Etemad-al-Dawla, Aqa Khan Nuri

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E?TEMAD-AL-DAWLA, AQA KHAN (originally Nasr-Allah) NURI, MIRZA (1222-81/1807-65; Figure 1), prime minister (sadr-e a?zam) of Persia under Naser-al-Din Shah Qajar (1268-75/1851-58).

Figure 1. Watercolor of Aqa Khan Nuri E?temad-al-Dawla by Sani?-al-Molk, British Library, Or. 4938, F11.

Aqa Khan Nuri was the second son of Mirza Asad-Allah Nuri, the chief army accountant (laškarnevis-baši) under Aqa Mohammad Khan and Fath-?Ali Shah. Part of the local nobility of the Nur region in Mazandaran, the Nuri family was prominent on the political scene as local governors of Nur and as officials and army accountants since the middle of 18th century (for the genealogy of the Nuris see E?temad-al-Saltana, 1349 Š./1970, p. 233; Qa?em-maqami, 1968, p. 141; Malek Kosravi). Aqa Khan began his official career at the age of twenty as an army secretary. Capitalizing on his father’s proximity to the Qajar court (?Azod-al-Dawla, p. 72) and his own administrative skills, he was promoted to the newly created post of minister of the army (wazir-e laškar) after his father’s retirement in 1245/1829. By the mid-1250s/1840s he ranked among the dignitaries of the state. In 1262/1845 Mohammad Shah’s failing health, uncertainties over succession, and the weakening grip of the grand vizier Haji Mirza Aqasi (q.v.) over the administration encouraged Aqa Khan, like other contestants for the premiership, to search for political patronage and build new alliances outside his own family and his army base. He approached the young heir apparent, Naser-al-Din Mirza, and his mother, Malek-Jahan Kanom Qovanlu, later the Mahd-e ?Olya (q.v.), to offer his services. In exchange for supporting them, and possibly for establishing secret contact with the British legation on their behalf, Aqa Khan received a written pledge from the prince promising him a high office once he acceded to the throne. After Mohammad Shah’s recovery later that year, however, Aqasi removed Aqa Khan from office on the charges of misappropriation, conspiracy, and secret

contacts with the British legation in Tehran. He was arrested, bastinadoed, fined ten thousand tomans, and sent in exile to Kašan, where he remained until the death of Mohammad Shah.

Aqa Khan returned to Tehran in Du'l-qa?da 1265/late September 1848, after seeking the assistance of the British chargé d'affaires, Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Farrant. He was warmly received there by Mahd-e ?Olya, who invited him to reside in the royal citadel (arg) as her advisor. Aqa Khan's return, however, was opposed by Mirza Taqi Khan Farahani, the new chief of the Azerbaijan army (amir-e nezam, q.v.) and the strong man in the Naser al-Din Shah camp. He ordered Aqa Khan's immediate return to Kašan. In response Aqa Khan and his brother, Mirza Fazl-Allah, sought refuge in the British legation where they were granted an informal protégé status and in effect removed from the jurisdiction of the Persian government (Watson, p. 411).

The promotion of Mirza Taqi Khan to the premiership with the title Amir(-e) Kabir (q.v.) dashed Aqa Khan's hopes. Amir Kabir did bow to pressure from Mahd-e ?Olya and appointed Aqa Khan as his lieutenant but largely excluded him from state affairs. The mutiny of the Qahramaniya troops in Jomada I 1866/March 1849, however, weakened Amir Kabir and brought Aqa Khan into the limelight. Amir Kabir had to take refuge in Aqa Khan's residence and relied on his mediation for a peaceful ending to the dangerous mutiny. As a result the prestigious title of E?temad-al-Dawla (q.v.), unused since 1216/1801, was conferred upon Aqa Khan, and he came to be recognized as the "second person" (šaks-e dovvom) below Amir Kabir.

By 1268/1851 the political base of Amir Kabir had eroded, ironically after he had managed to put down two major threats to Naser-al-Din Shah's throne: the Salar revolt (1264-68/1847-51) and the Babi insurrection (1265-68/1848-51; see BABISM). When Amir Kabir was removed from office in 1268/1851, Aqa Khan was offered the post. His appointment was made public on 22 Moharram 1268/17 November 1851, after he had unequivocally renounced his British protégé status. In consultation with Justin Sheil, the British envoy in Tehran, Aqa Khan gave his pledge that he was "under the protection of no state but that of the shadow of His Majesty the shah of Iran" (Ketab-kana-ye saltanati, album no. 249, cited in Qa?em-maqami, 1968, p. 108).

In order to strengthen his own position in the administration and to relieve the shah's anxieties, Aqa Khan encouraged the fallen Amir Kabir to accept a post outside the capital (the governorship of Kašan) along with British and Russian guarantees of his personal safety. However, the Russian envoy Dmitri Dolgorukov unilaterally offered the protection of his imperial government to Amir Kabir and duly dispatched the legation's guards to protect his residence. This action outraged Naser-al-Din Shah beyond measure and quickly turned Amir Kabir's governorship of Kašan into exile to the same town, where he was murdered on 17 Rabi? I 1268/9-10 January 1852 (Watson, pp. 400-404; Adamiyat, p. 707-26; see also AMIR[-E] KABIR,

BAG-E FIN). More than one source implicated Aqa Khan in this secret execution (see, e.g., Watson, p. 399; cf. E?temad-al-Saltana, 1349 Š./1970, pp. 236-37; Širazi). There is little doubt that Aqa Khan was happy to see Amir Kabir dismissed and disgraced if not destroyed. Sheil, naming the instigators of Amir Kabir murder, concluded that he could not "exonerate" Aqa Khan from "connivance in the tragedy" since he had given his "implicit approval" at the final hour. Aqa Khan, denying any involvement, retorted that if he had attempted to interfere with the shah's verdict his own life would have been in danger and he could not, therefore, do much beyond informing Sheil a few hours after the departure of the executioners to Kašan (Amanat, 1997, pp. 162-63).

Conservative by temperament, Aqa Khan stood for most of what Amir Kabir had hoped to change. Though relatively young when he took office, he represented the old school of Qajar statecraft. His very appearance, with a long beard, ornamented robes, and lavish entourage, as well as his extensive household, love for extravagance, decorum, titles, decorations and other emblems of power, elaborate forms of address to himself and to others, and the protocol and observance of hierarchical order in the court and the government, all conjured up images of Fath-?Ali Shah's era. His marked humor, deceptive congeniality, and scheming mind sharpened the contrast with his predecessor. Most of Amir Kabir's policies and administrative, military, and educational reforms were either abandoned or modified to the haphazard practices of Aqa Khan's term of office. Yet both Dar al-fonun (q.v.), the military polytechnic initiated by Amir Kabir, and Ruz-nama-ye waqaye?-e ettefaqiya, the official government gazette, continued to operate under Aqa Khan and came to leave their stamps on Qajar society during the Naseri period and beyond.

Aqa Khan shared with Amir Kabir, however, a desire to maintain the independence of the office of the premiership (sedarat) from the court and, if possible, the shah himself, albeit in a different way. Whereas Amir Kabir tended to involve the shah in the day-to-day affairs of the government and endeavored to keep him away from court intrigue, Aqa Khan aimed to distract the shah's attention from the government by busying him with women, entertainment, hunting, and excursions while carrying out his policies with soft words, persuasion, and flattery. Yet his success in monopolizing power did not rely solely on the shah's trust. Upon his appointment to the office, he employed many of his dependents, including his brothers, sons, cousins, distant relatives, and fellow townsfolk, who bolstered his sway over the administration and the army. All through his term of office, the chronic ills of Qajar government were rampant: sale of offices, misappropriation of government funds, nepotism, and granting of huge salaries and land assignments to the premier and his aides. Soon after Aqa Khan's appointment, Jules Richard, then a French teacher in the Dar al-fonun, noted in his diary, "All governmental affairs have returned to the same state that they were under Haji [Mirza Aqasi]" (cited in Taqafi, p. 86).

The first real crisis during Aqa Khan's tenure came in Du'l-qa?da 1268/August 1852, ten months after his appointment, when a group of Babis affiliated with Shaikh ?Ali Toršizi (?Azim) attempted to assassinate the shah outside Niavaran palace, in revenge for the execution of the Bab two years earlier. The ensuing panic in the capital and fear of further attacks and uprisings prompted the shah to order a round-up of Babis, including at least six citizens of the Nur region, of whom Mirza Hosayn-?Ali Nuri (later Baha?-Allah; q.v.), a distant relative of Aqa Khan, was the most prominent (Watson, pp. 407-10; Zarandi, pp. 595-602; Amanat, 1997, pp. 207-11). The alleged involvement of the Nuri elements was a serious liability for Aqa Khan. Mahd-e ?Olya accused him of being an accomplice of Mirza Hosayn-?Ali and thus a party to the plot. His earlier inconclusive contacts with the Babis in Kašan during his exile there and his advice against execution of the Bab in 1265/1850 may also have been known to his enemies. To absolve himself and to prove his loyalty to the shah, Aqa Khan thus fully indulged the shah's desire to inflict an exceptionally brutal punishment against the arrested Babis (Watson, p. 410). By allocating the victims for execution to government officials, notables, princes of the Qajar family, army officers and troops, royal guards, members of his own family, as well as the ulama, merchants, and the students of the newly established Dar al-fonun, Aqa Khan turned the massacre into a collective act of retribution by blood (qesas).

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Aqa Khan then faced a crisis in foreign policy. When the Crimean War (1853-56) broke out, Aqa Khan initially opposed the idea of an alliance with Russia (Watson, p. 415). However, his decidedly pro-British sentiments subsided because of tension with Sheil and his successors, and he was also pressed by the shah to respond positively to a new Russian overture for the conclusion of an alliance. In secret negotiations, the new Russian envoy, A. H. Anitchkov, promised financial benefits and military aid in exchange for an alliance against the Ottoman empire and its allies, Britain and France. Signed in Moharram 1271/September 1854, the treaty stipulated that in exchange for Persia withholding assistance to the Ottomans and their allies and for prohibiting the Ottomans from using Persian soil for military action, Russia would agree to relieve Persia of the balance of the war reparations required under the terms of the 1828 Treaty of Torkamancay (Amanat, 1997, p. 254).

The British, who became aware of the secret treaty through their agents in Tehran, saw it as another sign of Aqa Khan's disloyalty toward Britain. Their relations continued to deteriorate from 1854 to 1855 with running disputes between between Aqa Khan and the British chargé d'affaires, William Thomson, and especially his successor, Charles Murray (see ANGLO-IRANIAN RELATIONS ii). In Rabi? I 1272/November 1855, tension between

Aqa Khan and Murray over the appointment of one of Aqa Khan's political enemies, Hašem Khan Nuri Esfandiari, to a post with the British legation in Shiraz, developed into a major diplomatic row involving the two governments, the shah, and members of the royal harem. Aqa Khan, under severe pressure from the shah to resist Murray, objected to the British granting Hašem protégé status on the grounds that he continued to be employed by the Persian government and was a member of the royal household. He would not permit Parvin, Hašem's wife, to remain with her husband, arguing that she, being the sister of one of the shah's wives, would bring disrepute to the crown if residing in a foreign legation. Aqa Khan also fanned the rumors of an illicit relationship between Parvin and Murray. The outraged British minister, who demanded an official apology from the premier and Parvin's return to the legation, decided to haul down the legation's flag and declare a severance of relations with Persia in Rabi? I 1272/November 1855 (Watson, pp. 419-24). This incident brought Aqa Khan to the gravest test of his career. Murray's conduct flew in the face of Aqa Khan's advocacy of moderation and forced him to agree to the shah's adventurous design for the conquest of Herat (q.v.; see also ANGLO-PERSIAN WAR).

In Du'l-hejja 1272/August 1856 Aqa Khan, heartened by the early Persian successes in Herat under the command of Soltan Morad Mirza Hosam-al-Saltana, dispatched Farrok Khan Gaffari Amin-al-Molk Kašani (later Amin-al-Dawla, q.v.) on a mission to Istanbul and thence to Paris to negotiate resumption of relations with Britain and a peaceful settlement of the Herat question. He wished to secure Persia's indirect control over the city in order to insure the stability of Persia's eastern frontiers against intrusion by Dust Mohammad Khan. He entertained no illusion about Persia's ability to withstand a confrontation with Britain (especially after Britain's victory in the Crimean War), and the British threat of military retaliation made him more determined to follow a realistic course of action. Farrok Khan Gaffari's instructions for his mission (Farrok Khan, I, pp. 11-42) and his extensive correspondence with the premier afterwards delineate Aqa Khan's foreign policy and his objectives of negotiating a fair settlement with Britain, cultivating Napoleon III of France to benefit from his mediation and support, and expanding Persia's relations with other powers. In spite of Farrok Khan's diplomatic flexibility, the Persian two-tier strategy of war and diplomacy failed to persuade the British, who declared war on Persia in Rabi? II 1273/November 1856 and dispatched a large expeditionary force to occupy Bušehr (Bushire) in December of the same year. The collapse of the Persian defenses in Fars and Mohammara jeopardized Aqa Khan's premiership. Fearing British annexation of southern Persia, he persuaded the shah to give Farrok Khan full authority to negotiate a peace treaty. He hoped that a swift and unconditional Persian withdrawal from Herat would satisfy the British and salvage his own premiership. Aqa Khan's removal from office was one of Britain's thirteen conditions for resuming diplomatic relations with Persia, but the Paris Peace Treaty of 4 March 1857, which deprived Persia of Herat, left Aqa Khan in his post (for the text see

Hurewitz, I, pp. 341-43).

As early as 1271/1854, Aqa Khan's government was periodically in danger of collapse, and the threat increased because of defeat in the war and because of the shah's desire, under the influence of the harem, to receive a larger share of the government revenue. The question of designating the heir apparent added a new dimension to Aqa Khan's vulnerability. Aqa Khan hesitated to endorse the candidacy of Amir Qasem, the young son of the shah's favorite wife Jeyran (entitled Forug-al-Saltana). He was mindful of Mahd-e ?Olya's disapproval of Jeyran's humble origins as well as concerns over the appointment of an heir apparent with non-Qajar lineage on his maternal side. Annoyed by Aqa Khan's resistance, Jeyran and her allies began to intrigue against the premier. Incensed by the prospect of a full fledged coup, Aqa Khan struck back. In Du'l-hejja 1274/June 1857 he persuaded the shah to dismiss and exile two of his most influential foes: ?Aziz Khan Sardar-e Koll (q.v.), the chief commander of the army, and Yusof Khan Mostawfi-al-Mamalek, the influential chief government accountant. In place of ?Aziz Khan he made his own young son, Dawud, the secretary of the army and commander-in-chief. At the same time, Aqa Khan yielded to the shah's wishes regarding Amir Qasem, who was proclaimed heir apparent in Jomada I 1274/early December 1857 and given the title Amir-e Nezam. Aqa Khan's older son, Mirza Kazem Khan Nezam-al-Molk was named as tutor and supervisor of the young crown prince. As a sign of royal support Aqa Khan himself was elevated to the position of "absolute authority" (moktar-e koll). The new position prompted Aqa Khan to claim that he was an "unremovable" (bela-?azl) premier. For the moment, it seemed, Aqa Khan had outmaneuvered Jeyran, satisfied the shah, and purged his most dangerous rivals (Amanat, 1997, pp. 316-27).

This victory did not last long. The fatal illness and death of the new heir apparent in Du'l-hejja 1274/July 1858 faced Aqa Khan with a new crisis as Jeyran accused him of poisoning her son. The shah did not go along with this unfounded charge but nonetheless criticized the premier's conduct. Naser-al-Din preserved the appearance of congeniality and royal favor toward Aqa Khan while secretly siding with opposition party. On 20 Moharram 1275/29 August 1858, the vacillating shah finally put his seal of approval on a farman dismissing Aqa Khan from his post together with his sons, brothers, and other relatives and dependents, on the grounds of the premier's monopoly of power, his negligence, and confusion in the affairs of the state (E?temad al-Saltana, 1295/1878, II, p. 228). The Russian minister Anitchkov, angry for having been left uninformed about the matter, admonished the shah that he could not without previous reference to St. Petersburg dismiss his own minister if that minister should happen to wear a Russian decoration (Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, 60/233, Secret Intelligence Series, no. 19, Charles Murray to Lord Malmesbury, Tehran, 4 October 1858 and Enclosure no. 1, Minister Anitchkov to [Persia's] Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1 September 1858, cited in Amanat, 1997, p. 346). Nothing came of this protest. Neither did the later pleas of the French minister for leniency have any effect on the

shah. Aqa Khan and his family were placed under house arrest. Aqa Khan was subjected to a rigorous governmental review as a result of which he was held liable to a penalty of no less that one hundred forty thousand tumans. Most of his properties were thus confiscated to pay for the penalty (though some were later returned to his family). Aqa Khan's title of E?temad-al-Dawla was taken away from him and soon bestowed upon the shah's notorious maternal uncle ?Isa Khan Qovanlu, one of Aqa Khan's enemies. Aqa Khan and his immediate family were then sent into exile, first to his own estate in Aderan, north of Karaj, and shortly after to Soltanabad, where he remained for two years (Amanat, pp. 338-50).

After Aqa Khan's dismissal, Naser-al-Din Shah introduced a set of administrative reforms that divided responsibility of the government between six ministries with himself at the top. He temporarily eliminated the post of prime minister and began a period of direct rule free from ministerial mediation. Aqa Khan's government, though suffering from customary inefficiencies, had shared with previous administrations the intention to restrain the interference of the court and to some extent the shah himself. His fall brought to an end an era of powerful Qajar prime ministers beginning with Abu'l-Qasem Qa?em-maqam and continuing with Aqasi, Amir Kabir, and Aqa Khan and marked the beginning of a period of autocratic rule by the shah.

In 1277/1860 rumors circulated in Tehran concerning Aqa Khan's imminent restoration. In an interview with the shah, the new British minister, Henry Rawlinson, spoke favorably of the fallen premier hence prompting the shah to state bluntly that Aqa Khan's reappointment would cause "embarrassment" and trouble for everybody since he "assuredly [will] ruin every individual of the present cabinet; he might again weave a network of intrigue around me which could place me completely at his mercy" (Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office, Rawlinson to Russell, Secret and Confidential, no. 9, Tehran, 9 February 1860, cited in Amanat, 1997, p. 372). Aqa Khan was then removed to a less accessible location, spending two long years of impoverishment and illness first in Kerman and then in Yazd. In 1278/1861, the shah summoned two of Aqa Khan's sons to the capital and gave them low-ranking positions in the administration. He even went so far as to send a ceremonial robe and a golden pen case to Aqa Khan with a favorable autographed letter, in which he returned to him his old title. Facing a revolt of other high-ranking officials, however, the shah backed off and even allowed a more rigorous surveillance of Aqa Khan. Finally, in 1281/mid-1864, in view of his deteriorating health, Aqa Khan was permitted to retire to Qom, where he could be visited by physicians from Tehran though he was adamantly barred from returning to the capital. Aqa Khan died in Qom on 12 Šawwal 1281/10 March 1865, possibly a victim of foul play organized by his enemies (Amanat, 1997, p. 395 n. 77).

Three weeks later Aqa Khan's wife and family were released and allowed to return to Tehran. His sons, after some years of unemployment, acquired various positions in the administration. Kazem Khan Nezam-al-Molk was appointed a member of the Government Consultative Council and, after Mosta

wfi-al-Mamalek's dismissal, served in his place as the chief of the bureau of accounting (daftar-e estifa?). Haji Hosaynqoli Khan Sadr-al-Saltana, better known as Haji Vašangton (Washington), Aqa Khan's fourth son, was Persia's first minister plenipotentiary to Washington. ?Abd-al-Wahhab Khan Nezam-al-Molk, son of Kazem, also served in the hereditary post of secretary of the army and later in other capacities.

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