

presentation of the Fada'is as a movement of “hope and liberation” (452). He has masterfully told the Fada'is' story, including their writings, their successes, and their failures, leaving readers with the impression of the Fada'is as serious, brave, influential, and ideologically driven patriots. *Call to Arms* restores their story.

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**From the Kur to the Aras: A Military History of Russia's Move into the South Caucasus and the First Russo-Iranian War, 1801–1813. George A. Bournoutian (Brill, 2021), ISBN: 978-90-04-44515-4.**

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Despite their horrendous human and material costs, wars have failed to attract enough academic interest. Wars created or disrupted the world order and played a crucial role in generating new polities, relations and treaties. For example, the First Russo-Iranian War, which is the topic of George Bournoutian's *From the Kur to the Aras*, not only led to new types of relations and treaties, but also a new balance of power in Qajar Iran.

In the style of a traditional military historiography, Bournoutian's captivating story describes in extensive and vivid detail the battles that led to the Golestan Treaty (1813), providing a blow-by-blow account across eight chapters, five appendices, and 28 maps. Benefitting from Russian and Iranian primary sources and archival material, the book deconstructs the popular belief that Fath-ʿAli Shah and the Qajar dynasty were careless, fearful and weak in both their fight against Russia and their attempt to maintain Iranian territories in the South Caucasus. The war was not an easy win for Russia, nor was it a total defeat for Iran; in fact, during the entire war period, neither had the power to decisively defeat the other. Although Crown Prince ʿAbbas Mirza was in charge of the Iranian army, the shah himself directly participated in breaking the Russian siege of Yerevan in 1804 and supervised the repel of a Russian attack through the Caspian Sea in 1805, which intended to capture Rasht. However, the shah's reign was still not firmly established when war with Russia broke out, and thus he was unable to stay at the front for long due to internal problems. Nevertheless, even if he could not directly participate in the battles, he always attempted to camp near the border of the Caucasus with his special forces. In the war's final stages, the shah ordered his two elder sons, Dowlatshah and Adelshah, to assist ʿAbbas Mirza.

While there is no doubt of the Russian military's superiority in terms of tactics and equipment, the Iranians' fierce resistance, the Caucasian tribes' almost permanent uprisings (such as those of the Lezgis) and the Caucasian khanates' desire for autonomy and frequent, fear-driven shifts in allegiance left the war's fate undecided until the last moment. Iranian gains were meager but crucial to ensuring their hold on Yerevan and posing a constant threat to Georgia. The Qajars, however, both failed to embark on a joint expedition with the Ottomans, who were also at war with the Russians, and were unable to benefit from Napoleon's successive defeats of Russia in Europe.

Bournoutian's book begins with a background of Iran-Russia conflicts and disputes over the Kingdom of Georgia from the Safavid period, and discusses how Georgia plunged into uncertainty after the fall of the Safavids (1722) and deaths of Nader Shah (1747) and Agha

Mohammad Khan Qajar (1797). When the French and British, Russia's main rivals, became involved in the Middle East—the French with Napoleon's expedition to Egypt (1798–99) and the British with John Malcolm's Anglo-Iranian Treaty (1801)—Tsar Paul moved to annex eastern Georgia, whose reigning dynasty, the Georgian Bagratids, had been a Russian protectorate since 1783.

When discussing Tsar Alexander's rise to power in 1801, the author delves into the story in detail, describing the battles as accurately as a chronicler. He is successful in his comparison of the Russian and Persian narratives, the relevant passages of which are cited in full in footnote. Three chapters of the book deal with General Paul Tsitsianov's decisions and actions from the time of his arrival in Tbilisi until his assassination in Baku, thereby underlining his importance to the history of the war. It was in early 1803 that the tsar appointed Tsitsianov the commander-in-chief of the Caucasus, and the book rightly highlights his role in expanding Russia's mandate beyond Georgia and leading Russia into a ten-year-long war with Iran in the South Caucasus. Tsitsianov's policy was to intimidate the Caucasian khanates into submitting to Russian patronage, launching bloody attacks on any khanates that rejected his harsh conditions. In his first military operation, Tsitsianov stormed Ganja and killed its governor, Javad Khan Qajar, who had remained loyal to the Qajar dynasty. Although Tsitsianov later failed to capture Yerevan, he did manage to make deals with the khans of Qarabagh and Shakki.

However, Bornoutian's book does not properly address the relationship between Caucasian commanders, and between the Russian empire's periphery and center. The book fails to point out that Russian generals, like their counterparts in Central Asia, had a great deal of authority, ran negotiations with Iranian envoys, and generally acted independent of the center despite their official instructions. In fact, they made vital decisions on the spot, particularly during the Napoleonic wars when communication and provisions were mostly cut off. The situation on the battlefield was unpredictable and, due to harsh terrain and logistical problems, victory depended on numerous factors. The superior Russian weaponry did not necessarily lead to victory in face-to-face combat; soldiers' morale and commitment also decided the fate of battles. Thus, Russian commanders' duty stretched beyond only running troops and supplies: they were also political decision-makers and acted as the masterminds behind any action.

The book is precise and detailed in both operational terms and in terms of military equipment and force numbers. A disciplined and well-trained Russian army with access to advanced artillery and naval vessels was key to Russian victory. However, the book does not elaborate on the war tactics employed, particularly by the Russians. It would have been preferable to focus on the Russians' tactical style, because such was key to Russia's successive victories over the Qajars, despite having a smaller army. These tactics were developed by generals of various nationalities serving the Russian Empire in the Caucasus; generals who mostly studied in Russian and Prussian military academies and had either already experienced the Napoleonic wars or previously fought in the Caucasus.

The author rightly claims that, despite excelling in warfare, Russian commanders' extreme diplomatic inefficiency was one of the reasons they failed to connect with local people in the Caucasus and advance Russian goals through negotiations. Unfortunately, however, the book fails to adequately address the diplomatic side of the war. The focus is largely on military operations, leaving out the politics, even though diplomacy is an integral part of wars.

The section on Iran's relations with France and Britain during the war period, alongside their assistance to 'Abbas Mirza in building a new army and fortifications, does not present new information. The book overlooks the Qajar court's political initiative in dealing with France and Britain in the midst of war with Russia. While the representatives of these two superpowers were present in Iran at the same time and the precondition for one's presence was the departure of the other, the Qajars attempted to maintain relations with and take advantage of both parties. Every diplomatic move was closely tied to field operations

in the Caucasus and news from Europe. The Qajars had realized the significance of the military technology and tactics that France and Britain could provide Iran. Moreover, they hoped these European powers would mediate peace with Russia, but not under conditions imposed by Russia. Still, despite French and British attempts to broker peace, the war lasted a long time, as Russia was never willing to show flexibility. The assistance Iran received from France and, later, Britain—particularly from British officers and advisors—led to Iran's greatest victory in the Battle of Soltanabad in the war's final stage in 1812.

Although the author includes the text of the Golestan Treaty in its entirety, it is curious why he did not include a chapter analyzing the treaty and its impact. Interestingly, the book points out what happened to Georgia's ruling family and Armenians who sympathized with Russia. The Bagratid dynasty of Georgia, which had pledged allegiance to Russia, was dissolved as soon as Russia annexed Georgia, with members of the royal family sent to St. Petersburg in custody. Armenians were left with Russia's unfulfilled promises and later anti-Armenian decrees.

Of course, no book can cover all relevant aspects, particularly of a turbulent and eventful period about which there is little research. It would be unrealistic to expect Bournoutian's book to do so. Certainly, the book is a must-read and major contribution to scholarship on the First Russo-Iranian War.

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