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An Ottoman mission to Tehran: Mehmed Tahir Münif Paşa's second ambassadorship to Tehran and the re-making of Perso-Ottoman relations (1876-1897)

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Mehmet Tahir Münif Paşa's second ambassadorship to Iran (1896–1897) in the aftermath of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar's assassination in May 1896. It argues that the Shah's death brought about a turning point in Perso-Ottoman diplomatic relations and that Sultan Abdülhamid's decision to assign Münif as his representative in Tehran was an affirmation of a new age in Ottoman foreign policy. In what follows, the article will consider Münif's second mission to Tehran in an attempt to bring greater specificity to Perso-Ottoman relations in the first half of the Hamidian era (1875–1896). It also seeks to explore how the rapprochement between the two states in the mid-1890s had unexpected consequences for Iranian émigrés in the Ottoman Empire, thereby considering how Perso-Ottoman diplomatic history is entangled with the construction and negotiation of the life trajectories and circumstances of these trans-national actors in the Ottoman Empire.

On 1 May 1896, telegraph offices from Calcutta to New York reverberated with shock upon receiving news from Tehran that Nasir al-Din Shah, the fourth ruling member of the Qajar dynasty, had been assassinated at the shrine of Shah 'Abd al-'Azim by an assailant of the name of Mirzā Rezā Kermāni. At the time of his assassination, Nasir al-Din Shah had ruled over Iran for over forty-eight years (1848–1896). The reaction in the presses and in the hallways of Europe, Russia and the United States was one of bewilderment and apprehension. The *London Times* bemoaned the loss 'of one of the great arbiters of the destiny of Western Asia',¹ and the *New York Times* commented that 'an oriental despot with inclinations towards modern civilization', and a king of 'amazing character' had been murdered by an assassin 'said to be a Sayyed of Kerman'.²

But in the Ottoman capital and in the offices of the Bâb-ı Ali (the Sublime Porte), the response to the news of the Shah's demise was different. Shock that a commoner could kill the Shah of Persia and apprehension about the possible political repercussions of a less than

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The *London Times*, 'The Shah of Persia', 2 May 1896. London, England.

²The *New York Times*, 'King's King Murdered: Persia's Sovereign Victim of a Fanatic,' 2 May 1896. New York, USA.

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peaceful succession on the delicate balance of power in the region was overshadowed by the recognition that the Ottoman state had perhaps played a more direct role in the 'disastrous incident' (*vāk'a-ı facia*).³ The assailant, Mirzā Rezā Kermāni had very recently spent time in the Ottoman Empire. Although, according to the Qajar state, he had acted alone, his 'known associates' were Iranian émigrés in the Ottoman Empire with close ties to the Iranian community of Istanbul. Ottoman officials from within the Yıldız Palace were quick to remark that it was likely that Mirzā Rezā Kermāni had acted on the orders and encouragement of the Muslim ideologist Jamal al-Din al-Afghāni,⁴ who was at the time a guest of the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul and an ardent critic of Nasir al-Din Shah.⁵ These initial speculations were at least partially validated following Kermāni's arrest, when Kermāni admitted to his interrogators that he held Afghāni in great esteem, and that he had met him in Istanbul shortly before travelling back to Iran and murdering the Shah.

All this did not escape the attention of the Yıldız Palace. In an internal memorandum transcribed by a civil servant in the Palace just days after the Shah's death, it was noted that 'for too long have the officials of the Porte kept Iranian trouble-makers (*erbāb-ı müfside*) in the Ottoman Empire under the veil of their protection'.⁶ Matters had been made worse when Mirzā Rezā Kermāni was caught by a detachment of Iranian troupes 'heading towards the Ottoman border' following the assassination, ostensibly en route to the Ottoman Empire where he believed he could find shelter. In the immediate aftermath of Nasir al-Din Shah's assassination, the correspondence coming out of the Yıldız Palace manifested a sense of urgency that the Bāb-ı Āli had to respond conclusively to the assassination of the Shah of Iran in order to prevent a full-scale diplomatic crisis.

As the crisis around the assassination of Nasir al-Din Shah unfolded in the Ottoman capital, an Ottoman delegation tasked with participating in the celebrations marking Nasir al-Din Shah's fiftieth jubilee was slowly making its way to Tehran via the Istanbul-Tiflis-Tabriz route. They had almost concluded their journey and were some sixty kilometres from Tehran when news of Nasir al-Din's assassination reached them. At the head of the delegation was Mehmet Tahir Münif Paşa (1830–1910), seasoned Ottoman statesman and one-time ambassador to Tehran (1872–1877). News of the assassination was to change the nature of Münif Paşa's mission: although Münif had left Istanbul for Tehran with the intention to return to Istanbul after the jubilee celebrations, the Shah's assassination resulted in his permanent posting to Tehran as the Ottoman ambassador to the Sublime State of Iran (*Dowlat-e Aliyye-ye Irān*). Soon after his arrival in Tehran, Münif Paşa received a new set of orders. His mission was, in the first instance, to relay the Ottoman Sultan's condolences to the Iranian state. More crucially however, he was to ensure a 'reconciliation' with the newly enthroned Muzaffar al-Din Shah, invite him to Istanbul to meet in person with Sultan Abdülhamid (r. 1876–1908) and finally, though not least, to ask the Iranian state's support in the resolution of the Armenian Question which had resulted in Armenian revolutionaries seeking refuge from Ottoman forces by crossing the border into Iran.⁷

³Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (BOA.). Y.PRK.HR. 21/76, 18 Zilkadeh 1313/1 May 1896.

⁴Jamal al-Din al-Afghāni (1838–1897), was a political activist and Islamic ideologist who travelled throughout the Muslim world during the late 19th century. He is considered one of the pioneers of Islamic modernism and was an advocate of pan-Islamic unity. He was critical of Nasir al-Din Shah, whom he believed had 'sold' Iran to European powers, mainly the British and Russians. For al-Afghāni, see Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal al-Din 'al-Afghani'*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968.

⁵BOA. Y.EE. 3/100/31/1709, (undated).

⁶BOA. PRK.HR. 21/83, 24 Zilkadeh 1313/7 May 1896.

⁷Ebüziyya Tevfik, 'Münif Paşa', *Yeni Tasvir-i Efkâr*, no. 253 (Istanbul, 12 February 1910).

The purpose of this article is to evaluate this period in Perso-Ottoman relations through the prism of Münif Paşa's mission to Tehran. It will do so by discussing the period leading up to Münif's posting and Nasir al-Din Shah's assassination. It will then focus on Münif Paşa's sojourn in Iran in 1896–1897, as well as drawing on his letters and memoirs from his first posting to Tehran between 1872 and 1877. This examination of Perso-Ottoman relations and Münif Paşa's 'biography' and mission hopes to contribute to two distinct but overlapping debates: first, it will provide an account of the nature of Perso-Ottoman diplomacy as set against domestic and international developments taking place in the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran in the late nineteenth century. Second, it will contribute to discussions relating to the Iranian subjects of the Ottoman Empire by integrating the perspectives of Iranian émigré-dissidents in the Ottoman Empire to political histories of Qajar Iran and the Ottoman Empire. The presence and fate of Iranian émigré-dissidents in the Empire was an integral part to the unfolding events in the mid-to-late 1890s discussed in this paper.

Moreover, although much has been written about Ottoman diplomatic history in the long nineteenth century, most accounts still focus overwhelmingly on the Empire's relationship to Europe.⁸ These accounts study the Ottoman Empire through the lens of the Eastern Question⁹ and how the Empire (re)negotiated its place in a world where it was seen as a 'weak player' or 'minor actor'.¹⁰ Even studies that have argued for the Empire's relative strength and emphasized its capacity to exercise territorial sovereignty have fixed their gaze overwhelmingly on the Western borders of the Empire.¹¹ Elsewhere, questions relating to how the Ottoman Empire exercised political viability on a global scale have been limited, for the most part, to considerations of Sultan Abdülhamid's pan-Islamic policies beyond the Empire's borders.¹²

By focusing instead on the Ottoman state's dealings with its neighbour to the East, Qajar Iran, at the end of the nineteenth century, this piece will provide evidence for the Ottoman Empire's attempts to promote pro-active diplomacy on a trans-regional scale with its neighbour to the East. It will do so by evaluating the diplomatic rapprochement in Perso-Ottoman relations following Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar's assassination in 1896. This

⁸Carter Vaughn Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789–1922*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980; Roderic Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Matthew S Anderson, *The Eastern Question: 1774–1923*. London: Arnold, 1966; Matian Kent (ed.), *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1996; F.K. Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy: Abdülhamid II and the Great Powers, 1878–1888*. Istanbul: Isis, 1996; Sinan Kunalalp, *Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on the Eastern Question*. Istanbul: Isis, 2012.

⁹The 'Eastern Question' revolved around a question that emerged in European diplomatic circles the late eighteenth century, namely the fate of the Balkans if the Ottoman Empire disappeared as the fundamental political presence in the Southeastern Europe. At the core of the Question lay the imperialist desire of the Great Powers and Russia to extend their power and influence through diplomacy, military intervention, commerce, and missionary activities in Ottoman lands.

¹⁰AS Kanya-Forstner, 'French expansion in Africa: The Mythical Theory' in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (eds), London: Longman, 279.

¹¹See, for example, Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and Legitimacy in the Late Ottoman Empire 1876–1909*. London: IB Tauris, 1999; Maurus Reinkowski, 'Hapless Imperialists and Resentful Nationalists: Trajectories of Radicalization in the Late Ottoman Empire' in Maurus Reinkowski and Gregor Thum (eds.), *Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2014*; Selim Deringil and Sinan Kunalalp, *Studies on Ottoman Diplomatic History*. Istanbul: ISIS, 1990.

¹²There are notable exceptions. See for example, Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and Hijaz*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017; Sabri Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary 1843–1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2103; Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011; Karen Kern, *Imperial Citizen: Marriage and Citizenship in the Ottoman Frontier Provinces of Iraq*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011.

event saw Münif Paşa being (re)instated as the Porte's representative in Tehran and opened a new age in Perso-Ottoman relations. It will also be demonstrated, however, that this new era of rapprochement between the Ottoman and Qajar states, far from being an isolated event, was the harbinger of changes in Hamidian domestic and foreign policy more broadly. Finally, the article will also briefly consider how this new era of compromise and reconciliation between the two states affected Iranian subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

'Things are Changing': Hamidian policy at the Empire's Eastern frontiers and the end of the century

In the spring of 1896, Perso-Ottoman relations had been strained for some time. This was a result of continued border issues between the two states¹³; Abdülhamid Sultan's pursuit of pan-Islamism on the international stage which also included the Shi'i majority shrine-cities of Ottoman Iraq; and the Ottoman state's sheltering of Iranian political dissidents within its borders.¹⁴ However, since the mid-1890s, a number of developments on the domestic and international spheres had brought about calls from within the Yıldız Palace demanding that the nature of Ottoman relations with Iran be re-assessed. For the Hamidian state, Nasir al-Din Shah's death and the enthronement of Mozaffar al-Din Shah (r.1896–1906) presented an opportunity to be seized upon.¹⁵

On the international stage, the Armenian uprisings and subsequent Hamidian massacres of 1894–1896 had placed the Qajar government in a unique position whereby it could decide at its own discretion whether to harbour or deport Armenian revolutionaries who regularly fled to the Iranian side of the Perso-Ottoman border in order to evade Ottoman forces.¹⁶ The Hamidian massacres of Armenians in the Empire's Anatolian heartlands was a result of Sultan Abdülhamid's attempts at reasserting pan-Islamism as state ideology as well as the acts of sabotage carried out by Armenian revolutionaries who hoped for European intervention.¹⁷ The heavy-handed suppression and attacks on the Armenian civilian population of Anatolia would indeed result in further European intervention in the Empire's internal affairs. The stated aim of this intervention was the guaranteeing of the safety and rights of Armenian subjects of the Empire, though it also signalled the end of Britain's strategic commitment to the Ottoman Empire's defence.¹⁸ In other words, the stakes were high for the Ottoman Empire: in the face of the escalating crisis in Eastern Anatolia and pressure from European states to contain the violence, the Ottoman state required the support of the Qajar government in ensuring that Armenian revolutionaries and leaders operating on the Iranian side of the border did not evade punishment and were returned to the Ottoman Empire.

¹³See Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands*.

¹⁴Khan Malek Sāsāni, *Yādbudhā-ye Safārat-e Istanbul*. Tehran, (1345/1966). 259–261.

¹⁵The enthronement of Mozaffar al-Din Shah was a moment of opportunity for the Ottoman state, but it was also a period of 'possibilities' to pursue political reform within Iran due to the Shah being perceived as 'feeble and ignorant', as argued by Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet. See, Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*. 84–87.

¹⁶Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1880–1908*. London: Routledge, 2006. 115–116.

¹⁷Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008. 31.

¹⁸Jeremy Salt, 'Britain, the Armenian Question and the Cause of Ottoman Reform: 1894–1896,' *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26, No. 3, (1990): 308–328. The end of active British support for the Ottoman Empire was an indirect outcome of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878.

Moreover, the Ottoman state maintained that there had been attacks against Ottoman Kurds from the Iranian side of the border. Although the Qajar centre struggled to control its periphery effectively and lacked the means by which to police all its borders,¹⁹ this does not appear to have invalidated its negotiating power with the Ottoman state. Indeed, a letter that Sultan Abdülhamid sent to Nasir al-Din asks that the Shah recall that there is an understanding between the two states and requests that Iranian forces prevent such attacks. He concludes the letter to the Shah with a warning: the mistreatment of Ottoman Kurds at the hand of Iranian officials or Armenian gangs from the Iranian side of the border will not be tolerated.²⁰

The Qajar response to the Hamidian state's petition that Armenian revolutionaries be surrendered to the Hamidian Regiments was to demand that Iranian dissident-émigrés being harboured in the Empire be returned to Iran.²¹ The mid-to-late nineteenth century had seen the Ottoman Empire become a site for political action and dissent where defectors of the Qajars regime had found relative safety.²² Indeed, in the 1890s, the Qajar state's demands that the Bâb-ı Âli put an end to Iranian dissidents freely roaming in the Ottoman Empire, which 'offered [these Iranian dissidents] a hospitable space for critical and creative thinking and action',²³ increased. The Yıldız Palace therefore had to re-evaluate whether the discontinuing of the Porte's support of Iranian dissidents was a fair price to pay in exchange for the Armenian revolutionaries east of the Ottoman border.²⁴

The written exchange between the Iranian statesman-turned-dissident Mirzâ Malkum Khan²⁵—based in London—and the renowned Iranian political thinker and dissident Mirzâ Āqâ Khan Kermâni—who was in Istanbul at the time—reveals that Kermâni was aware of the Bâb-ı Âli's diplomatic exchange with the Qajar state concerning the Armenian Question, and the possible repercussions the escalating crisis could have on his, and other émigré-dissidents', welfare. Kermâni concludes one such letter to Malkum stating: 'but surely, [the Ottoman state] could not be so pitiless (*nāmard*) that they would surrender me to Iran'.²⁶ As early as late 1894, there were clear indications that a change in policy between the Ottoman and Qajar states was on the horizon.

The urgency to enter discussions with the Qajar state in order to improve diplomatic relations was precipitated by opposition at home. Following the arrival of another Iranian dissident, Jamal al-Din al-Afghāni in Istanbul in 1892, it gradually became apparent that Young Turk opposition to the Hamidian regime was being reinforced by their exposure to ideas put forth by the adversaries of Nasir al-Din Shah who found an intellectual base in Afghāni's house

¹⁹For a discussion on Iran's perennial struggle to bring into check its periphery, Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018. 76–78; 897–908.

²⁰Letter from Abdülhamid to Nasir al-Din Shah. BOA. YEE 36/23.

²¹BOA. Y.EE. 3/110/31/1709, 21 Zilkadeh 1313/4 May 1896.

²²Tanya Elal Lawrence, 'The Iranian Community of the Late Ottoman Empire and the Egyptian "Crisis" through the Persian Looking Glass: The Documentation of the 'Urabi Revolt in Istanbul's Akhtar,' *Iranian Studies*, 51, no. 2, (2018): 245–267.

²³Hamid Dabashi, *Persophilia: Persian Culture on the Global Scene*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. 163–173.

²⁴In 1895 the Iranian dissidents demanded by the Qajar state were Jamal al-Din al-Afghāni, Mirzâ Āqâ Khan Kermâni and Shaikh Ahmad Ruhi, all of whom were residents of Istanbul. With the exception of al-Afghāni, these men would be extradited to Iran following Nasir al-Din Shah's assassination.

²⁵Mirzâ Malkum Khan (1834–1908), was an Iranian statesman-turned-dissident who started his career in the service of the Qajar state, but who became one of the most vocal of its critics after falling from grace in 1872. See, Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.

²⁶Undated letter from Mirzâ Āqâ Khan Kermâni to Malkum Khan, Sarvân Muhammad Kashmiri, 'Nāmeḥā-ye Mirzâ Āqâ Khan Kermâni' in *Makāteb-e Tārikhi be Khatt-e Bozorgan*. Tehran, 1350/1971. 222.

in Nişantaşı in Istanbul.²⁷ Upon his exile from Qajar Iran, Jamal al-Din al-Afghāni had arrived in Istanbul in 1892. Sultan Abdülhamid had hoped that Afghāni would be an asset to his rule: he was a high-profile Muslim ideologue whose endorsement of Ottoman sovereignty would benefit the Sultan in his bid to promote the Ottoman head of state's station as the sultan-caliph of the Islamic world. This was a foreign policy move that reflected the Empire's attempts to look outward and beyond its formal borders as an 'global' Empire by recruiting international figures such as Afghāni.

For over a decade before his death, Nasir al-Din Shah had watched Abdülhamid's overtures to Muslims beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire with some mild angst and interest. For example, in 1878, the Qajar ambassador to the Sublime Porte, Mirzā Hosain Khan (1858–71), had communicated to Nasir al-Din Shah the Ottoman Sultan's self-styling as the leader-caliph of the Islamic world, stating that 'the Ottomans have embarked on a new policy of promoting Islamic unity under the leadership of the Ottoman Sultan as the caliph of the Muslim world'.²⁸ Elsewhere, that Sultan Abdülhamid had 'proclamations sent out to Egypt, India, Iran and Central Asia', asking that Muslim communities in these distant parts of the world recognize his caliphate was communicated to Nasir al-Din Shah by his consul-general in London.²⁹ These overtures were not regarded kindly by the Qajar state.

It was set against this backdrop of promoting Hamidian prestige and Ottoman sovereignty that in 1892 the exiled Afghāni had been extended the invitation to Istanbul.³⁰ And in 1893, faced with the problem of Armenian revolutionaries crossing the Iranian border into Eastern Anatolia and disturbances in the Ottoman 'atabāt between the Sultan's Shi'i and Sunni subjects,³¹ Sultan Abdülhamid decided to implement earlier proposals for a Sunni-Shi'i rapprochement by requesting that a working-group be set up under Afghāni to promote his pan-Islamist agenda abroad, and specifically in Iran.³² In response to this request, Afghāni requested that Yusuf Rıza Paşa, a former minister to Tehran and close confidant of Sultan Abdülhamid; the Persian scholar Muallim Feyzi; the poet Būrhanüddin-i Belhi Efendi; Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni; the Iranian émigré Shaikh Ahmad Ruhi; Ruhi's brother Mirzā Abu'l Qāsem; Mirzā Hasan Khabir al-Molk (of the Iranian embassy in Istanbul); and the Qajar Prince Shaikh al-Rais write to influential figures throughout the Shi'i world. However, the correspondence between members of Afghāni's Istanbul circle, namely a letter written by Kermāni to the 'ulema of the 'atabāt was discovered by the Iranian consul in Baghdad later that year. When the consul-general communicated this discovery to the Iranian ambassador in Istanbul, in January 1894 the Qajar Foreign Ministry demanded the deportation of al-Afghāni, Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni; Shaikh Ahmad Ruhi and Mirzā Hasan Khabir al-Molk to Iran.³³

²⁷BOA. Y. MTV. 80/120 (undated).

²⁸Ibrāhīm Safā'i, *Barghā-ye Tārikh*. Tehran, 1351/1972. 113–114.

²⁹Lawrence, *The Iranian Community*. 12.

³⁰Nikki Keddie, 'Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 4, no. 3 (1962), 283–289.

³¹'Atabāt (literally 'thresholds'), denotes the Shi'i shrine cities of Iraq—Najaf, Karbalā, Samarra and Kazemeyn—and contains the tombs of six of the twelve imams as well as the secondary sites of Shi'i pilgrimage. Traditionally the crucible for Shi'ism, these cities are also major sites of religious learning. The 'atabāt constituted a frontier zone between the Ottoman Empire and Iran from the sixteenth century onwards, and the politics of a Sunni Ottoman Empire ruling over the Shi'i population of these holy shrine cities remained a contentious issue through to the twentieth century. See, Selim Deringil, 'The Struggle Against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq,' *Die Welt des Islams*, 30, No. 1 (1990): 45–62.

³²Gökhan Çetinsaya, 'The Caliph and Mujtahids: Ottoman Policy towards the Shiite Community of Iraq in the Late Nineteenth Century,' *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July 2005), 569–570.

³³BOA. BEO. 341/25,569, 4 Rajab 1311/11 January 1894.

The Porte would resist these demands for some time. It was still the Palace's hope that this cohort of Persophone Ottomans and Iranian dissident-émigrés could effectively stress the advantages of a Sunni-Shi'i rapprochement to leaders across the Shi'i world thereby promoting the Sultan's prestige beyond the borders of Empire. However, there were other considerations that tilted the balance against the working-group. Namely, that links maintained by Iranian dissidents to oppositional groups in the Ottoman capital made Afghāni and Iranian émigré-dissidents of the Empire unpopular amongst officials at the Bâb-ı Âli, particular Grand Vizier Halil Rifat Paşa.³⁴ Far from being an asset to the regime as initially envisaged by Sultan Abdülhamid, Afghāni's home came to be associated with oppositional thinkers, members of the Young Turks, Babis and Iranian exiles, which in turn made the Sultan suspicious of Afghāni and his motives.³⁵

Indeed, earliest contact between Iranian exiles and Ottoman oppositional groups (as well as members of the Committee of Ottoman Union and Progress) dates back to this period.³⁶ For example, Yusuf Akçura, a leading figure in the development of pan-Turkism in the early Republican period, attributes the development of a distinct understanding of pan-Turkism in the early 1900s to discussions in Afghāni's house in the 1890s. He also credits the Turkish nationalist writer and politician Mehmed Emin (Yurdakul)'s³⁷ exposure to Afghāni and his circle as being instrumental to the development of Mehmed Emin's ideas.³⁸ It was in Afghāni's Nişantaşı home that Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni and Mehmed Emin first came into contact.

Mehmed Emin was not the only future Young Ottoman with whom Kermāni associated through the Afghāni circle. İbrahim Temo, one of the founding members of the Committee of Union and Progress, notes that it was Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni who introduced him to İshak Sükuti, with whom he would establish the Committee of Union and Progress. According to Temo, Kermāni had a 'makeshift bookstore' by Beyazıt Mosque, where he sold copies of 'rare books that were hard to come by' and 'the Persian newspaper published in London which opposed the Shah's rule'.³⁹ This newspaper was ostensibly Malkum Khan's *Qanun* (published in London, 1890–1892), which was distributed in the Ottoman Empire by Kermāni.⁴⁰ Indeed, the influence of *Qanun* in disseminating revolutionary ideas has been acknowledged by İbrahim Temo, who recounts his sharing of copies of the publication with his friends in

³⁴ Letter from Halil Rifat Paşa to Sultan Abdülhamid, BOA. Y.EE. 87/86. May 1896.

³⁵ Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*. p. 31.

³⁶ For references to Iranian influences on Ottoman revolutionaries, see Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri*, 67–69; Sina Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki*. Istanbul: İmge Yayınları, 2017. 56–57; İsmail Temo, *İttihad ve Terakki Anıları*. Istanbul: Alfa, 2013. 59; Tâqizadeh, 'Panislamisme et Panturquisme,' *Revue du Monde Musulman*. Paris, 1913. 185.

³⁷ Mehmed Emin Yurdakul (1869–1944) was an ideologue of pan-Turkism and is considered the father of patriotic Turkish poetry.

³⁸ Yusuf Akçura, 'Vahdet-i Cinsiye Felsefesi,' *Türk Yurdu III*. Istanbul, 1330/1912; 'Şeyh Cemaleddin-i Efgani,' *Türk Yurdu VI*. Istanbul, 1330/1912, 2263–2267. Akçura refers to Afghāni's 'unrelenting belief that Islamic nations could rise up as one,' as being an inspiration for subsequent pan-Turkists, who maintained that the same notion could be applied to Turkish-speaking peoples. In the same way that Afghāni believed Muslims of one nation could look outside the borders of their country and come together with Muslims around the globe; Turkic peoples could create a system based on kinship and on purely ethnic terms.

³⁹ İbrahim Temo, *İttihak ve Terakki Anıları: Atatürk'ü N'için Severim?* Istanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2000. 22.

⁴⁰ Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni provided Malkum with much of the material which was published in the newspaper. In other words, Kermāni exported from Istanbul to London material for *Qanun* which was deeply critical of the Shah's regime, and which in return was read by Ottoman opposition groups in the Ottoman Empire. See, Undated letter from Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni to Malkum Khan in Sarvān Muhammad Kashmari, 'Nāmeḥā-ye Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni,' in *Makātebe Tārikhi be Khatt-e Bozorgān*. Tehran, 1350/1971. 217.

opposition. When Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated by Mirzā Rezā Kermāni, this event was considered an epic accomplishment amongst Young Turks, who wished to see Abdülhamid meet a similar end. In the aftermath of Mirzā Rezā Kermāni's execution on 12 August 1896, members of the Committee of Union and Progress hailed him as a martyr for progress, and a symbol 'revolutionary ideas'.⁴¹

As links between the Ottoman opposition and the Afghāni circle became more flagrant in the capital and the Armenian 'crisis' escalated in the East, the Palace's reluctant stance on the Qajar state's request that the 'mischief-makers' be deported was revised.⁴² First, in late 1895, chiefly because of their support of Armenian revolutionaries, the founders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP)—İbrahim Temo, İshak Sükuti, Tunalı Hilmi Bey, Murat Bey (Mizancı Murat) and Refik Nevzat—were exiled from Istanbul.⁴³ Around the same time, in November 1895, the Istanbul law enforcement issued an arrest warrant for the three émigré-dissidents demanded by the Qajar state.⁴⁴ In December 1895 Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni, Shaikh Ahmad Ruhi and Mirzā Hasan Khabir al-Molk were arrested and deported from Istanbul and imprisoned in Trabzon where they awaited their fate.

Therefore, by late 1895 the Ottoman opposition's contacts to Iranian émigré-dissidents and the Qajar state's capacity to aid and harbour Armenian revolutionaries during the Armenian massacres saw the Porte's gradual abandonment of the practice of accommodating such Iranian émigrés. Similarly, the policy of communicating directly with *mujtahids* in the 'atabāt to ensure the Sultan's standing amongst Shi'i populations in the neighbouring Islamic world was dropped. Instead, the Porte and Yıldız Palace decided to opt for a policy of rapprochement with the Qajar government. Notwithstanding, it was the outcome of this gradual change in policy that a delegation was set up to attend Nasir al-Din Shah's Jubilee Celebrations in May 1896 with Münif Paşa at its head.

Just the man for the job: background to Münif Paşa's 'Mission' to Tehran

The Ottoman delegation tasked with partaking in Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar's jubilee celebrations marking fifty years of his rule had almost arrived in Tehran when news of the Shah's assassination on 1 May 1896 reached Münif Paşa and his entourage.⁴⁵ Within days of the event, Münif was to receive instructions from the Yıldız Palace that he was to remain in Iran for Mozaffar al-Din's Shah's coronation and that his posting to Tehran was now permanent.⁴⁶ His new and most immediate mission was to ensure a shift rapprochement between the Qajar and Ottoman states. Although a change in policy had been in the making for some time, Münif Paşa was to ensure its total realization and settle its terms.

Münif Paşa was just the man for such a job. He was one of the most seasoned statesmen of the Hamidian period, having served thrice as Minister of Education (1877; 1878–1880 and 1885–1891). Münif was also a confidant and advisor to the Sultan Abdülhamid (though at the time he had recently fallen out of grace).⁴⁷ Münif Paşa was

⁴¹Temo, *İttihad ve Terakki Anıları*. 69.

⁴²BOA. MKT. MHM. 534/37, 8 Zilkadeh 1312/3 May 1895.

⁴³Sina Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki*. İstanbul: İmge Yayınları, 2017. 55–56.

⁴⁴BOA. Y.A.HUS. 287/39, 23 Jumada'l-âkhar 1313/11 November 1895.

⁴⁵Münif Paşa to Yıldız Palace: BOA. Y.A.HUS. 1176/14/126. 25 May 1312/6 June 1896.

⁴⁶BOA. Y. PRK. 79.41. 3 Zilhiccah 1313/16 May 1896.

⁴⁷Sultan Abdülhamid's relationship to Münif Paşa is observed in some detail in Ali Budak, *Batılışma Sürecinde Çok Yönlü Bir Osmanlı Aydını: Münif Paşa*. İstanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2004.

also known for establishing the *Cemiyet-i İlmiye-i Osmaniye* (The Ottoman Scientific Society)⁴⁸ in 1862 and founding the Science Journal, known as *Mecmûa-i Fünûn*. More importantly however, Münif had spent five years in Tehran in the mid-1870s as the Porte's ambassador and had been awarded the honorary *Şîr u Hurşid* medal by the Qajar state as recognition of his 'services to Iran'.⁴⁹ He was a Persophile with extensive experience dealing with Iranian statesmen.

Münif was also a long-standing advocate of maintaining closer relations with the Empire's neighbours to the East, including Iran, and in this respect, he was unusual amongst statesmen of the day. Early on during his first ambassadorship to Tehran, he had submitted a comprehensive report (*lâyiha*) to Şirvanzade Rüştü Paşa, the grand vizier between 1872 and 1874, citing what he believed to be the most pressing issues in need for improvement in the realm of Ottoman diplomacy.⁵⁰ The *lâyiha* is of particular note because much of what Münif proposes became state policy under Sultan Abdülhamid, who was to accede to the throne in 1876. Münif's close relationship to the young Sultan Abdülhamid is well-documented, and the *lâyiha* also offers insight into how the Porte's ambassador to Tehran was instrumental in shaping Hamidian policy.⁵¹

In the report to Rüştü Paşa, Münif expresses his opinion that the Ottoman Empire needs to implement a more active foreign policy in places such as Iran, Afghanistan, Zanzibar, Java and India where there are significant Muslim populations: he argues that the Empire's 'passive' stance benefits European nations, and that 'following the European example, the Ottoman state too must follow an active relationship in these lands'. However, he singles out Iran and Greece as the two states with which the Porte needs to pursue a more 'professional' (*ehil*) relationship, noting that given the political and economic significance of both Iran and Greece, the stature and experience of the ambassadors representing the Ottoman state need to reflect the strategic value to maintaining close ties with the states of these countries.⁵² Crucially though, Münif insists that these ambassadors must be Muslim subjects of the Empire rather than non-Muslims. The custom in the Empire had been to assign non-Muslim subjects to represent the economic and by extension, political, interests of the Empire in Greece and the Balkans, something Münif believes must change.⁵³

⁴⁸Established by Münif Paşa) and endorsed by imperial decree on May 1861, the *Cemiyet-i İlmiye* undertook a programme of scientific popularization (similar to the encyclopedists in France) and published a periodical, *Mecmûa-i Fünûn* (Journal of Sciences), which remained in circulation—albeit with intervals—between 1862 and 1883. *Mecmûa-i Fünûn* aimed to introduce Ottoman audiences to scientific ideas, but the definition of 'scientific' was employed broadly. For example, the journal published on economic themes, and was the first publication to write about Muslim communities outside the Ottoman Empire (an interest which was to gain prominence among the Young Ottomans in subsequent years). For *Mecmûa-yı Fünûn*, see, Ali Budak, *Mecmûa-yı Fünûn: Osmanlı'nın İlk Bilim Dergisi*. Istanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat Yayınları, 2011.

⁴⁹BOA. İ. HR. 355/21,576, 8 Safar 1298/10 January 1881.

⁵⁰Münif Paşa to Şirvanzade Rüştü Paşa. BOA. Y.EE. 91/38. Undated. The report (*lâyiha*) is undated but must have been drafted sometime in 1873 given that Münif was posted to Tehran in late 1872 and Rüştü Paşa was grand vizier February 1874.

⁵¹See, Kayahan Özgül. *XIX. Asrın Benzersiz Bir Politeknîği: Münif Paşa*. Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2014; Budak, Ali. *Mecmûa-yı Fünûn: Osmanlı'nın İlk Bilim Dergisi*. Istanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat Yayınları, 2011; Ali Fuat, 'Münif Paşa,' *Türk Tarih Encümeni Mecmuası*. May 1930, Vol.1; İsmail Doğan, *Tanzimat'ın İki Ucu: Münif Paşa ve Ali Suavi*. Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2018.

⁵²Münif Paşa to Rüştü Paşa. BOA. Y.EE. 91/38.

⁵³For an examination of the network of Phanariot elites bound in Ottoman 'governance', see, Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011.

In the *lāyiha* Münif underlines that adequate diplomatic representation in Iran is essential if the Ottoman Empire hopes to promote the Sultan's title of caliph and thereby establish closer ties with Muslims across the globe, including but not limited to Iran.⁵⁴ The important point here is that Münif Paşa believed that Iran occupied a 'special' status (*mevki '-i hass*) because it was an independent Muslim power and that diplomatic relations with the Qajars needed to acknowledge Iran's unique situation as a sovereign Muslim power that neighboured the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁵

Münif had therefore long been an advocate for forming closer diplomatic ties with Iran, and his first ambassadorship to Tehran is considered a turning point in Perso-Ottoman relations because it brought about a marked increase in communication between the two states. Significant here is that although the period post-the 1870s saw a marked *increase* in diplomatic relations, this did not necessarily bring about an improvement: the two states did not enjoy 'cordial ties' until later in the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ According to Khan Malek Sāsāni, this was largely due to pan-Islamism becoming a cornerstone of Hamidian foreign policy and Ottoman implementation of tighter control in the Shi'i shrine cities of Iraq. However, Sāsāni also attributes the tension in relations in the first half of the Hamidian period (1875–1896) to the rise of pan-Turkism in the Ottoman Empire, which saw Turkish nationalist statesmen taking a hostile position vis à vis Iran.⁵⁷

That Münif was selected by Sultan Abdülhamid to head the jubilee delegation to Tehran in 1896 to assist in improving Perso-Ottoman relations was therefore a conscious decision reflecting Münif's experience and his previous attempts at increasing diplomatic ties between the two states. But there was more to Münif Paşa's assignment to the head of the jubilee delegation to Tehran: on the eve of this commission, Münif had fallen from grace at the Yıldız Palace and his posting to Tehran was a banishment of sorts following a disagreement with Sultan Abdülhamid over the Armenian question and the Empire's standing amongst European nations.⁵⁸ Münif had been invited to the Palace in April 1895 at the height of the Armenian massacres in Eastern Anatolia where he had expressed his opinion that the Armenian uprisings were a product of British and French 'encouragement and meddling' and that if left unchecked, it would be impossible to contain the 'Armenian trouble' (*Ermenilerin mefāsidi*) in the East.⁵⁹ According to official sources, Münif's additional statement that the Empire was 'frail' and that it had 'been left behind', when even a nation such as Russia, which had 'once been insignificant but [is] now one of the great nations of Europe' (*Rusya Devleti vaktiyle ehemmiyetsiz bir hâlde iken el-yevm Avrupa düvel-i muazzamasından māduttur*) had greatly offended the Sultan Abdülhamid.⁶⁰ Münif had also indicated that the Armenian crisis would pave the way for Britain and France's further intrusion in the internal affairs of the Empire.

⁵⁴ Münif Paşa to Rüştü Paşa. BOA. Y.EE. 91/38.

⁵⁵ For an overview of Perso-Ottoman relations, in particular the question of the settling of border disputes between the states, refer to Stanford Shaw, 'Iranian Relations with the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,' in Peter Avery et al., (eds.) *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol.7. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; Ateş, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands*; Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*; Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*. 66–69.

⁵⁶ See, Sāsāni, *Yādbudhā*, 247–261; Rahim Ra'is Niyā. *Irān va Osmāni dar Āstāne-ye Qarn-e Bistom*. Vol. 1. Tehran, 1385/2006. 69–81.

⁵⁷ Sāsāni, *Yādbudhā*. 260–261.

⁵⁸ Kayahan Özgül, *Münif Paşa*, 37–38.

⁵⁹ Münif Paşa's 'Report on the Armenians' (*Ermenilere Dair Ma'ruzât*). BOA. Y.EE. No. 8 1087/77/3.

⁶⁰ Sultan Abdülhamid to Münif Paşa. BOA. Y.EE. No. 1, 156/15/3. Dated Shawvāl 1312/March 1895.

Abdülhamid's response to Münif would come in the form of a *tevbihnâme* (a formal caution) sent to the Paşa in March 1895: the caution stated that Münif's 'accusations' that had been 'hurled like a cannonball' (*ortaya bir gülle atmak gibi söylenilmiş olan*) needed to be clarified. The Sultan had felt that these words were 'baseless insults directed both at [the Sultan] and the Ottoman state, [...] nullifying [Münif's] twenty years of service to that state.'⁶¹ Abdülhamid had ended the admonishment on a more personal note, stating that his minister's words had left him unable to sleep (*kalbim pek ziyade mükedder olmuştur [...] bu gece gözüme uyku girmemiştir*). Following this caution, Münif Paşa was not re-assigned to a posting, despite his request that he be sent to Vienna as the Ottoman envoy.⁶² It was set against this backdrop that Münif's assignment as the head of the delegation to Tehran had been decided. Despite the mission originally being a temporary posting to attend Nasir al-Din Shah's jubilee celebrations, having spent six years of his career in Tehran as the Ottoman minister to Iran in the 1870s, Münif Paşa is recorded to have commented that this was a 'punishment' given the difficult conditions in Iran and his old age.⁶³ Tehran was no Vienna.

Indeed, Münif Paşa's letters from Tehran during his first assignment as Ottoman envoy to the Qajar court indicates that despite his interest in and respect for Iranian culture and history, he also experienced in Iran what he describes as an 'unparalleled backwardness'.⁶⁴ In a letter penned in July 1873 to the Office of the Grand Vizier, the *Sadâret*, Münif Paşa recounted that:

Although I often complained about the slow pace of progress and was unhappy about our country's affairs, ever since I arrived in Iran, I give thanks for our circumstances (*İran'a geleli beri hâlimize çok şükrediyorum*). These lands are beyond what one can imagine in terms of how badly they are governed and in terms of how destitute and poor they are (*buraları gerek sū-i idārece ve gerek fakr ü harābiyetçe tasaavur olunabilecek derecenin mâ-fevkindedir*). [...] There are no more than a few people in the whole city whom one can see socially. I have no choice but to endure these circumstances as such is the requirement of our profession.⁶⁵

Münif Paşa's letters also indicate that he was unhappy with the manner in which business of state was handled in Tehran by members of the court. For example, in another letter addressed to the *Sadâret* dated 9 September 1873, the minister describes how it is almost impossible to be granted an audience with Nasir al-Din Shah unless his premier, Mirzâ Hussein Khan Mushir al-Dowleh, was offered a bribe. 'It is as if the Shah is a puppet in his premier's pocket', Münif laments, adding that:

In Istanbul they are under the impression that Iran is in possession of a state, and that our words and complaints might have a bearing on [the comportment of that state]. They see the Shah's splendid attire and his pomp and take it as a marker of Iran's prosperity and power (*Şâhin elbise ve ihtişâmına bakarak İran memleketinin servet ü kudretine zâhib oluyorlar*). They do not understand that what you see here is the opposite of how things actually are.⁶⁶

⁶¹BOA. Y.EE. No. 1, 156/15/3. Dated Shavvâl 1312/March 1895.

⁶²BOA. Y.EE. No. 15/1161. Münif had already been out of a job since his dismissal from his post as Minister of Education in 1892. His repeated requests for re-assignment to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were ignored.

⁶³İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*. Vol. 2. Ankara: MEB Yayınları, 1971. 1005.

⁶⁴Münif Paşa's Letter to the Grand Vizier, Mehmed Rüştü Paşa, 26 Temmuz 1289/7 August 1873. 'Münif Paşa'nın Mektupları,' in *Uhuvvet-i Fikriye*. No. 19(3). 26 Haziran 1330/9 Temmuz 1914.

⁶⁵Letter from Münif (undated), 'Ehibbâdan bir zâta'. 'Münif Paşa'nın Mektupları,' in *Uhuvvet-i Fikriye*. No. 19(3). 26 Haziran 1330/9 Temmuz 1914.

⁶⁶Letter from Münif to *Makam-ı Celil-i Sadâret*, 16 Rajab 1290/9 September 1873 in 'Münif Paşa'nın Mektupları,' in *Uhuvvet-i Fikriye*. No. 19(3). 26 Haziran 1330/9 Temmuz 1914.

Münif's letters and reports to Istanbul during his posting to Tehran indicate that he was unimpressed with the conduct of statesmen at the Qajar court, but they also provide glimpses into what an Ottoman statesman considered of note. There is an undeniable hint of what has been called 'Ottoman Orientalism' in these observations⁶⁷ Münif favourably compares the Ottoman Empire to Iran, noting that 'there can be no capital in the world as lacking as Tehran', and stating that despite the Ottoman Empire being in at a disadvantage on the global stage, it is still in a different league to Qajar Iran.⁶⁸

For example, when in 1873 an Executive Council (*Shurā-yi Dowlat*) and Legislative Council were (re)established to discuss matters of state at the Shah's behest, Münif Paşa wrote to Istanbul reporting on this development. He explained that the Executive Council (which he labelled the *Meclis-i İcrā*) had been directed to implement the decisions taken by the Legislative Council (which he called the *Meclis-i Tahkik*) but that given the state of affairs in Tehran:

It is certain that within no time this Executive Council will be unable to perform even the most trivial and meagre of duties that it is tasked with carrying out and in a very short time will become obsolete (*az vakit zarfında mülgâ ve metruk olacağı bi-iştibâhtır*).⁶⁹

Münif added in the same report that he felt certain that although the Executive Council was to act as the equivalent of the Office of the Grand Vizierate in the Ottoman Empire (*güyâ Sadâret makamına kaim olarak*), the ministers assigned to the job were ill-equipped to distinguish between legislative and executive powers. Elsewhere, Münif also reported on attempts to establish some form of militia, describing how the Qajar state had to rely on militia to exert its will in the provinces. 'Although these new forces met up twice a week and in total ten-to-fifteen times, nothing was achieved', (*haftada iki defa on beş kere ictima` eylemişlerse de müzakerât-ı vâkia` hiç bir neticeyi müntic olmayarak*) was Münif Paşa's damning verdict of Mirzâ Hussein Khan's effort at military reform. Münif highlights that Mirzâ Hussein Khan had spent time in the Ottoman Empire where he was posted as ambassador between 1859 and 1869, and adds that such Mirzâ Hussein Khan's inspiration was in fact earlier reforms in the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁰

Münif Paşa's five-year posting to Tehran between 1872 and 1877 was largely seen as a success: the minister was elevated from the rank of 'middle-ranking ambassador' (*orta elçi*) to 'high-ranking ambassador' (*bâla elçi*) in November 1875.⁷¹ When he was recalled to Istanbul in February 1877, it was in order to take up the post of Minister of Education, an appointment that reflected that he was in the 'good books' of the recently-enthroned Abdülhamid.

The circumstances of Münif's second posting to Tehran in 1896 were therefore vastly different. The minister had fallen out of favour with the Palace, and is reputed to have said 'I believe that they are sending me to my death' upon receiving orders to lead to jubilee delegation to Tehran in late 1895.⁷² However, given his intimate familiarity with the

⁶⁷Ussama Makdisi, who coined the term, refers to how the Ottoman centre represented their own Arab periphery as an integral part of the Ottoman 'theatre of backwardness' and the construction of the Ottoman Empire 'Other'. Although the treatment of Iran is not part of Makdisi's argument, it can be applied to Münif's treatment of Qajar Iran. See, Ussama Makdisi, 'Ottoman Orientalism', *The American Historical Review*, Volume 107, Issue 3, June (2002): 768–796.

⁶⁸Münif Paşa, *Ehibbâdan bir Zâta*.

⁶⁹Münif Paşa to Yıldız Palace. BOA. Y.EE. Resmi Maruzat. 1/1 No. 102. (Undated).

⁷⁰BOA. Y.EE. Resmi Maruzat, No. 521. 6 Jumada'l-âkhar 1292/10 July 1875.

⁷¹BOA. Sicil-i Ahval Defteri, No. 3, 246. 24 November/25 Shavvâl 1292.

⁷²İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, 1005.

Iranian political landscape, his knowledge of Persian and his years in the service of the Ottoman state, Münif was without a doubt the best man for the job to implement the change in foreign policy as envisaged by Abdülhamid.

Münif in Tehran: 1896-1897

His excellency the Shah will complete the one-day journey between Qazvin and Tehran in six-to-seven days arriving in Tehran on Tuesday. However, in order for it not to be known to the public which carriage he will be in, there will be five identical carriages in the procession [...] The Shah, very much like the deceased Shah (*Şah-ı merhum*), appears not to trust many people and employs no more than just a few people in his immediate entourage.⁷³

Münif was to send the report to Istanbul detailing the coronation of Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar (r.1896–1907) in June 1896. In the aftermath of Nasir al-Din Shah's death, there had been some angst about whether the succession would be a peaceful one. Considered a 'weaker' figure than his father, Mozaffar al-Din Shah's transition to the Qajar throne was in fact largely peaceful, thanks to the machinations and efforts of the chief officer of the state, Amin al-Sultan, in ensuring the smooth transition.⁷⁴

Jamal al-Din al-Afghāni, in Istanbul as Sultan Abdülhamid's guest, was quickly identified by Qajar interrogators as the culprit who had convinced the assassin, Mirzā Rezā Kermāni, to 'cut down the tree of Nasir al-Din's reign'.⁷⁵ It was reported that Mirzā Rezā Kermāni had confessed that Sultan Abdülhamid had told Afghāni:

Due to the long duration of his reign and his venerable age, Nasir al-Din has acquired a power and prestige such that if he is firm, the Shi'i divines and people of Persia will not move to support our ideas or accomplish our aims [of achieving pan-Islamism].⁷⁶

Regardless of whether Afghāni had overstated the Ottoman Sultan's insinuation that Nasir al-Din Shah was a force to be reckoned with if his hopes at promoting pan-Islamism in the Shi'i world was to be successful, it was clear that Istanbul had become a hot-bed for promoters of anti-Qajar sentiment. Officials of the Porte were also advised that the Ottoman sultan's safety needed to be maintained lest 'the Babi fanatics who enticed Mirzā Rezā Kermāni to this act while he was in Istanbul' decided to attempt further action.⁷⁷

Münif was immediately put to work to resolve the potential crisis in Perso-Ottoman relations. The first matter to be resolved was the fate of the three émigré-dissidents whose arrests had been demanded of the Ottoman state even before Nasir al-Din Shah's demise: namely, Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni, Shaikh Ahmad Ruhi and Mirzā Hasan Khabir al-Molk. At the time of the Shah's assassination the three men were in Trabzon, and in order to illustrate that the Ottoman state was serious in its pursuit of the absolute restoration of good relations, the

⁷³Münif Paşa to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BOA. Y.EE. 14/1176/126. 25 Mayıs 1312/6 June 1896.

⁷⁴Amin al-Sultan was quick to act, and immediately secured British and Russian support and demanded that all princes of the royal family declare loyalty to Mozaffar al-Din. See, Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah and the Iranian Monarchy*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008. 440–442.

⁷⁵Amanat, *Pivot*. 442.

⁷⁶Edward Granville Browne, *The Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909*. London: Mage Publishers, 2006. 65, 183.

⁷⁷BOA. Y.PRK. HR. 21/76, 18 Zilkadeh 1313/1 May 1896.

three dissidents were surrendered to the Qajar state within days.⁷⁸ Although Afghāni was briefly detained in Istanbul, he was soon released but was kept under surveillance in house arrest.

There were other gestures of goodwill towards the Qajar state on the Ottoman end. One of the most important developments was the decision to ban, *Akhtar*, the Persian-language newspaper published in Istanbul between 1876 and 1896. Owned by an Iranian émigré, Mohammad Tāher Tabrizi, *Akhtar* was initially 'intended to be an organ of the Qajar state in the Ottoman Empire', given the substantial community of Iranian expatriates who resided there with connections to Iranian Azerbaijan and Iran.⁷⁹ However, rather than promoting the prestige of the Qajar state, *Akhtar* would become a mouth-piece of sorts for the Hamidian state and be instrumental in endorsing the Sultan's sovereignty to Persian-speaking audiences across the region. *Akhtar's* progressive stance and pro-Ottoman viewpoint was a matter of some displeasure to the Qajar state throughout the time it was in circulation.⁸⁰

Indeed, during the twenty years it remained in circulation, *Akhtar* transmitted news of developments taking place in the Ottoman Empire, thereby affirming Ottoman sovereignty and status beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire; namely in Iran, the Caucasus, Egypt and India, where *Akhtar* came to have a wide readership that consisted mainly of Shi'i Muslims.⁸¹ On the other hand, *Akhtar* was considered a symbol of the success of the Iranian community of Istanbul, and this émigré community's 'gift' to other Iranian communities across the world because it was one of the only newspapers in Persian to be widely-circulated both inside and outside Iran.⁸² Due to its pro-Ottoman stance, in Iran *Akhtar* was not as warmly-regarded in official circles, and it was finally banned in 1892 following its reportage on the Tobacco Régie and ensuing protests in Iran. Nasir al-Din Shah went as far as to offer a one-off gift to Muhammad Tāher, demanding that *Akhtar* refrain from publishing material against the Tobacco Régie.⁸³

However, it was in the months following Nasir al-Din Shah's assassination, in September 1896, that *Akhtar* was indefinitely banned from circulation in the Ottoman Empire. The reason for the prohibition of the periodical was an outcome of the policy of rapprochement between the Hamidian and Qajar states: it reflected that the promotion of the Ottoman state in Persian-speaking lands was now a less pressing a concern than the containment of opposition at home with links to Iranian dissident-émigrés and the repression of Armenian revolutionaries on the Eastern borders of the Empire. *Akhtar* was a bargaining chip.

Muhammad Tāher Tabrizi, who was not provided with a reason for the indefinite ban of the publication, petitioned for *Akhtar's* re-establishment on a number of occasions, but without success.⁸⁴ Consequently, the Ottoman capital—home to a substantial Iranian community—

⁷⁸BOA. PRK.HR. 21/83, 24 Zilkadeh 1313/7 May 1896. All three men were executed on the orders of Mozaffar al-Din Shah in Tabriz in June 1896.

⁷⁹Tanya Elal Lawrence. *The Newspaper Akhtar and the Iranian Exile Community of Istanbul in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Istanbul: Libra Press, 2016. 18.

⁸⁰Letter from Nasir al-Din Shah to Amin al-Sultan, from Safa'i, Ibrahim, *Asnād-i Siyāsi-yi Daurān-i Qajāriyeh*. Tehran, 1347/1968. Document no. 71.

⁸¹Lawrence, *Iranian Community*, 3. The article argues that the publication's treatment of developments in the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, India and Europe was not only in keeping with the Porte's policy, but was an *extension* of Hamidian foreign policy.

⁸²Niyā, *Irān va Osmāni*.355–357.

⁸³Niyā. *Irān va Osmāni*. 277–279.

⁸⁴The last of these petitions dates to 1898. See, Y.A.RES. 93/12, 8 Muharram 1316/29 May 1898.

would have to do without a Persian-language newspaper until the Constitutional period, following the closure of the Iranian Parliament in June 1908 by Muhammad Ali Shah, and the ensuing period of Civil War in Iran (1908–1909) which saw the flight of many Iranian constitutionalists to Istanbul.

But life improved for Iranians living in the Ottoman capital in other ways: it was also a result of the re-appraisal of its relations to the Qajar state that in July 1896 the Ottoman government allowed the observation of Shi'i rituals in the month of *Muharram*—specifically at *Ashura*—in the Valide Han and its environs for the first time.⁸⁵ Since the 1860s, the observation of these Shi'i rituals were tolerated in the Valide Han—the pivot of Iranian cultural, economic and religious life in Istanbul—but the observation of mourning rituals to mark *Ashura* was not permitted outside the Valide Han. In 1896, following the death of Nasir al-Din, these rituals were formally recognized and allowed by the Bâb-ı Âli for the first time.⁸⁶

On the Iranian side, the enthronement of Mozaffar al-Din Shah saw the re-shuffling of ministers at the highest echelons of the Iranian government: the pro-British Amin al-Sultan was replaced by Amin al-Dowleh—an Ottoman sympathizer—as grand vizier. Mirzâ Mohsen Khan Mushir al-Dowleh (formerly Mo'in al-Molk)—ambassador to the Ottoman Empire between 1873 and 1890—was installed as the new foreign minister. In particular, the appointment of Mirzâ Mohsen Khan Mushir al-Dowleh as foreign minister was seen as a step 'in the right direction' by the Yıldız Palace, largely because of Mirzâ Mohsen Khan's personal friendship with Sultan Abdülhamid. It was reputed that Mirzâ Mohsen Khan's dismissal in 1890 from his post as ambassador to the Porte had been a consequence of his close association with Abdülhamid.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Münif Paşa was seen as an 'Iranian sympathizer' in Iranian official circles, and his appointment as ambassador to the *Dowlat-e Aliyye-ye İrân* had the intended effect of demonstrating that the Ottomans were serious about a political re-alignment with Qajar Iran.⁸⁸

Münif Paşa had also been instructed to extend Mozaffar al-Din Shah an invitation to the Ottoman Empire and to inform the Shah that he was to be conferred the *Nişan-ı İmtiyaz* by the Sultan.⁸⁹ A second Ottoman delegation would travel to Iran in March 1898, at which point Münif was released from his appointment in Iran, which he had been requesting for over six months.⁹⁰ With the Ottoman delegation came Şemseddin Bey, the newly-appointed minister to Tehran.⁹¹ The most pressing concern for the Hamidian state as relayed to Mozaffar al-Din Shah remained very much the same: any Iranian support and/or tolerance for Armenian

⁸⁵Sāsāni, *Yādbudhā*, 108–109.

⁸⁶Notwithstanding, Hamidian policy was not without inherent contradictions to, namely in the Empire's borderlands to Iran in the province of Iraq. As Karen Kern and Selim Deringil have noted, Abdülhamid's reign also saw the restrictions on Ottoman-Iranian marriages in Ottoman Iraq harden in the period under study. This was a consequence of the Ottoman Sultan's move towards a pan-Islamic understanding of Ottomanism, which was expressed in terms of religious (Sunni) uniformity. This quest for religious uniformity discouraged the union between Sunni and Shi'i populations in the 'atabāt. However, marriage between Iranian and Ottoman subjects elsewhere in the Empire was not prohibited. See, Kern, *Imperial Citizen: Marriage and Citizenship*; Deringil, *The Struggle Against Shiism*.

⁸⁷Sāsāni, *Yādbudhā*, 242–243.

⁸⁸Ebüziyya Tevfik, 'Münif Paşa,' in *Yeni Tasvir-i Efkâr*.

⁸⁹Nejat Göyünç, 'Muzafferüddin Şah ve II. Abdülhamid Devrinde Türk-İran Dostluk Tezahürleri,' in *İran Şehinşahlığı'nın 2500. Kuruluş Yıldönümüne Armağan*. Istanbul 1971. 147.

⁹⁰It appears that Münif was unhappy in Tehran and that his daughter had been unwell. For copies of these letters see, İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, 1009–1010.

⁹¹Muhammad Reza Nasiri. *Nasireddin Şah Döneminde Osmanlı-İran Münasebetleri, 1848–1896*. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1991. 122–125.

revolutionaries needed to cease.⁹² Münif's earlier correspondence with Istanbul indicate that discussions concerning this matter demonstrated that the Qajar state was sympathetic to the request put forth by the Sublime Porte.⁹³

One of the members of the delegation, Mehmed Rebi Paşa reported to Istanbul that during the meeting with the recently-enthroned Shah, Münif reminded the monarch of the Ottoman state's pressing request, to which Mozaffar al-Din Shah responded:

One matter I will try my utmost to realize will be the improvement of the alliance between our two Muslim states (*en ziyade ihtimam ve gayret edeceğim cihet iki hükümet-i İslamiyye arasında itilafın pek ileri götürülmesi olacaktır*), for it is my great hope that our two Muslim states will be able to move forth together as one and work together on every issue.⁹⁴

The Ottoman delegation then reminded the Shah that Armenian mobs were believed to be congregating on the Iranian side of the border, and that they were thenceforth attacking Kurdish villages in Ottoman lands. It is of note that the Shah appears to have been well-informed on the matter, informing members of the delegation that Kurds had been attacking Armenian villages and that this had resulted in a refugee crisis. He added that Armenian militia were being supported by the Russians, and taking refuge in Russia rather than Iran.⁹⁵ Mozaffar al-Din Shah did however assure the Ottoman delegation that he would do his utmost to keep in check both Kurdish and Armenian gangs on the Iranian side of the border.

According to the report sent to the Yıldız Palace, Mozaffar al-Din concluded the meeting on a cordial note, relaying his best wishes to the Ottoman Sultan and adding that he would visit the Sultan in Istanbul the following year en route to Europe. Indeed, as promised, in the Autumn of 1900, Mozaffar al-Din Shah visited Istanbul as part of his first trip to Europe. In Istanbul, the Abdülhamid received the Shah as a *misafir-i hassû'l-hass*, which meant that the Shah was afforded the status bestowed on the highest ranking of guests.

Conclusion

By the time Münif Paşa was relieved from his posting to Tehran and took leave to return to Istanbul in March 1898, causes for tension between the two states were almost entirely on the mend. Münif's tenure had been short-lived but had fulfilled its purpose. The Iranian border became a less pressing concern to Istanbul in the immediate future, and relations between the two states improved markedly: Mozaffar al-Din Shah was as good as his word, and ensured that Armenian 'gangs' were not allowed free reign on the Iranian side of the border, whilst the Ottoman state agreed to co-operate with the Qajars and no longer consented to harbouring Iranian political dissidents in the Ottoman Empire.

These developments meant that in sharp contrast to the first twenty years of Sultan Abdülhamid's reign, the second half of the Hamidian period saw the severe restriction of the relative freedom of expression afforded to Iranian émigrés in the Ottoman Empire. Some Iranians émigrés were affected more than others. Where Jamal al-Din al-Afghāni was kept in virtual isolation until his death in Istanbul in March 1897, Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni, Shaikh Ahmad Ruhi and Mirzā Hasan Khabir al-Molk faced deportation and execution. Muhammad

⁹²BOA. Y.EE. 3/110/31/1709. 22 Nisan 1313/4 May 1897.

⁹³Münif Paşa to Yıldız Palace, see, Hikmet Dağlıoğlu, 'Münif Paşa'nın Mektuplarından,' *Başpınar Mecmuası*, II/No.20.

⁹⁴BOA. Y.EE. 20/411/49/63.

⁹⁵BOA. Y.EE. 20/411/49/63.

Tâher Tabrizi was forbidden from publishing what was considered the most progressive Persian-language newspaper of the time. With the ban on *Akhtar*, the Iranian community of Istanbul lost its voice. But life improved in other ways: *muharram* and *‘azâdâri* ceremonies were henceforth deemed lawful, and in the ‘atabât, the Ottoman preoccupation with the ‘Shi‘i problem’ dropped from sight, resulting in the relative easing of Ottoman presence in the shrine cities.⁹⁶

While a great number of Ottoman intellectuals of the period lived in exile, prominent Iranian intellectuals and émigrés had been able pursue careers in the Ottoman Empire because they were considered ‘assets’ to Sultan Abdülhamid’s policy of promoting of pan-Islamism outside the borders of the Empire. However, by the mid-1890s, Abdülhamid’s pressing concern was to preserve the solidarity of his regime in the face of Young Turk opposition and the Armenian uprisings. As a consequence of this new climate, a reconciliation with the Qajar state was considered preferable to the preservation of Iranian émigrés in the Empire. The Porte’s new weapon of choice was political rapprochement, and its ally the Qajar government and its embassy in the Empire. Ultimately, Nasir al-Din Shah’s assassination triggered a new era in Perso-Ottoman relations.

The course of events that led to the Münif Paşa mission to Tehran in 1896 presents an opportunity to illustrate the multiple processes at play in Perso-Ottoman relations in the first half of the Hamidian era. This perspective raises questions about how the rapprochement between the two states affected the lives of Iranian émigrés and dissidents in the Ottoman Empire, as well as revealing that the relations between the Ottomans and Qajars were dynamic and ever-shifting; problematizing the widely-held notion that the two states enjoyed a stable, if not unchanging relationship in the late nineteenth century. It has been argued that this period is distinct from the earlier nineteenth-century and needs to be assessed on its own terms, incorporating how developments on the domestic and foreign fronts for the Ottomans as well as the Qajars shaped policy-making. The consideration of this chapter in Perso-Ottoman relations also demonstrates that this diplomatic history is intimately intertwined with the socio-political circumstances surrounding the presence of Iranian communities in the Ottoman Empire. Finally, it has been illustrated that the picture that emerges from the individual ‘biographies’ of statesmen such as Münif Paşa is one that highlights the value of focusing on how the biographical scale of analysis complements political histories of states. Although this biographical focus on Münif Paşa is not the locus of the article, it serves as a useful starting point for greater discussion on how the Ottoman and Qajar states interacted and intersected with the ‘minor’ players that made up the mechanisms of state, thereby shaping policy and governance.

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⁹⁶Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 116–117.