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The Role of the Great Game in the Inefficiency of the Formality System of the Iranian Court from 1796 to 1896

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Abstract

Historically, formalities and diplomatic protocols, as one of the pillars of successful international diplomacy, have played a crucial role in shaping the political currents of the time. This study examines and studies the role and effect of British-Russian rivalries regarding the inefficiency of the Iranian formality system, as well as analyzing the function of these formalities in the relations of this power triangle during the Qajar era, and by means of a historical method and a descriptive-analytical view which is based on documents, travelogues and historical resources of the Qajar era, it seeks to answer the questions of to what extent diplomatic rituals and ceremonies have been effective in the rivalry and emulation of Russian and British governments in Iran? What were the factors that led to the structural weakness of Iran's formalities and its becoming a buffer state in the great game between Russia and Britain? What role did the performance of the Russian and British ambassadors play in Iran's formality relations?

It seems that factors such as imitation and competition of the British and Russian ambassadors for Formalities respect caused the role of Formalities in Iran's relations with the Russian and British governments to be not positive and effective. Meanwhile, the performance of the Russian and British ambassadors, the establishment of Formality agreements and the negligence of the Iranian government were not ineffective in shaping formality actions and reactions between the governments.

Keywords: Formalities, Iran, Britain, Russia, Qajar.

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1. Introduction

During the Qajar era, due to the importance of strategic depth and principle geopolitical components of Iran, the buffer state (acting as a fender for the clash of world powers), The Great Game (British and Russian political and military rivalries) and the issue of India (Khalili,2012:110–111), foreign political, security and economic pressures and threats were exerted on the Qajar government in the Persian Gulf from four directions: Russia from the south, British India and Afghanistan from the east, the Ottomans from the west, and Britain from the south (Roxane,2008:5), most important of which was the rivalry between Britain and Russia for dominance in Asia. The term "The Great Game" was first given to these rivalries through a letter written to a friend by one of the British officers in the area, Lieutenant Arthur Conolly, in the late 1840's. The term was later coined by Rudyard Kipling in a 1901 novel named "Kim" (Kipling,1997:53), and introduced Iran as one of the pieces of the chessboard on which the game of determining the dominant power of the world was being formed (Andry Yuva,2009:7; Hamidi and Zehi,2017:111). The Great Game was a purely colonial competition in the geopolitical arena of Central Asia that ended with the Great Russian Revolution of 1917 (Yazdani and et al.,2007:124). Among these rivalries, Iran played the role of the buffer and shock absorbing state.

2.Theoretical Framework

In political geography, the term "Buffer State" is used to describe a small independent country, which is located between two potentially rival and hostile world powers, thus reducing the risk of war between them. Peaceful and turbulent environment as a battleground between the great powers. The term of buffer was first applied to a political entity in 1875; buffer state was first used in 1883"[1].The world's earliest states, for security reasons utilized transition or border zones to spatially separate themselves.[2]Municipal states of Greece perhaps are the first buffer regions or borders created by human beings.[3]In Sassanid era, also, Iranians created Hire and Greeks created Ghasan as buffer states and their function was to lower the opponent's pressure. (Hafiznia and et al,2013:4) Actually buffer state is a weak power between two or more stronger ones, maintained or even created with the

1. Murray,1933:127.
2. Spykman,1939:406
3. Ibid.397.

purpose of reducing conflict between them. In other words, the buffer state is usually defined as a small independent state lying between two larger, usually rival, states. It seems natural to think of it as a sort of political fender serving to reduce the danger of conflict between its greater neighbors. (Hafiznia and et al,2013,5)

In the 19th century, due to the political weakness and military pressures of foreign governments on the Qajars, Iran had become the arena of Russian-British colonial rivalries and acted as a buffer state between them. In fact, the onset of Iran's foreign relations with the Tsarist Russian conquests was on account of accessing to warm and open waters. After conquering India and some of the islands and sea passages of the Persian Gulf as well as the Indian Ocean, Britain practically became neighbors with Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia (Shamim,2010:159). The British colonialist efforts to protect its largest colony, India, and the emergence of a power named Napoleon Bonaparte in France and his conquests, left Iran in the middle of a not-so-

During the Qajar era, the Indian subcontinent played an important role in the fate of Iran. The British intensified their hegemonic operations in India in the early nineteenth century. They also sought to infiltrate Central Asia and the Caucasus in order to strengthen their control over the Middle East, However Russia blocked the way for Britain to carry out its plans, and its expansionist policies pursued two main goals: First, utilizing the economic resources and the routs by which Iran could reach the Indian Ocean, and second, reaching the Indian subcontinent (Verhram,2006:338). Hence the long-running British-Russian conflict over interference in Iranian affairs radicated in the Middle East. The necessity of defending India against Russia and France was Britain's main excuse for advancing to the east (Foran,1992:110; Wright,2001:10). The Qajar government, which in its conflicts with Russia and Britain had failed to take any effective actions against them, began efforts to maintain its sovereignty. These efforts were significant in the field of multilateral diplomacy.

During these years, Fath Ali Shah (1797-1834) and his son and crown prince Abbas Mirza and Mohammad Shah's efforts (1834-1848) to use the existing contradictions and conflicts between two powers in order to regain the power of the Safavid era proved unsuccessful. Nasser al-Din Shah's modernist approach to use the presence of powers to modernize Iran and the process of giving privileges to the two powers also did not yield positive

results (Andry Yuva,2009:7), and conflicts between the powers constantly plagued the Iranian government. One of the issues that has been the cause of dispute between Russia and Britain in those years was the issue of ceremonies and diplomatic affairs, which is the subject of the present study.

As part of the new political frameworks, foreign envoys and European ambassadors started visiting the Qajar court. Since traditional Qajar formalities were no longer deemed appropriate for conducting diplomatic affairs, and the Iranians lacked organized and systematic structures to update and assimilate with international protocols, diplomatic agencies and organizations, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies, were created to adopt these new principals. However, establishing these agencies did not solve deficiencies in the country's ignorance of international developments. Moreover, different interpretations of diplomatic protocols would constantly lead to disagreements. The government, therefore, decided to translate and apply the European diplomatic guidelines and regulations which they hoped would facilitate their assimilation with the European ideals. However, assessing and analyzing the guidelines was often not accurate, and the Qajar's efforts to adopt international norms, in general, was more or less blind imitation.

On the other hand, the Europeans did not have a shared language and understanding with their Iranian counterparts in diplomatic protocols, and would not adhere to Iranian formalities and traditions. The Iranian government was relatively weak in terms of political and military might. The Europeans took advantage of the situation. This power dynamic was also manifest in their formalities and diplomatic etiquettes. The most influential foreign countries in this field were Russia and Britain.

The concept of buffer states is a part of the Balance of Power theory that has entered the European strategic and diplomatic thinking since the 17th century. These governments typically pursue a neutral foreign policy and act as the balancing powers between hostile powers. The Iranian government, which in terms of strategic geography has played the role of a buffer state in the rivalries between the Russian and British colonial powers in the Qajar era, also pursued a positive balancing policy in fulfilling the goals of the two rival governments in terms of diplomacy and diplomatic etiquette. In the meantime, only the buffer state, Iran, was damaged in terms of diplomatic position and dignity, and no harm was done to the two powerful governments.

3.Research Methods

As a result, the present study adopts a historical methodology, using a descriptive style, based on documents, travel journals and historical accounts of the Qajar period. The library research method, comparing and analyzing the available sources –especially primary sources, was used to collect the data. After collecting the necessary data, the information was organized and analyzed. Finally, the data and its analyzation were used to draw conclusions.

4.Background Research

So far, no comprehensive research has been conducted on the functioning of formalities in the Great Game, but research on the formality system and diplomatic etiquette of the Qajar court and the ceremonial performance of the British and Russian ambassadors has been conducted independently that is not irrelevant to the topic under discussion and will be mentioned in a few cases below.

Prior research has only implicitly touched on the subject. For example, Zargari Nejad and Khosravizade (2012) studied the process of internalization of the diplomatic apparatus, starting with the first three kings of the Qajar Dynasty to the creation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – and the evolution of the formalities under the Ministry- in their article titled "Welcoming protocols for ambassadors and foreign envoys in the Qajar Era ending with the reign of Naser al-din Shah". However, their research is not comprehensive for several reasons. First, studying the role of formalities in political relations was not one of the aims of the above-mentioned research and it does not specifically address the role of formalities in Russian-British rivalries. Moreover, the historical sources referenced in the article do not include official and written documents.

Another example of recent research on the role of diplomacy and the performance of Russian ambassadors to Iran is Godarz Ashtiani's (2013) titled "Diplomacy in the Middle of the two Wars: General Yermolov's Mission in Iran and its Outcomes". In the study, the researcher explains and describes the events surrounding the General's mission in Iran, and also writes about its context, goals, and outcomes and the role the embassy played in the relations between the two countries. Although more specific, the research takes into account a limited timeframe concerning the present study; thus, it too is not comprehensive enough. Also, this article only

examines the performance of the Russians in Iran and does not mention Iran's relations with Britain and the Russian-British rivalry in Iran.
Sabah Khosravizadeh (2017) is the most recent published work on the subject. He mainly writes about how different diplomatic agencies and organizations were created in the Qajar era. Khosravi Zadeh explains and describes the history of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, it does not overlap with the aims of the present study and its focus on the Russian and Britain government's diplomatic relations with the Qajar court.

5.Discussion

During the Qajar era, political issues occurred with utmost formalities. (Serena,1983:77) However, these formalities lacked a particular method foundation. For instance, some ceremonies and traditions originated from Persian ancient customs and some others were done according to guest ambassadors' requests. Lack of knowledge about international formalities during the early Qajar era caused Iran state to perform the whole ceremonial rules according to foreign ambassadors' desires. There were practically no specific principles and practices. This caused Iranian officials to relate formalities to the governments' discipline and political behavior. If an ambassador displayed dignity and gentility, ceremonial behavior and courtliness were generalized to the ambassador's country and they considered that nation as the dominant power. And if an ambassador was deemed law-abiding and unwilling to do affairs with delay or postponement, the Qajar considered it as an indication of the host king's power. They considered an agent or ambassador as intelligent in diplomatic decisions if he was strict about political formalities. (Malcolm,2000:828)
The strictest and most low-abiding foreign representatives to perform such formalities were British ambassadors and delegations and Britain's consulates in India. They not only obliged themselves to observe formalities in Iran and did not neglect them, but they also assessed the formalities meticulously. In fact, they tried to pave the way to achieve their diplomatic ambitions by applying formalities. They even postponed any negotiations with Iran court if they encountered any disregard and neglect over performing formalities. On the other hand, British envoys drew Iranian's attention and made court members satisfied by paying attention to their ceremonial principles and eventually accomplished their political objectives. It is said that English officials believed if they honored and appreciated

British king and pledged to ceremonial respects, it would serve a role model for Iranians as well to honor Britain's king. (Morier,2007:202)
Russian ambassadors acted in exact opposition of their British counterparts when it came to observing protocols and principals. They did not observe Iranian customs, as a sign of respect, and adding insult to injury, claimed that significant issues would arise if the Iranian side acted in a similar fashion towards the Europeans. (Simonic,1974:96)
The Russians did not show the proper respect towards the Iranians, and at the same time expected full adherence to protocols even in regards to low-rank agents of their embassy. It has been noted that, occasionally, they would introduce low-rank agents or guests of the embassy, as important and famous figures in Russia in order to force the Iranians to treat them with full diplomatic formality (Korf,1993:95). The following are examples of the actions of the Russian and British ambassadors in dealing with the ceremonies of the Iranian court and their disputes and rivalries over formality matters.

5-1. Formality differences between Iran and Russia

During the reign of Fath Ali Shah (1797-1834), as border disputes between Iran and Tsardom of Russia started to escalate –as a direct consequence of Russia's increasing aggressive behavior, foreign envoys and ambassador found themselves with new access to the Qajar court. Russian ambassadors and envoys had an aggressive attitude toward Iran and looked for ways to humiliate Iranian monarchy. A list of different Russian representatives is provided below as an appendix.
One of the first ambassadors with such attitude was General Yermolov. He had been assigned to Iran in 1816 to find a solution to the disputes surrounding the Golestan treaty (Dokotsboe,1986:151) Yermolov's first official meeting was with Ghaem Magham, the Iranian Grand vizier (1834-1835). He used the meeting to present Neselrodeh's, the Russian Foreign Affairs minister, letter to the Grand Vizier, informing him of the new ambassador and asking for his cooperation ((Rashtiani,2009:51-52)
In contrast with the formal and respectful manner in which the crown prince Abbas Mirza (1789-1833) treated him, Yermolov left Tabriz for the Tehran without the proper farewell ceremony. This blatant disregard and unprofessional move by the Russian General angered Abbas Mirza's court and the Iranians considered such a move as Russia's refusal to recognize the heir to the throne (Abdullah Yof,1957:112). Nevertheless, he refused to

accept the crown prince's invitation for an official dinner after returning from the capital, stating that he would never sit at the same table with his enemy.

Despite Yermolov's misbehaviors, the Iranian side greeted him in full compliance with formalities when he visited the Shah on 31 January 1817. Some have argued that this was the first formal greeting of a foreign envoy in the history of the Qajar dynasty. Fath Ali Shah's military base, Soltanieh, was chosen as the greeting site and several rows of soldiers and cavalry were arranged on its lawn. The Russian General watched the greeting ceremony from the top of a nearby hill. A special horse adorned with jewelry was presented as a gift, and five thousand cavalry greeted him (Marvzi,1990:219-220). Nevertheless, Yermolov believed that the Iranian side had not set up any formal ceremony for his meeting with the Shah, during which he handed the Shah his letter of credence. He also urged Russia to do the same to Iran's ambassador to the country (Mosalmaniyan ghobadiani,2008:593; Matthee and Andreeva,2018:93)

The Russians expected precise adherence to formal codes for themselves but did not extend the same for the Iranians –even if it interfered with their political goals and interests. For example, when Abbas Mirza introduced his ambassador to Russia and sent him along with gifts to Petersburg (1817), he hoped that the move would encourage the Tsar government to recognize him as the heir apparent publicly. But the Russians had no desire to publicly recognize Abbas Mirza as the rightful heir to the throne, and upon Yermolov's request, greeted the new ambassador without any formal ceremony. Besides accepting the gifts, the Russians did not recognize the Iranian Prince as heir apparent to the Persian throne (Abdullah Yof, 1957:120).

One of the major points of contention between the two countries with regards to formal Iranian tradition was the issue of dress protocols and standing while in the audience of the Shah. Taking off one's shoes before entering confined and carpeted spaces is an eastern tradition dating back thousands of years. Muslims reference a story in Quran about the Prophet Moses as the source of this tradition (Movahedi,2011:187). Moreover, Iranian culture had always emphasized spiritual cleanliness, thus banning people from entering carpeted rooms with their shoes on. Furthermore, Iranians considered taking one's shoes off as a sign of respect toward the elders –a practice that had been established long ago in Iranian royal courts

(Hedayat,1960:707). In the early years of the Qajar dynasty, foreign ambassadors, in addition to taking off their footwear, were required to touch the entrance door of the palace with their foreheads and wear long red stockings in their meetings with the Shah. (Abdollah Yof,1957:110) Hollingbery described the socks as, essentially, as slippers (Hollingbery,1984:44) Lord Nathaniel Curzon described the stockings as red footwear, which were a standard in court attire, and all minister plenipotentiaries and foreign ambassadors had no choice but to wear them over their trousers. This tradition would last until the reign of Fath Ali Shah. (Curzon,1984:429) The unique socks were made of red broadcloth and covered the leg up to the thighs. (Dieulafoy,1982:73) Furthermore, James Morier wrote about high heel sandals, Na'lein in Farsi, which the ambassadors were required to wear. (Morier,2007:226) At the time, even if the meetings with the Shah took place outside of the palace, either in an open space or in the palace's garden, where a carpet had not covered the ground, the visitors had to take off their shoes per the formalities. For example, James Morier writes about the time he had visited the palace to ask for a meeting with Fath Ali Shah, only to find the Shah in the garden beside the pool. Having no other choice, he had to take off his shoes and walk on wet ground. (Morier,2007:251)

Figure (1): A Painting Depicting Sir John Malcolm, Sir Gore Ouseley and Sir Harford Jones Wearing the Red Stockings

In Iranian tradition, removing the hat was also considered a sign of disrespect, and as such, everyone was prohibited from doing so while in the audience with the Shah (Brugsch,1995:128). Furthermore, ambassadors could not sit down but instead had to stand still while meeting the Shah. The above mentioned 'rules' in Iran's formal protocols were always protested by foreign ambassadors, particularly Russians. The first mission to disregard the rules, meeting Fath Ali Shah with their shoes and not wearing the unique socks, was General Yermolov's and his staff. According to formal Iranian protocols and Qajar tradition, this diplomatic delegation had disrespected the Shah of Iran. In his memoirs, Yermolov recalls the event as a proud moment, reprimanding the French and British ambassadors for adhering the Qajar formal protocols. While meeting with Abbas Mirza, the Russian General again refused to wear the unique socks, despite the Grand Vizier's requests to do otherwise (Rashtiani,2014:58). The Qajar courts insisted on the fact that British and French ambassadors agree to their formal protocols. Notwithstanding, Yermolov refused to perform the formalities, saying: "I have not come here with the same goals as Napoleon's spy [Count Gardane] or those of the representative of tradespeople [Sir John Malcolm]" (Abdullah Yof,1967:110).

Figure (2): Yermolov in Audience with Fath Ali Shah

(**Source:** Alexei Petrovich Yermolov,1777-1861. Biography ", version of the Historical Association of the Imperial Army of Russia,1912 - Painter: Ilya Mashkov)

Another Russian ambassador that found himself at odds with the Qajar court formalities was Prince Alexander S. Menshikov (1826) whose meeting with Fath Ali Shah was clearly unfriendly and unpleasant (Abdullah Yof,1957: 144-145). These issues and differences led to the addition of an appendix defining the formal protocols for diplomats and ambassadors in the Treaty of Turkmenchay which will be discussed below.

5-2. The Impact of the Turkmenchay Treaty on Iran's Formalities Relations

After Iranians suffered defeat in the second Russo-Persian war in 1838, negotiations took place Turkmenchay village between representatives of Iran, Britain, and Russia that culminated in a treaty with 16 chapters. In order to interpret certain articles in the treaty, a number of other treaties were added separately later, namely trade, judicial and capitulation, formalities related to diplomats and ambassador, and finally a treaty regarding reparations and border disputes (Ghaziha,2002:28).

The signing and finalization of the treaty satisfied, to a high degree, the Russian government's political aims and aspirations. They requested extra authority and curtsy for their representatives, in addition to capitulation, which was considered highly unusual by the Iranian side. However, since chapter 9 of the Treaty had specified writing guidelines for observing diplomatic protocols between the ambassadors of the two countries, an agreement was added as an appendix to the Treaty of Turkmenchay. The agreement led to French and British ambassador to request the same treatment and rights as their Russian counterparts.

In the above-mentioned agreement, certain vital issues regarding formalities were emphasized, which in addition to referring to international diplomatic protocols, honored the requests and wishes of Russian ambassadors. The formal principals were agreed upon as follows:

1. The greeting ceremony for the Russian ambassador at the border shall be performed in a timely fashion and by an individual equal in rank.
2. Local rulers and princes of each state are tasked with the military greeting ceremony and reception.
3. During the reception, a chair shall be prepared for the ambassadors. Iranian royal court was obligated to prepare a chair for the ambassador while in an audience with the Shah, defying Iranian traditions.
4. Any place that had military units present in the ambassador's route was obligated to perform military salute.

5. A person of high rank, and close to Shah, must greet the ambassador at the royal palace and elders of the community must also attend. Moreover, the military order' present arms should be performed for the ambassador.
6. An appropriate residence must be prepared for the ambassador.
7. The Grand Vizier, along with elders, shall visit him the next day, and on the third day, an audience with the Shah must be provided.
8. The necessary formalities for the ambassador's visit to the court should be prepared.
9. The Russian ambassador was obligated to prepare a set of shoes, and change into them before entering the palace.
10. The formal proceedings were to be equal for a Russian representative and agent.
11. If the ambassador, or envoy, carried a letter from his king, the Shah would receive the letter directly from his hands.

The above items, and certain others in the same spirit, were agreed upon between the two governments (DOC,3829/19:107-11)

Furthermore, with the signing of the Treaty, British Ambassadors also requested the same treatment, citing Russia. Therefore, Iranian diplomatic formalities became an avenue for colonial powers to compete against one another. The Qajars, not wanting to cause any disputes and disagreement, would often opt to prepare a similar ceremony for different missions (Hedayat,1960:689). Moreover, in the tenth chapter of the Treaty of Paris, which was signed in 1857 with the British government over disputes regarding Herat, a provision related to the execution of formalities stipulated that, henceforth, the Iranian government must treat Britain's ambassadors according to international protocols. (Khosravizadeh,2017:103)

The signing of Turkmenchay Treaty did not solve the problems between the two countries, but instead gave rise to other issues. The first ambassador of Russia to visit Iran after the Treaty was Alexander Griboyedov (1828-1831). To prepare for his greeting ceremony, Iranians, for the first time, observed all of the items set out in the Treaty; that is, the guidelines were in accordance with the principals detailed in the Treaty (Estudox,1853:7-33 and 1). Nevertheless, Griboyedov's behavior and treatment of the Iranian side was contrary to common principals of formality. Clearly, the Treaty did not stop Russia's excessive demands and problems between the two sides persisted. The Iranian government had treated the ambassador with respect,

however, Griboyedov considered himself more than just an ambassador and looked at the Qajar court with disdain and arrogance. The level of formality he demanded for himself was that of a King which, naturally, led him to consider anything less as a sign of disrespect. In his meeting the Shah, he even went so far as refusing to change his shoes –defying the principals of the Treaty (Hedayat,1960:707-706).

The Treaty created certain problems for the Shah, namely, giving the Russian the autonomy to behave according to their principals and traditions, and doing so in a way that would not harm his reputation among Iranians. Therefore, the Shah ordered the Russians to wear covered shoes, taking them off before entering the palace so that the soles of their shoes would not pollute (Najis) the Royal Court (Flandin,1978:70).

Although by signing the formality appendix had agreed to observe a set of principles and diplomatic formalities for their respective ambassadors, the Russians viewed it more as a means of dismissing the traditional Iranian formalities and were not willing to treat the Qajar government with respect.

Another instance of these disrespects has been recorded by Mo' ir al-Mamaalek, recounting Prince Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgorukov's behavior as the minister plenipotentiary of Russia during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah. Visiting Iran as the Russian regent on order from the Tsar, Prince Dolgorukov attended the general greeting ceremony of the Marble Throne. Defying customs and traditions, he dismissed the Shah and went immediately to the special place designed for foreign envoys. The rare and disgraceful behavior led to the astonishment of the audience, and the Shah, while visibly fuming with anger, called for the Prince and said, "Close your embassy this very day and leave the country as possible". The Russian Prince tried to apologize, but the Shah cut him short, "We do not change our statements, this is a matter between the Russian government and us". Iran sent out a cable to the Tsar that very same day, and the Prince left Iran in shame (Moayer Al-Mamlek,1993:62).

Russian ambassadors were often dissatisfied and arrogant, viewing the grandest of gifts and gestures as insufficient. For example, in Grand Vizier (1851-1858) Mirza Agha Khan Nouri's letter to Mirza Hussein Khan, the consulate in Tbilisi, he responded to the complaints of Nchykvf, the chargé d'affaires to Iran (1853-1857). Mirza Agha Khan, in the letter, strongly denounces the accusations of the Russian representative regarding Qajar hospitality. The Russian representative, although being only a chargé

d'affaires had been treated as a minister in Iran, had claimed upon his return to Russia that he had been disrespected and given a ragged fabric as a gift. In the mentioned letter, the Grand Vizier questions the validity of the Russian envoy and deny any mistreatment (Estodux,1857:19-5).

Iranian public attitudes and opinion of the Russians also fueled the disagreements between the two governments. The various Wars and conflicts between the two nations, in addition to the hostile attitudes, had led to a deep resentment for Russian among ordinary Iranians. For instance, Eugene Flandin (1840-1843) recalls that the people of Maku had mistaken him, the French orientalist, and his staff for Russians and threw stones towards them (Flandin,1978:59).

However, it is not just a case of Iranians' disgruntlement with the Russians, the Turks did not have a favorable view of them either, preferring the British (Burgess,2005:13). These attitudes and the examples mentioned above indicate that the Qajar's problems with the formalities were not limited to their traditional view towards international protocols and Turkmenchay, Russian ambassadors' behavior also played a critical role in forming these negative emotions.

Figure (3): Russian Ambassador to Tehran

(**Source**: Golestan Palace House Album:894-60)

5-3. Competition and Supremacy of Russia and Britain in the post-Turkmenchay Formalities

The Iranian government, as a buffer state between the two colonial rivals, has always sought to grant each of them the same privilege in terms of formalities, and has sometimes encountered difficulties in doing so. In some cases, the Iranian government had to be negligent in enforcing ceremonial laws to satisfy one of the parties. Ivan Simunovich's letter, as the minister plenipotentiary of Russia in the time of Fath Ali Shah, upon arriving in Tehran is one example of these collisions. At the time of his arrival to Tehran (1833), no residence had been selected for him, forcing him to choose a desolate palace and paying for repairs himself. The Iranian agents did not compensate the minister for his expenses (sakma,824/295:92). In fact, the place of residence had also been morphed into a political matter, and Russia and Britain's competitiveness had forced the Iranian government to consider fairness to both sides when providing a place of residence, not wanting to upset the other side. Unsurprisingly, the Shah ordered the foreign minister, Mirza Abol Hasan Khan, to select the residence and the manner of greeting for Simunovich in a way that would not cause the British any disrespect (Campbell,2005:231)

Predictably, diplomatic protocols in Iran became a source of competition between the British and Russians, each vying for more concessions from the Qajar to prove their dominance. Russia, which was always more demanding in general, found an opportunity with the signing of Turkmenchay treaty and was looking to use it to its fullest potential. Feeling left out, the British protested the special status given to their Russian counterparts and demanded equal treatments from the Iranian government. Case in point, Britain's minister plenipotentiary, expressed his frustrations in a letter to Mohammad Shah in 1836 regarding his Russian counterpart's quest for superiority. In the letter, the British minister particularly notes that Colonel Simonic had asked for a private audience with the Shah for the Eid al-Fitr ceremony, an occasion where all foreign envoys would traditionally meet the Shah together, citing his lackluster knowledge of Farsi. In his opinion, that request further proved the Russian quest for superiority and had to be firmly rejected by the Iranians (Estudox,1252:3-15).

The issues over precedence and priority in salutations were understandably a point of contention and competition among foreign envoys. Amir Kabir revoked Britain's right of precedence, which prompted Justin Sheil to write

a letter to him and protest such a decision. (Estudox,1275:41) Consequently, in 1858, Charles Murray submitted correspondence to the Shah of Iran and pleaded to have precedence in the salutations. (Estodux,1275:41) Over the years, by considering the political power and position of counties, the right to have priority would be granted to individual representatives of sovereign nations.

The problem continued to persist even during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah (1848-1896), with the British still requesting equal treatment as set out in the Iran-Russia agreement. Sir Justin Sheil, The British ambassador to Iran, watched and closely observed his greeting ceremony in Tabriz, looking for any discrepancy in the protocols in comparison to the treatment that the Russian envoys enjoyed (Sheil,1983:26)

To eliminate any potential quarrels with the ambassadors, the court tried to conduct identical ceremonies. (Campbell,2005:233) For instance, the arrival of Charles Allison in 1865, as the ambassador of Great Britain, prompted the government to send four officials from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, another four from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and approximately thirty persons from the Ministry of War to greet the ambassador. In the guidelines for the ceremony, it was explicitly ordered that the greeting staff should only consist of the same persons who welcomed the Russian ambassador(Estudox,1269:33-23). The attention to details and their implementation indicates the degree to which these ceremonies were necessary for the governments.

Nevertheless, the Turkemanchay Treaty continued to be a source of problems for years to come. Meeting the Shah while one wore his shoes was still not entirely accepted by the Iranians. Although they were trying to adapt to international customs and practices, the traditionalist approach of the Qajar court considered it as a taboo both religiously and culturally. The Iranians, for years, looked for ways to circumvent this dilemma.

The manner of sitting down and getting up was another disagreement between the two countries. According to Iranian custom, no one was allowed to stand while meeting the Shah, and kneeling before his majesty applied to everyone, without exception. Astonishingly, by signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchay, the Russians gained the right to sit down in meetings with the Shah. (DOC.19/3829) Almost immediately following that, other government, including Britain, requested the same treatment as the Russians. The Qajar believed that by allowing ambassadors to sit down

in front of the Shah, his status as the King would be devalued since even princes and Shah's children were not allowed to do so. Only Shia clerics enjoyed such a privilege. Therefore, years later and to solve this conundrum, the Shah would start addressing the ambassadors standing, while behind a curtain or to trivialize the agreement, the Grand Vizier would be permitted to sit down as well. Furthermore, for meetings in the Nowruz holiday, Iranian New Year celebrations, comfortable armchairs would be provided for the ambassador's minutes before the meeting and no person would be allowed near the chamber. Thus, the Shah was not seen with foreigners sitting in front of him. (Pollock,1989:259) In 1854, with the arrival of Charles Murray as the ambassador plenipotentiary of Britain and in accordance to an agreement between the two countries, the Shah was essentially forced to provide a chair for the ambassador during meetings. However, before permitting the ambassador to sit down, the Shah would order, in Farsi, the princes present in the meeting to sit down. (Hajebo doleh,1915:118) Presumably, the Shah's intention for this action was to deny the ambassador of any exclusive privilege.

5-4. The Supremacy of Governments in the Welcoming Ceremony

According to the diplomatic formality section of Turkemenchay, the two governments were obligated to provide greeting ceremonies for the ambassador upon his arrival in the country, sending a delegation of the elders of the town –often hand-picked by the Shah, Grand Vizier, and the Foreign Minister (Estodux,1271:23). For Russian ambassadors, a group of Ghazagh cavalry were also sent to attend the greeting ceremony (Estodux, 1273:23). For instance, in Nchykvf greeting ceremony in 1853, a delegation was selected by the Royal court, Grand Vizier, embassies, and the foreign Ministry to pay their respects. Seif al-Molk was selected as the chief greeter by the court and local elders, sheriff, and military also attended (Estodux, 1269:31)

The highest echelon of the Qajar government, including the Shad, Grand Vizier, or Foreign Minister, never attended these ceremonies, but always sent individuals as representatives, except in rare occasions when the ambassador and his government received special attention and treatment. For instance, during the reign of Mohammad Shah (1834-1848), the arrival of Simunovich as the ambassador of Russia (1833-1839) prompted the Foreign Minister to personally attend his greeting ceremony because of the Shah's special relationship with the Russians. Obviously, the event irritated

Sir Henry Ellis, the ambassador of Britain (1835), requesting the same treatment for himself. In order to force the Iranian government, he stayed for a day in Sulqan (near Tehran) (Simonic,1974:95; Wright,2001:70).

Figure (4): Honoring Sir Harford Jones in the Presence of Fath Ali Shah (Sir Harford Jones (Sitting on the Right)

(**Source:** Painter: Robert Smirk. 1809-1810, Painting on canvas)

5-5. Military Salutes Issue

Military salutes were a part of Iranian greeting ceremonies for all foreign envoys and missions (Estodux,1269:11; Estodux,12-2:28). However, if the delegation was from Russia, the Iranians made sure to execute the ceremony with more grandeur (frazar,1985:152). It has been argued that the reason for such extravagant ceremonies for Russian was so that Iran could show its might and power to the former enemies. For example, when General Min Cuis, the representative of Caucasus, arrived in 1866, soldiers lined up the street from Darvazeh Shemiran. Nearly six hundred soldiers saluted and paid their respects to the Russian General, in addition to representatives from the Royal court and foreign Ministry (Estodox,1283:2-1).

One of the Russian envoys who arguably received the most military salutes was Zinoviev, chargé d'affaires to Iran during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah which in 1863 entered Tehran. Ishik Aghasi Bashi, the title given to the president of the greeting ceremony, personally attended the ceremony and the heads of different guilds, including the trumpeter, the commander of

the guards, and the commander of special riflemen, accompanied him (Estodux,1283:1). In the same year, Mister Allison, the minister plenipotentiary of Britain (1860-1872) also visited Iran. He was treated with a salute once in the entrance of the palace by 100 soldiers, once in the square by 400 soldiers and gunners, and once in front of palace itself by the special guards (Estodux,1279 -1280:9)

A quick comparison between the differences in greetings for the two ambassadors makes it crystal clear that Russian power-play eventually influenced the formalities of the Qajar court. Despite the international protocols that clearly viewed a minister plenipotentiary as having a higher rank than a chargé d'affaires, the Iranians treated the latter with more respect and formality. The Russians' exercise of their powers and quest for superiority provided the ground for this inequality in treatment.

6.Conclusion

Global developments in the 19th century and Iran's geopolitical position in the international arena and its position as a buffer zone between the two great powers of the time, Russia and Britain, caused the colonialists to turn their attention to Iran and this land came an arena for Russian and British rivalries. The role of the Russian and British governments in facilitating Iran's assimilation with the International formalities was biased. Opportunist intentions and the competition with together not only hampered their efforts in this regard, but also showcased Iranian regime's weaknesses, making the formalities a perfect excuse to further humiliate Iran and highlighted foreign governments supremacy. Britain and Russia played a critical role here. By signing political and economic treaties with Iran. Also, by exerting their power in matters related to formalities, Iranian diplomatic customs were transformed, in a limited way, and without any prior foundation and cohesive structure in place, from a traditional system to that of a modern one. The sudden shift in procedures, without appropriate support systems and culture, led to an ineffective diplomatic system that imitated foreign traditions without a proper support system. The Avarice and interference of foreign ambassadors and representatives in diplomatic confrontations and their show of force in consolidating their demands for respect were illegal and unplanned factors in Iranian formality. On the other hand, in order to compete with each other, these two colonial powers had unreasonable and extreme demands from the Iranian court in the field of

formalities. Foreign ambassadors abused the Iranian government and directed matters in any direction they wished, and weakness and inability against the colonialists in the field of formalities was also seen. As the scales of power of one of the colonizers became heavier, he received more ceremonial privileges and honors from the Iranian government and showed weak performance and lack of authority and political power of the Iranian government in the international arena that was a reflection of the geographical space that the Iranian government was trapped between the two Russian and British colonizers. In the meantime, the role and performance of the ambassadors of the Russian government was accompanied by a behavior accompanied by violence and reckless and hegemonic hegemony, which sometimes caused the straining of relations and the sharp reaction of the Iranian people. On the other hand, the British ambassadors exercised their demands and interests under the guise of respect and law, and maintained their position of power in the court of Iran by behaving in accordance with customs. In the end, the weakness of the Iranian government was enough to play the role of the buffer government to moderate the power of the two countries, Russia and Britain, but this mediation led the Qajar government to collapse and internal discredit. The Iranian government, as a buffer state, helped to achieve Britain's power-hungry goals, such as preventing the Russian army from passing through Iran to gain access to India, the largest British colony. On the other hand, Russia's aspirations for power in the pursuit of colonial interests, such as the attainment of warm and free waters, were also realized during the Turkmenchay Treaty, all of which were achieved in line with the ceremonial deconstruction of the Russian and British ambassadors.

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