

Sovereignty and Statehood in Early Qajar Rule: An Exercise in Conceptualization¹

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How was sovereignty understood and practiced in the early Qajar period, both as a concept and as a social contract? Why did the Qajars, similar to the established Safavid rulers before them, call the territory they ruled *mamalek mahruse Iran*, the “Guarded Kingdoms/Domains of Iran”? What does the epithet *mamalek mahruse* imply? Is it a substitute for the term *empire*? What are the implications of identification on the nature of sovereignty, rule, and the state when this term is used? What implications did it have for the future of Qajar statehood? How were Iran’s interactions with the larger world influenced by the early Qajar statehood? How did sovereignty and state rule in Iran differ from a hypothetical Westphalian state where centralized states allegedly have

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hegemony over the means of coercion, the states exercise their power over a defined territorial domain, and their right to exercise power in their domains is recognized or tolerated by others? What do these differences tell us about the limits of a Eurocentric theory of state and state formation, and how can a more nuanced and historically informed theory of sovereignty and state be developed?

This study—still in its primitive stage—focuses on these questions by concentrating on border wars in Iran, Russia, and to a lesser extent the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly over Caucasia. Yet this is not a study of borderlands and frontiers (like the works of Sabri Ates, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, and Alfred J. Rieber)² despite its references to the frontier wars. Rather, this study focuses on the interactions among these three powers and the impact of their wars on the early Qajars' sovereignty and state formation in Iran. The number, length, and intensity of the wars these Euro-Asian military forces engaged in during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are indeed staggering: Persian–Russian wars of 1722–23, 1795–96, 1804–13, and 1826–28; Persian–Ottoman wars of 1722–27, 1730–36, 1743–46, and 1821–23; and Russian–Ottoman wars of 1710–12 (part of the Great Northern War), 1735–39, 1768–74, 1787–91, 1806–12, 1828–29, 1853–56 (part of the Crimean War), and 1877–78.

I have two goals here. The first is to provide a framework for understanding Iran's interactions with its powerful neighbors beyond the more accepted analytical frameworks of “the Persian question,” “the Eastern question,” “the Great Game,” and their derivatives, such as “defensive developmentalism,” which look upon the political development of Iran and the Ottoman Empire as responses to the pressures of Western imperialism. The second is to look afresh at the process of state formation in non-European settings.

²Sabri Ates, *Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Alfred J. Rieber, *Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

No doubt forces of Western imperialism were deeply involved in shaping the course of history in Iran and in the broader region, particularly by the end of the eighteenth century, but I am considering a more complicated framework by focusing on the long interactions among Iran, Russia, and the Ottomans and how they interacted with the Western forces as a system. The Western imperial forces intervened on a global scale, but they needed to interact with an existing system. It is the interactions of these two systems (Western and Euro-Asian) and their long-term impacts, rather than the international machinations, or responses of these individual powers to the changing global order, that interest me here.

Others have also implicitly or explicitly taken steps in a revisionist direction and treated the interaction of Iran with other forces not as a “one-way street.”³ Yet I am articulating this interaction as a theoretical concept for the transformation in regional reconfiguration of power through the lens of what—using Janet Abu-Lughod’s idea⁴—could be called “systematic change.” By comparing the formative phase of a tribal dynasty in an agrarian society, its concept of sovereignty, and its practice of statehood with that of a hypothetical nation–state in an industrial setting, I am continuing my efforts at developing a state theory that is more appropriate in explaining political structures in non-European settings. Here, also, I am not alone. Others have done this for different non-European settings.

The historical, political, and social environments that gave rise to the Iranian, Russian, and Ottoman states, along with their frequent wars and interactions with Western powers, gradually transformed the extent of these states’ territories, power structures, and physiognomies. By absorbing or losing territories and people, these states redefined their scope of operation and resources and, to a certain extent, their religious orientations, and attempted to homogenize their subjects. In this

³Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Iranian Studies: Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2012).

⁴Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

process, the local and regional powers lost their relatively autonomous powers and became more dependent on the central rulers, or changed their loyalty before being absorbed by larger political entities.

As it is difficult to discuss the impact of this process under one rubric, I describe this transformation as gradual changes in a state's capacity and strategy to rule, partly deliberate and partly as a result of the system's evolution. In doing so, I treat the state as a political community that is exercising rule over a certain territory. While formation of a modern and centralized army became the main strategy of these powers, and they ended up developing traits similar to those of European nation-states, their evolution followed a different trajectory and outcome. Iran used the Ottoman and Russian models as the blueprint for its state-making strategy, rather than the European model. Ultimately, I argue that the geographical proximity of these Euro-Asian powers, their long history of interactions, and the lasting impact of the khanate system—a legacy of the Mongols—converged and transformed the structure and physiognomy of these states, despite differences in their political appearance and their own self-identification. They formed the basis of what could be called the Euro-Asian state system.⁵

Analytically, what I am discussing here could be viewed as the short-term impact of the restructuring of Euro-Asia in its regional and global interactions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In her seminal work, *Before European Hegemony*, Janet Abu-Lughod discusses the existence of a “world system” in the thirteenth century composed of “sub-systems,” none hegemonic over the others. The interaction among the units that later formed this world system stretches back to the time of the formation of the classical empires. The developments I discuss here are another restructuring of world history in *longue durée*, what Abu-Lughod calls “a systematic change.” This systematic change, she argues, “should be viewed as shifts in the direction and

⁵Ariel Salzmänn, *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival Paths to the Modern State* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003); Behrooz Moazami, “The Making of the State, Religion and the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1796–1979)” (PhD diss., The New School for Social Research, 2004); Behrooz Moazami, *State, Religion and Revolution in Iran, 1796 to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

configuration of central trends.” In any systematic change, she argues further, “successive systems reorganize in a somewhat cumulative fashion, the lines and connections laid down in prior epochs tending to persist even though their significance and roles in the new system may be altered.”⁶ Perhaps the chaotic world that we are witnessing now in Euro-Asia is another moment of this “restructuring.”

Historically, the process of the transformation of political structure that concerns me could be described as the incorporation of the khanate system of rules, as well as rules of fragmented tribal khans, beys, and local patriarchs, into a larger state ruling an extensive territory with diverse ethno-entities but similar religious affiliations. The Mongolian tradition of statehood based on the power of khanates reproduced itself and formed a different constellation of power than the ideal form in the Westphalian state system. In this process, the Euro-Asian states of the post-Mongolian period transformed, disintegrated, and evolved into a new system of states that were centralized and constitutionalized but still based on fragmented authorities. The Euro-Asian state evolved and restructured itself in several “systematic changes” in contrast to the ideal of a Westphalian state system, where centralized states have hegemony over means of coercion and freely exercise their power over a defined territorial domain.

State and Sovereignty

In this context, I am defining *state* as follows: a political community with formal and informal mechanisms of rule consisting of juridical traditions or institutions and loosely yet institutionally organized religious authorities ruling over a large inhabitable territory and a sizable population with a sustainable history of socioeconomic and cultural interactions. The degree of this political community’s inclusiveness and the extent of formality or informality of institutional and organizational development of its judiciary and religious apparatus and type of socioeconomic and cultural interaction defines “the stateness”⁷—its

⁶Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 368.

⁷J. P. Nettl, “The State as a Conceptual Variable,” *World Politics* 20 (1968): 559–92.

character and physiognomy—and its strategy of rule. However, it does not change the essence of a state’s rule, which is a mechanism and strategy of rule. This definition of state could also apply to a contested state or a colonial state. My theoretical articulation on the relationship of state and sovereignty is based on this definition of state and its implied logic.

While a state has physical manifestations with tangible organizational and institutional capacities, sovereignty is imaginary and ideal. “In the state,” Marx argues, “man is the imaginary member of an imaginary sovereignty, divested of his real, individual life, and infused with an unreal universality.”⁸ Yet “this unreal universality” has its own power. Rationalization of state power means providing conditions for its acceptance by its subjects. Its internalization, though imaginative and subjective, implies certain retroactive interactions between the state and its subjects. Hence, sovereignty is a conceptual abstract and a social contract. The ambiguity inherent in the ideal of sovereignty is, indeed, its source of power.

Sovereignty, as a formal and informal social contract, oversees the expectations and interactions of different parts of a society toward the political authority. How this social contract is constructed, understood, and practiced is altered by various factors: the state’s geographic position; cultural boundaries and characteristics; the shape and size of the population; and changes in the nature of the social composition of society, the nature and extent of power, and the origin of its ruling elite.

Sovereignty in micropolitical entities such as tribal chiefdoms is limited to their internal domains, and sovereignty in a vassal state is defined by the nature of the relationship of the vassal with the larger state—most often, changing loyalty is an act of survival or a calculation for further empowerment of the ruling elite. Sovereignty in large centralized states that are based on fragmented authorities is the sum total of sovereignties of related but autonomous domains defined through long-term

⁸Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (1844), ed. Andy Blunden, Matthew Grant, and Matthew Carmody (2008–9), www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/.

historical and geographical relations, and is negotiated with the central power through local power holders. Suzerainty in this case is articulated through the degree of loyalty of the local magnate to the central power. In short, the structure of state power and its strategy of rule determine the type of sovereignty and vice versa, yet their interaction takes place in a regional and global environment and is affected by that environment. While in theory state power is based on the state's available internal resources, the power of sovereignty, its mobilizing capacity, changes throughout time and takes different forms.

To narrate the trajectory of the development of sovereignty and state in the early Qajar period, I start with the Persian–Russian wars of 1795–96, 1804–13, and 1826–28, and make some brief remarks about the Russian–Ottoman wars of 1806–12 and 1828–29. I analyze the meaning of territories lost and gained, discuss some of the major treaties, and sketch a rough portrait of their consequences in the development of the Qajar state. The Persian–Russian wars were essentially frontier wars over Caucasia and helped to define the extent of the Iranian and Russian states, their sovereignties, and the sovereignties of the Caucasian khanates. The same logic is applicable to the Persian–Ottoman war of 1821–23, and the Russian–Ottoman wars of 1806–12 and 1828–29.

The Qajar state (1796–1925) was formed after seventy years of anarchy, coinciding with a major offensive of Western powers globally and regionally. I am using the example of the Qajar state to develop ideas about the interaction of Euro-Asia with the larger world through war and state formation.

The Persian–Russian War of 1795–96

The formation of the Safavid Empire, which planned to revive the historic Iranian Empire, occurred at roughly the same time as the Ottomans' Ghazi state transformed into an empire during the rule of Mehmed the Conqueror and Muscovite territory expanded during the rule of Ivan III, who proclaimed himself czar and "Ruler of all Rus" in 1503. These developments set the tone for the next three hundred years.

The Mongol invasion had already made different parts of Euro-Asia more connected, leading to a pattern of cooperation and conflict, and a synthesis of different cultural and political traditions and similar modes of operation. A system was already in place, and its transformation can be traced. These developments in Euro-Asia, coinciding with the European Age of Discovery, were the beginning of the restructuring of the regional and global order. The evolving empires of Euro-Asia all started the processes of forming a standing army, centralizing bureaucracy, and expanding territory before they had significant interactions with European powers.

The Safavid Dynasty emerged when followers of a small Sunni–Sufi order that had turned Shi‘a operating in a predominantly Sunni region of northwestern Iran formed a coalition with the fighting forces of Qizilbash, an alliance of the Turkoman Shi‘a tribes of Anatolia, and declared themselves the first Iranian state since the Sassanids. Like the Sassanids, the Safavids adopted an official religion. While the Safavids were not originally Shi‘a and by all accounts Shi‘ism was not the religion of the majority of Iranians, it seems that adopting Shi‘ism as the official religion was one of the most efficient ways that the Safavids could establish a distinct identity and resist possible onslaught by the Ottomans. The state grew, and by 1576, Tahmasp I had secured almost the same borders as in the Sassanid period. At the height of Safavid power, Shah Abbas I officially ruled the territory called *mamalek mahruse Iran*, the Guarded Kingdoms/Domains of Iran. He transformed the state’s military, administrative, and fiscal structures by dismantling the Qizilbash tribal army and introducing an army based on Georgian and Circassian slaves and converting large tracts of land traditionally granted to tribal chiefs into crown lands that he taxed directly. The new state gradually mixed the Persian, Arabic–Islamic, and Mongol traditions of statehood, fusing them with Byzantine and Ottoman traditions.

By the mid-fifteenth century, the Ottomans had already started forming a centralized state and a standing army and were transforming themselves into an empire following the conquest of the Byzantine Empire. By the

end of his reign, Mehmed the Conqueror had transformed from warrior sultan to emperor and was controlling two lands (Europe, Asia) and two seas (Black, Mediterranean). His death in 1481 brought instability, but soon Selim the Grim subdued revolts in Anatolia, fought with Safavid rivals at Chaldiran in 1514, and finally ended the Mamluks' rule in Egypt, Syria, and Hijaz. In Cairo, Selim firmly established himself as the conqueror of the Arab lands and champion of the Islamic cause. The sharif of Mecca gave him the keys to the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and bestowed on him the title of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. Historians debate whether Selim or others after him assumed the title of caliph, though most agree that the first recent international recognition of the title appeared in the Treaty of Peace (Küçük Kaynarca) in 1774 following the Russian–Ottoman War of 1768–74, which recognized the sultan's capacity as "Grand Caliph of Mahometanism, according to the precepts prescribed to them by their law."⁹

After Ivan III became czar in 1503, he claimed that Russia was the successor state of the Roman Empire, a claim that was acknowledged if not invented by the Orthodox Church. *Czar* was in fact the Russian version of the title *caesar*. The formation of the Romanov Dynasty and Russia's aggressive expansion further reinforced the idea that the czar also held some religious authority. Under Peter the Great, the state centralized, and bureaucracy and education were reformed. These transformations were sometimes hailed as the Europeanization and secularization of Russia, but they did not stop the trends of expansion, identification with the Orthodox Church, and Russification of the conquered territory. Peter the Great began calling himself the emperor in 1721.

In the midst of these three emerging powers lay Caucasia, which had diverse ethnic and religious groups dispersed over a vast territory with military and commercial strategic importance. Caucasia was the natural battlefield of these emerging powers, each claiming to defend a

⁹Treaty of Peace (Küçük Kaynarca) (1774), Article 3, fass.nus.edu.sg/hist/eia/historical-texts-archive/.

specific religious group and each administered by a number of small and medium-sized kingdoms, tribal chiefdoms, and khanates acting autonomously or as vassals of the bigger states. The Iranian and the Muscovite (later Russian) states were concerned with South Caucasia (the Russians call it *Transcaucasia*) and North Caucasia. Russia had already become Iran's neighbor when it annexed the khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan on the shores of the Caspian Sea during the reign of Ivan IV.

The strategy of state building in the region that began in the sixteenth century included a number of wars that led to the formation of buffer states and vassal states, and the annexation of khanates into larger states. Expanding and securing the frontiers was symbolic of the power of these states, each identifying with a religion. Armenia and Georgia, being overwhelmingly Christian, were important to Russia, and Iran's disintegration after the fall of the Safavids made Russian advances more possible.

The Qajars, possibly a blend of Tatar and Turkish tribes, traced their own descent to the Tatar Tamerlane, and through him to the Mongols. A relatively small tribe that constituted part of the Qizilbash forces that fought to establish the Safavid Dynasty, the Qajars hoped to revive the Iranian Empire. The formation of *mamalek mahruse* was their aim. Perhaps nothing more than timing and the manner of the coronation of Agha Mohammad Khan, the founder of the dynasty, can explain his continuation of the policy of securing contested borders as his state-building strategy. He set out to establish the Guarded Kingdoms/Domains of Iran before controlling the whole of Iran and crowning himself king using the ceremonial sword of the Safavid shahs.

Agha Mohammad Khan fought for ten years to gain control of northern, northeastern, central, and southern Iran. In 1783, Erekle II of Georgia, a former tributary state of the Safavids (and long before that a vassal state of the Sassanids), had shifted Georgia's allegiance to Russia and was formally under the protection of the Russian empire. Noting that Catherine the Great was more focused on her European neighbors than

on Iran, Agha Mohammad Khan mobilized a huge army and sacked Tiflis in 1795, reportedly massacring 100,000 Georgians and taking at least 15,000 men and women as slaves. It was only after securing the frontier that Agha Mohammad Khan crowned himself monarch in 1796. He opted to take the eastern part of Iran, still in the hands of his rivals, and planned to reclaim Herat in Afghanistan. As Avery suggests, “Iranian history may in fact be seen as alternating between attempts by a single paramount power to suppress Iran’s fragmentation and once again realize the dream of Empire.”¹⁰

Catherine II sent forces to avenge the sack of Tiflis and to consolidate Russian power in Caucasia, compelling Agha Mohammad Khan to abandon the plan of retaking Herat. The death of Catherine II in 1796 and the later assassination of Agha Mohammad Khan postponed the wars for the time being, but a large disputed region remained: “The disputed borderland extended from Georgia and Yerevan east to the Caspian Sea and from the southern slopes of the Caucasus to the Aras (Araxes) and Kura rivers, although along the coast the zone exceeded these limits in both directions, from Derbent in the north to Talesh in the south.”¹¹

Before the narration of these wars over Caucasia continues, the meaning of *mamalek mahruse* needs to be considered. Why was it used—and it was used frequently—and what does that imply? The term consists of *mamalek*, the Arabic plural of *molk* (domain, estate, city, province, or country) and the Arabic *mahruse* (guarded, protected). When used together, the words denote an aggregation of different domains or kingdoms, highlighting the importance of a central power protecting the entire territory. Protection by a political authority is certainly suggested. The term can have a religious connotation as well, as in protection against certain evil. While the word *domain* can indicate the territory within borders, it can also have a more flexible meaning

¹⁰P. W. Avery, “Dream of Empire,” in *War and Peace in Qajar Persia: Implications Past and Present*, ed. Roxane Farmanfarmaian (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2008), 13–16. Quote on p. 16.

¹¹Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780–1828* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 10.

related to the extent of a political authority's power. The term *domain* is used in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian with the same pronunciation and meaning. The Qajars and the Ottomans used it as the official title of their empires until their demise. Is *mamalek mahruse*, in fact, an epithet for an empire and its domain?

It should be noted that there is no Persian, Arabic, or Turkish word for *emperor*, though sometimes Ottoman sultans used the term to express their power. The term *emperor* was not used by the Achaemenids (550–330 BC), who created the world's first empire 2,500 years ago, or the Sassanids, who coincided with the Roman and, later, Byzantine Empires. In Persian, the term *shahanshah* or *shah shahan* (king of kings) was used to indicate the centrality and empowerment of one ruler over less powerful rulers. In Arabic, the term used was *malake al-muluk*, meaning “king of kings,” and in Turkish, *padishah* (with a similar meaning), which was originally Persian. The point is not semantic here; it is political. These terms had similar connotations as *emperor* but denoted a different type of rule.

An empire's domain in Persian has not always been called *mamalek mahruse*. According to Abbas Amanat, “For at least two and half millennia Iranians called their land Iran.” Further, he continues: “At least since the third century CE there was a well-defined political concept, an imperial entity with a centralized authority, called *Iranshahr* (Kingdom of Iran) and located it [*sic*] in *Iranzamin* (the land of Iran).”¹² The term *mamalek mahruse* was rarely used in Iran before the Mongolian period, and its usage developed only gradually in the post-Mongolian period. *Mamalek mahruse* should be read as a particular form of statehood based on a coalition of a small but armed and powerful tribal minority within the existing ruling bodies, a fusion of Mongolian–Turkish military power and previous forms of statehood. *Mamalek mahruse Iran* was the gradual reincarnation of the Iranian spirit and Iranian history in the form of political rule.

¹²Abbas Amanat, “Iranian Identity Boundaries: A Historical Overview,” in *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–33. Quotation on p. 4.

Despite the importance of the term *mamalek mahruse* and its frequent use, particularly during the Qajar period (it was also the official name of the Ottoman Empire¹³), I have not found much literature on the term's origins, use, or implications. The only comprehensive study I have found is a short article in Persian by Bagher Sadri-Nia from 1995.¹⁴ According to Sadri-Nia, the term first appeared during the Ilkhanid (1256–1335) period and then again during the reign of Tamerlane (1370–1405). First used in reference to cities and provinces, it gradually came to mean the larger territory under Mongol control, including Persia and a majority of khanates. The fusion of the term with the name of Iran seems to have occurred during the reign of Shah Abbas I (1587–1629). The Qajars adopted it as the official name of Iran and used it until their demise.

The Persian–Russian Wars of 1804–13 and 1826–28: Further Restructuring

The Persian–Russian wars of 1804–13 and 1826–28 were a continuation of the 1795–96 war, yet they unfolded in a different regional and international environment. The eighteenth century ended with Napoleon invading Egypt and Syria, and the nineteenth century started with the British and the Ottomans together defeating France. Russia was expanding and at war with France and Sweden and officially at war with Britain, though actually not fighting. The Ottomans were in retreat, and the Qajars were busy setting up a tribal state. The Persian–Russian War of 1804–13 became a part of the Napoleonic Wars, as did the Russian–Ottoman War of 1806–12. Iran officially entered the wars on the side of France before growing closer to Britain. The restructuring of Euro-Asia was the order of the day, and the wars fought among Iran, Russia, and the Ottomans were part of a larger transformation.

¹³Selim Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998).

¹⁴Bagher Sadri-Nia, “Pejoheshi dar bareh estelah mamaleke mahruse Iran” (“A Research on the Term of Protected Kingdom/Domain of Iran”), *Iran Shenakht* 1 (1995): 65–85, www.ensani.ir/storage/Files/20120506081611-7012-11.pdf.

In December 1800, Czar Paul I annexed Georgia to Russia as competitors of Fath Ali Shah were challenging the rule of the new king in Iran. In 1804, Czar Alexander I continued this policy of Russian expansion by capturing Ganja and advancing toward Armenia in South and East Caucasia, beginning the Persian–Russian War of 1804–13. Russia had several advantages in its war against Iran. They included a mechanized professional army, Georgian forces providing continuous reinforcements, and the ability to capitalize on Christian–Muslim enmity. The Iranian army, mostly a seasonal army organized along tribal lines and that recruited soldiers through the *buniche* system—taxing villages in men, horses, and food—were no match for a European army in a long-term war. Although the French and British had assisted in training the Iranian army, almost all the existing accounts suggest that it remained inadequate because of a lack of infrastructure and organizational skills. According to Muriel Atkin, “By 1812 ‘Abbas had a European-trained army of about 13,000 infantry, cavalry, and artillery (of which most were infantry).”¹⁵

By the end of the nine-year war, Fath Ali Shah and his crown prince, Abbas Mirza, recognized the czar’s sovereignty over the contested territories of Georgia, Mingrelia, Abkhazia, Ganja, Qarabaq, Qobba, Darband, Baku, Dagestan, and Sakki under Article 3 of the Treaty of Golestan. The treaty reflected the changing power equation. It was dictated by the Russians and, in fact, written in Russian. Sir Gore Ouseley, the British ambassador to Iran, was heavily involved in drafting the text, and it was negotiated by Mirza Abolhassan Khan Shirazi, an Anglophile Iranian politician and the shah’s representative for the peace talks, at a time when Britain was an ally of Russia against France. Article 4 of the treaty gave Russia permission to intervene in the succession to Iran’s throne as “help and support” to maintain security. This article, which was a blueprint for Russian intervention in Iran, was similar to what the Russians were demanding in other victories. The basis of the Treaty of Golestan was *status quo ad presentem*, meaning that each side essentially kept the territory then under its control. This

¹⁵Atkin, *Russia and Iran*, 145.

satisfied neither side. The Iranians had lost territory, and the Russians wanted more. This was a recipe for further war.

The Persian–Russian War of 1826–28 also arose from internal court conflict in Iran, British intrigue, and the activities of the *usuli ulama*,¹⁶ who, representing the proto-orthodoxy of Shi‘ism, were drawing attention to Russian atrocities toward the Muslims of Caucasia as a pretext for jihad. (Most likely, the British had a hand in the *ulamas*’ agitation.) Abbas Mirza started the war in September 1826 by advancing toward Ganja and Sosa. The Russians fought back, and after some early Iranian victories, marched all the way to Tabriz, capturing the city in October 1827. By January 1828, they had taken over Ardabil, the first Safavid capital. This unprecedented defeat forced the Iranians to sign the Treaty of Turkmenchay.

The new treaty replaced the Treaty of Golestan. Iran recognized the sovereignty of Russia over the Erivan and Nakhchivan khanates (East Armenia) and the remainder of the Talesh khanate (northern Iran). The treaty also set Iranian frontiers, determining the Aras River and part of the Caspian Sea to be the natural border and giving Russia full rights to navigate all of the Caspian Sea. In addition, the treaty further expanded Russian interference in Iranian succession disputes and recognized Abbas Mirza as the crown prince, guaranteeing the continuation of his line of succession. Russian merchants were given the right to trade freely throughout Iran, and imports of Russian and Iranian goods were subject to a single 5 percent tax. As a result, Russia became Iran’s main economic partner until 1935.

The Persian–Russian War of 1826–28 and the Russian–Ottoman War of 1828–29 that followed further strengthened the Russian position in the Balkans and Caucasia. These wars changed the nature of war making and state making, and gradually transformed the regional and international political order, intensifying the ongoing restructuring. The

¹⁶The religious scholars of the Usuli school of Shi‘ite jurisprudence, developed in contrast to the Akhbari (traditionalist) school. They argue for the primacy of the *ulama* as interpreters of Islamic law and prophetic and Imami traditions.

new political configuration that was evolving after the Conference of Vienna has been characterized as the restoration of the ancient regimes. However, it was more than that. It was a prelude to further Russian expansion in Asia and Europe and, more importantly, to the ascendancy of British hegemony in the new evolving world system based on industrial capitalism. In political terms, the Eastern question became a part of the Great Game that paved the way for British hegemony. Aggressive British trade policies that immediately followed these wars, such as the Anglo-Ottoman Treaty of 1838, which abolished all Ottoman trade monopolies, perhaps were a sign of this global transformation.

Conclusion

The internationalization of these regional conflicts did not homogenize the political transformation of the Euro-Asian states, casting them in the European model. Rather, it further shaped the Euro-Asian states as a distinct state system. Centralization of state power as an aggregate of a fragmented power structure continued. Many of the khanates and territories that were absorbed by Russia or the Ottomans maintained some of their power, which later became a basis for a claim of statehood or actual statehood.

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, Russia continued to expand, and the Ottomans maintained their power. Until the end of the Qajar period, Iran called itself *mamalek mahruse Iran*. It built up its standing army on the model of the Russian Cossacks, and in fact, Russia led and paid for Iran's army for much of the Qajar period. Iran's state reforms were based on the Russian reforms and Tanzimat reforms (1839–76) of the Ottomans. In all three societies, a central power ruled over its periphery by negotiating and making alliances with the existing fragmented authorities. As the bureaucracy and laws of Iran, Russia, and Turkey developed, they incorporated many common features. All three states had a religious dogma as the basis of their governance. Even as Iran, Turkey, and Russia moved in different ideological directions under different political leadership following the disintegration of their

empires, a similarity in their state structures remains apparent. None reproduced what has been seen as the ideal form of the Westphalian state system.