

# **Iranian–Russian Encounters**

Empires and revolutions since 1800

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## 2 From confidence to apprehension

### Early Iranian interaction with Russia

*Maziar Behrooz*

#### Introduction

Iran's reunification in the late eighteenth century under the Qajar tribe came in the aftermath of nearly a century of warfare and territorial disunity. By all accounts, this period was also one of depopulation and economic contraction. It took Aqa Muhammad Khan Qajar 16 years of intense warfare to defeat his rivals and reunify Iran. By the time of his coronation in 1796, the new shah's unification of Iran had restored the guarded domain of Iran (*mamlek-e mahruseh Iran*) to approximately the dominion of the fallen Safavid Empire in 1722. The unification of Iran under the Qajars and Iran's entry into the nineteenth century had a number of distinct characteristics which may be summarized as follows: first, unification occurred at a time when Iran was just about to come out of a difficult century by restoring its territorial unity and central authority; second, it happened at a time when the Qajar dynasty was just about to redefine, legitimize, and transform itself from a tribal to a dynastic/royal identity; and third, Qajar unification occurred at a time when Iran was about to be engulfed in an aggressive colonial onslaught that included international intrigue and diplomacy.

Among the colonial powers arriving at Iran's doorstep, Russia stood out as the most territorially aggressive, Iran's closest European neighbour, and the one with which Iranians had had the most interaction during the 1700s. Unlike Iran, Russia in the eighteenth century had gone through significant military, administrative, educational, and, to some extent, economic transformation. Between the reigns of Peter I (d. 1725) and Catherine II (d. 1796), Russia had become a gigantic land empire with a powerful military that had defeated all its traditional rivals, namely Sweden, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the eighteenth century, Russia had gained some 500,000 square miles (1,295,000 square kilometers) of territory and had a population of about 36,000,000 to 40,000,000 with an army some 500,000 strong.<sup>1</sup> In this context, by the late eighteenth century the eastern Caucasus had become a focus of Russia's imperial ambition, making it a major menace to the newly established Qajar state in terms of its hegemony over that region.

This chapter examines Iranian perceptions of the Russian Empire in the wake of Iran's unification under the Qajar shahs and as military conflict over control

of the eastern Caucasus became an unavoidable reality. The period under study roughly begins in the 1780s and ends in the 1820s and covers Russia under Tsarina Catherine II and Tsars Paul, Alexander I, and Nicholas I, and Iran during the reign of Aqa Muhammad Shah and Fath Ali Shah. Iran's encounter with Russia was the Qajar state's first interaction with an aggressive European power endangering the guarded domain.

Studies of this period show that the Iranian and Russian elites each had a low view of the other, both before Qajar unification and through the early nineteenth century. These negative impressions centered on each viewing the other as uncivilized and backward, hence holding the other in contempt. However, as recent research suggests, the Qajar elite had developed a degree of respect for Peter I as a forceful and successful reformer.<sup>2</sup>

Early Qajar encounters with Russia occurred in the southern Caspian region as Aqa Muhammad Khan was engaged in a tough struggle for supremacy over Iran. The first encounters occurred in 1781 in the Mazandaran region and in 1782 in the Gilan region. In both cases, Aqa Muhammad Khan managed to force the Russians to back down and leave the area. Both cases involved the presence of Russian consular interest intertwined with commercial interest and Russian attempts at strengthening its military presence by trying to establish military forts. In this context the Russians also interfered in the ongoing struggle for supremacy within Iran, which involved various tribal and local factions, including the Qajars. These encounters nevertheless seem to have given the first Qajar ruler, Aqa Muhammad, an inkling concerning Russian ambition in Iran, leaving a negative impression on him and making him distrust the Russians for the rest of his life.<sup>3</sup>

Russian policy toward Iran and the eastern Caucasus was developed during the reign of Catherine and included both military and commercial interests. Militarily, the Russians had become interested in dominating the region in order to be in a better position to confront the Ottomans in the western Caucasus. Commercially, the region presented Russia with a potential opportunity to dominate trade with Iran and expand beyond, into India.<sup>4</sup> As far as the eastern Caucasus was concerned, from early on, Russian policy was focused on making the Kura River and ultimately the Aras River the border between the two empires. In 1783, under the Treaty of Georgievsk, Irakli, the *vali*, or king, of Gorjestan (eastern Georgia) officially severed his small kingdom's four-hundred-year relation with Iran and put himself under Russian protection. King Irakli of Georgia belonged to the Bagration dynasty, which had been ruling the region as a vassal of the Iranian shahs with the title of *vali* or governor. But as central authority in Iran collapsed in the eighteenth century, Irakli began a diplomatic effort to switch to the Russian side, and the Treaty of Georgievsk was the culmination of this process.<sup>5</sup> Other Christian communities of the eastern Caucasus also showed interest in becoming subject to Russian rule and throughout Iran's conflict with Russia aided the latter in its military efforts.<sup>6</sup>

Neither the Treaty of Georgievsk nor Russian interest in the eastern Caucasus deterred Aqa Muhammad Shah, which seems to point to his self-confidence in

confronting the Russians, a characteristic he maintained throughout his encounter. By 1795, Aqa Muhammad was ready to bring the eastern Caucasus back under Iranian rule. In the summer of that year, his 60,000-strong force, mostly cavalry, moved toward the region.<sup>7</sup> He spent the initial months gaining the submission of Muslim rulers of the region, the most intractable of whom proved to be Ibrahim Khalil Khan Javanshir, the khan of Qarabagh. Here, a lack of effective artillery, the most daunting deficiency in the Qajar military, became evident. This was a problem that would continue to undermine Qajar war efforts against Russia in the coming years.

According to the tradition of military campaigning in the east, the upkeep of Aqa Muhammad's large force relied on the local population for material and other logistical support. Also in line with tradition, those who defied the Qajar ruler and resisted were subject to looting or slavery, or both. In this context the movement of the Qajar army in the region brought much devastation and hardship to the local Muslim and Christian populations alike.

The Qajar advance culminated in the devastating sack of Tiflis (Tbilisi) in September 1795.<sup>8</sup> However, Aqa Muhammad failed to consolidate his position and began to move back toward the Mughan plain near the Caspian Sea, where he spent the winter. It may seem surprising that a military leader such as Aqa Muhammad did not consolidate his position. But looting and creating fear as a substitute for garrisoning the conquered territory was in line with the Turko-Mongol military tradition to which the Qajars belonged. According to this tradition, such acts were considered adequate for the short-term deterrence of future trouble. Furthermore, the largely nomadic Qajar force was a seasonal army and it was expected of the ruler that he would dismiss the bulk of the military for the winter. At any rate, it seems he was worried neither about Russian attempts to defend Gorjestan nor about a Russian counterattack. In the Mughan plain, Aqa Muhammad secured sufficient support to be declared *shahanshah* of Iran, and held his coronation in early 1796.

There are two theories as to why the Russians failed to come to Irakli's defense. One theory suggests that General Ivan Gudovich, the commander of Russian forces in the region, underestimated Aqa Muhammad and the imminent danger he posed. According to this view, the Russian commander viewed the Russian presence in the region as deterrence enough for the Qajars not to attack. Another theory suggests that his forces were too scattered in operations against the Ottomans, and therefore he was not able to react promptly.<sup>9</sup> Whichever was the case, the Russian response finally came in 1796 with a full ground and naval invasion.

In May 1796, Catherine II committed a 50,000-man force (other estimates suggest 30,000–40,000) under Valerian Zubov to occupy the region, with the ultimate goal of toppling Aqa Muhammad Shah and replacing him with a half-brother who had defected to Russia. The Russian force quickly occupied Darband-Qobbeh and by mid-June had secured the submission of Ganjeh, Shamakhi/Shirvan, Shakki, Qarabagh, Talesh, and Badkubeh (Baku). The other khanates of the eastern Caucasus, namely Iravan and Nakhjavan, were not occupied during this round of fighting.<sup>10</sup>

Aqa Muhammad Shah was in Khorasan planning the invasion of Herat and Bukhara when the news of the Russian invasion reached him. He rushed back to Tehran to prepare the army for a counterattack. Meanwhile, Catherine died in November 1796 and the Russians had withdrawn by the time the shah moved toward the region with a force of 10,000. Aqa Muhammad Shah was assassinated in Shusha-Qarabagh in May 1797 and the anticipated encounter between Iran and Russia did not materialize, owing to the deaths of the protagonists.<sup>11</sup>

Interesting observations can be made on Iranian attitudes toward the Russians at this early stage. Starting at the top, Aqa Muhammad Shah did not trust the Russians and was confident he could rise to their challenge. While history has judged the shah as a brutal conqueror, he has also been judged a pragmatic, calculating, and shrewd military and political leader. He is famously recorded by Malcolm, through his chief minister, Haji Ibrahim Khan Kalantar, I'temad al-Dowleh, as voicing a confident view in his ability to face the Russians. After telling his troops that his cavalry force would prevail against the Russian aggressors, the shah was recorded as telling Haji Ibrahim:

Can a man of your wisdom believe I will ever run my head against their walls of steel, or expose my irregular army to be destroyed by their cannon, and disciplined troops? ... Their shot shall never reach me: but they shall possess no country beyond its range. They shall not sleep; and, let them march where they choose, I will surround them with a desert.<sup>12</sup>

The above quotation reveals a number of interesting facts about the shah's military strategy against Russian aggression. First, it shows that even without having had a major encounter with Russian military power, the shah was acutely aware of his opponent's strength and his own shortcomings as far as the military was concerned. Perhaps brief encounters in the Caspian region a decade earlier had given him enough experience. Second, the shah's strategy for facing the Russians seems to have been a classic Iranian response to a stronger enemy, especially one with modern artillery. Iranians had been using this strategy since the time of the Parthian Empire's wars with Rome up to the early Safavid wars with the Ottoman Empire. This strategy included not giving direct battle but instead retreating and attacking in guerrilla style where the shah's army had an advantage, and conducting a scorched earth policy, hence denying the invading force the ability to sustain itself on occupied land. As noted, the first Qajar shah was known for his military leadership and pragmatism, both of which are evident in the above quotation. The shah was renowned for his dedication to the military, spending much of his time with his soldiers, making sure they were well armed, fed, and paid, and that discipline was maintained.

How realistic was the shah's understanding of Russian power and his own ability to withstand it? Could such a strategy have worked under the best of circumstances? The Russian Empire had clear advantages over Qajar Iran in terms of population, military strength, wealth, and resources, and it could rely on the local Christian population to provide some support. The Qajar shah's army at

this point was about 60,000–70,000 strong, a mainly tribal cavalry force equipped with outdated light camel-mounted artillery called *zamburaks* plus a limited number of aging heavy artillery pieces used mostly for siege purposes. The shah's dominions, including the khanates of the Caucasus, included only about 5 to 6 million inhabitants against Russia's 500,000-strong army and estimated 40 million population.<sup>13</sup> In 1812, Russia threw these resources into the field and defeated both the Qajar army and Napoleon's Grand Army simultaneously. On the other hand, for the shah's strategy to have worked, he would have needed to have reliable allies among the khans of the eastern Caucasus, many of whom had time and again proven to be poor allies of the Qajars and more interested in preserving their own independence. An interesting observation on the character of the khans of the Caucasus suggests: "The most common characteristic of these khanates was their desire to maintain their independence and safeguard their rule, and they would have taken any step in this regard."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps such a strategy had a chance of success if it could exhaust the Russians, making them believe that the whole venture was not worth the cost. As we shall see, this would not be the case, as the Russians showed much determination and persevered through difficulties.

The brief Russian occupation of the Caucasus, less than a year after Aqa Muhammad Shah's conquest, was both less repressive and less destructive than the shah's occupation and the future Russian occupation after 1804. In this context, it seems that the Russians left a positive impression on the local population. Valerian Zubov's ability to maintain the strict discipline of his troops projected an impression of justice, as Malcolm noted:

The countries ... through which it [the Russian army] marched were friendly: and its commander [Zubov] had observed so strict a discipline, that he left, in the provinces he had invaded, as strong an impression of justice as of the power of the sovereign whose troops he commanded.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the region's merchants had also been having interaction with the Russians and had developed a positive attitude toward them, particularly the fact that their female ruler had become a successful conqueror of the Ottomans.<sup>16</sup>

The early period of direct confrontation was followed by a period of disengagement between Russia and Iran (1797–1803), a period in which two new rulers took over. Tsar Paul's policy of distancing Russia from the policies of his mother, Catherine, as well as a more anti-British foreign policy and attempts to accommodate France, translated into less Russian attention toward the eastern Caucasus.<sup>17</sup> In Iran, this was a period when Fath Ali Shah was attempting to consolidate his power and therefore Tehran was also paying less attention to the disputed region.<sup>18</sup> Fath Ali Shah appointed his 9-year-old son, Abbas Mirza, prince regent (*na'eb al-saltaneh*) in 1798–9 and Abbas arrived in Tabriz as governor with an entourage of advisers in 1804.<sup>19</sup> Abbas Mirza's appointment played a crucial role in future Russo-Iranian relations, as he would become the principal commander of the armed forces defending the eastern Caucasus. Also during this

period, the khanates of the Caucasus, including Gorjistan, went back to their old policy of maintaining their autonomy while paying lip service to either Russia or Iran. Hence, the above factors translated into a period of calm and a return to relative autonomy for the khans of the region.

It has been suggested that before 1804 the Qajar ruling class underestimated the Russian resolve to conquer the region and that Russian aggression was viewed as a matter of temporary raids rather than an attempt permanently to annex the region.<sup>20</sup> This conclusion seems to be based on the lack of preparedness on the part of Iran for the new round of confrontation with Russia. However, it is difficult to see how the new shah could have done more in preparing his military in light of all the other, internal problems he was facing. At any rate, with the Russian annexation of Georgia in 1801, it is difficult to see how the Qajars could have interpreted Russian intentions as anything other than a resolve to conquer the region permanently. However, from a broader perspective the Qajars were not well informed of developments in Russia. They may have derived a sense of Russian military might and aggressiveness through the limited encounters they already had had with Russia. What was perhaps more difficult to understand was the sheer resources and size of Russia. To have had such comprehension, the Qajars would have needed to have sent ambassadorial missions to Russia, accompanied by observant diplomats and translators, in order to collect intelligence on Russian society and state. None of these things had been done at this point.

Interesting observations were made by the British ambassadorial mission to Iran in 1808–9 regarding Iranian knowledge of Russia. Two members of the mission – Harford Jones, the ambassador, and James Morier, one of his secretaries – made detailed records of their stay in Iran. Morier was surprised by the general lack of knowledge of the outside world among Iranians in general, and wrote, “[T]he Persians in general, however, live in the profoundest ignorance of every other country.” But Morier seems to have made a few exceptions regarding the above general observation. Evaluating the character of the shah’s chief minister, Mirza Shafi Mazandarani, Morier observed that he “was sufficiently acquainted with all the different courts of Europe,” and also “had acquired something of geography, when the French ambassador and suite were his guests.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Morier reports that the Prince Regent Abbas Mirza was interested in European history as well as European military manuals and that he “wanted to know more about the history of England, France and Russia in order to compare them.”<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, Harford Jones recorded the following observation about the lack of knowledge about Russia among Iranian statesmen. The observation was made after he attended the shah’s royal council in 1809 near Tabriz:

[T]he information which the Persian Ministers possessed of the nature and real force of the Russians on their frontier, and particularly of the position which the force, whatever it was, was placed,—of its powers of motion, of its supplies, and of its character,—to be so vague, so imperfect, and on

many points so contradictory, as not only to cause me great surprise, but also well-grounded alarm as to what might be the ultimate event of such ignorance, and such unaccountable neglect of the commonest military rules.<sup>23</sup>

The apparent lack of knowledge of Qajar statesmen about the world in general and Russia in particular, and the struggle to get better acquainted with both, may perhaps be best understood in view of the cultural transition that Iran was undergoing in the early 1800s. As has already been noted, the dynasty that unified Iran in the late eighteenth century was essentially a family belonging to a much larger tribal formation known as the Qajar. In this context, while the dynasty was attempting to establish a royal identity, many tribal cultural habits remained and worked to slow down the process of change. The addition of a Persian-speaking scribal class of administrators was a major boost to this process but it was hardly adequate. Even Persian-speaking administrators such as Mirza Shafi, Mirza Bozorg Farahani (the first Qa’em Maqam), and Mirza Abu al-Qasem (the second Qa’em Maqam) had a limited understanding of the world. Qajar statesmen time and again underestimated the Russians and were unable to safeguard the interests of the state when faced with international diplomacy.

Relations between Iran and Russia deteriorated sharply with the accession of Alexander I in 1801. The new Tsar ordered the annexation of Gorjistan in September 1801, toppling the Bagration dynasty and shipping most of the family off to Russia. Irakli’s Faustian deal with Russia, made to deter Iran and safeguard Georgian sovereignty, had resulted in the total loss of that very sovereignty. The Tsar named General Paul Tsitsianov governor of Georgia and Inspector of the Caucasian Line the following year. The general’s name was commonly pronounced “Sisianov” or “Zizianov” in Persian but his second title, “the Inspector,” was pronounced “*Ishpokhdor*” in Azari Turkish and it is by this title that he was commonly referred to by most Iranians.<sup>24</sup> Tsitsianov presided over a new round of aggressive and brutal military aggression that triggered the first Russo-Iranian war of 1804–13. The general was of Georgian extraction but raised and trained in Russia. He apparently had strong negative feelings toward Muslims in general and the “Persians” in particular, and held in contempt everything related to Iran. Hence, Tsitsianov’s tenure as commander and governor was a brutal episode in the new chapter of conflict.<sup>25</sup> His conquest of Ganjeh in early 1804 is a good example of his tactics and attitude. The assault on Ganjeh was no less brutal and murderous than Aqa Muhammad Shah’s sack of Tiflis in 1795 and reduced the city to rubble, killing its khan, Javad Khan Ziadoghlu-Qajar, his son, and many of the defenders and civilian population.<sup>26</sup> This particular episode and the Ishpokhdor’s subsequent brutalities and humiliating attitude toward the “Persians” was in contrast to the Zubov expedition of 1796 and made Tsitsianov a particularly hated and feared man.

The Russian commander’s next confrontation was with Abbas Mirza’s forces in Iravan during July–September 1804. Here a 10,000-strong Russian force<sup>27</sup> with heavy artillery attempted to capture Iravan, the most populous and most

prized of the eastern Caucasian khanates. The confrontation took place at a time when the Iranian side had not yet initiated its modern military (*Nezam-e Jadid*), and fought with its traditional army of mobile cavalry and light artillery. After an inconclusive encounter at Uch Kelisa (Echmiadzin), the Russians laid siege to Iravan accompanied by heavy bombardment as the forces of the khan of Iravan, Muhammad Khan Qajar, retreated to the citadel.<sup>28</sup> According to Bontems, the Ishpokhdor's army not only was cruel to the local Muslim population but also looted and severely damaged Armenian religious centers at Uch Kelisa.<sup>29</sup> Bontems contrasted the Russian behavior with the respectful manner with which the Qajar shah treated the local Christian population. At any rate, a much larger force (some 20,000 strong) commanded by Abbas Mirza and the shah himself in turn encircled the Russian force and began attacking it and cutting off its supply line. The Ishpokhdor eventually had to retreat, but the episode shows the continuing confidence on the part of the Iranians in their ability to repel the Russians.

During 1804–5 the Russians secured the submission of other khans of the region, the most significant of whom was Ibrahim Khalil Khan Javanshir of Qarabagh, who switched sides and submitted. The assassination of the Ishpokhdor was the high point of this round of confrontation. The general was assassinated on February 20, 1806 while attempting to negotiate and secure the submission of the khan of Badkubeh (Baku). The khan, Husayn Qoli Khan Badkubeh, tricked the Ishpokhdor into meeting him at a neutral location near the city wall, where he was shot by the khan's cousin, Ibrahim Khan Badkubeh.<sup>30</sup>

Tsitsianov's death resulted in the temporary withdrawal of Russian forces from the Baku region. News of his death was a small victory but a major boost to Iranian morale as his severed head was rushed to Tabriz and then Tehran.<sup>31</sup> But the assassination of the Russian commander did not make a dent in Russian resolve as by the end of 1806 Russia had occupied all the khanates of the eastern Caucasus with the exception of Iravan, Nakhjavan, and Talesh. Abbas Mirza's attempt to take back Qarabagh failed, owing to a lack of effective siege artillery and the assassination of Ibrahim Khalil Khan Javanshir by the Russians.<sup>32</sup> By the end of 1807, Abbas Mirza had managed to employ a number of Russian and Polish deserters and prisoners of war to attempt to train his military on the European model. These Russians, a few hundred in number, were mostly enlisted men without high military value, but they made a positive impression on the Iranians and many of them became loyal officers in Abbas Mirza's emerging new army.<sup>33</sup> The employment of the Russians also suggests that in Tabriz the idea of the necessity of developing a modern military had already developed.

It was after this wave of conquests that Qajar self-confidence began to wane and give way to apprehension. Jaubert, in his 1806 visit to Iran, made a number of interesting observations on Qajar statesmen's attitude toward the Russians. He captured the 17-year-old Abbas Mirza's frustration in fighting the Russians in the following words of the prince: "All my efforts and courage in confronting the Russian army have been unsuccessful. People applaud my successes while I alone am aware of my shortcomings."<sup>34</sup> Jaubert also shows that Abbas Mirza

was well aware of the firepower and discipline of the Russian artillery and infantry, and had already concluded that he would need a similar force to defend Iran against the Russians. But perhaps the most telling of his observations is the frank assessment given by Mirza Shafi Mazandarani, Fath Ali Shah's chief minister (*sadr-e a'zam*):

The Russians, whom we previously considered inferior due to their extreme lack of wit, today are in many ways ahead of us ... the Russians have extended their sphere of influence from the Neman to the Danube to the Aras to the steppes of Crimea to the mountains of Gorjestan ... their gradual domination can to some extent show us as to what we need to do. Our resistance against this flood is futile. If our empire's northern border has been forced to recede a little, we should expand our eastern border up to and beyond Qandahar.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, Qajar Iran eventually did adopt this strategy, only to be confronted with expanding British colonial interest in what is today Afghanistan, and with similarly disappointing results. Mirza Shafi is not known as having been a great statesman compared to Mirza Isa (Mirza Bozorg) Farahani, the first Qa'em Maqam, his future deputy and Abbas Mirza's chief minister, or his predecessor Haji Ibrahim Khan Kalantar, I'temad al-Dowleh, but Jaubert's remarks suggest that at least some of the civilian administrators of the Qajar state were weary of the situation and were already looking at a way pragmatically to accept the reality of Russian superiority and their own loss of territory. The attitude of Mirza Shafi, as the statesman in charge of the administration of the court (*dar al-khelafeh*) of Tehran stood in contrast to that of the court (*dar al-saltaneh*) of Tabriz led by Abbas Mirza and the Qa'em Maqam. Abbas Mirza continued to express self-confidence when he was quoted as saying in 1812, "With every defeat the Russians inflict on me, they unwittingly teach me a lesson and by learning from these lessons I shall benefit."<sup>36</sup> Clearly a wedge was being created between Qajar statesmen in Tehran and Tabriz regarding how to deal with Russia. While one would have expected the Tabriz party to be the more hesitant, because of their proximity to Russia, the situation was quite the reverse. By this stage of the conflict with Russia, it seems that Qajar statesmen in Tehran had started to advise compromise and acceptance of the reality of the dominant position of Russia in Caucasus. The statesmen in Tabriz seem to have believed that Russia was in a weak position and that the situation could be turned around in Iran's favor if only a modern force could be trained.

Among the Tabriz statesmen, the first Qa'em Maqam was by far the ablest, not only in Azarbaijan but in all of Iran.<sup>37</sup> He was known to be an ardent and consistent anti-Russian high official and had developed a close relationship with Abbas Mirza. As such, the first Qa'em Maqam no doubt played a major role in developing the uncompromising anti-Russian strategy of the court of Tabriz.<sup>38</sup> This difference of opinion on Iran's abilities and Russia's military strength would continue up to the end of the second war with Russia in 1828.

The Russian command of the Caucasus changed hands four times between 1806 and 1812, with Ivan V. Gudovitch (1806–9), Alexander P. Tormasov (1809–10), Philip O. Paulucci and Nikolai F. Rtishchev jointly (1809–11), and finally Rtishchev alone (1811–16) taking their turn. The period 1806–11 was a difficult one for Russia, with long wars with the Ottoman Empire (1806–12) and with Napoleonic France, and with tribal insurrections in various part of the eastern Caucasus. Tsar Alexander's commanders in the Caucasus were therefore ordered to bring the conflict with Iran to an end but without offering any meaningful concessions. Both Gudovich and Tormasov wrote to Abbas Mirza and proposed peace by making the River Aras the border between Iran and Russia, but both proposals were rejected. In reality, Russian peace terms were demands for nothing short of total capitulation by the Iranian side at a time when Iran had not been defeated. In addition, the Russians continued to insult Fath Ali Shah by addressing him by his pre-coronation name, Baba Khan (Jahanbani). Each rejection by the Iranian side resulted in escalation of conflict by the Russian army, as in the case of the second siege of Iravan, conducted by Gudovich in 1808, which eventually caused some three 3,000 Russian casualties and a retreat.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, the period 1806–12 was one when Iran was in a relatively good position to face a much stronger enemy. Iranian statesmen seem to have been aware of this fact and of the difficulties Russia was facing. During this period, Russia was under such pressure that it could commit only about 10,000 troops to the Iranian theater, while the Qajar army numbered seven times that figure. This was also a period when the shah decided to accept recommendations on reorganizing and modernizing the military, establishing the *Nezam-e Jadid* in early 1808.<sup>40</sup> By this time, especially after the setbacks of 1806–7, it had become clear that without a modernized military, especially modern artillery and infantry, to complement the shah's traditional military, defeating the Russians would be impossible and the best the shah could hope for would be a defensive war to hold on to what was not occupied by the Russians. In this context, the task of organizing the *Nezam-e Jadid* forces was given to Abbas Mirza, the effective commander-in-chief of the Iranian war effort, with the aid of first the French and later the British. Aqa Muhammad Shah's strategy of pulling back and conducting a scorched earth policy and guerrilla attacks had had only limited success, owing to Russian firepower and the Russian strategy of fortifying captured fortresses and using them as a platform for the next stage of attack. Added to the problem was the unreliability of the Caucasian khans, who had proven to be poor allies of the Qajars. By 1808, Iran was clearly in a defensive posture, struggling to hold on to Iravan and Nakhjavan while only able to conduct limited raids deep into Russian-occupied territory without the ability to hold any territory or recapture any of the cities lost to the Russians.

But even in this period there are hints that Iran's assessment of the Russian threat was problematic at best. Harford Jones's observations upon his visit to the shah's royal military camp in the summer of 1809 are telling. By the summer of 1809 a little over a year and a half had passed since the *Nezam-e Jadid* forces had been organized under French instructors. While Jones was not a military

man, his assessment of the state of the *Nezam* forces is not flattering; he found them to be poorly trained and led. He goes so far as to suggest that the traditional tribal forces under the command of Muhammad Ali Mirza Dowlatshah, Abbas Mirza's half-brother and chief rival, were more reliable than the European-trained forces of the crown prince.<sup>41</sup> On another occasion, at the pasture of Ujan and while present at a royal council attended by Abbas Mirza, the first Qa'im Maqam, Mirza Shafi, and two other Qajar noblemen, Jones made a number of telling observations. According to him, Fath Ali Shah had praised the readiness of the *Nezam* forces and the availability of supplies in Tabriz and Iravan and had then ordered the Abbas Mirza to march and attack the Russians until they were driven from Georgia. When asked for his opinion, Harford Jones discussed at length the merits of fighting a defensive war while Iran remained the weaker party, using natural barriers (rivers and mountains), pointing out that there were no realistic assessment of Russian strength on the Iranian side, and that an alliance with the Ottoman Empire, at this point at war with Russia, was advisable.<sup>42</sup> He then made the following remarks to the shah:

In saying this, let it not be imagined, that I undervalue the bravery of your troops; but that I only speak of them relatively, when opposed to those who have been longer disciplined, and more experienced in a species of warfare, to which Persia is at present not much accustomed. Russia possesses a large army of troops ... and I cannot contemplate an *offensive* war with that power, on the part of Persia ... If your majesty proposes to attack the Russians, it appears to me, the most important thing for you to be acquainted with, is, their means, their resources, what number, and what kind of forces.<sup>43</sup>

The shah, we are told, was convinced and left the war to the prince regent to conduct as he saw fit. The fact that it took the British ambassador to convince the shah points to the level of the court's unrealistic assessment of Russia and the tribal nature of warfare even after the introduction of European-modeled forces. The new *Nezam* forces, although equipped, uniformed, and drilled in the European ways, were still led by tribal military commanders.

By 1812 the *Nezam* forces had been trained for three more years under British officers and had gained some experience in battle. Before 1812, Iran and Russia continued to have skirmishes followed by negotiations. At some point, Iranian forces made deep penetrations into Russian-occupied territory, as far north as Ganjeh, but were not able to hold any fixed position.

In March 1812, Russian forces briefly and unsuccessfully crossed to the south of the River Aras, and Russian brutality gave the local population a taste of heavy-handed Russian occupation.<sup>44</sup> This spelled a new round of intense fighting between the two as war with France loomed, leading Russia to make a hasty peace with the Ottoman Empire in May 1812, returning all captured territory. Full-fledged battles with Iran resumed in July 1812, as Napoleon's Grand Army was preparing to invade Russia. Nevertheless, the first Russo-Iranian war came



to an end after Iran's defeat in October 1812 at Aslanduz and January 1813 at Lankaran.

By the time the Treaty of Golestan was signed, in October 1813, a clear wedge had appeared between Tehran and Tabriz on the assessment of the Russian threat. The court at Tehran had the final word in accepting the treaty. The shah accepted defeat in light of British pressure and promises, real financial problems, and military challenges elsewhere. Indeed, the shah, advised by Mirza Shafi and others, reluctantly accepted this arrangement, hoping, somewhat naively, that the British could get him a better deal with the Tsar. In Tabriz, Crown Prince Abbas Mirza and his chief minister, the first Qa'em Maqam, were against signing the treaty and voiced their confidence in Iran's ability to regroup and continue the war. But Tabriz was overruled by the shah.<sup>45</sup> Abbas Mirza and the first Qa'em Maqam had presided over the establishment of the modern force, which was under Abbas Mirza's command. Although defeated in 1812 and 1813, Abbas seems to have been confident in his own ability to continue the war. Both Tehran and Tabriz were displeased with the outcome of the war but apparently their conclusions were based on two conflicting assessments of Iran's ability to continue and, more importantly, Russia's strength.

The period between the first and second Russo-Iranian wars, 1813–26, provided more opportunity for interaction between the two sides, but while it seems that the Russian view toward Iran hardly changed, this period is the beginning of a readjustment of the Iranian elite's attitude toward Russia. Qajar Iran's first opportunity for observing Russian society closely and for a longer duration came with the Ilchi mission. Mirza Abu al-Hasan Khan Shirazi Ilchi led a mission for ratification of the Golestan Treaty and to negotiate the return of some of the lost territories. The mission lasted almost three years (1814–16), owing to the absence of Tsar Alexander I, who was preoccupied dealing with Napoleon. The Ilchi mission was chronicled by a younger member of the mission named Mirza Muhammad Hadi Alavi-ye Shirazi, and his chronicle provided the Iranian elite with the opportunity to examine Russia more closely than ever before. The chronicle is a mixture of the recording of everyday, mundane events and a detailed observation of Russian society. It presents the reader with conflicting attitudes toward Russia, which may be attributed to the different understandings of Russia on the part of Ilchi and his younger assistant. As a seasoned diplomat and one who was known to have had pro-British views, Ilchi had developed a lifelong dislike for the Russians. Furthermore, his observation of Russia and Russians was in line with his generation's attitude: that the Russians were brutes and unclean. The chronicle complains about a variety of Russian characteristics, from Russian washroom hygiene and practices to the "dominant" status of Russian women in society.<sup>46</sup> But the author also shows a fascination with the state of Russian cities, opera houses, factories, etc. An underlying theme in this document is the author's fascination with "order" in Russian society, and the fact that everything, from cities to governmental bodies, was properly organized.<sup>47</sup>

Another visitor to Russia, a younger man, had a more positive impression of Russia. Mirza Saleh Shirazi spent some time in Moscow and St. Petersburg on

his way to Britain as part of Abbas Mirza's first group of students sent abroad in 1815. Mirza Saleh's account is in general more detailed and accurate than the earlier chronicle, which points to the observant approach of its author. The author takes it upon himself to provide the reader with a detailed account of Russian history, society, and social organization. He noted similarities between Russia's despotic form of government and Iran's political system, but he was impressed with Russian efficiency in general, and showed much admiration for Peter I.<sup>48</sup> Most notably, and similarly to Ilchi, Mirza Saleh was impressed with "order," both in the organization of centers of learning (Moscow University and library) and in the efficiency of the police force.<sup>49</sup>

The relationship between Iran and Russia began to take a turn for the worse after the 1816 appointment of General Alexis Pertovich Yermolov as commander-in-chief of Georgia with jurisdiction over all of Russian-occupied Caucasus and ambassador-extraordinary to the court of Tehran. His responsibilities included command of the Independent Georgia Corps, which had considerable autonomy as how to deal with the local population and with Iran. Yermolov is on record as of one the more brutal Russian officers in charge of the Russian-occupied Caucasus, and perhaps the single most instrumental figure in causing the second war between Russia and Iran. Pushkin, for example, wrote, "Bow down thy head, oh, Caucasus: submit; Yermoloff comes."<sup>50</sup> Known as "Yermol" to the locals, he openly expressed his wish to unleash terror on the region in order to secure submission,<sup>51</sup> and his central strategy was to bring all of the Caucasus, both Ottoman and Iranian territories, under Russian control. Yermol traveled to Iran in 1817 and visited both Tabriz and Tehran. His visit to Tabriz immediately created friction with Abbas Mirza and the Qa'em Maqam. Members of his entourage, such as Moritz von Kotzebue, had a negative view of the first Qa'em Maqam,<sup>52</sup> and the encounter in Tabriz left a negative impression as Yermol refused to observe court protocol, treating the prince with a condescending attitude and refusing to recognize him as heir apparent, while establishing contact with his half-brother and chief rival Muhammad Ali Mirza Dowlatshah. In addition, the general created more friction by demanding the return of Russian deserters employed in the Iranian military.<sup>53</sup> When visiting the shah in Tehran, his attitude was different only in that he showed respect to Fath Ali Shah but displayed "limitless arrogance" toward other court officials and refused to observe court procedures.<sup>54</sup> He refused the shah's naive request for the partial reinstatement of Iranian rule over the lost territories and offered only minor concessions. Having left a very negative impression of Russians in Iran, the general would spend the rest of his tenure until 1827 subduing the occupied population and preparing the ground for annexation of the rest of the eastern Caucasus.

Another reason for the worsening of relations between Iran and Russia was the ambiguities in territorial demarcation in the Treaty of Golestan, a problem that was left to future negotiations. Both the Iranians and the Russians were displeased with the treaty. The Russians had accepted Golestan only as a temporary arrangement, as their strategic plan had always seen the River Aras as the new border with Qajar Iran. On the other hand, for the Aras to become the new

border, the two remaining khanates of Iravan and Nakhjavan had to be annexed. It seems Yermolov used the territorial dispute to bring about a new round of conflict, as his aggressiveness did not help settle the issue and prolonged negotiations failed to produce results.

The next major diplomatic encounter between the two empires occurred in 1819. This was the ambassadorial mission of Semyon I. Mazarovich sent by the court of St. Petersburg as a permanent resident diplomatic mission. A member of the Mazarovich mission was a young poet-turned-diplomat by the name of Alexander Griboyedov, who had joined the mission in Tiflis.<sup>55</sup> The mission's task was to negotiate the following: the border dispute related to the Golestan Treaty, repatriation of Russian deserters who had formed a battalion in Abbas Mirza's army, the problem of Iranian protection of the Georgian prince Alexander (Iskandar Mirza) Bagration, and trade with Iran.<sup>56</sup> The mission did not repeat the disrespectful behavior of the Yermolov mission and in this sense left a better impression in both Tabriz and Tehran. But friction did arise between Griboyedov and Abbas Mirza over the repatriation of Russian deserters, and negotiations over the border dispute did not get far either. The issue of Russians residing in Iran and Griboyedov's insistence on their repatriation would in 1829 cause his death in Tehran.

During General Yermolov's tenure, pressure on the Muslim population of occupied Caucasus increased. This pressure included implementing direct Russian rule on some of the khanates by removing the autonomous khans, substituting shari'a law with Russian law, undermining the position of the Muslim ulama, and finally by favoring the Christian population against the Muslim peoples of the region.<sup>57</sup> The final straw came with the occupation of the northern shore of Lake Gokcha (Sivan) in 1825. Even the British chargé d'affaires in Tehran, Henry Willock, who blamed Abbas Mirza for the outbreak of the second war with Russia, admitted the aggressive Russian behavior in this case.<sup>58</sup>

As has already been noted, the court of Tabriz was against the Treaty of Golestan from the beginning. The first Qa'em Maqam was known to be anti-Russian and he seems to have been the architect of Iran's strategy toward Russia during the interwar years. According to this strategy, Iran would maintain a policy of "hostile peace" toward Russia in order to be able to defend itself against future Russian aggression. This strategy would necessarily secure the crown prince's position in the Qajar power hierarchy as the effective commander of forces facing the Russians and would, in addition, make sure the flow of money from Tehran continued uninterrupted.<sup>59</sup> Some observers have pointed to this strategy as the main cause of the outbreak of the second war with Russia. In his study of the second Russo-Iranian war, while dismissing the British chargé d'affaires' contention that Iran was responsible for the outbreak of the war, P. W. Avery makes the following remark:

[I]t is difficult to agree with Willock that he [Abbas Mirza] incited a stirring of religious feeling with a view to forcing Fath Ali Shah into war. He tried to keep a precarious balance between peace and war, but nearer a war than peace. Circumstances went beyond his control and he lost the balance.<sup>60</sup>

Hence, it is argued that by this strategy, Abbas Mirza had created a situation of "no war, no peace" and that eventually he lost control. The above observations, however, seem to underestimate the aggressiveness of the Yermolov administration in the Caucasus and its resolve to provoke another conflict with Iran and annex the remaining Caucasian khanates. In other words, the Qajars seem to have been faced with two options when confronted with the "Yermolov factor." One option was to give up the remaining khanates without a fight, and the other was to fight for them. Internal Iranian dynamics played a role in the outbreak of the war insofar as the timing of the conflict was concerned, but they do not seem to have made much difference in causing the eventual outbreak.

In this context, Yermolov seems to have been the single most instrumental factor in instigating the second war between Russian and Iran. By all accounts, Yermolov was a capable administrator and military leader, but he was also brutal and cruel, especially when it came to dealing with the local population. He also dealt with Iran in a condescending manner, and held all Muslims in contempt. His purposeful rudeness toward Iranian officials in his 1817 travels to Tabriz and Tehran had left a trail of bitter memories among officials of both courts. Perhaps the most important legacy of Yermolov was his intention from early on to prepare the ground for the conquest of the remaining khanates under Iranian rule and to make the River Aras the new border. To accomplish this task, Yermolov seems to have adopted the policy of one of his predecessors, General Paul Tsitsianov (the Ishpokhdor), to provoke conflict with Iran and to have followed this with the employment of brutal force.

Yermolov's mistreatment of the Muslim population under his command resulted in discontent and insurrections in the region, followed by harsh Russian repression. By early 1826 his command was faced with a number of uprisings in the region, the most important of which were major uprisings in the high mountains of Daghestan and in Chechniya. The Russian military faced much difficulty in suppressing these risings.

Another provocative action by Yermolov was the Russian occupation of the northern shore of Lake Gokcha (Sivan) in the Khanate of Iravan in 1825. A clear violation of Golestan, this action was the most significant provocation by the Russian side. While negotiations with the crown prince had apparently resulted in an agreement to swap land for the occupied territory, the agreement was not ratified by the shah and was declared null and void.<sup>61</sup> Yermolov, however, contended that the agreement was binding and had refused to retreat. The Lake Gokcha occupation clearly showed that it was Russia and not Iran which initiated hostilities and breached Golestan, and that Iran was left with no choice but to come up with a proper response.

All of the above factors resulted in the second major military confrontation between Iran and Russia. The second Russo-Iranian war (1826-8), despite initial victories, was a major defeat for Iran. Yermolov's strategy of provoking confrontation worked, as Russia annexed Iravan, Nakhjavan, and Talesh. There has been much discussion and disagreement as to how the second war started and who was to blame. What is clear is that after the Treaty of Turkmanchay (1828),

Iran's attitude toward Russia changed. The self-confidence of previous years gave way to total apprehension and even fear of the northern neighbor. The attitudes of the courts of Tehran and Tabriz once again converged as the reality of the loss of the Caucasus sank in.

The Griboyedov mission of 1829 and the subsequent massacre of the mission in Tehran is an appropriate case in point. Alexander Griboyedov entered Tehran at the head of a mission to deliver the ratified Treaty of Turkmanchay and to deal with other business, including war reparations. However, upon insisting on the return of some Christian female slaves who had become wives and mothers in Iran, he incited a riot in Tehran that led to the death of almost all the Russians in the Tehran embassy compound.<sup>62</sup> In this context, the nervous Iranian reaction was telling and shows how much attitudes toward Russia had changed in Iran. One Qajar historian sums up the reaction as follows:

When Crown Prince Abbas Mirza heard of the occurrence, he ordered all the soldiers and the nobles to put on black dress as a sign of mourning, all the bazaars to be closed for three days, and all the people to stop working.<sup>63</sup>

The shah followed up by sending a diplomatic mission to Tsar Nicholas I offering his deep regrets. The high-ranking mission was led by Abbas Mirza's son Prince Khosrow Mirza and arrived in St. Petersburg in 1829. The mission's observations were recorded by Mirza Mostafa Khan Afshar, Baha' al-Molk, an official accompanying the prince. Like his predecessors, Afshar made a number of interesting observations on Russian society and further demonstrated the change of attitude among the Iranians. While visiting a military training school in Moscow, he sadly noted the high level of education of Russian officers compared to the lack of education among Iranian officers. He was impressed by how Russian officers could lead a large number of soldiers in an orderly manner while recognizing the abilities of their own forces and the enemy's points of strength and weakness. Afshar continues, "Truth be told, our military men have been training under the English for a while, but what have they learned except formal [useless] military drills?"<sup>64</sup> He then quotes General Ivan F. Paskevich, the victor of the second Russo-Iranian war, as telling him:

[Y]ou cannot have better soldiers than you already have, for in the battle of Ganjeh they rushed up close to the mouth of our cannons, and stood their ground, they can walk five verses (*farsakh/farsang*) ... but you do not have [competent military] leaders to lead them according to the needs of the time and location.<sup>65</sup>

Afshar too expressed his admiration for the "order" with which the Russians conducted themselves and organized their society. He seems to have been among the first Iranian officials to begin to understand that having modern weapons and drill was not enough in terms of having a modern military. He made the following observation and judgment in a sad tone:

It is regrettable that we clearly see the progress of our neighbor, which has been attained in a short time, but we are not thinking about doing the same so that we would not be always defeated by our neighbor.<sup>66</sup>

Here Afshar alludes to reasons other than military ones as the key to the progress of Russia. Of course, for the rest of the century Qajar Iran would toy with the necessity of broader reform accompanied by a further readjustment of attitudes toward Russia.

## Conclusion

The Qajars began thinking about Russia and the Russian threat to the guarded domain with a sense of self-confidence typical of a newly victorious tribal dynasty. The Qajar tribe and Aqa Muhammad Shah's family had suffered much throughout the eighteenth century in order to reach the point of his coronation in 1796. Both the shah's grandfather and father were killed while contesting for power, and the shah himself was badly mutilated in a similar struggle. The shah managed the reunification of Iran against all odds and with much difficulty. He put his sense of self-confidence immediately to work against the Russian threat. It is safe to say that his understanding of how strong Russia was and how much Russian society had progressed was limited in scope and did not go much further than the few encounters he had had in the previous years. But Aqa Muhammad Shah was a shrewd ruler and he seemed to be aware of the odds against him. He clearly had developed a strategy for confronting the Russian threat, although he had no way of knowing how strong an enemy he was facing.

Fath Ali Shah's accession to the throne coincided with a new century, a more aggressive Russian policy, and an international situation that was now dominated by the consequences of the French Revolution of 1789. When discussing the internal dynamics of Iran during the long reign of Fath Ali Shah (1797-1834), it is necessary to take into consideration the court of Tabriz as an essential part of the process. This is because Abbas Mirza and the two Qa'em Maqams played a pivotal role in developing policy toward Russia, although the final decision remained the shah's prerogative. It is during the reign of Fath Ali Shah that one can see the gradual withering away of the self-confidence of the previous generation. The wedge between Tehran and Tabriz as how to confront Russian aggression remained a reality throughout the confrontation. Only with military defeat in the field, expanded interaction with Russia, and a more aggressive Russian policy in the 1820s did the early confidence give way. To be sure, the Qajars fought long and hard against a far superior foe, and they could not have done so without their having had confidence in their own ability to resist.

An interesting byproduct of interaction and conflict with Russia was the genesis of the Iranian policy of maintaining an equilibrium between stronger European colonial powers, a hallmark of Qajar policy for the rest of the nineteenth century. Once it became clear that facing Russia needed the backing of

nother power, both militarily and financially, the "art" of pitting one power against the other in order to maintain a balance, negative and positive equilibrium, was born.

## Notes

- 1 For the Russian population, see Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 276–7; Gary Marker, "The Age of Enlightenment 1740–1801," in Gregory I. Freeze, ed., *Russia: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 141; for Russian territorial gains and the size of the military, see Muriel Atkin, *Russian and Iran, 1740–1829* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), p. 99.
- 2 Maryam Ekhtiar, "An Encounter with the Russian Czar: The Image of Peter the Great in Early Qajar Historical Writing," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 29, nos. 1–2, Winter/Spring 1996, pp. 57–70.
- 3 Muhammad Taqi Lisan al-Mulk Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh* (Tehran, 1377/1998), pp. 44–5, 51–2; Ali Qoli Mirza E'tezad Saltaneh, *Eksir al-tavarikh*, ed. Jamshid Kianfar (Tehran, 1370/1991), pp. 28–34; Gavin Hambly, "Agha Muhammad Khan," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7: *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 115–16, 119.
- 4 Khanak Ishqi, *Siyasat-e nezami russiyeh dar Iran 1790–1815* (Tehran, 1353/1974), pp. 299–30.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–3; Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, pp. 10–13.
- 6 Ishqi, *Siyasat-e nezami russiyeh dar Iran 1790–1815*, p. 24; Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, p. 13.
- 7 Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, p. 39; E'tezad Saltaneh, *Eksir al-tavarikh*, pp. 46–55.
- 8 E'tezad Saltaneh, *Eksir al-tavarikh*, p. 77.
- 9 John Malcolm, *The History of Persia from the Early Period to the Present Time*, vol. 2 (London, 1829), p. 197.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 198; Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, p. 82; Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, pp. 39–41.
- 11 For the shah's movements and assassination, see Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, pp. 83–5; Reza Qoli Khan Hedayat, *Fehrest al-tavarikh* (Tehran, 1373/1994), pp. 323–6.
- 12 Malcolm, *The History of Persia*, p. 201.
- 13 For estimates on the shah's military, see Robert Grant Watson, *Tarikh-e Iran dar دوره-ye Qajariyeh* (A history of Persia from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the year 1858), 3rd edition, trans. Vahid Mazandarani (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publishers, 1354/1975), p. 98; Malcolm, *The History of Persia*, pp. 190–1; for an estimate on Iran's population at the end of the eighteenth century, see Charles Issawi, ed., *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 20.
- 14 Ali Reza Rahvar-e Liqvan and Parviz Zare' Shahmars, *Tarikh-e Qarabagh* (Tehran, 1997), p. 75.
- 15 Malcolm, *The History of Persia*, p. 200.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- 17 Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, p. 275.
- 18 Hedayat, *Fehrest al-tavarikh*, pp. 325–40; Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, pp. 101–17.
- 19 Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, p. 101.
- 20 Gavin Hambly, "Iran during the Reigns of Fath Ali Shah and Muhammad Shah," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, p. 146.
- 21 James Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor to Constantinople in the year 1808 and 1809* (Philadelphia, 1816), p. 195.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 279.
- 23 Sir Harford Jones Brydges, *An Account of the Transactions of His Majesty's Mission to the Court of Persia in the Years 1807–1811* (London, 1834), p. 253.

- 24 This had a mischievous twist to it as well. The name "ishpokhdor" is made up of three Turkish words: *ish* (work or job), *pokh* (dirt or shit), and the verb *dor* (is) which would make it mean "he whose job is shit."
- 25 For Tsitsianov's view on Iran, see John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London, 1908), pp. 62–3; Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, pp. 71–3.
- 26 Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, p. 67; Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, p. 82; Hasan Fasa'i, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, trans. Herbert Busse (New York, 1971), p. 108; Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, p. 124.
- 27 Estimates of the size of the Russian force vary from 3,500 to 20,000.
- 28 This was the first battle of Iravan, but the accounts of Iranian and non-Iranian sources differ sharply as to the number of Russian troops; see Sepehr, *Nasekh al-Tavarikh*, pp. 127–9; Hedayat, *Fehrest al-tavarikh*, pp. 342–4; Fasa'i, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, pp. 107–9; Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, p. 76; Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, p. 69.
- 29 August Bontems, *Safarnameh-ye August Bontems* (Voyage en Turquie et Perse 1807), trans. Masureh Ettehadiyeh (Tehran, 1354/1975), pp. 56–7.
- 30 For the assassination of Tsitsianov, see Sepehr, *Nasekh al-tavarikh*, pp. 140–1; Hedayat, *Fehrest al-tavarikh*, pp. 348–9.
- 31 Because Tsitsianov's head and hands were rushed to Tabriz and Tehran for identification purposes and as a sign of a grand achievement, the Persian proverb "*sar-e ishpokhdor avard*" came to life and remained in use until the mid-twentieth century.
- 32 For the siege of Shusha and assassination of Javanshir, see Rahvar-e Liqvan and Zare' Shahmars, *Tarikh-e Qarabagh*, pp. 103–6.
- 33 Aleksandr Kibovskii, "Bagaderan'-Russian Deserters in the Persian Army, 1802–1839," *Tseikhgauz*, No. 5, 1996. Available at <http://marksrussianmilitaryhistory.info/Persdes2.html>.
- 34 P. Am. Jaubert, *Mosaferrat dar Armanestan va Iran* (Voyage en Arménie et en Perse), trans. Ali Tehrani (Tehran: 1347/1968), p. 136.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- 36 Gaspar Drouville, *Safarnameh-ye Drouville 1812–1813* (Voyage en Perse 1812–1813), trans. Javad Mohi (Tehran: 1337/1958), p. 175.
- 37 Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor to Constantinople*, p. 277; Jones Brydges, *An Account of the Transactions of His Majesty's Mission to the Court of Persia*, pp. 279–81.
- 38 James Fraser, *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces on the Southern Bank of the Caspian Sea* (London, 1826), pp. 306–7.
- 39 Fasa'i, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, p. 124.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- 41 Jones Brydges, *An Account of the Transactions of His Majesty's Mission to the Court of Persia*, pp. 255–6.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 267–9.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 269–70.
- 44 Ishqi, *Siyasat-e nezami russiyeh dar Iran 1790–1815*, pp. 161–2.
- 45 Drouville, *Safarnameh-ye Drouville 1812–1813*, p. 181; Ishqi, *Siyasat-e nezami russiyeh dar Iran 1790–1815*, p. 124.
- 46 Mirza Muhammad Hadi Alavi-ye Shirazi, *Dalil al-sofara: safar nameh-ye Mirza Abu al-Hasan Khan Shirazi "Ilchi" beh Russiyeh*, ed. Muhammad Golbon (Tehran 1363/1984), p. 29.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 85–92.
- 48 *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 150; Mirza Saleh Shirazi, *Safarnameh*, ed. Ismail Ra'in (Tehran: 1347/1968), pp. 108–12, 137–8.
- 49 Shirazi, *Safarnameh*, pp. 123–5.
- 50 Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, p. 92.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

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loritz von Kotzebue, *Masaferat beh Iran: douran Fath Ali Shah 1817*, (Narrative of Journey into Persia in the Suite of the Imperial Russian Embassy in the Year 1817), trans. Mahmud Hedayat (Tehran, 1348/1969), pp. 69, 111. For more on Yermolov's mission see Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, p. 101; Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, pp. 153–4.

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### 3 Khosrow Mirza's mission to St Petersburg in 1829

*Firuz I. Melville*

Next, word had it that the nose was walking, not on the Nevski Prospekt, but in the Taurida Park,<sup>2</sup> and, in fact, had been in the habit of doing so for a long while past, so that even in the days when Khozrev Mirza had lived near there he had been greatly astonished at the freak of nature.

(N. Gogol, *The Nose*, St Petersburg, 1836)

Gogol's *Nose* was one of many witnesses to the fashion of the day in the imperial capital of Russia and its inspiration, the 16-year-old Khosrow Mirza (1813–75), the seventh son of Crown Prince 'Abbas Mirza (Figure 3.1), who travelled from Tehran to St Petersburg on the "Redemption" mission after the Tehran massacre of the Russian embassy, including its head, Russian minister plenipotentiary A. S. Griboedov (1790–1829) on 30 January/11 February 1829.<sup>3</sup> To avoid yet another military conflict with Russia, seemingly inevitable in this situation, Fath 'Ali Shah sent his grandson with apologies to St Petersburg. His trip lasted ten months (May 1829–February 1830),<sup>4</sup> of which he spent almost three in St Petersburg, fully enjoying the life of a celebrity among the highest Russian nobility.

Khosrow Mirza's "Redemption" mission was of extreme importance, not only for both countries but for all participants in the Great Game,<sup>5</sup> determining its future direction. As such, it generated several contemporary records from both the Russian and the Persian sides, which scrupulously collected various details about each other, including news from the Ottoman front, or the illness of the shah and the crown prince.

There have been attempts to introduce the primary sources regarding the mission. However, until now there has been no comparative study of the complex surviving Persian and Russian materials related to this event and the people involved. This large task remains outstanding, and the purpose of this chapter is to produce a survey of the materials that will be the basis of a forthcoming reconstruction and analysis of the influence of the mission on the future direction of the Great Game, of the perception of the Persians and the Russians of each other, of the ways and methods of identification of the common and alien in each other, or what is known as the "otherness" in the dichotomy of Orientalism–Occidentalism.