excessive diligence by exaggerating existing problems in an attempt to prove that the situation in Iran deserved Soviet attention. For instance, British officials argued that the activities of German intelligence in Iran were mostly aimed against the Soviets, and that Nazi spies did not represent much danger for British interests.<sup>20</sup> By stating this, the authorities of Great Britain concluded that Moscow should take complete responsibility for putting political and, if necessary, military pressure on the Iranians in order to guarantee their loyalty to the Allies.<sup>21</sup>

However, the Soviets dismissed both the allegations on the gravity of the German threats and statements that the initiative in Allied actions against Iran should be taken exclusively by them. As argued by contemporaries of the events, the authorities of the USSR and Stalin personally retained a substantial degree of mistrust in British intentions regarding Iran and the

joint alliance with Moscow.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, British reports on German activities in Iran obviously contradicted the information received by Moscow from its diplomats and spies on the ground. According to the Soviet ambassador to Tehran, Andrei Smirnov (1905–82), the activities of Great Britain in Iran were much more dangerous for the USSR than those of Nazi Germany.<sup>23</sup> Smirnov reported that, while not very effective in their efforts against Moscow's presence in Iran, German agents were indeed engaged in activities aimed at the destabilization of British positions in the region, but their work had far more in common with psychological warfare than with open sabotage. They spread anti-British rumors, gathered information and called upon the population of the southern cities not to work for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (the AIOC). Nonetheless, until August 1941 Great Britain paid almost no attention to these activities, although, as mentioned in the documents of the NKVD, “it was enough for London just to press on Tehran a little bit harder” to expel the German agents from Iran.<sup>24</sup>

That is why when, on 19 July 1941, in spite of all initially achieved agreements, the British authorities sent their diplomatic note regarding the German presence in Iran to the Iranian government several days after the Soviet memorandum regarding this issue (although both documents were expected to be delivered to Tehran at the same time), the reaction of the USSR leadership was harsh.<sup>25</sup> The Soviet government openly stated that it was not going to tolerate any attempts to position the Russians as the main and only initiator of harsh steps against Iran. The message was clear and, subsequently, the British decided to abstain from any further attempts to do this.

Yet, the German threat was chosen as the main justification for the Allied invasion of Iran in August 1941. The reasons for this are still not clear, and historians can only speculate regarding the nature of this decision. In the search for the answer, it would probably make sense to address other historical events of that period. Most of the largest conflicts of the 1930s and 1940s, such as the German invasion of Poland and the USSR as well as the winter war (1939–40) between the Soviet Union and Finland, started on hollow and artificial pretexts. The aggression was justified by the necessity of a preemptive strike to neutralize the alleged threat of an invader. Under these circumstances, the Allied operation in Iran was no exception. It is also notable that, until late July 1941, when the two countries started discussing the necessity of the military operation against Iran, Moscow was reluctant to discuss the German threat in the Middle East with London. However, the British authorities found another way to draw Soviet attention to Iran.

## **Lend-Lease and Iran**

As already mentioned, the idea of using Iran as the shortest and safest route to deliver military equipment to the Soviet Union was voiced by the British government on the first day of the German invasion of the USSR. The first practical proposals were received by Moscow as early as 28 June 1941. On that day, ambassador Cripps met with the head of the NKVT,<sup>26</sup> Anastas Mikoyan (1895–1978). During the meeting, the British diplomat argued that in order to provide the Soviets with necessary military and non-military equipment the Allies should use

all capacities of the trans-Iranian railroad as well as the road network of Iran. The advantages of the so-called Iranian route for Lend-Lease supplies were obvious: it was shorter than the trans-Pacific route (via Vladivostok) and safer than its northern alternative (via Murmansk).<sup>27</sup> As opposed to the Vladivostok and Murmansk routes the Lend-Lease supplies could also safely pass the territory of Iran the whole year round.<sup>28</sup>

It is notable that, on 28 June 1941, Cripps was very well prepared for the meeting with Mikoyan. The ambassador was accompanied by technical experts and members of the economic section of the British diplomatic mission to Moscow. They informed Mikoyan about the quantity of military supplies that London was ready to send to the USSR, and they provided him with a detailed report on the state of the Iranian road and railroad infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> According to the British experts, the trans-Iranian railroad could represent the main interest for the Allies. He argued that its capacities allowed the transportation of 400 tons of goods daily. They also emphasized the fact that after the necessary reconstruction of the railroad and the improvement of facilities in the port of Bandar Shahpur the above-mentioned figure could rise to as much as 800 tons a day. Moreover, the British government promised to accomplish this renovation work in the shortest time period possible. (The reconstruction of the port of Bandar Shahpur was expected to take about one-and-a-half months.)<sup>30</sup> The British authorities also declared their intention to increase the number of railroad wagons in Iran by sending around 1,000 open freight cars to this country, which were previously promised to the shah. As an alternative or supplementary route, London also offered to use the Baghdad–Mosul railroad with its transport capacity of 300 tons daily. From Mosul military supplies for the USSR were supposed to be transported by road to Erbil and via the Iran–Iraqi border to Tabriz and further on to the USSR.<sup>31</sup>

This time the government of Great Britain played its cards well. The serious and detailed report of British diplomats convinced Moscow of the inevitability of using the Iranian transport infrastructure for Lend-Lease supply purposes. When on 29 June 1941 (the day after the meeting between Mikoyan and Cripps), the US ambassador to Moscow, Laurence Steinhardt (1892–1950), saw Molotov to discuss the perspectives of the Lend-Lease supplies it was the Soviet minister who stated the necessity to pay greater attention to the usage of the Iranian route for the transfer of military goods to the USSR.<sup>32</sup>

Some historians have used the above-mentioned meeting between Mikoyan and Cripps as proof that the need to help the USSR was the main reason for the Allies launching an offensive operation against Iran. However, this is not quite true. In spite of all the promises given by Cripps during their meeting with Mikoyan, to immediately launch military supplies to the USSR via Iran as soon as the southern neighbor of the Soviet Union agreed on the transit of the military goods through its territory, London started practical discussion about this question only at the end of September 1941, when Iran had already been occupied. The initial agreement between the Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom concerning future supplies to the USSR was signed on 1 October 1941. Nevertheless, the British were reluctant to implement achieved agreements even after. Thus, prior to the signing of the said document, Churchill warned the Russian ambassador in London, Maiskii, that the Soviet government

should not have any illusions about immediate British assistance. According to him, until the winter of 1941–2, Great Britain would be unable either to open the second front or to send military supplies to the USSR.<sup>33</sup> However, during the autumn and winter of 1941–2, any attempts of the Soviet authorities to remind their ally that the military operation in Iran was initially seen as a measure to create a secure route for military supplies did not yield positive results. The British persistently insisted that they needed more time, and offered a number of reasons to explain their inability to provide the USSR with any help. For instance, London justified delays at the beginning of Lend-Lease supplies through Iran with its decision to improve and reconstruct the relatively new Trans-Iranian railway. This process was supposed to be accomplished by mid- 1942.<sup>34</sup>

In the autumn of 1941, the British government also was not going to use any other alternative supply routes. Thus, in the case of the so-called northern corridor (through the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans to the seaport of Murmansk, located in the extreme northwest part of the USSR bordering on Norway and Finland) it referred to the necessity of waiting until the beginning of the polar night in January 1942, which would prevent the Germans from using aviation against northern sea convoys to Murmansk.<sup>35</sup>

The above facts raise certain doubts as to whether military supplies were the main reason for the Allied invasion of Iran. Moreover, as stated by one of the high-ranking Soviet officials, Leonid Zorin, who was directly involved in the process of the organization of Lend-Lease supplies to the USSR, the Iranian route acquired vital importance for the Allies only in mid-1942, after tragic events connected to sea convoy PQ-17, which proved the obvious fact that the northern supply path was unsafe.<sup>36</sup>

The British attitude to the issue of military assistance to the Soviet Union could be explained by the general military and political situation on the Russian front in the second half of 1941. London also considered it illogical to dispatch assistance to the USSR and send its troops to the Eastern front when the defeat of the Soviet Union seemed to be a question of weeks or even days: British soldiers were able only to prolong the agony and the supplies and, on the other hand, could be captured by the Germans. In this case, Britain had no interest in sending military assistance to the USSR until the end of 1941.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to the authorities of Great Britain, the Soviets believed that the Lend-Lease military supplies could be received by Moscow via Iran almost immediately and for this they needed to use the Iranian infrastructure. However, there was a problem: by 28 June 1941 this infrastructure still belonged to an independent country.

### **Anything but Military Goods**

Initially, Moscow did not consider military invasion the only way to guarantee the consent of the shah to transport the Lend-Lease consignments to the USSR via Iranian territory. At first, Stalin tried to reach agreement without the use of force. On 30 June 1941, newly appointed Soviet ambassador to Tehran Smirnov met with Prime Minister `Ali Mansur (1895–1974). It is

notable that the diplomat requested this meeting two hours after his arrival in the country. His behavior shocked the Iranians who were very rigorous in matters of diplomatic protocol. After only two hours in the country Smirnov had not presented his credentials to the authorities of Iran, and, technically, he was not entitled to discuss any issues regarding bilateral relations between the two countries.<sup>38</sup> However, according to the memories of his assistant and interpreter, Daniil Komissarov (1907–2008), the ambassador had urgent directives from Stalin and these directives compelled him to break with protocol. The persistence of the Soviet diplomat was soon rewarded, and Mansur gave him an audience.<sup>39</sup>

During the meeting, Smirnov stated that, “the Soviet government expressed its gratitude for the decision of the Iranian nation to pursue the policy of complete neutrality in the war.” He also handed Mansur the Kremlin's proposal to sign a new augmented agreement on the development of bilateral trade and the principles of the transit of the Soviet goods through Iranian territory.<sup>40</sup> Among everything else, the document implied the passage of military goods. By offering this treaty, Moscow probably sought to achieve two goals. On the one hand, it attempted to avoid the use of force in Iran. The occupation would inevitably require keeping substantial military forces in the country which, instead, could be used at the German front. On the other hand, the Soviet government strove to secure the neutrality of its southern neighbor. When instructing Smirnov, Stalin stated that the USSR would not benefit from the engagement of Iran in the war on either side. He considered both the British and German penetration of Iran equally dangerous for Soviet interests, and that the fully fledged joining of Tehran to either the Axis or Allied camps would strengthen the position of Moscow's rivals.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, the Iranian authorities were also concerned about maintaining their neutral status. According to the reports of Soviet diplomats and intelligence, Reza Shah and his government had no illusions about the possibility that in the case of a German breakthrough in the Caucasus Iran would become the only buffer between the Nazi war machine and its ultimate goal – British India. This, in turn, implied that, as had happened during World War I, Iran could again become the battle ground between third countries. Yet, this time, the Iranian leadership wanted to avoid a repetition of past experience.<sup>42</sup> As a result the ruler of Iran, Reza Shah, tried to avoid taking any steps that would give the Great Powers a pretext for an invasion. Under these circumstances, Mansur was compelled to reject the Soviet proposal regarding the new trade and transit agreement in order to avoid complications in the relations of Tehran with Berlin. The prime minister emphasized that his government “would welcome the increase in the bilateral trade and agree on the transit of the Soviet goods apart from those which could compromise the neutrality of Iran.”<sup>43</sup> Smirnov pretended to ignore this answer. During the meeting, he several times repeated the statement concerning the Soviet interest in the transit of the wide range of goods through Iran, and, each time, he received a polite, but negative response. By the end of the talk, Mansur probably became irritated with the persistence of the Soviet ambassador and openly told him that the USSR might transit “anything but weapons, although with the transit of other goods Moscow had no problems even before.”<sup>44</sup>

Even after that negative response, Smirnov did not give up. Instead, he attempted to address the shah directly. Such an opportunity occurred on 5 July 1941, when, according to diplomatic

protocol, the Soviet ambassador was supposed to present his credentials to the head of the country. The fact that he raised an important question during what was usually considered a formal ceremony was supposed to highlight the significance of the problem for the Soviets. Yet, the answer of Reza Shah was the same as that of Mansour: no.<sup>45</sup>

On 5 July 1941, Iran's ruler to a certain extent decided his own destiny and that of his country. The refusal to transit military goods to the USSR had a two-fold influence on the behavior of Moscow. On the one hand, the Soviets admitted the possibility that the negative answer of the shah might have been caused not only by the decision to pursue a neutral status but also by pro-German feelings. This, in turn, created certain ground for allegations that Tehran was waiting for the outcome of the German offensive on the Russian front in order to decide which side to join.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, after the refusal, Stalin began to look for other ways to acquire the right to transit military goods through Iran. The Soviet government launched more active consultations with its new ally, and the British were ready to nudge Moscow to "a right solution".

### **What Should We Do with Iran?**

On 10 July 1941, Stalin again met with Cripps. He openly asked the British diplomat regarding the measures that the Allies could take to strengthen their influence on Iran and make its government more cooperative. By that time, the Soviet authorities had not yet worked out their new strategy regarding Tehran: all options were on the table, but Moscow still hesitated about the use of force against its southern neighbor. Thus, just two days earlier (on the evening of 8 July 1941), deputy head of the NKID, Solomon Lozovskii, summoned Iranian ambassador Saed and informed him that the authorities of the USSR would like to ask the shah's government to grant necessary diplomatic assistance and protection to Soviet citizens living in Vichy France and occupied French territories. The Soviets also sought Tehran's assistance in establishing diplomatic relations with the government of Philippe Pétain (1856–1951). It is hard to assume that Moscow would address such requests to a country that it planned to attack. Furthermore, in both cases, the reaction of the Iranian side was positive.<sup>47</sup>

However, Stalin's question to Cripps on 10 July 1941 determined the future development of the situation around Iran. The ambassador did not hesitate in his answer. He informed the leader of the USSR that the British embassy in Moscow had already asked its government to consider the possibility of the joint diplomatic demarche regarding Iran. Cripps also stated that, from his point of view, the diplomatic moves could appear insufficient, and the Allies would be compelled to use force. This was the first time that the possibility of military actions in Iran was directly mentioned during the talks between Great Britain and the USSR. Furthermore, it happened at the highest level possible.<sup>48</sup>

As of that moment, British diplomats changed the strategy they used during their negotiations with the Soviets. If, before 10 July 1941, London cautiously tried to find out Moscow's stance on Iran and the possibility of a joint military operation, after that day the British straightforwardly insisted on the implementation of military measures. The signing of the

agreement on joint military actions against Germany on 12 July 1941 between Great Britain and the USSR only strengthened the determination of London regarding the Allied military operation in Iran.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the day after the meeting of Stalin with Cripps on 10 July 1941, the British authorities sent their request to the military command of Great Britain to give the final assessment regarding the necessity to conduct an offensive against Iran and, several days later, they got a positive answer. This was done in spite of the fact that there was still no information on whether the Soviets were ready to join the military operation.

Subsequently, on 19 July 1941, Eden via Maiskii officially told the government of the USSR that Britain was willing to occupy Iran.<sup>50</sup> Later that day, Maiskii was summoned to Churchill's private retreat at Chequers for a meeting with the British prime minister. In his report regarding this talk with Churchill, the Soviet ambassador wrote:

Churchill was very decisive about Iran: he repeated almost everything I heard this morning from Eden but with even more emphasis on the necessity of using all measures including the joint occupation of the country.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, London was not very satisfied with the results of these consultations with Moscow. While actively discussing different aspects of the potential military operation, the Soviets were still hesitant about it. The only positive outcome (for the British government) was the decision to conduct all bilateral consultations regarding the possible military operation in London (in order to intensify the negotiation process and avoid the necessity to reconfirm agreements achieved in Great Britain by additional consultations in Moscow).<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, even without the firm agreement of the USSR to invade Iran, on 22 July 1941, the British forces in the Middle East received the orders of their government to prepare for the occupation of Iran's Khuzestan province and the securing of the oil infrastructure in Kermanshah and Abadan.<sup>53</sup> Later, Churchill acknowledged this order as the only right measure to protect the British interests in the region.<sup>54</sup>

Moscow confirmed its participation in the military operation only on 13 August 1941. On that day, Eden and Maiskii negotiated the text of another diplomatic note addressed to the government of Iran. At the end of the meeting, the Soviet ambassador informed his British colleague that if the government of the USSR did not receive a positive response from Tehran to this document, it would agree on the military operation. On 16 August 1941, the diplomatic note was handed to the authorities of Iran. Unfortunately, Reza Shah was slow in responding to it. On 23 August 1941, the Iranian answer was received by the Allies. Tehran agreed to expel Germans from the country's territory in order to allay the British and Soviet concerns. However, it was too late. On 21 August 1941, Cripps met with Molotov's deputy, Vyshinsky. The meeting lasted only fifteen minutes. However, its importance is hard to overestimate: during these fifteen minutes, Vyshinsky informed the British ambassador that Moscow agreed with the plan to invade Iran. Initially, the offensive was expected to start on 23 August 1941. Later, the Soviets asked for more time and for the beginning of the operation to be postponed until 25 August 1941.<sup>55</sup>

The Anglo-Soviet negotiations that took place between 10 July and 21 August 1941 raise two questions. The first question is related to the unexpected speed with which the British government launched the military preparations of the operation. As opposed to the Soviets, who started working on their invasion plans no earlier than the mid-August 1941 (and, thus, they missed the initially appointed date of the invasion), the British began preparations more than a month earlier without even knowing whether their initiative would be supported. What were the reasons behind this? The second question is: What was the last argument that made the Soviet authorities accept the British offer? After the negative response of the Iranian authorities to the offer of the USSR to sign a new agreement that would allow the transit of military goods for the Soviet Union through the Iranian territory, Moscow became more inclined to use force against Tehran. However, it was still hesitant about this.

## **Oil and Old Imperial Rivalry**

To understand why the British were eager to discuss this specific topic, it is necessary to address events that took place in the Middle East before the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

By the beginning of 1941, the overall situation in the region was not favorable for Britain. The successful German military operations in Europe and the defeat of France strengthened a belief among segments of the national elites in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt in the forthcoming victory of the Third Reich over the United Kingdom. This, in turn, led to the intensification of various national struggles against the British in the Middle East.<sup>56</sup> Thus, on 1 April 1941, the nationalist government of Rashid Ali al-Gailani took power in Iraq.<sup>57</sup> The first step of the new Iraqi authorities was the establishment of close relations with Germany and the Vichy Republic of France.

Moreover, during the first part of 1941, the German General Staff saw the situation in the region as favorable for carrying out its strategic plan “Orient,” aimed at reaching the borders of British India and further invading the subcontinent, thereby rejoining with the Japanese.<sup>58</sup> The German command intended to carry out this plan during the second half of 1941 and in early 1942. This, in turn, meant that all British oilfields in the Middle East, as well as the center of the British Empire, India, were in danger.

Responding to the existing threat, during the winter and spring of 1941 London planned and prepared a number of military operations aimed at regaining control over the situation in the Middle East and protecting its oil resources. After the successful accomplishment of these operations, by the second half of June 1941, the British managed to deter the German offensive in Egypt and establish loyal authorities in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.<sup>59</sup> The only military operation that London could not carry out during that time was the occupation of Iran. However, Great Britain was not going to leave Iran uncontrolled.<sup>60</sup> First, this country was the key point of all possible variants of the German offensive in India. The occupation of Iran would allow London to create an additional line of defense there against a possible Wehrmacht offensive. Second, by that time, Iran possessed the largest proven oil reserves accessible to

Britain, and London wanted to secure stable supplies. The British government was worried about German plans to capture Iranian oil wells and refineries. London also mistrusted Reza Shah, who had already tried to exploit the situation by “forcing London to increase the oil royalties in 1940.”<sup>61</sup> Third, in spite of the successful demonstration of the capabilities of British military forces in Iraq, the shah continued to behave independently. To annoy Britain, he gave refuge to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husaini,<sup>62</sup> and to the supporters of Rashid Ali al-Gailani,<sup>63</sup> and continued to trade with the Germans. All these factors together with the strong pro-German feelings of a part of the Iranian political elite led the British to consider Iran the center of instability in the Middle East.<sup>64</sup>

The only obstacle to the possible military solution of “the Iranian problem” was a treaty signed between Persia and Soviet Russia in 1921. Under Articles V and VI of this agreement, in case of the use of Iranian territory by a third power to threaten the security of the USSR, the Soviet Union had the right to invade Iran to eliminate such a threat. Until 22 June 1941, taking into account existing tensions between London and Moscow, any British military operation in this country could provoke retaliation from the USSR. As a result, on the eve of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the British discussed the hypothetical occupation of Iran. However, immediately after the involvement of the USSR in the war, the British government gave an order for more detailed preparations to the command of its military forces in the Middle East. At the same time, the Foreign Office was assigned to persuade the Soviets to run the joint offensive against Iran as quickly as possible.<sup>65</sup> According to some sources, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the military command of the British forces in the Middle East was also putting great pressure on the British authorities to use the existing situation to put Iran under stricter control. Thus, on 10 July 1941, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in the Middle East General Archibald Wavell (1883–1950) requested that London take immediate measures regarding Iran aimed at the replacement of Reza Shah with a figure more loyal to London. He argued that this had to be done before the outcomes of the German conflict with the Soviets became clear.<sup>66</sup>

It cannot be excluded that the report of General Wavell was one of those last factors that compelled London to even more active steps in the region: as mentioned above, shortly after 10 July 1941, the British forces in the Middle East received an order to launch preparations for the invasion of Iran, without knowing whether or not the Soviets would support this military operation. Furthermore, in July and August 1941 the defeat of the USSR seemed imminent, and the speed of the German advance on the Eastern front led to the assumption that by the winter of 1941 the Nazis would conquer the Caucasus and enter Iran. In this situation, it was conceivable that the British command would dare to start the invasion of Iran unilaterally to protect the oil wells and the refinery in Abadan. By that time London had already concentrated its military forces on the Iraqi border with Iran.<sup>67</sup>

The scenario of British forces unilaterally occupying Iran was absolutely unacceptable for the Soviet government. As a political heir of the Russian Empire, the USSR had its own interests in the northern part of Iran and it thus reacted with vehemence to any attempts of other powers to increase their influence in this region. From 1920 to 1921, to acquire total control

over Persia and export Communist doctrine, Moscow even tried to establish a Soviet republic in Gilan.<sup>68</sup>

In his instructions to Smirnov on the eve of 22 June 1941, the Soviet leader told the ambassador to watch out for the British. Stalin was very concerned about their activities in Iran and emphasized that Moscow, at any cost, should not allow London to spread its influence over the northern part of this country.<sup>69</sup> Under these conditions, Moscow was determined to prevent Great Britain from bringing Iran under its full control.<sup>70</sup> During the period of July–August 1941, Soviet diplomats and spies in Iran reported that British military forces were preparing for active military action in this country.<sup>71</sup> Thus, Smirnov was informing the Kremlin that Great Britain was allegedly sponsoring the construction of fortifications along the Iranian–Soviet border in the Caucasus. According to the ambassador, British forces were expected to use these defenses in the case of a Soviet defeat by Germany in order to hold the advance of the Nazi forces toward India.<sup>72</sup> It is hard to say whether these reports by the NKID and NKVD<sup>73</sup> reflected the real picture or whether they were just speculations caused by general anti-British hysteria common among Soviet officials. Yet, for the government of the USSR this information may have led to only one conclusion: with or without the approval of the USSR the British would launch their military operation in Iran. Moreover, the Soviet leadership was also alerted by attempts of the British diplomats to clarify the readiness of the Kremlin to implement Articles V and VI of the 1921 agreement. On 20 July 1941, Cripps openly asked Molotov about measures that might be taken by the USSR if Iran was invaded by the forces of a third country.<sup>74</sup> Under these circumstances, Moscow had no options but to agree on the joint occupation of its southern neighbor in order to prevent the British from intervening in the zones of Russian national interest. To a certain extent, the Soviet concerns regarding the British presence in Iran were not baseless. Thus, in 1943, British intelligence deployed in Tehran its training centre where it was preparing agents recruited from the nationalities of the Soviet Central Asian republics who were later sent to work in the USSR.<sup>75</sup>

## **The End of the Shah**

The Allied military operation began on 25 August 1941. The official pretext for this invasion was the refusal of Reza Shah to expel German citizens from Iran. The Iranian government, in fact, started the process of reducing the number of Germans living in its territory by either asking them to leave or refusing to prolong their residence permits. However, this process needed more time than requested by the Allies and this was enough for Great Britain and the USSR to accuse Tehran of failing to satisfy their requirements.<sup>76</sup>

After the beginning of the operation, the Allied forces faced almost no resistance: the Iranian army either withdrew or preferred to stay in its barracks. In fact, the active phase of the operation was finished on 31 August 1941, at which point the Iranian government declared its decision to cease resistance.<sup>77</sup> Yet, there was at least one more action to be done to finish the military operation in Iran. And this action was related to the necessity to replace Reza Shah. In spite of all misfortunes, the Iranian ruler remained an influential figure. He also retained

control over the remains of the army and demonstrated a firm intention to protect what he saw as the national interests of Iran.<sup>78</sup> Under these conditions, as long as he, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, stayed in office it was hard for the British and Soviets to consider themselves the absolute masters of the conquered country.<sup>79</sup>

Russian documents indicate that the British authorities were the first to raise the question about the destiny of Reza Shah. On 12 September 1941, Cripps visited Molotov. During the meeting, he asked about the opinion of the Soviet leadership regarding the possible replacement of the current Iranian monarch. The British diplomat explained this necessity by referring to the unreliability of Reza Shah and offered to reinstate the Qajar dynasty. According to him, this could be done through the forced displacement of Reza Shah and the creation of the regent council. Cripps also expressed his unwillingness to see Reza Shah's son and heir, Mohammad Reza, as a new ruler of Iran.<sup>80</sup>

The reaction of the Soviets to this initiative was muted. Molotov openly stated that the abdication of Reza Shah was more in the British interest than that of the Soviets. According to him, the USSR did not see Reza Shah as the serious obstacle to the Allied cause in Iran. However, he also did not have any substantial objections to the removal of the monarch. The only exception concerned the candidature of the successor. Molotov did not elaborate further but, allegedly, he supported Smirnov's opinion.<sup>81</sup> The latter offered to restore the parliamentary republic, liquidated by Reza Shah in the 1920s, as a form of governance in Iran. In discussion with his British counterpart, Sir Reader William Bullard (1885–1976), Smirnov argued that the Qajar dynasty was unpopular among the Iranians and that its restoration would not lead to the stabilization of the country.<sup>82</sup> There was probably another reason for the Soviet diplomat to make this suggestion as well: the Qajar dynasty would inevitably fall under British control (as it had been before), giving London the obvious advantage in terms of its increased capacity to influence the situation in Iran. This was completely unacceptable to Moscow. However, a democratic republic, in turn, could easily fall under Soviet influence (given the popularity of communist and leftist ideas in Iran of that time); but that, in turn, was what the British could not agree on. As a result, Bullard offered the compromise figure of Mohammad Reza.<sup>83</sup> The candidature of a young and inexperienced heir of Reza Shah satisfied both Moscow and London, since his accession to the throne would not give any advantages to either of them.

Shortly after Cripps' visit to Molotov, Moscow sent a dispatch to Smirnov with the order to completely support any actions of the British government regarding the future of the Pahlavi dynasty.<sup>84</sup> The Soviet authorities decided not to put up obstacles for the British in this regard. The military operation in Iran was nearly over, and the Soviet authorities did not wish to create any tensions with their new ally.<sup>85</sup> On 16 September 1941, the Soviet and British forces began their march to Tehran, and Reza Shah had no other option but to abdicate.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

The Allied military operation in Iran took place for a number of reasons. However, none of

these was related to the officially declared pretexts for the invasion (mainly alleged activities of German spies in Iran). By August 1941, the two superpowers suddenly appeared to be interested in the occupation of this country. Yet, each had its own motives. While Great Britain intended to protect the property of AIOC, the Soviets were interested in the creation of a safe route for military supplies through Iran. However, in contrast to the British, the Russians tried to avoid a military confrontation with their southern neighbor. During June–July 1941, they made several efforts to persuade Tehran to allow the Allies to use Iranian road infrastructure for the delivery of Lend-Lease consignments to the USSR. Moreover, Moscow partly succeeded in this: the government of Iran agreed to the passage of non-lethal munitions and goods. Even the adamant refusal of the shah to allow the transit of weapons for the USSR did not completely convince Moscow of the necessity of military invasion. The last straw that broke the camel's back were the reports of Soviet diplomats and intelligence persuading the Russian authorities that London was about to invade Iran without the assistance of Moscow. And that is where the old rivalry between Great Britain and the USSR played its role. The Soviet Union was unwilling to let its traditional opponent (who was now a temporary ally) seize complete control over Iran. Consequently, Moscow agreed to the joint military operation against Iran.

Finally, Moscow unwillingly played the important role in the final part of the Iranian tragedy of 1941 – the abdication of Reza Shah. Archival sources suggest that, although the abdication of the shah was initiated by London, it was the Russian leaders who insisted that the Qajars should not rule Iran again, and, thus, they accidentally saved the Pahlavi dynasty.

## Notes

1. NKID stands for Narodnyi Komissariat Inostrannykh Del (People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs). During 1923–46, the NKID was the equivalent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the USSR.
2. E. P. Gusarov, ed., *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV (Moscow, 2000), 14.
3. Georgii Kynin, ed., *Sovetsko-Angliiskie otnosheniia vo vremia Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny. 1941–1945*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1983), 50.
4. G. E. Mamedov, ed., *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIII, part 2, bk. 2 (Moscow, 1998), 755.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. *Izvestiia TceKa KPSS*, 4 (1990), 202–3.
9. Kynin, *Sovetsko-Angliiskie otnosheniia*, vol. I, 80.
10. Gusarov, *Documenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 49; Kynin, *Sovetsko-Angliiskie otnosheniia*, vol. I, 69.
11. Gusarov, *Documenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 49.

12. Leonid Zorin, *Osoboe Zadanie* (Moscow, 1987), 11.
13. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 49.
14. Kynin, *Sovetsko-Angliiskie otnosheniia*, vol. I, 51.
15. Ali Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921* (London, 2003), 72; D. S. Komissarov, "Smirnov kak diplomat i grazhdanin (1905-1982)," *Diplomaticheskii Ezhegodnik* (1997), 144–9.
16. Kynin, *Sovetsko-Angliiskie otnosheniia*, vol. I, 51.
17. *Ibid.*, 72.
18. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 576.
19. *Ibid.*, 231.
20. *Ibid.*, 576.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Komissarov, "Smirnov kak diplomat i grazhdanin (1905–1982)," 144–9.
23. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 230.
24. *Ibid.*, 230–1.
25. *Ibid.*, 181, 231.
26. NKVT stands for Narodnyi Komissariat Vneshnei Torgovli (People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade). During 1930–46, the NKVT played the role of the Ministry of the Foreign Trade in the USSR.
27. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 59–61
28. *Ibid.*, 63.
29. *Ibid.*, 59–61
30. *Ibid.*, 61.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 63.
33. Kynin, *Sovetsko-Angliiskie otnosheniia*, vol. I, 115.
34. *Ibid.*, 117
35. *Ibid.*
36. Zorin, *Osoboe Zadanie*, 11.
37. *Ibid.*, 11.
38. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 86.
39. Komissarov, "Smirnov kak diplomat i grazhdanin (1905–1982)," 144–9.
40. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 86.
41. Komissarov, "Smirnov kak diplomat i grazhdanin (1905–1982)," 144–9.
42. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 116–17, 228–9.
43. Komissarov, "Smirnov kak diplomat i grazhdanin (1905–1982)," 144–9.

44. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 87.
45. *Ibid.*, 116.
46. *Ibid.*, 116–17, 228–9.
47. *Ibid.*, 126, 143–4.
48. Kynin, *Sovetsko-Angliiskie otnosheniia*, vol. I, 80.
49. *Ibid.*, P. C. 82–3.
50. Semen Agaev, *Germanskii Imperializm v Irane* (Moscow, 1969), 113; Khadzhi Murat Ibragimbeili, *Krakh “Edelveisa” i Blizhnii Vostok* (Moscow, 1977), 35.
51. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 170.
52. *Ibid.*, 218–20.
53. Agaev, *Germanskii Imperializm*, 112.
54. Kynin, *Sovetsko-Angliiskie otnosheniia vo vremia Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, vol. I, 111.
55. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, p. 246.
56. Vitalii Naumkin, ed., *SSSR i strany Vostoka nakanune i v gody Vtoroi Mirovoi Voiny* (Moscow, 2010); Richard Stewart, *Sunrise at Abadan. The British and Soviet Invasion of Iran, 1941* (London, 1988), 34–52.
57. Faramarz Fatemi, *The USSR in Iran* (London, 1980), 17; Stewart, *Sunrise at Abadan*, 34–52.
58. Arkhiv VIMAIiVS, Fond 22r, opis’ 2, edunitsa khraneniia 21, tetrad’ 1, list 1; Ibragimbeili, *Krakh “Edelveisa” i Blizhniy Vostok*, 33, 40–6; Fatemi, *The USSR in Iran*, 18.
59. Michael Axworthy, *Iran; Empire of the Mind* (London, 2008), 232.
60. Fatemi, *The USSR in Iran*, 18–19.
61. Mohammad Goli Majd, *Great Britain and Reza Shah* (Gainesville, 2001), 377.
62. Hajj Amin al-Husaini (1895–1974) was an Arab nationalist and active member of anti-Zionist and anti-British movements in Palestine. From 1921 to 1948, he was the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Al-Husaini had an active role in the Arab Revolt in Palestine in 1936–9. During World War II he openly collaborated with the Germans and Italians. In 1941, he supported the nationalist coup staged by Rashid Ali al-Gailani in Iraq and was involved in the activities of the Gailani government. In May 1941, al-Husaini issued a fatwa calling for a holy war (jihad) against Britain. After the fall of Gailani, wanted by the British government, he fled to Iran and, subsequently, to the German part of Europe.
63. Rashid Ali al-Gailani (1892–1965) was an Arab nationalist and prominent political figure in Iraq. During his tenures as a prime minister in 1940 and 1941, he established close links with the Axis countries in an attempt to counterbalance the British presence in the country. On 1 April 1941, he staged a coup in Iraq and created the pro-German National Defense Government. To regain control over this country and eliminate a

potential threat to its oil fields, Britain was compelled to launch a military operation against Gailani, which was successfully accomplished by 31 May 1941. On 29 May 1941, Rashid Ali al-Gailani fled to Iran.

64. M. Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century. A Political History* (London, 1989), 116–20.
65. Cyrus Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah. From Qajar Collapse to Pahlavi Rule* (London, 1998), 405.
66. Agaev, *Germanskii Imperializm*, p. 110.
67. G. N. Valiakhmetova, “Irakskaiia neft’ v voennoi strategii Anglii i Sovetskii faktor: 1940–1941,” *Vestnik Cheliabinskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* XXXVIII (2009): 72.
68. See Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialistic Republic of Iran, 1920–1921* (Pittsburgh, 1995).
69. Komissarov, “Smirnov kak diplomat i grazhdanin (1905–1982),” 144–9.
70. *Ibid.*, 144–9.
71. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 230, 231.
72. *Ibid.*, 288, 230.
73. In 1934–46, the NKVD (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs)) was the name of the Soviet secret police organization, whose functions also included counterespionage and intelligence operations.
74. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 172.
75. See Ibragimbeili, *Krakh “Edelveisa” i Blizhnii Vostok*.
76. Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah*, 405.
77. Stewart, *Sunrise at Abadan*.
78. Arfa Hassan, *Under Five Shahs* (New York, 1965), 301.
79. Mamedov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIII; Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV.
80. Gusarov, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. XXIV, 295–6.
81. *Ibid.*, 296.
82. Komissarov, “Smirnov kak diplomat i grazhdanin (1905–1982),” pp. 144–9.
83. *Ibid.*, 144–9.
84. *Ibid.*, 144–9.
85. Kynin, *Sovetsko-Angliiskie otnoshenia*, vol. I, 113.
86. Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, 302.