

**THE RUSSIAN-SAFAVID RELATIONS AND RUSSIAN
DIPLOMACY IN 1715-1735****Nigar R. Gozalova**

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Abstract: The issue of *studying the history of diplomatic* missions, consulates and embassies is particularly important for the study of international relations in the 18th century. In the absence at that time of a tradition of permanent diplomatic embassies in the Safavid empire, the exchange of missions and the establishment of consulates, together with and diplomatic correspondence were the main forms of establishing and maintaining intergovernmental contacts. This article describes the Russian diplomatic missions attempts' to ratify the Treaty of St Petersburg in 1723, during a turbulent period for the Safavid dynasty offers a significant perspective on the region's history.

The paper relies on official and semi-official historiography, contemporary mainly Russian accounts, and archival dates, as well some secondary sources.

Keywords: *Nadir shah, Russi-Iran relations, Councils, Diplomatic Missions, Residents, Embassy*

INTRODUCTION: Collapse of the Safavid Empire and Russian Expansion

In the early 1720s, the Safavid Empire faced a profound crisis that ultimately culminated in its collapse. The series of uprisings that erupted across the country played a pivotal role in this downfall. The weakened Safavid monarchy's absolute inability to effectively respond to external threats led to the Shah's court capitulating to Afghan forces led by Mir Mahmud. As a consequence, in October 1722, Shah Sultan Hussein (reign: 1694-1722) was compelled to relinquish power to the Afghans. [Avery (1993):15] The seven years of Afghan rule marked a period of turmoil characterized by violence, plunder, the razing of towns, and widespread devastation across many regions of the country. Shah Hussein's son, Tahmasp, fled Isfahan accompanied by eight hundred Qajars in June 1722. In the same year, he proclaimed himself Shah Tahmasp II (reign: 1722-1732). [Krusinski (1840): 113] However, the new Shah found himself lacking both funds and military support. With the advance of the Afghan army, he had to flee from Qazvin to Tabriz, then to Ardabil and finally to Mazandaran. Over the following seven years, the Safavids managed to maintain partial control only over the northern regions of the country.¹

The demise of the Safavid Empire was not an unforeseen event for the primary stakeholders, Russia and the Ottoman Empire, as they were well-prepared for its collapse. As early as 1715, Peter I dispatched an embassy to Isfahan, led by Volynsky A.P., which

¹ Only 14 years after the Afghan invasion, the Safavid dynasty completely leaves the political scene.

remained in the Safavid state from 1716 to 1718 for reconnaissance purposes. Officially, Volynsky's mandate encompassed negotiating a trade agreement with the Safavid government and establishing Russian consulates and vice-consulates in the region's major trading hubs. Moreover, A. Volynsky was assigned the responsibilities of both gathering intelligence and establishing essential contacts at the Safavid court. According to Peter's directives, it was imperative to acquire information regarding the presence of the Shah's military and commercial ships, with a specific focus on Gilan and other coastal provinces. [Bushev (1978): 24] On July 30, 1717, a trade treaty known as the "assecuracion" (reassurance) was signed between Volynsky and the chief minister of the Shah, Etimad-al-Dawla² Fatali Khan. [Aliev (1979): 46–58] The treaty facilitated the establishment of Russian consulates in Isfahan, Shirvan, and Gilan. Upon his return to Russia, Volynsky's detailed report on the deteriorating conditions within the Safavid state provided Peter with substantial political insights, leading him to conclude that the Safavid regime was on an inevitable path towards collapse. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, Volynsky advised the Russian emperor to strategically occupy a segment of Safavid territory with a limited military presence until another power assumed control. [Lockhart (1958): 107]

After the conclusion of peace with Sweden in August 1721, Peter I took advantage of circumstances that were highly favorable for the Russians: the murders and robberies of Russian merchants during the unrest in Shirvan and Shamakhi, and most importantly, the appeal to the Ottoman Sultan by the leaders of the uprising, Hajji Dawud and Surkhay Khan of Qazikumukh, requesting military assistance to secure the territories they had seized, as well as recognition of these territories as subjects of the Ottoman Empire. [Lytsov, (1951): 178-187]

Seeking a deeper understanding of the regional dynamics between 1716 and 1720, expeditions were dispatched ostensibly to explore trade routes to both the western and eastern seaboard. Notably, Bekovich-Cherkassky led one such expedition from 1714 to 1715, followed by A. Kozhin and V. Urusov in 1718, and K. Verden and F. Soymonov from 1719 to 1720.³ Resulting from these expeditions, a detailed map of the entire Caspian Sea region was created. It is noteworthy that Russian explorers did not revisit the Caspian region until 1726, with another expedition led by F. Soymonov. [Soymonov (1763)] In pursuit of his objectives, Peter the Great undertook rigorous preparations for the Caspian expedition, conducting detailed analyses of its economic, political, diplomatic, military, regional, and international dimensions. Additionally, ideological groundwork was laid for the Eastern campaign, with Peter I entrusting Prince Kantemir⁴, renowned for his expertise in Eastern affairs, with the management of the campaign office. Kantemir's mastery of Oriental languages enabled him to play a prominent role in this campaign. He created an Arabic typeface, set up a special printing press and printed

² E'temad-al-Dawla (arab. "Confidant of the State"), an important title given to people in the administration favored by the court. Under the Safavids it was a title of the prime minister, and under the Qajars it was the highest administrative (divani) title.

³ For more details, see [Shteinberg (1949)]; Gadzhiev (1979)]

⁴ In the Caspian campaign, Admiral General F.M. Apraksin commanded the army, while the head of the Privy Chancellery, P.A. Tolstoy, and Prince D.K. Kantemir managed civil affairs. The three formed His Majesty's Council.

in Azeri-Turkic, Turkish and Persian the Manifesto of Peter the Great to the Peoples of the Safavid State, which he had written and translated on 15 July 1722. [Aliyev (1963): 9]⁵ The manifesto declared that Russian troops were arriving to support Shah Hussein against the "rebels" who had risen up, not only challenging their ruler with arms but also harming Russian merchants and trade. On June 24, Peter dispatched a lieutenant to the Shamkhal, Adil Girey⁶, with the manifesto, directing him to provide copies to the Shamkhal and distribute others to Derbend, Shamakhi, and Baku. [Golikov (1838):154-155; Hanway (1762):187] As a result, in October-December 1722, Russia captured Derbent (by laying the fortress of St. Cross in coastal Dagestan at the confluence of Agrakhani and Sulak) and Rasht (Gilan). Baku was captured by Russian troops only in 1723.⁷ [Gozalova (2010): 50-51] The Caspian campaign (1722-1723) resulted in a portion of the Caspian Sea falling under Russian control. Additionally, the southeastern Caucasus, which encompassed most of the province of Azerbaijan, and western Iran came under Ottoman rule from 1723 to 1726.

Simultaneously with military actions, Peter I sought to utilize diplomacy to persuade the Safavids to acknowledge Russia's claim over the captured Caspian provinces. At the commencement of the campaign on June 22, 1722, the Russian consul at the Safavid court, S. Avramov, was assigned the mission of persuading the Shah to forge an alliance with Russia. Avramov's objective was to assure the Shah that the presence of Russian troops in Shamakhi was not aimed at waging war against Safavids but rather at quelling the rebels who had endangered Russian interests. Specifically, he referred to the incidents of robbery and murder involving Russian merchants in Shamakhi in 1721. Russia emphasized that it could not permit the Caspian provinces to fall under Ottoman rule, stating, "we cannot allow the Turks to be here". [Golikov (1838): 141-143]

Therefore, on September 23, 1723, a treaty was finalized in St. Petersburg with the Safavid ambassador Ismail Bey⁸, who lacked the authority to enter into such an agreement. The treaty pledged Russia's enduring friendship and support to the Safavid state against the rebels. In exchange, the Shah committed to permanently cede to Russia

⁵ At least 1,000 copies of the Manifesto were printed in Turkish, and the total circulation of the Manifesto in Eastern languages likely reached around 5,000 copies. [Gusteryn (2008): 64-65]

⁶ Adil-Gerey II - Kumyk shamkhal of Tarki, who ruled from 1719 to 1726.

⁷ Immediately after the capture of Baku by Russian troops under the command of General Matyushkin on July 26, 1723, Turkish forces, advancing from Kars and Diyarbakir, easily took Tiflis and moved towards Ganja, Irevan, and Nakhchivan.

⁸ It is important to note that during the siege of Isfahan by the Afghans, Shah Sultan Hussein dispatched Ismail Bey to St. Petersburg to negotiate a pact with the Russian government for military assistance to the Safavids. However, following the fall of Isfahan to the Afghans and Tahmasp II's ascension to the throne, Ismail Bey, who had not yet departed Iran, acknowledged Tahmasp II's authority as the new Shah. [Kurukin (2023): 87-96] However, following the fall of Isfahan to the Afghans and Tahmasp II's ascension to the throne, Ismail Bey, who had not yet departed Iran, acknowledged Tahmasp II's authority as the new Shah. Subsequently, Tahmasp II received alarming news that Russian troops had already arrived and seized Rasht. Disturbed by this development, the Shah dispatched a messenger to summon Ismail Bey back. However, upon the messenger's arrival in Rasht, Colonel Shipov falsely claimed that the ship transporting Ismail Bey had departed for Russia and denied access to him. Unaware of the deception, Ismail Bey boarded one of the Russian ships and departed. [Yuzefovich (1869): 186-187] It's crucial to underscore that this treaty was never ratified by Shah Tahmasp. For additional details about the ambassador's reception, see Bergholz (1860):135-139.

the cities of Derbent and Baku, along with all their associated territories, as well as the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran, and Astrabad. Additionally, the treaty further specified that the Shah would receive Russian troops for domestic peacekeeping. [Lockhart (1938):11] These provinces were the richest and most significant provinces of the Safavid state. [Markham (1874):293] However, Tahmasp II vehemently opposed the ratification of this agreement, deeming it legally invalid. Ismail Bey was subsequently branded a traitor and did not dare to return. He remained in Russia until the end of his life. [Aliyev (1975): 64] Of course, the consent of the Safavids was necessary for the Russian government to legitimize its efforts to seize Safavid territories amidst the effective collapse of this state. In that case, unlike the Turks, the Russian troops would formally have legitimate grounds for carrying out their expansionist plans.

The news of the treaty between Russia and the Safavids heightened the Ottoman government's activity. The Ottoman court became aware of this treaty through a Venetian newspaper published in Italy, which included a translation of the treaty sourced from St. Petersburg newspapers. Additionally, the Turks received a copy of the treaty directly from Peter Neplyuev, the Russian ambassador in Istanbul. The treaty's dissemination in Europe contributed to a surge in hostility towards Russia. [Lockhart (1958):228-300] In response to the Russian-Safavid treaty, the Ottoman government declared all Safavid territories as its own. Orders were issued to the troops stationed on the frontiers to prepare for war. [Markova (1966): 30]

By the beginning of 1724, the positions of Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the region were clearly delineated, essentially through occupation, marking the division of Safavid lands. After extensive negotiations, on June 24, 1724, in Istanbul, a treaty was signed between the Russian and Ottoman Empires mediated by the French ambassador de Bonac, clarifying the possessions of these states in the Caucasus. The Treaty of Istanbul in 1724 regarding the division of Safavid territories between Russia and the Ottoman Empire recognized the Caspian provinces as belonging to Russia, described as "voluntarily" ceded by the Shah. As compensation, the Ottoman Empire established control over Kartli, Kakheti, Ganja, Yerevan, Karabakh, Tabriz, and Qazvin. Regarding Shirvan, situated between Russian and Turkish dominions, it was decided to consider it under the Sultan's protectorate, without the right to station troops there. [Markova (1966): 30-31] The Treaty of Istanbul marked a military-diplomatic victory for Russia. Through skillful maneuvers, Russia was able, firstly, to temporarily secure its presence in Eastern Azerbaijan and Gilan, enabling it to become a significant military-political player in the Middle East. Secondly, due to this intricate strategy, Russia temporarily entered into a situational alliance with the Ottoman Empire. As a result, the Ottomans recognized Russian interests in the Caucasus-Caspian region, as well as territorial acquisitions in Safavid territories, thereby agreeing to the absence of any access to the Caspian Sea. However, Shah Tahmasp refused to acknowledge the Treaty of Istanbul of 1724.

The assumption that the weakened Safavid state would easily succumb to external pressure proved to be gravely mistaken. Furthermore, neither the Russian treaty with the Safavid state in 1723 nor the Russian treaty with the Ottoman Empire in 1724 were acknowledged by Shah Tahmasb II. Additionally, the local populations of the conquered territories resisted submission. The severe repercussions of the Afghan, Ottoman, and Russian occupations laid the groundwork for a liberation movement against the invaders.

This movement was led by the capable commander Nadir of the Turkic Afshar tribes, who adopted the title *Tahmasb-qoli Khan* (servant of Tahmasb), to demonstrate his loyalty to Shah Tahmasp.

Meshchersky's Mission

The first Russian consulates in the Safavid empire (in Isfahan and Shamakhi) appeared after the signing of the treaty in 1720.⁹ In December 1720, Semen Avramov [Turilova (1996):106] was appointed consul in Isfahan and Captain Alexey Baskakov in Shamakhi. Officially, they were to seek 'every assistance' from the local rulers for Russian merchants to buy and export raw silk to Astrakhan without hindrance. Unofficially, they were to gather military and political intelligence. [Kurukin (2010): 42]

It should be noted that throughout the 18th century Russian diplomats did not have a permanent residence in the Safavid state, they were located in Rasht (Gilan), Ganja and other cities. Permanent representation appeared only after 1723. [Turilova (1996):105] After signing the treaty of 1723, Russia decided to send its official diplomatic representative to the Safavid state for permanent stay. [Memorandum (1841):303] By decree of 18 September 1723, Prince B.V. Meshchersky, a non-commissioned lieutenant of the Preobrazhensky Regiment, and Semyon Avramov, a secretary, were appointed Russian resident. In April 1724 the ambassadorial mission entered the Safavid domains. Due to unrest in the country, the ambassadors were attacked several times on the road from Rasht to Ardabil, but the ambassadorial guards managed to disperse the attackers each time. Tahmasp II settled for some time in Qazvin, where Semyon Avramov found him. Avramov reported that he was received by Shah Tahmasp and handed him a proposal for an alliance with the Russian Empire. [Kurukin (2010): 82] Shah Tahmasp received Meshchersky graciously and was presented with a gift from Peter the Great (a golden water pipe). However, the Shah categorically refused to ratify the treaty, stating that Ismail bey had no authority to conclude the treaty, which placed the Caspian provinces of the Safavid state under Russian jurisdiction, and that he had only been sent to confirm friendly relations.

At the end of May 1724 Meshchersky and Avramov, having achieved nothing, set off on their return journey. Another attempt to ratify the treaty was made in November 1725 by S. Avramov on instructions from St. Petersburg, who was again instructed to go to Shah Tahmasp II to ratify the treaty. [Ulyanickiy (1899): 221] In case of refusal, the Shah was to be reminded that Russia might think: "If Shah Tahmasp would not agree, we are ready to agree on another candidate and we will act, for which all the proper preparations are being made". The consul stayed at the Shah's residence from May 1726 to January 1729.

Attempts to ratify the treaty by Dolgorukov and the Georgian king Vakhtang

The more successful was the advance of Ottoman troops in the region, the more actively Russia sought to achieve a formal agreement with Shah Tahmasp and ratification of the

⁹ For the full text of this treaty, see: Bushev (1978): 274–277.

treaty of 1723, and for this purpose already in 1726 together with the new commander V.V. Dolgorukov came to Gilan to persuade Shah Tahmasp and the former king of Kartli Vakhtang VI together with Georgian prince Amilahor arrived in Gilan to convince Shah Tahmasp. [Kurukin (2010): 305,308] However, Tahmasp II reiterated his stance, deeming the provisions of the St. Petersburg Treaty unacceptable, and consequently declined to ratify it.

As a result of Nadir's successful liberation mission, the position of the Afghan Ashraf was considerably weakened. It can be said that since 1727 negotiations on behalf of Shah Tahmasp II with Russia were conducted personally by Tahmasb-qoli Khan. Valuable gifts were sent Russian court for Shah Tahmasp II's cronies and military commanders. [Nikonov (2008): 147] From 1728 Russian diplomats began to work on establishing friendly relations with the camp of Shah Tahmasp II and his commander-in-chief Tahmasb-qoli Khan.

Once more, diplomatic envoys were dispatched, and in one of the messages conveyed by the Safavid Shah Tahmasp through the ambassador Mohammed Nesir, it was explained that the Shah was displeased with the Russian court for consenting to the partition of Safavid state with the Turks. He pointed out that "Azerbaijan and Georgia were currently under Turkish occupation. Shah Tahmasp, having achieved numerous victories against the rebels, expressed his desire for friendship and alliance with Russia". [Bronevskii]

At the end of 1729, *Tahmasb-qoli* Khan expelled the Afghans and restored Safavid power in Isfahan in the person of Shah Tahmasp II. The following year he succeeded in recapturing all of western Iran and most of Azerbaijan, including (in August 1730) Ardabil, which had been taken by the Ottomans. [Tapper (1997): 103] With the revival and strengthening of the Safavid state, it naturally sought to regain all its former possessions. As soon as he entered Isfahan, Nadir (*Tahmasb-qoli* Khan) demanded from the Ottoman and Russian empires the return of all the lands that had formerly belonged to the Safavids.

Levashev's Diplomatic Activity

Lieutenant-General Levashov was sent to Gilan in April 1723 to "take" the Safavid lands "ceded" to Russia by the 1723 Treaty of St Petersburg. On 16 September Peter the Great appointed him 'chief administrator of all the conquered provinces'. [Turilova (1996):106] Seeking to gain a foothold in the region, Russia decided to negotiate not only with Tahmasb but also with Ashraf¹⁰ to accept the terms of the treaties of St Petersburg (1723) and Istanbul (1724). Russian diplomats were simultaneously in negotiations with two groups - the Afghans (Ashraf Khan) and the Safavids (Shah Tahmasp II). As a result of negotiations with Ashraf, Lieutenant-General Levashov signed a treaty at Rasht (Yartsa) in February 1729 [Bronevskii], returning to the Afghans Astrabad and Mazandaran, which were still unoccupied by Russian troops.¹¹

¹⁰ Ashraf Khan the Afghan chief who ruled as Shah over part of Iran from 1725 to 1729.

¹¹ Full text of the treaty concluded between the Russian government and Ashraf, see: Yuzefovich (1869): 189.

In August 1730, the Russian Empress Anna Ioannovna appointed Levashov Ansheff General and Commander-in-Chief of the newly conquered lands. [Inventory of Imperial Decrees (1875):229] Two years later (1732), she first replaced him with Lieutenant-General P. Lefort, and then appointed Prince Louis Gruno of Hesse-Homburg, Major of the Guards and Lieutenant-General, in his place; but she soon recalled him as well and reappointed Levashov (decree of 27 July 1733). [SIRIO (1898): 347–348, 369] He held this post until the end of the Russian presence in the South Caucasus in 1735. [Kurukin (2010): 218] Vasily Yakovlevich Levashov was again promoted to the rank of General-Ansheff and 'Chief Commander' of the Lower Corps. However, P.P. Shafirov was assigned to him as Second Minister Plenipotentiary.

General V.Y. Levashov, who became the commander of Russian troops in the newly conquered Caspian provinces and actually the Russian viceroy in the region, organised a whole intelligence network. "Spies are sent from us everywhere without fail", Levashov reported to Empress Anna Ioannovna in September 1731. The names of these 'spies' are recorded in the administration's income and expenditure books for 1729-1731 in the 'Baku Commander' collection of the Archives. From 1726 these local 'spies' were regularly sent to Rasht, Ardabil, Tabriz, Qazvin, Isfahan, Hamadan, Mashhad and other cities, returning two or three weeks later with the information and rumours they had gathered." [Kurukin (2010): 243]

The year 1730 passed in fruitless negotiations with the Ehtima Devlet Mirza Rehim, who had arrived in Rasht. The Safavids demanded the return of the provinces, and negotiations with the Shah's representative were again unsuccessful. To establish contact with a new political force in the person of the influential Tahmasb-qoli Khan, Lieutenant-Colonel Ivan Yurlov and the unflappable Semyon Avramov were sent to the Shah's court in Qazvin. [Armiano-russkie otnosheniia (1978):17-19] They carried a letter on behalf of Levashov to his new "most honourable friend", informing him of the death of Peter II and the accession of Anna Ioannovna to the throne. [Kurukin (2010): 323] Yurlov and Avramov returned to Rasht without a reply, but an envoy from Tahmasb-qoli Khan, Mirza Muhammed Ali, arrived after them. At Levashov's reception, the ambassador again demanded the return of the Caspian lands on behalf of the Shah, to which the general replied that the provinces would not be returned by Russia, and to the threats of war he reminded that Russia could come to an agreement with the Turks. The commander went on to say that such important problems are not solved by ultimatums, but by negotiations between authorised persons. The two sides agreed to continue negotiating. [Kurukin (2010): 324]

With the accession of Anna Ioannovna to the throne of Russia (1730-1740), an increase in diplomatic activity between the two countries is observed: embassy exchanges and negotiations were conducted both with Shah Tahmasp and with Tahmasb-qoli Khan separately. In early 1730, the Shah's ambassador Mirza Ibrahim arrived in Moscow with proposals: if Russia helps to clear the territory of Iran from the Turkish occupants, the Shah will cede to it both the areas already occupied by Russian troops and those promised under the treaty concluded in 1723 with Peter the Great. Otherwise, all conquered territories were to be returned to the Safavid state. [Kurukin (2010): 325] On his part, in 1730, Tahmasb-qoli Khan, to maintain diplomatic relations, personally dispatched a congratulatory letter on the occasion of the coronation of the new empress.

[Astrabadi (2016):118-119] Amidst significant shifts in the international landscape, including the looming threat of war over the Polish throne and the escalating tensions in the Caucasus, the Russian government made a strategic decision to withdraw its troops from the Caspian regions. This move aimed to transform the Safavid state from a potential adversary into a valuable ally. As reported by the British resident in St Petersburg, C. Rondeau, the intention of the Russian court was to return all appropriated territories to Safavids as soon as possible, without compromising the dignity of Russia. Empress Anna Ioannovna convened two "secret councils" in May and August 1730, during which it was decided to return the seized lands to the rightful claimant, Tahmasp II, the representative of the Safavid dynasty, acknowledging him as the legitimate authority over these territories. [SIRIO (1894): 401] In October 1730, Empress Anna Ioannovna, concerned about the significant casualties due to fever and plague among Russian troops stationed in Gilan, dispatched a letter to Tahmasp outlining the conditions under which Russia would return the province. Vice Chancellor Osterman emphasized that Russia's primary objective, both for its own interests and for negotiations with the Turks, was to employ all means necessary to persuade the Shah to accept the treaty already concluded with the Turks. [Osterman (1726).] In June 1731, when the return of Gerat to the Safavids became apparent, the Empress, with the announcement of the conditions for the liberation of Gilan, dispatched Shafirov, who had been instructed not to allow the Turks to outpace Russia in concluding peace with the Safavid state.

At the same time, in April 1731, Baron Shafirov arrived belatedly in Rasht, sent to conclude a bilateral agreement. He brought the Shah "sables and other soft furs" for the sum of 1600 rubles, and "especially for the expenses of soft furs" (for gifts to close dignitaries) for the sum of 3,000 rubles. Birds of prey were a special item among the goods sent: gyrfalcons, falcons, balabans, hawks. [Никонов (2008):145] Even Mirza Ibrahim, who came to Rasht, at first said that he had only been instructed to accept provinces from the Russians without any agreement, but then he agreed to negotiations. [Kurukin (2010): 329] They were successful: according to the project presented by the Russians, the Empire ceded Gilan and Astara 'along the Kur River' to the Shah for the sake of 'eternal neighbourly friendship' and promised to hand over the remaining territories when the western lands of the Safavid state were liberated from the Turks, and the Russian representatives also hoped for some monetary compensation for the ceded lands. Mirza Ibrahim went to the Shah with the Russian project; negotiations continued in Tabriz, where Captain Kutuzov was sent with gifts for the Shah - birds of prey (hawks, gyrfalcons and falcons); however, he never reached the Shah in August 1731 - he was forced to turn back from Ardabil. [Kurukin (2010): 330-331] Tahmasp's Turkish campaign¹² caused a complete halt to the negotiations, and the Treaty of Rasht signed in January 1732. According to that treaty, Russia committed to returning all seized territories within five months, except for those situated north of the Kura River. These lands were to be retained until the expulsion of the Turks from West Azerbaijan, Georgia,

¹² The 1731-1732 military campaign, held by Tahmasb II, aimed to launch an offensive into the Ottoman-held Caucasus. However, it ended in a catastrophic defeat, resulting in the loss of all the territorial gains made by Tahmasb-qoli Khan during the previous year.

and other Safavid provinces under their control. Additionally, the treaty granted Russian merchants in the Safavid state and Safavid merchants in Russia the freedom to trade. Furthermore, both states were obligated to appoint diplomatic representatives to each other's courts, formalizing diplomatic relations. [Lockhart (1938): 58]

On September 7, 1732, a long-anticipated event occurred: Nadir deposed Shah Tahmasp II and placed the young son of the latter, Shah Abbas III, on the throne, declaring himself as regent, or *naib as-saltaneh*. This effectively ended the dual rule in the country. Henceforth, Nadir became the absolute ruler, and it was he with whom external actors would have to deal in the future. In 1733, to announce the proclamation of Shah Abbas III and to continue diplomatic relations with Russia, Nadir sent an embassy to St Petersburg led by Ahmad Khan with a large present consisting in pearls, precious stones 3-4 lions, 2 tigers, 4-5 monkeys and others. [Floor, W. (2009):25] Due to the delay of his ambassador in the capital, Nadir, now acting as regent, personally sent a letter to the Russian Empress, requesting the release of his ambassador and expressing his hope that the goals of the mission would soon be achieved. [Astrabadi (2016):59-61]

During this period, Nadir engaged in negotiations with Russian ambassadors, conveying his discontent with the Russian government's reluctance to relinquish control over all Caspian territories, with particular emphasis on Baku and Derbent. In October 1734, Nadir besieged Ganja [Cook (1770): 465], where there was a large Turkish garrison under the command of Haji Ali Pasha who strongly defended the fortress. Amidst the siege, Nadir made an appeal to the Russian ambassador, who was in attendance, urging for the return of the Caspian territories of Baku and Derbent. Faced with the looming specter of conflict over the Polish throne and the escalating tensions in the Caucasus, the Russian government opted to withdraw its troops from the Caspian regions. This strategic move aimed to transform the Safavid state from a potential adversary into a valuable ally. To finalize the treaty, an embassy headed by Prince S.D. Golitsyn, accompanied by a retinue including Nadir's ambassador Ahmad Khan, was urgently dispatched to Isfahan.

The negotiations concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Ganja on March 10, 1735. According to the treaty, Russia agreed to evacuate Baku within a week and Derbent within two months from the date of signing. In exchange, the Shah pledged eternal allegiance to Russia and undertook not to transfer Baku and Derbent to any other power, particularly Ottomans. Furthermore, the Sulak River was designated as the border between Russia and the Safavid states. Both parties also agreed to notify each other before engaging in peace negotiations with Ottomans. [Lockhart (1938): 86] Even though Russia had relinquished the last of Peter's conquests in this area, it remained steadfast in adhering to the fundamental principle of its Eastern policy, which aimed to thwart the expansion of Ottomans in the region. [Sykes (1921): 96] Consequently, the transfer of lands to the Shah raised fewer concerns. Therefore, English diplomats conveyed in their message: "...Her Majesty, would never consent, cost what it will, that the Turks should settle on the Caspian Sea." [SIRIO (1891): 410]

At the same time, as Nadir's siege of Ganja continued, it became evident that the prolonged capture of Ganja was not in line with the interests of both Russia and the Safavids. Recognizing this, the empress decided to provide assistance to Nadir. As a result, Levashov dispatched an officer-engineer and four artillerymen disguised in local

attire, along with several significant artillery pieces, to the Shah's encampment. [Lockhart (1938): 85] According to Cook, Golitsyn, the Russian ambassador to the Safavid state, sent a letter to Nadir, indicating that everything was prepared and inviting him to proceed. Nadir responded that he could not do so immediately but encouraged them to commence whenever they were ready, pledging to join them once they had achieved some progress. "Though Kouli-khan was glad that the bastion was destroyed, yet he was very sorry that he had not seen the operation". [Cook (1770): 465–466] Nadir, appointed Hassan Ali Khan the *ma'ayyer-bashi* new ambassador to Russia. [Floor, W. (2009):55]

Thereby, in 1735, the last remnants of Russian presence vanished from the Safavid state, enabling the Nadir to reclaim the liberated territories without obstruction. This event marked the beginning of a new phase in relations with Russia, which lasted until the end of Nadir's life and throughout the Afsharid period. On the surface, it may have appeared that friendly relations were established between the two states. However, a closer examination reveals a different reality. In essence, these relations were a covert, veiled conflict between Russia and the Safavid state. Russian policy in the region was inherently dualistic. On one hand, Russia opposed its primary adversary, the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, the growing military power of Nadir concerned Russia, which hoped to eventually return to the South Caucasus. Consequently, Russia sought to counter Nadir's consolidation by all means short of open confrontation, as Nadir had by then restored the historical borders of the Safavid state.

CONCLUSION

The Petersburg Treaty of 1723, aimed at securing Russia's strategic interests in the Caspian region, faced significant challenges on the path to ratification. Shah Tahmasp II's reluctance to acknowledge the treaty's validity posed a formidable obstacle, prompting Russian diplomats to embark on a series of missions to secure his approval. From Meshchersky's diplomatic overtures to Levashov's strategic maneuvering, each envoy navigated the complex web of Safavid politics with skill and determination. Despite facing resistance from Tahmasp II and competing interests from the Ottoman Empire, Russian diplomats remained steadfast in their pursuit of ratification.

The diplomatic landscape was further complicated by the rise of Nadir-qoli Afshar, who emerged as a central figure in Safavid politics. Nadir's ascendancy to power in 1729 and his subsequent overthrow of the Safavid dynasty reshaped the region's geopolitical dynamics, challenging both Russian and Ottoman ambitions.

Through the treaties of Rasht (1732) and Ganja (1735), Russia ceded Peter the Great's conquests to the Shah. In return, Nadir promised to ally with Russia and avoid peace talks with the Ottoman Empire without Russian consent. Russia's motives were twofold: it lacked control over Peter's acquisitions in the South Caucasus, and tensions with the Ottoman Empire were rising, with the Crimean Khan raiding Russian borders in 1735. Nadir's victories over the Ottomans liberated the South Caucasus, forcing the Ottomans to confront multiple adversaries, including the Safavids, Russia, and Austria.

Russia aimed to delay its conflict with Turkey (1736-1739) by keeping the Safavid-Ottoman war active, but this strategy ultimately failed, leading to a break between the

Ottomans and Russia. Russia needed an alliance with the Safavids for future actions against the Ottomans, starting with returning the Caspian provinces to the Safavid state.

Despite Russia's efforts, Nadir independently negotiated peace with the Ottomans after the Russo-Ottoman War began. In 1736, he restored the Safavid state's borders and declared himself Shah at the Kurultai in Mugan, overthrowing the Safavid dynasty.

Russian all diplomatic missions after Peter I's Caspian campaign (1722-1723) and the Treaty of St. Petersburg (1723) show that these diplomatic initiatives took place against the backdrop of broader geopolitical dynamics, including the Safavid-Ottoman rivalry and Russia's expanding influence in the Caucasus and Caspian regions. The interactions between these powers shaped the course of diplomatic negotiations and influenced the outcome of regional conflicts and alliances.

Despite Russia's efforts to secure Safavid recognition of its territorial gains, the situation remained fluid and subject to change. Safavid-Ottoman relations, Safavid internal politics, and the shifting balance of power in the region all played a role in shaping the trajectory of diplomatic interactions between Russia and the Safavid state.

In conclusion, Russia's diplomatic efforts following the Treaty of St. Petersburg and Istanbul reflected its ambitions in the Caucasus and Caspian regions and its desire to establish itself as a major player in the geopolitics of the early modern era. While these efforts were not always successful, they nonetheless contributed to shaping the regional balance of power and laid the groundwork for future diplomatic initiatives and engagements.

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